**BLIND CITIZENS AUSTRALIA**

**ABN 90 006 985 226**

**ANNUAL PRESIDENT’S REPORT**

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2016**

*Foreword: Due to limited staffing resources and recent operational changes at BCA, it has not been possible to produce a detailed annual report for 2015-16. However, as you will read, BCA has continued to grow and thrive as the national representative voice of Australians who are blind or vision-impaired.*

# President’s Report

## Overview

Over the past twelve months, BCA has turned its attention to overcoming some of our key challenges. I became President in October, affirming a commitment to re-engaging in a genuine conversation with members; developing an energised and transparent board; developing strategic positions on issues of concern to members; and creating opportunities for young and emerging leaders.

## 2015 – 16 Appointments and resignations

Greg Madson stepped down as President at the 2015 Annual General Meeting. We thank Greg for his tireless commitment to BCA during a very challenging period. Erika Webb did not stand for re-election at the 2015 AGM. Our sincere thanks to Erika for her work as a board member and in particular, for the energy and commitment she brought to leading the organisation at the Perth Convention last October.

In August, we appointed Leah van Poppel as CEO. Leah had previously worked with BCA in a policy role. So she was known to many members.

## Member Engagement

In November 2015 we announced a competition to find a new theme song for BCA’s weekly national radio program, “New Horizons”. This was a direct response to feedback received, from younger members in particular, that the previous theme, whilst appropriate for its time, was no longer viable. Steve Richardson won the competition and worked with Steve Sparrow and Rikki Chaplin to record the new theme song. We are proud that we now have a theme written, performed and recorded by people who are blind. This is an important reminder of what BCA is all about, empowerment and showcasing of people who are blind or vision impaired. The song can be purchased via ITunes, with proceeds going to BCA.

Much of our time over the past year has been spent listening to the views of members, whether via e-mail, phone or in person. By the time you read this report, I will have visited all states to meet with members. This work has been critical in terms of building relationships based on openness and trust, particularly as we have begun considering complex issues in relation to the structure of branches and closer working relationships between like-minded organisations. It has also enabled us to gain an understanding of what members expect from our organisation and what the key issues are. We have been reassured by the number of members who have been keen to engage in the forums we have held. This level of interest should give us all confidence that BCA continues to play an important role in the lives of our members.

## Board and CEO Development

This has been a strong focus, beginning with Governance training for all board members at our face-to-face meeting last November. At the same time, all directors were given areas of responsibility which they were asked to lead and report back on at board meetings.

Leah van Poppel was appointed as BCA’s new CEO in August 2015. One of my key roles during the year has been to support Leah. As a CEO myself, I am acutely conscious of the importance of investing time and energy in this area and have been pleased to do so along with other directors.

## Organisational Sustainability

We have developed a new strategic plan. The plan takes account of recommendations from the BCA Leader’s Summit held in June 2015; current funding circumstances; and broader changes in the disability sector, resulting from the roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

We recognise the wealth of knowledge and expertise we are fortunate to have in our former leaders. So we have established the Former Leaders Advisory Group (FLAG). We have begun seeking their advice on issues relating to sustainable funding options for BCA.

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## Funding

Following the loss of Federal Government funding in the 2014-15 Financial Year, and in an atmosphere of uncertainty regarding continued Victorian Government Advocacy and Information support with the introduction of the NDIS, the Board has been working to identify and secure other stable forms of financial support that will enable BCA to continue to provide independent advice and support to and on behalf of, blind and vision impaired Australians. We greatly appreciate the support we receive through the Jeffrey Blyth Foundation, Vision Australia and the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, but are determined to broaden our funding base so as to ensure our sustainability and autonomy.

And, most importantly we acknowledge and greatly appreciate the financial support we receive from our members and friends. Not only do these contributions amount to a substantial proportion of our annual income, they also provide important evidence of the value that our members place on having an independent, nationally representative, consumer voice.

## Strategic Advocacy

In the lead up to the 2016 Federal Election campaign, BCA developed positions on four key strategic areas. They were to address inequities between My Aged Care and the NDIS; to call for legislative reform to bring audio description services to all Australian television networks; to ensure that the information needs of people who are blind or vision-impaired are fully met by the NDIS; and to ensure full funding is restored to BCA to enable it to fully deliver on its mission.

A letter-writing campaign to politicians on these issues was developed. We also wrote letters to the editors of major newspapers, conducted radio interviews and shared information via BCA’s communications channels in the lead-up to the Federal Election.

## Leadership Development

Whilst we have made limited headway in this area in any formal sense, we are making slow but steady progress behind the scenes. We have begun to identify young and emerging leaders with the potential to contribute to BCA. We are considering how best to provide appropriate training and support to those with an interest in leadership positions at a local and national level. We are also considering how we might use next year’s national convention as an opportunity for development.

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## Closing Remarks

While we have made a start in re-establishing BCA as the national representative voice of people who are blind or have low vision, there is still much to be done. Our progress would not have been possible without a collaborative and cohesive board. I feel incredibly fortunate to have the support of all Directors and thank them for their commitment and dedication during the year. I particularly want to acknowledge and thank John Simpson, Vice-President and Daniel Stubbs, Treasurer. Their support, advice and diligence have been of immeasurable assistance to me.

On behalf of members and Directors, I want to thank Leah and all staff, past and present for their dedication and willingness to go above and beyond for BCA.

Finally, thank you to you, our members, for all you do to make BCA a strong national voice of people who are blind and vision-impaired. Whether you contribute as the President of a local branch, as a donor, or as someone who listens to “New Horizons”, we really appreciate your contribution and look forward to continuing to work with you in 2016-17.

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**Emma Bennison**

**President**