

**ACCESS PLUS WA DEAF — CENTENARY**

*Statement by Minister for Disability Services*

**MR D.T. PUNCH (Bunbury — Minister for Disability Services)** [2.09 pm]: I am pleased to inform the house that on 5 November, I had the great pleasure of representing our Premier at the centenary gala of Access Plus WA Deaf, formerly the WA Deaf Society. It was a privilege to attend and speak at the event, celebrating that momentous occasion. Access Plus has an incredible history of supporting the Western Australian community. Since 1921, it has provided a range of inclusive services to make information more accessible for the deaf and hard of hearing. One hundred years of generous service is almost unheard of these days and is certainly a remarkable milestone to be recognised and celebrated.

For more than 30 000 Australians, Auslan is their primary language. Access Plus has played a critical role in raising general awareness of deafness in society and the importance of creating an accessible environment. But more notably, it has helped to empower the deaf and hard of hearing to live more connected lives, free of communication barriers. With the challenges of the last few years, a continuing global pandemic, border closures and lockdowns, fires and cyclones, never has it been more imperative that these communication barriers are broken down. Such events have reminded us all just how important it is that everyone receives timely and accurate information. The work that Access Plus has done, and is continuing to do, to make critical, public announcements accessible to those who are deaf or hard of hearing has been phenomenal. I think we all recognise Fiona, who is often standing alongside the Premier as he makes important community announcements. Premier, Fiona sends her best wishes. However, I would like to take this opportunity to recognise all the Access Plus interpreters for assisting the state government to reduce communication barriers and help keep everyone safe. I hope the increased visibility of Auslan encourages more businesses to invest in interpreting services to make information more accessible. I also hope that this will encourage more people to become Auslan interpreters, something we know we need. There has never been a better time to enrol to study Auslan either, with the cost of studying a diploma in Auslan recently reduced by 70 per cent at WA TAFEs.

I have every confidence that Access Plus' strong established legacy will propel it to achieve even more great things over the next 100 years. I will be excited to see some of these life-changing achievements unfold in the coming years. Congratulations, Access Plus.