# Vision Australia

# Access to Taxi Services Position Statement

**June 2020**

# Position Statement summary

Taxi services remain an important means of transport for many people who are blind or who have low vision. They represent the closest equivalent to autonomous car travel, and are often a crucial link to maintaining employment, gaining an education, and participating in recreational, sporting and other community activities. However, barriers such as inconsistent and inadequate subsidies, lack of disability awareness, poor response times for short trips, and inaccessible fare meters, continue to hinder the independent access to taxi services for our client group. Given their role as an important transport link to the community, Vision Australia wants government and the taxi industry to take comprehensive action to remove any structural and attitudinal barriers that limit access to taxi services for people who are blind or have low vision.

If you would like this position Statement in an alternative format or wish to discuss it with Vision Australia’s Government Relations and Advocacy Team, please contact us:

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# Background

Transport plays an essential role in our ability to participate actively in modern Australian life, whether it is for employment, education, sport or just to meet up with friends or do the shopping. However, inadequate public transport and limitations on door to door travel without independent movement by car can hinder economic, cultural and social inclusion for people who are blind or have low vision.

Even when bus, tram, train or ferry services are available, they are often difficult to negotiate safely, confidently and independently. Barriers exist that are often related to the vehicles themselves or the access infrastructure, service information, navigation between different transport modes and set routes in relation to one’s actual destination. Thus, because people who are blind or have low vision cannot enjoy the convenience and flexibility of independent car travel or adequate public transport, taxi services are often the only way in which our clients can gain access to community spaces, activities, facilities and services. Taxi services are therefore a necessity rather than a luxury for many people who are blind or have low vision.

Unfortunately, and despite some cooperation from the taxi industry, people who are blind or have low vision still encounter significant barriers when attempting to use taxi services. Anecdotal evidence and reports from taxi regulators and equal opportunity authorities on formal complaints show that barriers to access are persistent and are found in all states and territories. These barriers include:

* Taxi drivers who refuse to pick up passengers with dog guides and other mobility aids;
* Taxi drivers who are not able to find the passenger’s destination and who drop the passenger at an incorrect, often unfamiliar, location;
* The inability or unwillingness of some taxi drivers to assist passengers to navigate between the taxi drop off point and the entrance of their actual destination;
* Taxi drivers who do not honour state and reciprocal interstate taxi subsidy arrangements;
* Zoning regulations (i.e. “no stopping” zones) which prevent taxis from stopping outside buildings in CBD areas, requiring passengers to navigate their way some distance, most often unassisted, from their drop off point to their actual destination;
* State government taxi subsidy schemes that do not provide uniform eligibility criteria for people who are blind or have significant low vision across jurisdictions;
* The failure of state taxi subsidies to keep pace with inflation and taxi fare increases, and the inconsistency of subsidy limits across state jurisdictions; and
* Fare meters, online and App booking systems that are inaccessible to patrons who do not read using sight.

It is further the case that people who are blind or have low vision are among the most economically disadvantaged in the community. Vision Australia’s most recent employment survey conducted in 2012 shows that 58 percent of people who are blind or have low vision are unemployed and one third of those who are in paid employment would like to work more hours. Initiatives such as government taxi subsidies are not just a means of making taxi transport more affordable, but also part of a broader response to the systemic disadvantage experienced by many people who are blind or have low vision. As such, these initiatives must evolve to keep pace with inflation and fare increases as well as taking into account the needs and aspirations of users.

There are also broader issues related to the provision of information in formats accessible to people who are blind or have low vision that also lead to inequities in the provision of taxi services. In addition to the fare meter and booking systems, these include information identifying the vehicle and information about the driver. These issues make it difficult for passengers to identify the particulars related to their journey, and can make use of taxis more uncertain and stressful for passengers.

It is true that awareness and public advocacy of these issues has made some progress in some parts of Australia, and many taxi drivers themselves choose to operate with a high standard of customer service ethic. However, these gains have not resulted in consistent and significant outcomes that adequately provide equality in the provision of taxi services as a human right for people who are blind or who have low vision. Having ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008, all Australian governments under the Commonwealth have an obligation and responsibility to ensure equity and dignity for everyone in the provision of public goods and services. Article 9 in particular of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, asserts that:

“To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas”.

In order for taxi services to be conveniently and equitably available to patrons who are blind or have low vision as an integral element of public transport there must be significant attitudinal and structural change that spans across government regulation, owners and operators of taxi services, and drivers alike.

# Position Statement

1. People who are blind or have low vision have the right to access taxi services with the same level of amenity and convenience as other passengers, and to use the mobility aid of their choice when doing so.
2. Taxi regulators, owners and operators must ensure that booking operators, all drivers in training and all licensed drivers, receive adequate training of their responsibilities and obligations under applicable equal opportunity, human rights and disability discrimination legislation.
3. Taxi regulators, owners and operators must ensure that all licensed drivers and drivers in training are sufficiently instructed in the provisions and operation of local and reciprocal interstate subsidy scheme vouchers and cards.
4. Taxi regulators, owners and operators must move to develop a consistent customer service culture within standard operating practice, which includes provisions to assist passengers who are blind or have low vision to and from the vehicle and their point of origin or destination.
5. State and municipal councils must work with the taxi industry to enable easy access taxi drop offs at all possible street locations in the CBD.
6. State and territory governments must develop and implement a uniform eligibility regime across Australia for taxi subsidy schemes, which includes people who are blind or have low vision and provisions for both permanent and temporary blindness and low vision.
7. Eligibility for taxi subsidy schemes should not be means tested and usage should not be capped.
8. State and Territory Governments must ensure that subsidy rates automatically keep pace with taxi fare increases, are indexed annually and reflect both the importance of equal access to taxi services and the level of disadvantage experienced by scheme recipients.
9. State and reciprocal interstate subsidy schemes should be accessed at the point of sale across Australia, by means of a reusable plastic electronic card, and not single use paper vouchers.
10. Taxi vehicle identification must be uniformly displayed in both tactile lettering and braille, both internally and externally, on each passenger door of the vehicle.
11. Taxi regulators, taxi owners and operators must take action to mandate the phased introduction of accessible talking fare meters into all taxi vehicles by 2020.
12. Taxi operators must ensure that online booking systems are WCAG 2.0 AA compliant, and that downloadable booking software such as smart phone Apps are user tested and fully accessible to users who are blind or have low vision who use these devices with assistive adaptations.
13. There must be a national uniform approach to penalties for taxi drivers who refuse to carry passengers using dog guides or who in other ways discriminate against 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.