



Blindness. Low Vision. Opportunity.

Vision Australia's Western Australia Election Priorities 2017

There are over 36,000 people in Western Australia who are blind or have low vision, and this is expected to rise to over 60,000 by 2030 as the population continues to grow and live longer. By way of example, 1 in 30 West Australians aged 60 years or older have vision impairment that cannot be fixed by wearing glasses, 1 in 16 over 70 years old, 1 in 10 over 80 years old, and 1 in 7 aged 90 years or older.

Significant progress has been made for our community in Western Australia, including the agreement on the NDIS rollout, and the introduction of the iVote system at this election. We urge you to commit to acting on the following five issues to continue building Western Australia's record of achievement.

Election issue 1 - Transport

The use of taxis is a non-optional cost of blindness. They provide a crucial link to maintaining employment, gaining an education, and participating in recreational, sporting and other community activities.

The Taxi User's Subsidy Scheme (TUSS) provides support to people with a disability to access vital services, appointments, and employment, thereby facilitating independent living. The service is indispensable in rural and remote communities where public transport options are extremely limited or non-existent.

In Western Australia, the TUSS covers a 50% subsidy, of up to \$25 per trip. This amount is far below meeting the reasonable costs of taxi travel: subsidy schemes in Victoria and NSW provide up to \$60 of the fare. The current TUSS fare subsidy should be increased to support people who are blind or have low vision meet the non-optional costs of travel.

Additionally, Vision Australia recommends that the TUSS paper voucher system transitions to an electronic card payment system, which works similarly to a credit card. This minor change will vastly improve the user-friendliness of this critical essential service, especially for people who are blind or have low vision, and who therefore are unable to read printed vouchers.

Vision Australia calls on you and your party to:

- Review and extend the TUSS subsidy fare to \$60, in line with Victoria and NSW, to reflect the non-optional travel costs for people who are blind or have low vision.
- Transition the TUSS to an electronic card payment system to improve the accessibility of the scheme for people who are blind or have low vision.

Information and enquiries:

email: governmentrelations@visionaustralia.org ph: (03) 9864 9421

Election issue 2 - NDIS and Aged Care Reform

Vision Australia is an active service provider in Western Australian trial sites. The ongoing transition from block funding to individual packages under the NDIS is a major challenge facing our clients and Vision Australia.

We are especially concerned about:

- people over the age of 65 who cannot access services through the NDIS or Aged Care programs;
- those living in rural and remote areas; and
- how specialised services will be funded to meet their needs into the future.

A major gap facing our community is that the Commonwealth's aged care program does not deliver the specialised services, technology, and aids and equipment required by seniors who are blind or have low vision to maintain safe and independent living in their own homes.

The unavailability of information and forms in accessible formats is of major concern, as many people are still unable to access their plans, information, or forms in braille, large print, or audio formats, which limits independence and the ability to exercise informed user choice. We hope the WA NDIS model will not duplicate the problems experienced in other trial sites.

Vision Australia calls on you and your party to:

- Commit to improving access to specialist services within the Aged Care system, including in residential and aged care homes, and through the provision of specialist aids and equipment.
- Ensure that accessible information is provided on-demand, in a reasonable time, for all NDIS related documents and plans.

Election issue 3 - Access to rural and remote services

As the most sparsely populated state, Western Australia faces unique challenges in the delivery of specialist services to remote and rural areas. Without a tailored approach, blindness and low vision services for seniors and people living outside urban centres are at risk. Failure to address these issues now will lead to an increased burden on Western Australia's health and community services sector both now and in the future.

This is often compounded for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in community. In 2012-2013, eye and sight problems were the most common long-term health condition, reported by 33% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and yet specialist services are frequently difficult to access or unavailable in remote areas.

Vision Australia calls on you and your party to:

- Allocate additional funding to specialist blindness and low vision service providers to develop and deliver services to rural and remote communities in Western Australia.
- Commit funding to the delivery of culturally appropriate specialist services in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in community in rural and remote areas.

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Election issue 4 - Access to real employment opportunities

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 14% of the Western Australian population has a disability, a figure expected to increase as the population ages. Vision Australia research has found that the national unemployment rate for people who are blind or have low vision is at an unacceptable 58%.

We recognise and commend the WA Public Sector Commission's goal to meet or exceed employment rates of 2.3% for people with disability. However, as the 2016 State of the Sector report identifies that the current rate is only 2%, Vision Australia recommends you push for implementing a more ambitious target of double the current rate over the next four year term of Parliament.

Jobs are critical to achieving a genuinely independent and prosperous lifestyle for the blind and low vision community. The Western Australian Government has a responsibility to play a leadership role in the employment of people with disability.

Vision Australia calls on you and your party to:

- Double the workforce participation rates of people with disability including people who are blind or have low vision within the public sector in the next four-year term to 4%.
- Develop targeted plans at the department and agency level that address structural barriers to employment and deliver job opportunities, including an internship program for people who are blind or have low vision.

Election issue 5 - Accessibility of general services

Community services and facilities for the general population should be available on an equal basis to all, and should be responsive to their needs. Unfortunately, there are many barriers that prevent people who are blind or have low vision from accessing these services including a lack of information being made into accessible formats, low level or passive discrimination, poor understanding or outdated ideas about the capability of people who are blind or have low vision, or difficulty in travelling to appointments and locations.

Mainstream services including health, education, employment, transport, justice, community and local government services should be supported to provide a high quality, responsive offering to people who are blind or have low vision.

Vision Australia calls on you and your party to:

- Develop agency performance indicators on people with disability accessing mainstream services, by including disability specific questions in mainstream data collections.
- Development of Disability Action Plans by key government agencies that include measurable outputs on the accessibility of services, inclusion of recognition of disability needs and availability of information and support for consumers with disability.

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