**Vision Australia**

**2022 Victorian Election Priorities**

# Victorians who are blind or have low vision matter

It is estimated that nearly 100,000 Victorians are blind or have low vision[[1]](#footnote-1), and this number will continue to rise as our population ages. Vision Australia is the nation’s largest blindness and low vision service provider. With over 200,000 Vision Australia supporters just in Victoria, the community respect us as the nation’s leading expert in our field.

For more than 150 years Vision Australia, and its predecessors, have delivered services for our clients so they can live the life they choose. We support individuals at every stage of life, by providing a broad range of services, including: disability employment services, expert clinical advice, children services and orientation and mobility training.

We are also a leading provider of NDIS and My Aged Care for people who are blind or have low vision. Finally, one of our most utilised services is our library. It is the only one of its type in our nation, providing people with a print disability access to more than 43,000 accessible book titles.

We are pleased to present our 2022 Victorian Election Priorities, which were developed in consultation with Victorians who are blind or have low vision, most notably voters.

If you invest in issues that matter to people who are blind or have low vision, a significant positive impact will be felt by the blindness and low vision community and in some areas, by all people with disability.

## Vision Australia’s key priorities are as follows:

**Travel Subsidies**

* Maintain the Multi Purpose Taxi Program card, introduce audio announcements on buses, and increase the quality of audio announcements on trains and trams.

**Employment**

* Mandate, promote and monitor Australian Standard AS EN 301 549 within the Victorian Public Service.
* Strengthen the collection of disability information and publish progress towards the Victorian Government’s disability employment target.

**Pedestrian Safety**

* Ensure that any legalisation of e-scooters in Victoria permits commercialised e-scooters only, enforces a safe maximum speed limit in pedestrian areas, extends the Traffic Accident Commission compensation scheme to pedestrians who are injured in an e-scooter accident, and requires mandatory reporting of accidents involving e-scooters.

# Independent Travel

People who are blind or have low vision cannot drive and rely on public and point to point transport to travel independently. Commercial passenger vehicles such as taxis and Uber are the equivalent to independent point to point transport for people who are blind or have low vision.

The majority of Victorians who are blind or have low vision make use of the Multi Purpose Taxi Program (MPTP) fare subsidy. The MPTP can now be used in Victorian taxis and some rideshare services and covers 50 percent of the travel cost per trip, up to $60. The MPTP fare subsidy makes the cost of taxis and rideshare services more manageable for people who are blind or have low vision.

## Bus & train announcements:

Public transport is frequently used by people who are blind or have low vision to travel to work, school, medical appointments and social occasions. They rely heavily on public transport audio announcements to navigate. However, buses in Victoria do not have audio announcements making bus travel a more stressful and risky transport option than trains and trams.

Without audio announcements in buses, people who are blind or have low vision face the constant risk of overshooting their stop, potentially leading to rushed, unsafe attempts to exit the bus or getting off the bus at the wrong stop and finding themselves stranded in unfamiliar surrounds. The lack of audio announcements on Victorian buses is exposing people who are blind or have low vision to unnecessary risk and this must be resolved.

While train services in Victoria do offer audible announcements, they are not consistently clear, accurate or timely. Onboard train announcements are not to the same standard as those used in other Australian jurisdictions, and are often unreliable, causing undue stress for people who rely on them to determine the correct stop. Platform announcements are also inconsistent and unsatisfactory. This increases the risk of injury for travellers who are blind or have low vision as they are forced to rush due to late or unclear announcements.

## Vision Australia calls on the next Victorian Government to:

* Maintain the current Multi Purpose Taxi Program, and continue its expansion to include additional rideshare operators;
* Introduce clear, audible and consistent bus announcements; and
* Ensure all onboard and platform announcements for trains are clear, audible and consistent.

## Return on investment:

* Ability for everyone to contribute to the economy through access to employment, shops, entertainment and holidays;
* Less likelihood of mental health conditions such as depression due to social isolation; and
* Reduction in customer service complaints and reports to the Disability Discrimination Commission.

# Improving disability employment via accessibility standards

It is well known that people with a disability remain significantly underrepresented in Australian workforces. This is largely due to people with disability having multiple barriers to employment, which restricts economic participation and independence.

People who are blind or have low vision still face many barriers to both gaining and maintaining meaningful employment. Unfortunately, we know the employment rate of people who are blind or have low vision is the highest of all disability groups.

We are pleased to see the State Government working towards a twelve percent disability employment target[[2]](#footnote-2) in their workplaces, and we are equally interested to review the activities to meet this yearly benchmark. Vision Australia has identified that in order to help create more employment opportunities for people with disability, workplaces must be accessible. For job seekers who are blind or have low vision, and all people with disability, inaccessible technology and equipment within the vast majority of workplaces is a major barrier to equal access to employment.

Employees without disability are provided, by default, the equipment they need to do their jobs, however, the same provisions are not always offered to employees with disability.

Accessible equipment must be in workplaces from procurement stage, as it is often impossible to retro fit ICT to make it accessible.

AS EN 301 549 is the standard that exists to guide the procurement of accessible information and communications technology ICT, but currently it is not enforced within the Victorian Public Service.

## Vision Australia calls on the next Victorian Government to:

* Mandate, promote and monitor AS EN 301 549 within the Victorian Public Service. We seek a mandate within the first year of government; and
* Strengthen the collection of disability information and publish progress towards the Victorian Government’s disability employment target.

## Return on Investment

* Real steps towards achieving the disability employment target and reducing the alarmingly high unemployment rate of people with disability; and
* Government regarded as the leader in enforcing accessibility standards, setting the expectations for employers across this and other States.

# Pedestrian Safety

Electric powered scooters (e-scooters) are becoming an increasingly used form of transport in Australia. Whilst we appreciate the environmental benefit associated with the use of e-scooters, this must be balanced against the safety of all pedestrians, including those in the blindness and low vision community.

Public navigation is generally more challenging for people who are blind or have low vision. The introduction of e-scooters adds to this challenge. This is not only because of the potential for serious injury from collision with a fast-moving scooter, but also due to the near-silent nature of these vehicles which makes them difficult for a person with low vision to detect and take appropriate evasive action if necessary. In addition, the tendency for these vehicles to be left on footpaths creates an obstacle and potential trip hazard for blind and low vision pedestrians.

Vision Australia conducted a survey of its clients in 2021 in relation to the impact of e-scooters and other rideable vehicles. Of the respondents to that survey:

* 35% said that the presence of e-scooters and similar on footpaths has led to them using footpaths less often.
* 82% said that the prevalence of e-scooters and similar on footpaths has led to them feeling less safe.
* 50% had had a near miss with an e-scooter or similar on a footpath.
* 61% had encountered a trip hazard by a vehicle being left on a footpath.
* Over 50% said that the silent nature of e-scooters and similar was a serious issue.
* 30% indicated that the speed these vehicles travel was their main concern.

## Should the government choose to legalise e-scooters at the conclusion of the current e-scooter trial in Victoria, Vision Australia calls on the next Victorian government to:

* Permit commericalised e-scooters only;
* Enforce a maximum speed limit for e-scooters of 10km/h in pedestrian areas;
* Extend the Traffic Accident Commission compensation scheme to pedestrians who are injured in an e-scooter accident. This would allow insurance coverage for pedestrians in circumstances where a user is riding the e-scooter in a non-permissible manner; and
* Require mandatory reporting of accidents involving e-scooters.

## Return on investment:

* Ability for the whole community to access public areas and open spaces in a safe and accessible way; and
* Ensure the continued ability for people who are blind or have low vision to access and engage with the community independently and safely.

1. 1 ABS and SDAC [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. statedisabilityplan.vic.gov.au/every-opportunity [↑](#footnote-ref-2)