



## Briefing Note 9: Bill C-81 – *Accessible Canada Act*

### Recognition of Sign Languages

#### How does Bill C-81 currently address this issue?

Bill C-81 defines barrier broadly, and includes anything attitudinal or based on information or communications that hinders the full and equal participation in society of persons with disabilities and Deaf people. Given this broad definition of barrier and the power under Bill C-81 to develop accessibility standards and regulations, it is highly likely that these standards will address the provision of American Sign Language (ASL), Langue des Signes Québécoise (LSQ) and Deaf interpreters and accessible videos in ASL and LSQ as important tools for access to information.

However, Bill C-81 does not specifically recognize ASL or LSQ, which are critical for accessibility and civic participation of Deaf people in Canada.

#### Why is this concerning?

Deaf culture has its own defining characteristics, which include sign languages, cultural norms, historical traditions and heritage. Deaf persons have long called on the Government of Canada to recognize their unique languages. This recognition is important to ensure that Deaf persons have equal access to information, communication, employment, government services, and other federally-regulated sectors.

In 2017 the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities stated its concern about the lack of official recognition of ASL and LSQ and underscored the need to ensure high quality certification of sign language interpreters. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recommended that Canada recognize ASL and LSQ as official languages of Deaf persons.

#### How should Bill C-81 be changed?

Bill C-81 must recognize American Sign Language (ASL) and Langue des Signes Québécoise (LSQ) as languages of people who are Deaf in Canada.

#### Additional Advocacy Points

Some have said that it is not necessary to recognize ASL and LSQ in the *Accessible Canada Act* because human rights laws in Canada already require ASL and LSQ interpreters to be provided as accommodations for Deaf persons.

We agree that human rights laws require ASL and LSQ interpreters to be provided as accommodations for Deaf persons who need these services for effective communication. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to recognize ASL and LSQ in the *Accessible Canada Act*. Doing so will acknowledge that ASL and LSQ are not just accommodations, but are also important for cultural and language reasons. Doing so may also help to ensure that sign language interpreters and accessible videos in ASL and LSQ are provided more readily, thereby removing barriers faced by many Deaf persons.