# Vision Australia

# Access to Employment Position Statement

**June 2020**

# Position Statement summary

This position statement is about access to employment which is a fundamental right of all adults who are blind or have low vision. Employment is integral to maximising opportunities for participation in all aspects of life, including economic security, buying or renting a home, leisure and recreation, and access to goods and services, including assistive technologies. Given the high levels of unemployment and underemployment experienced by people who are blind or have low vision, governments, employer bodies, employers, and vocational educational bodies must develop and adopt policies and programs that will maximise opportunity for our clients.

If you would like this position statement in an alternative format or wish to discuss it with Vision Australia’s Policy and Advocacy team, please contact us:

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# Background

A core value of Australian society is that people should have the opportunity to pursue the career of their choice and to seek and gain employment. Under-employment and unemployment are regarded as undesirable and many studies have demonstrated the disadvantaging effects of unemployment and under-employment on health, well-being, self-esteem and the ability to participate in society as active citizens.

People who have a disability, including people who are blind or have low vision, have the same fundamental rights as other members of the community, and this includes the right to equal access to employment. The Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 makes it unlawful to discriminate against people with a disability in certain key areas of economic, social and cultural life, including employment. Australia has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) which, among other things, asserts the rights of people with a disability to have equal access to employment and call on signatories to remove barriers to such access.

Despite good intentions, there are still significant barriers facing people who are blind or have low vision in seeking, gaining and maintaining employment and unemployment rates are much higher than for the rest of the community.

In July 2007, Vision Australia conducted a comprehensive survey into the employment of people who are blind or have low vision in Australia. Based on 2000 interviews conducted between September 2006 and January 2007, the survey reaches some insightful but sobering conclusions:

* 69% of people of working age who are blind or have low vision are not in paid employment. Even if those who are identified as unemployed for reasons of retirement, education, homemaking or as a lifestyle choice are excluded, those who are blind or have low vision are four and a half times more likely to be unemployed than the national average. That is, 63% of the potential labour force with a vision impairment are unemployed, compared to 14% for the population as a whole.
* There are many “discouraged workers” who could potentially join the workforce. 40% of people of working age who are blind or have low vision indicate they are unemployed not by their own choice, but are not actively looking for a job. By contrast, the proportion of the general population in this “discouraged workers” category at a national level is only 8%.
* In fact, only 13% of those who are unemployed not by choice and who are blind or have low vision are actively looking for work.
* The proportion of long-term unemployed (those who are unemployed for more than a year) throughout Australia is 33%. This compares with 50% for people who are blind or have low vision.
* The levels of under-employment (time-based) are higher than national averages.
* 46% of the employed population who are blind or have low vision are working part-time. Furthermore, 13% of those employed indicate they are working part-time because they are unable to find a full-time job. For the Australian population as a whole, the corresponding figures are 28% and 6% respectively. Hence, those who are blind or have low vision are twice as likely to be under-employed than the general population.

It is evident from these findings that the vast majority of people who are blind or have low vision are not experiencing full access to employment, and Vision Australia’s position statement is that a whole-of-community approach is urgently needed to remedy this situation.

# Position statement

1. Access to employment is a fundamental right of all adults who are blind or have low vision, and is integral to maximising opportunities for their participation in all aspects of life, including economic security, buying or renting a home, leisure and recreation and access to goods and services, including assistive technologies.
2. People who are blind or have low vision should have the same opportunities to develop small businesses as the rest of the community, including businesses promoted primarily through the Internet.
3. Students who are blind or have low vision must have access to career and vocational counselling by specialists who are qualified and experienced in dealing with the special needs of people who are blind or have low vision.
4. Employer organisations must play a leadership role in promoting the benefits to employers of engaging people who are blind or have low vision and should consider initiatives such as employer awards to recognise the achievement of best practice.
5. Employers must ensure that job advertisements and other employment-related information are published in formats that are accessible to people who are blind or have low vision.

## About Vision Australia

Vision Australia is the largest national provider of services to people who are blind or have low vision in Australia. We are formed through the merger of several of Australia’s most respected and experienced blindness and low vision agencies, celebrating our 150th year of operation in 2017.

Our vision is that people who are blind or have low vision will increasingly be able to choose to participate fully in every facet of community life. To help realise this goal, we provide high-quality services to the community of people who are blind, have low vision or have a print disability, and their families.

Vision Australia service delivery areas include: registered provider of specialist supports for the NDIS and My Aged Care Aids and Equipment, Assistive/Adaptive Technology training and support,

Seeing Eye Dogs, National Library Services, Early childhood and education services, and Feelix Library for 0-7 year olds, employment services, production of alternate formats, Vision Australia Radio network, and a national partnership with Radio for the Print Handicapped, NSW Spectacles Program and Government Advocacy and Engagement. We also work collaboratively with Government, businesses and the community to eliminate the barriers our clients face in making life choices and including fully exercising their rights as Australian citizens.

Vision Australia has unrivalled knowledge and experience through constant interaction with clients and their families, of whom we provide services to more than 26,000 people each year, and also through the direct involvement of people who are blind or have low vision at all levels of our organisation. Vision Australia is well placed to advise governments, business and the community on challenges faced by people who are blind or have low vision as well as they support they require to fully participating in community life.

We have a vibrant Client Reference Group, comprising of people with lived experience who are representing the voice and needs of clients of our organisation to the board and management.

Vision Australia is also a significant employer of people who are blind or have low vision, with 15% of total staff having vision impairment. Vision Australia also has a Memorandum of Understanding with, and provides funds to, Blind Citizens Australia, to strengthen the voice of the blind community.

Position statement ends.