

POSITION STATEMENT



Auslan or AUSLAN?

ABOUT US

Deaf Australia is the leading national peak organisation for Deaf people in Australia. It represents the views of Deaf people who use Auslan (Australian Sign Language).

Deaf Australia is a true consumer group that represents, promotes, preserves and informs the developments of the Australian Deaf community, its language and cultural.

OVERVIEW

Events of the last 18 months have increased the prominence of Auslan, the sign language of the Australian Deaf community, in the media, in government circles, in public and private sector organisations, and amongst the general public. There has been an increased public and official awareness of some aspects of its importance to the Australian Deaf community, particularly its role in facilitating equitable access to information.

This increased prominence has naturally resulted in frequent references to the term "Auslan" in printed or digital text. On many occasions, writers or editors are choosing to present the word as an acronym, capitalizing the letters: "AUSLAN".

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The position of the Deaf community on this is quite clear, as outlined in a recent amendment to the Auslan Policy of Deaf Australia, the peak advocacy body for Australia's signing Deaf community:

"Auslan is a word coined by the Deaf community. It is a term derived from its meaning (Australian sign language), but which was never intended to be an acronym. Rather, it was coined for the purpose of referring in English to the unique signed language indigenous to Australian Deaf culture, which was developed and nurtured by generations of Deaf people as their natural language, and which is at the heart of Deaf culture and Deaf identity. As such, out of respect for the culture from which it originates, the word should be written as a proper noun ("Auslan"), and not capitalised as an acronym ("AUSLAN")."

While this is a small issue, it goes to the heart of how Auslan is perceived. For the Deaf community, it is critical that Auslan is recognized as an organic, complete, and distinct language, with the same status as equivalent spoken languages, and that its cultural origin in their community, and their custodianship of it, is acknowledged.

This is supported by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons of Disabilities which defines 'sign language' as a language (Article 2).

Presenting the word as an acronym is counter to the intention and wishes of the Deaf community from which it originated, and for whom it is a cultural totem.

KEYWORDS

Deaf, hard of hearing, hoh, portrayal, barrier, culture, Auslan, media, mainstream, stakeholders.

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Policies Superseded by this Policy	