

SBS launches audio description, giving more Australians access to enjoy the full story

SBS is making its programming more accessible for audiences with the full launch of audio description (AD) across a range of SBS and SBS VICELAND content on TV.

Audio description - the narration of visual and non-verbal elements of a program during gaps in dialogue - offers people who are blind or vision-impaired an understanding of what is being shown on screen. Flagship documentaries, compelling dramas, world-class movies, and cult classics that SBS is known for will feature in the selection of programming available on the live broadcast of SBS and SBS VICELAND channels.

The range of upcoming audio described titles being shown in June and July include the new SBS-commissioned documentary series *Who Gets to Stay in Australia?* which reveals stories of people seeking to call Australia home; SBS's iconic genealogy series *Who Do You Think You Are?*; inspiring stories of multicultural Australia in *Where Are You Really From?*, presented by Michael Hing; SBS favourite *Great British Railway Journeys*; the iconic *Godfather* film series and 90s cult phenomenon *The X Files* on SBS VICELAND - plus much more.

SBS has been running a successful trial of audio description across selected SBS and SBS VICELAND programming since early April. During that time, more than 135 hours of audio described content have been shown and SBS has been seeking feedback from audiences to help inform and improve how it delivers the service.

SBS Managing Director, James Taylor, said: "We're thrilled to be making many of SBS's distinctive and much-loved programs available for more Australians to enjoy with audio description. SBS's documentaries, dramas and movies take audiences on journeys around the world, create national conversations about issues impacting our society, and provide unique opportunities to be entertained. The launch of audio description is an important step in continuing to improve the accessibility of our content, and ensure more Australians are included and able to engage with and experience our programming.

"I'd like to thank the groups and representatives who have been consulting with us and advocating for the many Australians who are blind or vision-impaired, as well as those who have taken part in our research and provided valuable insights as we have trialled the service. This has been vital in informing our approach. We continue to seek feedback from audiences to ensure we're best meeting their needs."



The trial and launch of audio description follow the Federal Government's provision of grant funding to SBS and the ABC to implement audio description by 1 July 2020.

Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP, said: "The Morrison Government's additional funding of \$4 million for the ABC and SBS to deliver this innovation provides blind and vision impaired Australians with greater access to television content.

"I'm pleased our national broadcasters are embracing new ways to serve their audiences and broaden the variety of content available to blind and vision impaired Australians."

Emma Bennison, CEO of Blind Citizens Australia (BCA), has welcomed the launch, saying: "The introduction of audio description is a landmark step and life-changing milestone in making TV more accessible for people Australians are blind or vision-impaired.

"BCA and other blindness organisations have worked closely with both SBS and the ABC to facilitate their roll-out, and we acknowledge their commitment to providing a quality service that truly meets the needs of our community. We look forward more Australians now being able to enjoy TV with their family and friends, and the continued development of these important services."

From 28 June, SBS and the ABC will be providing around 14 hours each of audio described content every week, supported by features designed to ensure all audiences are aware of when this programming is available. This includes an audio chime and on-air notification alerting audiences to audio description being provided for a program about to be broadcast.

SBS is also outlining the content it has coming up across SBS and SBS VICELAND on a dedicated audio described program listing web page, which is accessible for blind or vision-impaired people with the use of a screen reader. There will also be on-air promotion informing all audiences of what audio description is, and the letters 'AD' will feature alongside scheduled audio described titles in electronic program guides available on TVs, and on the SBS program guide on its website, in the same way closed captioning is indicated for audiences.

SBS and the ABC engaged the Centre of Inclusive Design to help advise on the development of audio description services, and to undertake research to help in understanding the requirements and preferences of people who are blind or vision-impaired.

Manisha Amin, CEO of the Centre for Inclusive Design, said: "We are so pleased that ABC and SBS involved users in the design and testing of the new system. Given the different television sets and ways that we watch TV these days it was important to gain real feedback on what worked and what didn't.

"It was clear from our research that people were keen to have a quality audio description service. This is the first step on the journey. It's heartening to see both broadcasters taking an inclusive design approach to their services with audience needs at the core of their offering."

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Audio description can be enabled by changing the audio settings on a TV or set top box. Instructions for a range of tested models, and further guidance to assist people in setting up or disabling the service, is available online on the SBS website at sbs.com.au/audiodescription, where audiences can also access **SBS's dedicated audio described program listing web page**.

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