

Deaf Victoria open letter to Optus

Friday 23 July 2021

Dear: Melissa Hopkins, Head of Marketing, Optus,

CC: Deaf Australia; TikTok Australia and New Zealand; Australian Human Rights Commission; Australian Network on Disability; Victorian Office for Disability; B and T.

RE: Optus use of Auslan in new TikTok filter and #SignYes campaign

Auslan version of this statement: <https://youtu.be/3btGtf1fnuo>

Deaf Victoria has been made aware of your new #SignYes campaign launched on Thursday 22 July. We have had numerous Deaf Community members and allies raise this issue and to date, one official complaint has been made to us which we are now escalating via this letter. We believe our national branch, Deaf Australia has also raised this issue.

For context, Deaf Victoria, established in 1982, is funded by the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (formerly DHHS) to provide advocacy services on behalf of deaf and hard of hearing Victorians. We work across Victorian government and with private providers to increase access to services and to educate the wider community on how to work, play and study with deaf and hard of hearing people. At an advisory level, Deaf Victoria also represents deaf and hard of hearing interests in various state government settings and works with other disability groups and our peak body, Deaf Australia, to ensure those we represent are informed and included in decisions that impact their everyday lives.

While we are excited to see further promotion and increased awareness of “*sign language*” through this campaign (we assume your intent was *Auslan*, the language of deaf people in Australia- however this was not clear), we were disappointed to see how this campaign was designed and rolled out.

We are concerned with the following:

1. Inaccessibility of the campaign launch video. Namely there were no captions or Auslan access on the original video so ironically (and worryingly), deaf people could not access content related to *us* and *our* language
2. The apparent lack of deaf or native Auslan user representation in the campaign video or example videos/photos.
3. No mention of partner Deaf organisations or co-design with the Deaf Community campaign materials and associated press we have seen. See articles: [Optus](#), [Gizmodo](#), [B and T](#).
4. No platform given to deaf and hard of hearing Auslan users or creatives to talk about our language and culture through this innovation and associated press.

When Auslan is co-opted by those who do not have the cultural competency and rights to ownership, we feel disenfranchised and a missed opportunity for deaf people themselves to own, lead and contribute to society. Based on what Optus has showed us in how this campaign has been launched - without deaf people at the forefront; without even access to it and with no mention of how the Deaf community were involved, we feel uneasy.

To be clear- we support any organisation, large or small- to raise awareness of Auslan and the benefit of Australians learning our language. However, we always want this to be done in partnership with the Deaf community. And reported appropriately, with deaf involvement.

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We would welcome a response from Optus that addresses the following:

- Why were no Deaf Olympians or Deaf Paralympians involved?
- Was there any co-design with the Deaf community and Deaf Auslan linguistic experts?
- How was this released without ensuring it is accessible?
- Are you aware of Auslan Anywhere and other Auslan learning apps developed by Deaf organisations?
- How do you plan to ensure deaf and hard of hearing people have access to your services and campaigns long term?

DeafVictoria would like to make the following recommendations:

1. As a large corporate organisation with considerable reach, resources and influence, educate yourselves on how to engage better with the Deaf community.
Start with researching #DeafTalent #NothingAboutUsWithoutUs #Deaflympics
2. Engage reputable Deaf organisations such as Deaf Australia to ensure this and any other campaigns are culturally and linguistically appropriate and seek expert advice from same on how to achieve this.
3. Consult with deaf organisations to ensure your new and future videos are inclusive. This includes making your pay per view streaming services more accessible with increased captions!
4. Review the campaign considering your [Accessibility and Inclusion Plan](#) including social media campaigns and posts.
5. Meet with DeafVictoria for mediation with individuals who have made official complaints.
6. Produce, use and share only videos of Deaf native Auslan users to demonstrate how to replicate signs or learn Auslan.

We look forward to your response and to working with Optus to enable you to do better in the future and truly be inclusive to all Australians.

Regards,

Philip Waters
General Manager, DeafVictoria

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