

Vision Australia

2016 Federal Election Priorities

Invitation for candidates to commit to the blindness and low vision community

More than 350,000 Australians are blind or have low vision – 94% of whom are of voting age. As the population continues to grow older and live longer, this number will keep rising. Significant progress has been made for our community in recent years, including tactile features being added to the next generation of banknotes. But there is much more to be done!

This document outlines our key priorities for the 2016 Federal Election. Vision Australia is asking for a commitment on these five priorities, from you and your party, to keep improving living conditions for the blindness and low vision community.

Create meaningful employment for people with disability

Jobs are critical to achieving a genuinely independent and economically sustainable lifestyle for people with disability. As one of the largest employers across Australia, the Government has a responsibility to play a key leadership role towards increasing employment of people with disability.

The workforce participation rate for people with disability was recorded as 54.9% in 2012, compared with 82.5% for the remainder of the population, and the majority of studies indicate that people with disability are grossly under-represented in the public sector workforce.

Vision Australia calls on you and your party to commit to:

- **Set a new target to reduce the unemployment rate of people with disability to match the general population figure (from 9.4% to approximately 5.7%).**
- **Create a targeted APS internship for people who are blind or have low vision aged 18 to 21, to raise employability and off-set their lack of youth employment opportunities.**
- **Collect, collate and publicly report on the number of people with disability employed in the APS, and disaggregate according to disability type with a dedicated category for blindness and low vision, to track your progress.**

Ensure quality education for improved learning outcomes

Education is the critical pathway for transitioning successfully into meaningful employment – empowering students who are blind or have low vision with opportunity and choice. Vision Australia's research validates this strong correlation. In 2012, 66% of the blindness and low vision community who were engaged in paid work, identified as having post graduate qualifications. This illustrates the need to obtain higher academic qualifications in order to secure meaningful jobs.

It is critical for the Commonwealth Government to demonstrate strong leadership in working with the States, to ensure students who are blind or have low vision have equitable access, equipment and supports to achieve the best possible learning outcomes.

Vision Australia believes greater clarification and funding is needed to address the gaps between the NDIS and education portfolios to meet student needs – disability support is woefully under-funded through both the State and Federal education portfolios.

Vision Australia calls on you and your party to support blind and low vision students by:

- **Implementing recommendations outlined in the 2015 Review of the Disability Standards for Education and the Gonski Review, and create an appropriately funded 'student with disability' entitlement to significantly reduce overall costs.**

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- **Routinely collect, collate and publicly report on the progress of students with disability in achieving their learning outcomes, disaggregated according to disability type, and in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals.**

Support Senior's access to blindness and low vision services

Each year, Vision Australia provides services and supports to tens of thousands of people who are blind or have low vision, of whom 70% are aged 65 years or older.

Losing your vision impacts on your ability to do things safely and independently. Research has shown that it doubles the risk of falls, triples the risk of experiencing depression, quadruples the risk of hip fractures and leads to admission to nursing homes three years earlier.

To support seniors who are blind or have low vision we ask you & your party to commit to:

- **Fund specialist blindness providers to supply aids and equipment to seniors living with vision loss, so they remain safe and independent in their own homes for longer.**
- **Implement adequate policy and funding to ensure specialist blindness services can be delivered to Home Care Package holders and residents of nursing homes.**

Mandate Audio Description on Australian free-to-air television

Audio description is delivered as narration on a separate aural track, to describe visual elements happening in a television program during the natural pauses in the dialogue. Without it, people who are blind miss out on important content and social interaction opportunities, because they're unable to watch and discuss television like the rest of the community.

Australia is embarrassingly behind many other developed and developing countries in providing this service on free-to-air television. Vision Australia's research indicates that up to two-thirds of our clients do not have access to the internet, and that just 17% use a smart phone. Relying on online streaming to deliver audio description content in Australia is a second class service and it burdens pensioners with the cost of accessing programs, everyone else can enjoy for free and in real-time.

Vision Australia calls on you and your party to commit to:

- **Amend the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* to mandate a minimum of 14 hours per week of audio described content on all free-to-air and pay TV stations.**
- **Support the ABC to maintain audio description beyond the 2015/16 iView trial.**

Introduce accessible voting through iVote

The right to a confidential and independent vote is taken for granted by most people – astonishingly, at the 2013 Federal election, there was no way for people who are blind or have low vision to cast a secret and independent vote.

By establishing the iVote system, NSW became the national leader on accessible voting – allowing anyone with a disability, restricted mobility, reading difficulty, or those in a remote, interstate or overseas location to vote independently, in secret and on election day.

The blindness and low vision community deserves secret and independent voting options at Federal elections – rather than having to rely on others to complete a ballot paper on their behalf.

Vision Australia calls on you and your party to commit to working with the AEC to introduce an iVote system in time for the next federal election.