

# Vision Australia’s Priorities

# Queensland Election 2017

**Invitation to commit to the 2017 Queensland Election priorities of people who are blind or have low vision**

There are 75,000 Queenslanders who are blind or have low vision, including 70,000 of voting age. As the population continues to grow older and live longer, this number will keep rising.

Vision Australia strongly believes that supporting the rights and needs of Queenslanders who are blind or have low vision must be a priority for all political parties and candidates.

This document outlines key priorities for the 2017 state election to be held on November 25. Vision Australia seeks a commitment on these priorities from you and your party to keep improving Queensland for people who are blind or have low vision:

1. Creating more employment opportunities for people who are blind or have low vision.
2. Ensuring equal access to education.
3. Equitable and accessible transport options and supports.
4. Introducing accessible voting options, which afford a truly independent, secret and verifiable vote.
5. Creating a genuine partnership with Vision Australia by boosting funds to support the needs of Queenslanders who are blind or have low vision.

# Our Priorities

## MORE JOBS

The unemployment rate for people who are blind or have low vision is over ten times that of the general population and the highest of all disability groups. Thousands of skilled, highly capable and job-ready Queenslanders are unemployed or underemployed due to a number of barriers, including limited work experience opportunities.

Young people who are blind or have low vision very often miss out on part-time or holiday jobs such as hospitality or retail work as these kinds of jobs almost always require vision.

While we commend the Queensland Government for committing to a disability employment target of 8% for the Queensland Public Service (QPS), we are concerned that only 3.22% of this target was achieved, as noted in the latest 2015 Government social inclusion report.

We were also pleased to see that in March this year an Australian Standard for accessible ICT procurement was adopted. This outlines accessibility requirements for public procurement of ICT products and services. This represents great progress for Australian digital inclusion and has the potential to transform the public service into an employer of choice for people with disability.

For the ICT standard to be effective there must be a robust compliance mechanism to ensure procurement officers follow the standard when purchasing products and services that meet the needs of all employees and potential employees. We urge that there be widespread training on the standard for Procurement Officers and Procurement Branches in the QPS.

Jobs are critical to achieving a genuinely independent, prosperous and financially sustainable lifestyle for people who are blind or have low vision. The Queensland Government has the opportunity to take leadership in the employment of people with disability. Vision Australia would be proud to work alongside the Queensland Government to establish a public service graduate program for graduates of any age, who are blind or have low vision.

Vision Australia seeks:

* The Australian Standard for the procurement of accessible Information and Communications Technology (ICT), the EN 301 549, to be legislated as mandatory, monitored and publicly reported on.
* To help reach the 8% disability employment target, establishment of a Graduate Program in partnership with Vision Australia for two blind or low vision graduates per year.

## AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM

There are nearly 5,000 Queensland students who are blind or have low vision and many of these students are disadvantaged from the moment they enter the education system.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act, the Queensland Government is obligated to provide non-discriminatory access to education. Yet there are not enough resources to ensure that all students who are blind or have low vision have equal access to braille teaching, specialist technology, learning materials in accessible formats and learning programs tailored to their needs.

There is a widening gap for services provided to students in the metropolitan region compared to regional, rural and remote areas. Additionally, there are instances were some students receive approval for specialist equipment while others are being denied the same item based on that equipment not being on the Department’s buying list.

As the NDIS rolls out, there appears to be increasing confusion over where responsibility for such technology lies, leading to ongoing delays in the provision of vital learning tools and equipment. This can lead to an unequal learning environment and prevent students from flourishing in school.

Completing education goals continues to be extremely difficult for TAFE students who are blind or have low vision due to the failure of TAFEs to comply with accessibility standards such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). Many students who are blind or have low vision experience unnecessary difficulty in using online learning platforms and in obtaining learning materials in accessible formats.

Vision Australia seeks:

* A commitment to the provision of greater resources to support the education of students who are blind or have low vision, both at the school and TAFE levels.
* That there are clear obligations and enforcement mechanisms introduced for WCAG guidelines within Queensland education institutions.
* For all students who are blind or have low vision to have equal and timely access to the assistive technology they need in order to fully participate in school life.

## ACCESS TO TRANSPORT

People who are blind or have low vision do not drive and often rely on public transport to travel to and from work and to participate in community activities.

While we congratulate the Queensland Government for extending the Taxi Subsidy Scheme (TSS) until 2019 for NDIS participants, more needs to be done.

The TSS subsidy must be expanded to cover all forms of ridesharing such as Uber. Ridesharing is an affordable transport option, and people who are blind or have low vision should have equal access to the same ridesharing services as the rest of the community.

The promise of the NDIS is that no one will be worse off, no matter where they lived, yet current arrangements for transport subsidies are fragmented and inconsistent across states. Vision Australia urges the Queensland Government to work with other states, territories, the Federal Government, and the National Disability Insurance Agency to ensure that all Queenslanders have equitable access to transport supports that enable full participation in social and community life.

Vision Australia seeks:

* The TSS amount increased to $60 a trip. This is urgently needed after nearly 25 years of no increase, and would bring the TTSS in line with comparable schemes in Victoria and New South Wales. A commitment that TSS will be retained for NDIS participants past 2019.
* The TSS to be extended to other forms of point-to-point transport such as Uber.
* The Queensland Government to work with State and Federal counterparts for nationally consistent travel supports under the NDIS.
* The introduction of audio announcements on buses and at bus stations.

## ACCESSIBLE VOTING

Every eligible Queenslander must be able to exercise their right to cast a secret, independent and verifiable vote in all Australian elections. Even though the right to a secret ballot is woven into the fabric of Australia's political and constitutional history, Queenslanders who are blind or have low vision remain disadvantaged on Election Day.

While we applaud the Queensland Government for trialling e-Assist at the 2015 state election – there is still a long way to go.

Vision Australia seeks:

* That the Queensland Parliament follow in the footsteps of NSW and WA to introduce iVote, a remote electronic voting system that gives people who are blind or have low vision the opportunity to vote independently and in secret.

## INCREASED FUNDING

There is an urgent need for the Queensland Government to develop a fairer funding arrangement with Vision Australia. Vision Australia is experiencing a loss of government block funding with the introduction of the NDIS. This means that we are increasingly unable to provide the level of services that are needed by the blindness and low vision community. In addition, the majority of services we provide to Queenslanders who are blind or have low vision are unfunded: as they do not receive Disability Services Queensland funding, they will be at the back of the queue for transitioning to the NDIS.

In 2016, Vision Australia, with the support of public donations, spent more than $12 million on providing services to Queenslanders, which is a contribution of more than 70% of the cost of services to locals. The $2.1 million from the Queensland Government is simply not enough to meet the growing needs of the blind and low vision community. There is an urgent need for funded services in this transition period to maintain independence and quality of life.

The Vision Australia Library opens up a world of information to people who are blind or have low vision, or a print disability. Library members can access thousands of audio books, magazines, newspapers and podcasts, as well as thousands of braille and ebraille titles and music braille pieces. The Library supports literacy and is available to all people who are blind or have low vision, or a print disability. The Library currently receives funding from both the Victorian and New South Wales Government, and we request that the Queensland Government contributes to the ongoing library services that Queenslanders cannot access elsewhere.

**Vision Australia seeks:**

* $960,000 per annum over the next two years to support the transition of people who are blind or have low vision under 65 onto the NDIS, and to ensure ongoing access to high quality, specialist services.
* $250,000 per year to support Vision Australia’s Library services to Queenslanders who are blind or have low vision, or who have a print disability.