Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are Deaf

Below are some key points to keep in mind when working or communicating with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are Deaf.

Before an appointment

- Ask the Deaf person if they would like a NAATI accredited Auslan interpreter and an accredited Deaf Relay interpreter to assist with communication.
- Ask the Deaf person if they would prefer an age, gender and/or culturally matched interpreter—the interpreter should be booked in advance as they may be difficult to obtain at short notice.
- Determine the length of your appointment before booking the appointment with an interpreter—for appointments over one hour, two interpreters may be required.
- Contact an interpreter booking office in your area to request an available Auslan interpreter—the Interpreter Services Information System (ISIS) should be used to request an interpreter within Queensland Health.
- Other interpreting booking offices available are:
  - National Auslan Interpreter Booking Service (NABS)
    - Phone: 1800 246 945
    - Web: www.nabs.org.au
    - This service offers free interpreting services for all private medical appointments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Deaf sign language users and medical practitioners Australia-wide
  - Sign Language Communications Qld
    - Phone: 1300 123 752
    - Web: www.slcommunications.com.au
- Arrange to meet the interpreter/s prior to the appointment to discuss the purpose, the interpreter’s role and seating arrangements.
- Allow the interpreter to engage with the client briefly before the appointment so they can familiarise themselves with each other’s signing styles.
- Use visual aids where possible as they are a great communication tool for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Deaf people, especially if English is not their first language.
- Arrange for an appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support worker, community elder or an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander liaison person who knows the client well to support them with cultural and communication issues.

During the appointment

- Yarn with the Deaf person about who and where you are from, your family and your role.
- Be patient with the Deaf person and listen to their story.
- Don’t make assumptions—frequently check with the Deaf person that there is clear understanding of what is being said, the treatment, information and follow up appointments.
- Allow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support person to provide cultural or spiritual feedback if they would like to.

Note: Ensure your first step is to meet cultural competency standards in your workplace by attending educational workshops about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Deaf wellbeing. These workshops will provide you with the knowledge to appropriately meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Deaf people.

For more information

For more information about working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are Deaf, visit www.health.qld.gov.au/pahospital/mentalhealth/damh.asp.

This information has been adapted from: