

# WAVLI Research Project

April 2023

*Report from McLaughlin  
Educational Consulting  
Services and DRL  
Consulting*

© MECS and DLR Consulting April 2023

### *Acknowledgements*

It has been a pleasure to complete this review for the Westcoast Association of Visual Language Interpreters (WAVLI). We would like to thank all the stakeholders for their active participation in this process. Stakeholders included community interpreters from British Columbia, both staff and freelance interpreters, members of the Deaf community, and post-secondary institutions and agencies that provide interpreting services. It is their perspectives that will help WAVLI shape the future of interpreting in British Columbia.

Thank you also to Kirsten Hagemoen and Bryan Hemingway for guiding this research project and Nicole Pedneault, Heather Perry, Barb Mykle-Hotzon for serving on the WAVLI Community and Systems Engagement (CASE) Committee.

We wish WAVLI every success in addressing the content and recommendations stemming from this review and supporting the stakeholders in addressing the challenges facing the community regarding the provision of ASL-ENG interpreting services.

Joe McLaughlin, Ed.D., Consultant and Debra Russell, Ph.D., Consultant, Certified Interpreter

*In the words of one research participant #5:*

*I have seen the interpreters working incredible hours, and trying to provide services, but it is tough after COVID. So many things have changed, and many interpreters prefer to work at home for VRS or VRI assignments. I understand that, but it is very difficult for our Deaf community to not have interpreters for our doctor appointments and so on. I worry about how we teach interpreters and whether our program will close. What will that mean for our Deaf community? I believe together we must lobby our governments for policy and funding changes that can support access for the Deaf community and support the training of good interpreters who will continue to provide service for years to come.*

## Table of Contents

<u>Executive Summary</u> .....	<b>4</b>
<u>Context shaping this Research Project</u> .....	<b>5</b>
<u>Research Methodology</u> .....	<b>6</b>
<u>Demographics</u> .....	<b>6</b>
<u>Focus Group and Interview Research</u> .....	<b>8</b>
<u>Research Findings: Multiple Perspectives</u> .....	<b>8</b>
<u>Interpreters: Working Well</u> .....	<b>8</b>
<u>Interpreters: Not working Well</u> .....	<b>9</b>
<u>What keeps interpreters in the profession?</u> .....	<b>10</b>
<u>Three Top issues</u> .....	<b>11</b>
<u>Recommendations from Interpreters</u> .....	<b>11</b>
<u>Deaf Community: Working Well</u> .....	<b>13</b>
<u>Deaf Community: Not Working Well</u> .....	<b>13</b>
<u>Three Top issues</u> .....	<b>14</b>
<u>Recommendations from Deaf Community</u> .....	<b>15</b>
<u>Employers and Agencies that Provide Interpreting Services: Working Well</u> .....	<b>15</b>
<u>Employers and Agencies that Provide Interpreting Services: Not Working Well</u> .....	<b>16</b>
<u>Three Top issues</u> .....	<b>17</b>
<u>Recommendations from Employers, Agencies and Organizations</u> .....	<b>18</b>
<u>Discussion and Next Steps</u> .....	<b>19</b>
<u>Recommendations</u> .....	<b>21</b>
<u>Conclusions</u> .....	<b>22</b>

## **Executive Summary**

This report contains the findings and recommendations of a research project conducted by McLaughlin Educational Consulting Services and DLR Consulting for the Westcoast Association of Visual Language Interpreters (WAVLI). The research was conducted between February-April 2023.

The goal of the research project was to learn more about how interpreting services could be improved in BC, by understanding the perspectives of all the stakeholders involved - Deaf community, interpreters, and those who hire interpreters. WAVLI provided the funding to support this research project, with the goal to identify themes and systemic causes of discontent with the quality of interpreting services and the experiences of working as an interpreter in BC.

Two independent consultants, Dr. Joe McLaughlin and Dr. Debra Russell were retained to conduct the review.

The project was completed by conducting 4 focus groups and 3 additional follow up interviews. A total of 27 people participated in the focus groups. Focus group participants were recruited through WAVLI's internal networks of interpreters (256 registered members), Deaf community members and interpreter agencies.

The data are divided into three major stakeholder groups allowing for comparison across the groups. The major themes included:

- Shortage of Interpreters amidst Increased Demand for Services.
- Training Pathways for Interpreters (deaf and non-deaf).
- Working conditions that provide stability for interpreters.
- Need for a Stronger Professional Body.
- Collaborative Actions across Agencies and Employers.
- Complaint Processes to protect consumers.

The research identified that there are systemic issues that are reflected in government policies and practices and in the practices of post-secondary institutions and their commitment to quality training for interpreters. Further, there are systemic issues related to the kinds of advocacy and leadership work that is desired by interpreters and expected of the professional associations. Finally, the Deaf community has identified systemic issues that are affecting them, including the fact that they are limited from complaining about interpreters due to the lack of action among provincial and national professional associations and the fact the interpreter fees are creating a barrier to access for Deaf people in some contexts. The impact of not having interpreters for medical, legal, and other community setting appointments was highlighted frequently by Deaf participants. The report has generated a great deal of data that could be used to create short-term recommendations and actions.

**Community of Stakeholders:** Create Provincial Taskforce to develop a Strategic Plan to address both short- and long-term recommendations and solutions that have emerged in this review.

**Inter-agency Collaboration:** Explore having a shared calendar where interpreters can input availability and receive private offers based on their schedule, like what Provincial Language Services (PLS) uses for spoken language interpreters. Examine the ways in which VRS providers adjust policies that require scheduling commitments three weeks in advance to allow for more flexibility among freelance interpreters.

**WAVLI:** Develop strategic plan that focuses on hiring an Executive Director who can lead on strong marketing and government advocacy strategies; create options for group benefits for members; develop a paid and structured mentorship program that can build capacity of recent graduates; publish a suggested fee grid; explore functioning like a regulatory body like other professions that require mandatory continued education, etc.

This report has provided an overview of the issues surrounding the provision of interpreting services in British Columbia. This project was designed to provide a snapshot of the current strengths of service delivery, identify gaps and opportunities, and highlight recommendations to address the needs.

The stakeholders who participated in this 2023 research project want to see interpreting services continue to thrive and serve the community. By approaching the recommendations in a systematic manner, BC stakeholders could see significant and exciting changes to the ways in which interpreter development takes place within their province.

### ***Context shaping this Research Project***

At the present time there are several issues that appear to be converging that are creating challenges for interpreters wanting to provide services, those hiring interpreters, and Deaf community members wanting to access interpreting services. While this research project does not purport to be an exhaustive review of the issues, the major challenges include, but is not limited to:

- Accessibility legislation at the provincial and federal levels of government has increased the need for interpreters for public events such as the daily question period in the legislature, government announcements, and public consultation meetings, etc. This has increased the demand for qualified interpreters who are comfortable with media, political/legal discourse, as well as raising the important discussion on the public face of ASL and Deaf interpreters.
- Increased demand for interpreting services in Video Relay Services which can also allow interpreters to be accommodated with home-based offices.

- Increased demand for Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) assignments which can be accommodated with home-based offices.
- Threats of closure of the Interpreter Education Program at Douglas College based on low enrolment numbers and financial costs of administering the program.
- Unfilled community interpreting assignments in key areas such as medical and legal settings
- Contracting conditions associated with medical interpreting assignments that do not meet the needs of interpreters.
- Increased cost of living (gas, rents, food, etc.) that leads interpreters to consider moving out of the Lower Mainland, and/or to only take interpreting work that can be conducted remotely from one's home-based office.

Individual WAVLI members have expressed discontent with the delivery of interpreting services in BC, and as such, WAVLI believed that conducting some initial research could result in a more fulsome picture of the issues and potential solutions by involving multiple stakeholders.

It is hoped that the data and the recommendations contained in this report will be a catalyst for positive change for the multiple stakeholders in addressing some of the most pressing issues.

### ***Research Methodology***

This study drew upon qualitative research methods, employing focus groups and individual interviews and/or individual submissions in ASL or written English. Data were gathered during March 2023. Respondents provided informed consent prior to participating. The interview guide used in the focus groups and interviews was approved by WAVLI prior to conducting data collection.

Data collected reflected the experiences of adult Deaf community members, ASL-English interpreters, agencies, and post-secondary institutions that provide interpreting services.

### ***Demographics***

Focus group participants were selected and every attempt was made to ensure there was diversity reflected among the groups, especially across age, cultural background (participants identified as White, South Asian, Indigenous, Person of Colour), geographic location, number of years of interpreting service, and agency size. A total of 27 people participated in this research study.

The following information provides information on the stakeholder status of the participants, geographic location, gender, and age range.

Participants represented the following stakeholder:

**Table 1: Stakeholder**

Stakeholder	Responses	Percentage of Participants
Deaf Interpreter	1	3.71%
Registered Sign Language Interpreter	10	37.04%
Interpreter Agency	9	33.33%
Consumer	7	25.92%

Participants represented the following geographic locations:

**Table 2: Regions**

Regions	Responses	Percentage of Participants
Greater Vancouver	23	85.18%
Vancouver Island	3	11.11%
Central BC	1	3.71%
Northern BC	0	0%

The gender identification of participants was as follows:

**Table 3: Gender Identification**

Gender Identification	Responses	Percentage of Participants
Female	22	81.48%
Male	5	18.52%

The age range of participants was as follows:

**Table 4: Age Range of Participants**

Age Range	Responses	Percentage of Participants
20-30	3	11.12%

31-40	4	14.81%
41-50	7	25.93%
51-60	7	25.93%
61-70	4	14.81%
71-80	1	3.70%
80+	1	3.70%

Interpreters reported working in medical, mental health, post-secondary, elementary education social services, religious, and social services settings.

### ***Focus Group and Interview Research***

The following section summarizes the findings from the focus groups and interviews. The data were analyzed for themes and common patterns, as well as recommendations that came from the participants.

The focus group meetings were conducted in ASL. One follow-up interview with an employer of interpreters was conducted in English, allowing participants to respond in their preferred language. The facilitators summarized the responses based on the recorded meetings, and the meeting notes were then analyzed for the major themes and recommendations.

### ***Research Findings: Multiple Perspectives***

The data are divided into three major stakeholder groups allowing for comparison across the groups. The major themes included:

- Shortage of Interpreters amidst Increased Demand for Services.
- Training Pathways for Interpreters (deaf and non-deaf).
- Working conditions that provide stability for interpreters.
- Need for a Stronger Professional Body.
- Collaborative Actions across Agencies and Employers.
- Need for Complaint Process to support consumers.

### ***Interpreters: Working Well***

Interpreters identified aspects of what is working well in the community settings in which they have worked as interpreters, including:

- BC has screening processes that address medical and post-secondary interpreting.
- Strong interpreter education program that produces high-quality graduates.
- There are high standards for interpreting, including WAVLI Protection of Title.
- Interpreting community – cohesive and supportive of each other; share prep information that can support the next interpreter assigned to the request.
- Multiple and varied work opportunities.
- Some agencies have clear policies (e.g., covering travel, transportation time, fair rates) and work hard to obtain preparation information that supports effective interpreting and decreases anxiety among interpreters.
- Informal mentoring between new graduates of the IEP and experienced interpreters
- COVID has resulted in increased awareness of interpreting in general, and raised the profile of interpreters that are Deaf.

### **Interpreters: Not working Well**

Interpreters identified aspects of what is *not* working well in the community settings in which they have worked as interpreters, including:

- Cost of living and lack of benefits/retirement pension programs for freelance contractors.
- There is so much work that interpreters may be working beyond their physical and mental capacities, failing interpreters and Deaf community.
- Interpreters working in silos; feeling isolated from each other.
- Regional differences in service delivery (e.g., Interior of BC – inconsistent policies; lack of awareness of access rights of Deaf people, quality interpreting and working conditions; remuneration vs. volunteering; use of any “warm body” to interpret vs. qualified and screened interpreter)
- Transition from IEP graduation to work – screening tools are challenging for many recent graduates to pass which means that new interpreters may end up working in the K-12 system where the standards are lower or hold a second job outside of the profession of interpreting.
- Interpreting in educational settings - most school districts lack effective supervision and mentoring programs for new interpreters working in those settings; lack of Deaf teachers and role models; interpreters are the “default language models”.
- Inconsistent pay grids offered by different agencies/employers.
- Lack of policies at the government level that support interpreting access within government departments and services.
- Lack of structured mentorship programs, despite WAVLI’s registration processes that ask members if they would like to have a mentor, there is no WAVLI mentorship structure that provides a mentor.

- Agencies that have a mentality that is grounded in the 1980's where interpreters were paid per hour, vs. a two-hour minimum.
- Distances and time needed to travel in the Lower Mainland to provide on-site interpreting services, especially when the travel time is not compensated at the same rate as interpreting.
- Older demographic of interpreters – who will be the next generation of interpreter educators and interpreter leaders?
- Changing face of the community – are we attracting diverse new interpreters to reflect changing demographics of the Deaf community? Deaf community demographics reflects large South Asian community and a growing visible Indigenous community – where are the interpreters that can match that demographic?
- Shortage of interpreters – demand exceeds supply of interpreters; affects conditions where new graduates are charging the same rates as certified interpreters - unethical business practices that go unchecked and may be accept work for which they are not qualified.
- Training of Interpreters – the Douglas College program is very traditionally delivered, requiring Face to Face instruction, full-time study, all while living in one of the most expensive cities in Canada. Needs to adjust program delivery options.

### ***What keeps interpreters in the profession?***

Despite the number of aspects of interpreting service delivery that appear to be creating dissatisfaction among interpreters, when the interpreters were asked what was keeping them in the profession, the following responses were given:

- Flexibility as a freelance contractor allows me to determine my own schedule, which can accommodate caring for children/elders, travelling, and other interests.
- People – the diversity of consumers and settings allows for life-long learning and connection to the Deaf community.
- Creative and collaborative colleagues that make it a joy to provide service.
- Interpreters can bring their own background knowledge to apply to the interpreting work.
- Language is constantly changing; linguistics is challenging.

As these respondents said:

*The Deaf community taught me language, this is a gift I must respect – it is the best job EVER! - Participant #5*

*As a person from the POC community and who is gay, I feel like I can relate to the experiences of our community members that also share different intersectional identities*  
– Participant #10

### **Three Top issues**

The interpreters participating in this study suggested that the most concerning issues for them included:

- Interpreter shortage which is compounded by the threatened closure of the Interpreter Education Program and/or the delivery model which precludes interpreters from outside of the Lower Mainland to study from a distance.
- On-line work environments: teamwork, co-interpreting practices and standards lacking, for example:
  - *Are we returning to the machine model of you being on, I am doing my dishes while you interpret? Interpreters – some don't want a second platform to support each other, rather they just text or turn on camera for their 20 minutes – how is that effective or professional? – Participant #3*
- Education for agencies and government to understand the challenges and needs of interpreters and the Deaf community; interpreters want to partner/have a role in collaborating to determine policies that are suitable for interpreters and agencies.
- Agencies and interpreter deployment for community assignments of one hour in length – need for paid travel time, or consider a contracted block of time, to make it worthwhile to accept the assignment. As stated by this participant:
  - *I spend one hour travelling in both directions for a one-hour job; I am not paid for the three hours that it takes me to navigate traffic in Vancouver, nor the parking fees. I would rather stay home and do VRS or VRI work. – Participant #8*

### **Recommendations from Interpreters**

Interpreters offered the following suggestions that could serve to address some of the challenges:

- Provincial Task Group that has representatives from Deaf community, WAVLI, agencies and post-secondary institutions to create a strategic plan to address the challenges, resulting in a cohesive lobbying approach to take to the provincial and/or federal government.
- Agencies & Booking Processes:
  - collaborate on creating a shared calendar tool where interpreters can identify blocks of time when they are available, so that they do not receive work opportunities for time blocks when they are not available, like PLS system.

- consider contracting blocks of time and/or creating staff positions that can attract interpreters that wish to work in community settings such as medical, mental health, social services, and legal appointments. This would allow for stable and predictable hours of service delivery for both Deaf community and interpreters.
- benefits are attractive for interpreters.
- when covering arts-based work, build preparation time and rehearsal viewing into the contracted amount.
- WAVLI:
  - hire an executive director to manage the professional association more like a regulatory college.
  - as a professional association, raise dues to create a professional induction program of mentorship and support for new interpreters.
  - create an effective process for training and paying mentors.
  - require yearly continued development hours as a condition of membership; plan for a minimum of 4 professional development events per year.
  - provide mandatory sensitivity training for interpreters to work effectively with the IBPOC Deaf community.
  - Negotiate group benefit programs (short/long term disability, medical/dental benefits) like other professional associations – like the group liability insurance offered currently by WAVLI.
  - Consider publishing a fee schedule that reflects different criteria including education, years of experience, etc.
- Provincial Language Services:
  - When contracting agencies to provide Medical Interpreting Services ensure the contracted agency can deliver the service per professional working conditions, including appropriate policies that cover travel time and distance, support effective interpreting quality, and communicate effectively with all stakeholders in the delivery of this important service.
- Community Stakeholders:
  - Draw on international approaches to address the shortage of interpreters, both Deaf and non-deaf interpreters, including but not limited to:
    - Lobbying government to support a blended delivery program to train Deaf interpreters over a 12-month period; adapt curriculum resources from Ireland and/or Belgium; fund seats so that interpreters are paid to take the program; recruit diversity within the cohort including Deaf people from the Indigenous communities, and BIPOC communities.
    - Work with post-secondary institutions to offer creative delivery options for those wishing to take the multi-year interpreting program (distance delivery, summer residencies, intensive cooperative experiences, not

unlike other post-secondary programs offered by Royal Roads); in addition, the interpreting community desires a 4-year degree program vs. a 3-year program.

- Consider ways to address the lack of diversity among the interpreting student cohorts – draw from IBPOC communities, recruiting bilinguals that are multilingual and interested in adding ASL into their language bases and becoming interpreters who can service the diversity of Deaf communities in BC.

### ***Deaf Community: Working Well***

Deaf community members identified aspects of what is working well in the community settings in which they have worked with interpreters, including:

- Multiple agencies allow for choices, except for medical interpreting (only one service provider for MIS).
- Mental health interpreting services and programs are supporting Deaf community.
- Dental and massage appointments are covered on Vancouver Island.
- Interpreters seem well-trained and professional.
- Deaf-blind consumers have access to interpreters and intervenors, many of whom are Deaf.

### ***Deaf Community: Not Working Well***

Deaf community members identified aspects of what is *not* working well in the community settings in which they have worked with interpreters, including:

- Interpreters are not sufficiently diverse and/or not sufficiently trained to work with and understand the IBPOC community (microaggressions, racism, lacking in empathy and respect for cultural traditions and experiences).
- Some interpreters do not prepare for the work, just show up and we can see they didn't prepare.
- Shortage of interpreters throughout BC including Vancouver Island.
- Competition among agencies for the same pool of interpreters.
- Interpreter fees are becoming a barrier to access, where we are denied access to events based on the interpreter fees. In the words of this participant:
  - *Ironically, interpreters see themselves as allies, supporting the deaf community, but what they charge is preventing me from being able to participate in the community...opposite of ally behavior! - Participant # 16*

- Increased default to VRI interpreting service provision, even though some appointments and consumers prefer an on-site interpreter, quality of interpreting is very inconsistent via VRI.
- Many medical interpreting assignments unmet, or hospitals only offer RVI and then have no idea how to use the equipment which often doesn't work (e.g., pixelated interpreters, image freezes, internet firewalls don't allow for stable connection)
  - *I booked the specialist appointment months in advance, arranged for an interpreter, and was told on the Friday before the appointment on Monday that there would be no interpreter present – what? How can this happen when there were months of advance notice. And why did the agency not tell me that until Friday at 3 pm? In the end I found my own interpreter but seriously, this has a huge impact on us...Participant #14*
- Medical Interpreters: leaving early from assignments even though booked for 2 hours of time.
- Medical Interpreting: No consistent approach to covering emergencies, especially after business hours.
- Shortage of female DIs, especially to do the assignments for immigrant women (e.g., domestic violence, sexual assault, etc. – do not want a Male Deaf interpreter)
- There is no standard way to deal with ethical concerns of interpreters (e.g., WAVLI has a complaint process, but when receiving interpreting services from non-WAVLI members there is national complain process; as well, many deaf community members do not know that WAVLI has a complaint process)

### Three Top issues

The Deaf community members participating in this study suggested that the most concerning issues for them included:

- Recruiting diversity among interpreters, both Deaf and non-deaf who can work with IBPOC communities in B.C.
- Mentoring new interpreters.
- Shortage of community interpreters – more of them working in VRS and VRI settings which means we cannot access them for our day-to-day appointments.
- Education/advocacy needed for organizations and government departments about access requirements and working with qualified interpreters.
- Lack of a national complaint process to deal with ethical violations and a lack of awareness on how to complain about BC interpreters.

### ***Recommendations from Deaf Community***

The Deaf community members participating in this study suggested the following recommendations:

- WAVLI:
  - Address diversity and sensitivity training among interpreters to work effectively with IBPOC members of the Deaf community.
  - Educate the Deaf community about the WAVLI complaint process.
- Community Stakeholders:
  - work with post-secondary institutions and government to provide a consistent training program for Deaf interpreters, with a specific focus on increasing the number of female and Indigenous Deaf interpreters.
  - Work with Indigenous Health Providers to create accessible resources in ASL.
  - Work with government bodies and broadcasters such as CBC to create an effective news broadcast given with Deaf newscasters instead of using Deaf-Hearing interpreter teams; would save government dollars and be more effective (like Daily Moth or Deaf Dot approach).
- Agencies:
  - Need one website to book all assignments that can be shared among agencies.
  - Address the operational aspects of policy, scheduling, contracting interpreters in blocks of time to ensure coverage for medical/mental health appointments, and communicate effectively with consumers about progress on booking interpreters.
  - Create an effective on-call emergency service for medical and legal matters.
  - Explore using Zoom for VRI medical appointments vs dedicated health platforms that are difficult to navigate for Deaf community.
  - Create policies and best practices on where and when VRI can be used and should not be used (e.g., low risk = VRI use)
  - When using VRI, every attempt should be made to use BC interpreters who have context.
  - Immigration matters - YVR is often the first point of entry for immigrants; partner with immigrant agencies to ensure Deaf immigrants have access to Deaf interpreters who are more likely to provide accurate interpretation in complex situations where people do not yet know ASL.

### ***Employers and Agencies that Provide Interpreting Services: Working Well***

Employers, such as post-secondary institutions, organizations, and agencies that provide interpreting services were the third group of stakeholders and the participants identified aspects of what is working well in the community settings in which they have provided interpreting services, including:

- Having a staff model including benefits works for many of the agencies, organizations, and post-secondary institutions represented.
- Having freelance interpreters that allow the Deaf community has choices of service provider vs. the staff model which can limit choices.
- Office staff that are responsible for booking processes.
- There are high standards of practice.
- Interpreting community – cohesive and supportive of each other.
- Informal mentoring between new graduates of the IEP and experienced interpreters
- COVID has resulted in increased awareness of interpreting in general, and raised the profile of interpreters that are Deaf.
- Increased government-related events that attempt to make information accessible via media briefings, consultation meetings, public access to daily question period in the BC legislature.

#### ***Employers and Agencies that Provide Interpreting Services: Not Working Well***

Employers, including post-secondary institutions, organizations, and agencies that provide interpreting services were the third group of stakeholders and the participants identified aspects of what is not working well in the community settings in which they have provided interpreting services, including:

- Shortage of interpreters that cannot meet the increasing demand for services.
  - Shortage means that some students are delayed from participating in post-secondary programs and consumers end up rescheduling or not having an interpreter at all.
  - agencies like MIS paying travel expenses at \$0.11 over the government rate, creating unhealthy dynamics between contractors and other agencies.
  - interpreters pricing themselves out of the market with consumers declining to provide access based on interpreting fees.
- Insufficient numbers of Deaf interpreters and Deafblind Intervenors who are available for daytime assignments; many have full-time positions so are only available occasionally.
- Video Relay Service (VRS) providers noted that interpreters that have graduated during the global pandemic have skills that are less than those who have had learning experiences within the community, starting at a lower level of skill results in less satisfaction among callers.
- VRS policies that require interpreters to commit to shifts in advance prevents the interpreters from being available for community assignments.
- VRS companies need DIs on staff to provide appropriate services but are prevented from doing that per the policy; advocacy needed from all stakeholders.
- Need for specialized screening processes that are designed for current contexts.

- Lack of diversity among the pool of interpreters does not match the diversity of consumer profiles, especially for servicing the Indigenous and South Asian communities.
- Support for interpreters in terms of addressing mental health and emotional support to keep interpreters attached to the Deaf community.
- Training of Interpreters – the Douglas College program is very traditionally delivered, requiring Face to Face instruction, full-time study, all while living in one of the most expensive cities in Canada. It is at risk of closing or moving to other institutions, all of which results in a lack of strong graduates.

As these respondents said:

*We have so many opportunities to offer interpreters and we simply do not have the interpreters to fill those assignments - especially community on-site events! - Participant #22*

*Will the interpreting program respond to the changes required to attract students – it is a different world, but I feel the program is stuck in the 1990s delivery model. - Participant #18*

### **Three Top issues**

The employers, agencies and organizations participating in this study suggested that the most concerning issues for them included:

- Need for a cooperative and collaborative inter-agency approach to dealing with the problems through a strategic lens.
- Need WAVLI to have a stronger professional body presence like other professional registration bodies; hire an effective Executive Director who can lead from a strategic perspective.
- Cooperation among agencies to cover crucial assignments.
- Interpreter shortage which is compounded by the threatened closure of the Interpreter Education Program and/or the delivery model which precludes interpreters from outside of the Lower Mainland to study from a distance.
- Shortage of Deaf interpreters and Deafblind intervenors.
- VRS - changes to CVRS policy to allow for Deaf Interpreters to work in centres.
- Shortage of interpreters, especially with those who have community-based experience to strengthen their skills. As stated by this participant:
  - *There are new grads, but I cannot place them into assignments alone as they just lack the skills and experience - mentorship can only go so far. – Participant #19*

### ***Recommendations from Employers, Agencies and Organizations***

The employers, agencies and organizations participating in this study offered the following suggestions that could serve to address some of the challenges:

- Provincial Task Group that has representatives from Deaf community, WAVLI, agencies and post-secondary institutions to create a strategic plan to address the challenges, resulting in a cohesive lobbying approach to take to the provincial and/or federal government.
- Agencies & Booking Processes:
  - Need government support to develop/mentor interpreters and retain the mid-career practitioners.
  - Shared calendar to reduce the time commitment of emailing hundreds of interpreters that may not respond.
  - Development of standards on when and where VRI can be used, especially for recorded sessions with interpreters.
  - Education of consumers about the impact of verbally abusing interpreters on VRI/VRS assignments, which pushes interpreters out of the field.
  - VRS processes that require interpreters to commit to shifts several weeks in advance, therefore difficult to confirm community appointments.
- WAVLI:
  - as a professional association, raise dues to create a professional induction program of mentorship and support for new interpreters.
  - require yearly continued development hours as a condition of membership; plan for a minimum of 4 professional development events per year.
  - provide mandatory sensitivity training for interpreters to work effectively with the IBPOC Deaf community.
  - Negotiate group benefit programs (short/long term disability, medical/dental benefits) like other professional associations – like the group liability insurance offered currently by WAVLI. This may result in a larger pool of freelance interpreters.
- Provincial Language Services:
  - When contracting agencies to provide Medical Interpreting Services ensure the contracted agency can deliver the service per professional working conditions, including appropriate policies that cover travel time and distance, support effective interpreting quality.
- Community Stakeholders:
  - Draw on international approaches to address the shortage of Deaf and Deafblind interpreters, including but not limited to:

Lobbying government to support a blended delivery program to train Deaf interpreters over a 12-month period; adapt curriculum resources from Ireland and/or Belgium; fund seats so that interpreters are paid to take the program; recruit diversity within the cohort including Deaf people from the Indigenous communities, and BIPOC communities.

- Work with post-secondary institutions to offer creative recruitment programs (targeted high school marketing; diverse communities of bilingual students, etc.) and delivery options for those wishing to take the 3-year interpreting program (distance delivery, summer residencies, paying student tuition, intensive cooperative experiences, and other non-traditional pathways to professional credentialing, not unlike other post-secondary programs offered by Royal Roads)
- Work with the provincial government to fund internship/apprenticeship opportunities (like Ontario Interpreting Services Interpreter Internship Program) to address the bridging needs of new graduates.
- Consider ways to address the lack of diversity among the interpreting student cohorts – draw from IBPOC communities, recruiting bilinguals that are multilingual and interested in adding ASL into their language bases and becoming interpreters who can service the diversity of Deaf communities in BC.

### ***Discussion and Next Steps***

The following section provides a discussion of the common themes and needs that emerged within this program review.

There is clear agreement across the groups participating in this review that there are very serious issues that are having a negative impact on interpreters, Deaf community members and employers, agencies, and organizations. Across the data most common themes focused on the following:

- Shortage of interpreters, both Deaf and non-deaf, and the increased demand for interpreting services.
- The challenges of training interpreters and the need for creative solutions that are not tied to perpetuating the current model of post-secondary training.
- The need for stable, positive conditions (including benefits) to expand the pool of available interpreters, especially those who are willing to work onsite assignments.
- The need for mentoring and bridging programs to build capacity among recent graduates of Interpreter Education Programs.
- The need for a strong professional body (WAVLI)

It is also clear that there is a desire among the stakeholders for a collaborative approach to creating a strategic plan that can address the short-term and longer-term solutions that can improve the landscape of interpreting in BC. Stakeholders recognize that a cohesive and consistent approach to government funders is needed to be able to draw on the strengths and knowledge of the community in creating solutions that work well for all. This may best be accomplished through the creation of a provincial task force that can create a strategic plan that can be actioned in a thorough and planned manner to address the systemic challenges of lack of funding for interpreting services in some sectors, the lack of consistent government policy that combines accessibility with planned resources to support interpreter education, interpreter deployment and sustainable workforce planning.

While interpreters suggest that they would find staff and block contract days as attractive options that would support on-site community interpreting, some agencies find that option concerning from the stance of supporting consumer choice of interpreter. There are also concerns about what that may mean from the Canada Revenue Agency perspective as to when a contractor becomes classified as an employee. However, there are agencies that have used this approach in Canada and found it to be favourable in terms of ensuring community appointments can be confirmed and covered eliminating the problem identified by the Deaf community members of booking far in advance and not being able to secure any an on-site interpreter (medical/mental health/social services/legal, etc.)

Interpreters suggest that if they were able to purchase group rates for health-related benefits as freelance interpreters, that would go a long way to ensuring they can continue as independent interpreters. Also, it would be useful to the interpreters and likely benefit the Deaf community as well if the scheduling processes across multiple agencies could be streamlined. Interpreters reported that they receive over 30 emails a day with offers of work and that it is very time-consuming to respond each day, while also having to manage their books, invoicing, etc. This can also result in interpreters choosing not to respond to the emails which makes it very difficult for referral agencies to fill assignments.

The Deaf community is concerned about the lack of diversity among the interpreters, and the need for interpreters to have better training to serve the IBPOC community in more effective ways. There is a desire for a training program for Deaf interpreters and that this consistent training needs to be a program that can lead to a credential. In terms of training programs for interpreters, there is also recognition among all the stakeholders in this study that the current college model is not serving the profession well. The recommendations for change include exploring alternate delivery models, including cooperative programs, apprenticeship options, blended instruction with structured in-person residencies and online learning, etc. There is also a desire among interpreters to be credentialed with an undergraduate degree, given that most students take 4 years to become an interpreter.

Based on the data, there appear to be three levels of actions possible that could lead to the development of short-term recommendations. Some ideas for recommendations are embedded here for discussion purposes:

- **System Level Actions:** create provincial task force to develop a strategic plan that can address the structural challenges including government funding of interpreting services, investing in the training of interpreters through multiple pathways, and supporting the profession through policies that support access for Deaf communities. Lobbying for the reinstatement of a national complaint process that allows consumers and interpreters to be assured that there are options for managing ethical violation.
- **Operational Planning Level Actions:** marketing and social media presence about the importance of access and interpreting, strategies to attract interpreters with diverse intersectional identities; creation of community partnerships among professional bodies, post-secondary institutions and government departments to develop new training tracks for Deaf interpreters, modeled on best practice examples from other countries; enhancement of strong professional body that has a paid executive director who can lead on major initiatives such as negotiating benefit programs such as group life insurance, health and dental benefits, long term disability, etc. Collaboration among interpreter referral agencies through digital tools like a shared calendar where interpreters input availability and receive only offers based on the schedule (an example of such an approach is the Provincial Health Services Agency that operates a shared calendar for spoken language interpreters).
- **Mentoring, Continuous Learning & Interpreter Enhancement Actions:** WAVLI to create processes to structure and offer professional practice groups to staff and freelance interpreters, both Deaf and hearing. Provide structured and paid mentoring and continuous training to support interpreter development. Require continuous learning units for interpreters to ensure interpreters remain engaged and current as working professionals. Ensure the Deaf community and other consumers are aware of how to use the WAVLI complaint process.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Community of Stakeholders:**

- Create a Provincial Taskforce to develop a Strategic Plan to address the recommendations and solutions that have emerged in this review. This may require an external consultant that can help the group examine the data in this report and facilitate the development of a strategic plan.

### **Inter-Agency Collaboration:**

- Explore having a shared calendar where interpreters can input availability and receive private offers based on their schedule, like what PHSA uses for spoken language interpreters.
- VRS providers adjust policies that require scheduling commitments three weeks in advance to allow for more flexibility among freelance interpreters.
- Consider the ways in which policy and practice changes can support interpreter coverage, which could include part-time positions, block times or half or full day contract day rates, etc.
- Consider the ways in which more consistent policies might lessen the negative impacts of “competing” for interpreters; this could include more consistent practices on travel time, travel rates, etc.

### **WAVLI:**

- Develop a strategic plan that focuses on hiring an Executive Director who can lead on strong marketing and government advocacy strategies; the skill set required may require hiring someone from outside of the field with the benefits of having skills sets not typically found in interpreters.
- Negotiate options for group benefits for members.
- Develop a paid and structured mentorship program that can build capacity of recent graduates; publish a suggested fee grid.
- Consider publishing a fee grid that can guide practitioners and consumers about reasonable rates per the interpreter’s education and experience, etc.

### **Conclusions**

This report has provided an overview of the issues surrounding the provision of interpreting services in British Columbia. This project was designed to provide a picture of the current strengths of service delivery, identify gaps and opportunities, and highlight recommendations to address the needs. The report also found similar findings to the discussion groups that WAVLI CASE committee hosted during the summer of 2022 that explored some of the issues affecting interpreters. The discussions at that time revealed that interpreters were concerned about:

- Lack of funded mentorship
- Lack of sufficient input or consultation on the policies
- Rising overhead costs and the instability of community work/sustainable income
- Feeling isolated in the work we are doing.

- Lack of formal systems to support and train interpreters who want to specialize in medical, mental health and/or legal interpreting.

Recommendations included:

- A more stable form of employment in community interpreting
- A funded and formal system of mentorship
- More input/consultation on interpreting services and policies
- A system of support interconnection to the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deafblind communities

The current study has added to the picture by including other stakeholders' views. Those who participated in this 2023 research project want to see interpreting services continue to thrive and serve the community. By approaching the recommendations in a systematic manner, BC stakeholders could see significant and exciting changes to the ways in which interpreter development takes place within their province.