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Blind Citizens Australia

# Epidemic / Pandemic Policy

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## About Blind Citizens Australia

Blind Citizens Australia is the peak national representative organisation of and for Australians who are blind or vision impaired. Our mission is to achieve equity and equality by our empowerment, by promoting positive community attitudes and by striving for high quality and accessible services which meet our needs.

We provide peer support and individual advocacy to people who are blind or vision impaired across Australia. Through our campaign work, we address systemic barriers limiting the full and equal participation of people who are blind or vision impaired. Through our policy work, we provide advice to community and government on issues of importance to people who are blind or vision impaired.

As a consumer-based organisation, our work is directly informed by lived experience of blindness and vision impairment. Our members, our Directors and the majority of our staff are blind or vision impaired.

## About Australians who are blind or vision impaired

There are currently more than 450,000 people who are blind or vision impaired in Australia. According to Vision 2020 Australia, around 80% of vision loss in Australia is caused by conditions that become more common as people age. This raises a number of implications for Australia’s aging population, with one in every four Australians projected to be 65 years of age or older by the year 2056.

Eye conditions that cause vision impairment for Australians include: age-related macular degeneration, cataract, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma and uncorrected refractive error.

Australians who are blind or vision impaired can live rich and active lives and make meaningful contributions to their communities: working, volunteering, raising families and engaging in sports and other recreational activities. The extent to which people are able to actively and independently participate in community life does, however, rely on facilities, services and systems that are available to the public being designed in a way that makes them inclusive to the needs of all citizens – including those who are blind or vision impaired.

## Introduction

From time to time infectious diseases develop into epidemics or pandemics and create increased risks for the community. These occasions require specific policies targeted at the particular disease in question and general efforts at preparedness.

Blind Citizens Australia wishes as far as possible to protect its members, its staff, its volunteers, and the general public from infection or contagion by epidemics and/or pandemics.

Blind Citizens Australia will facilitate, through its policies and procedures, strategies designed to reduce risks to its members, its staff, its volunteers, and the general public.

Blind Citizens Australia will comply with all directions from authorised public health officers and recognised medical authorities in relation to the epidemic or pandemic.

## Scope

This policy applies to:

* Members
* Branches
* Staff
* Volunteers
* Contractors / Consultants
* Suppliers

## 1. Purpose of this policy

The purpose of this policy is to outline the strategies and actions that Blind Citizens Australia and its branches intend to take in the preparation and execution of face to face events to prevent the transmission of infectious diseases that are epidemics or pandemics, and control the transmission of infectious diseases when a case/s is identified.

For the purpose of this policy, infectious diseases mean diseases caused by pathogenic microorganisms, such as bacteria, viruses, parasites or fungi; the diseases can be spread, directly or indirectly, from one person to another. This policy is focused on infectious diseases that are declared to be an epidemic or pandemic.

It is recognized that where infection can spread through surface contact people who are blind or vision impaired are at a higher risk of contagion due to their use of touch for information gathering.

## 2. Policy context

This policy & procedure is not intended to override any industrial instrument, contract, award or legislation.

* Biosecurity Act 2015 (Commonwealth)
* Fair Work Act 2009 (Commonwealth)
* Fair Work Regulations 2009 (Commonwealth)

In carrying out the procedures listed, Blind Citizens Australia will be guided by the information and directions provided by Australian health authorities, the World Health Organisation, and its occupational health and safety obligations.

### Related Documents

Australian Health Management Plan for Pandemic Influenza ([AHMPPI](https://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-ahmppi.htm))

[ACT - Australian Capital Territory](https://www.health.act.gov.au/about-our-health-system/population-health/winter-wellbeing-and-flu)

[NSW - New South Wales](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pandemic/Pages/default.aspx)

[NT - Northern Territory](https://health.nt.gov.au/health-governance/department-of-health/health-disaster-management/pandemics)

[Qld - Queensland](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/diseases-infection/diseases/influenza/pandemic)

[SA - South Australia](https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public%20content/sa%20health%20internet/protecting%20public%20health/emergency%20management/pandemic%20influenza%20arrangement)

[Tas - Tasmania](http://flu.tas.gov.au/about_influenza/tasmanian_health_action_plan_for_pandemic_influenza)

[Vic - Victoria](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/emergencies/emergency-type/infectious-diseases/pandemic-influenza)

[WA - Western Australia](https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/A_E/Emergency-management-in-WA)

Trusted Information Sharing Network (TISN) for Critical Infrastructure Resilience: [Template Pandemic Emergency Management Plan](https://www.tisn.gov.au/documents/template%2Bfor%2Bpandemic%2Bplan.pdf)

## 3. Statement of principles

Blind Citizens Australia will plan for and make advance preparations for the possibility that its operations will be affected by an epidemic or pandemic.  In this event, it will, as far as possible:

Assist its members, staff, volunteers and others, as relevant, to minimise their exposure to the illness concerned.

Support employees, volunteers, contractors and members to take reasonable precautions to prevent infection or contagion.

Provide reimbursement for the cost of any personal protective equipment (PPE) that is required in order to carry out BCA activities, during an epidemic/pandemic. This may include hand sanitiser, gloves and face masks. Contact must be made with BCA prior to purchase to arrange this.

Maintain its services and operations throughout the period of concern.

In the event of an infectious disease being declared an epidemic or pandemic, Blind Citizens Australia requires people covered by this Policy to take the following precautions:

Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water.

Maintain at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing. If you are asked to act as a sighted guide, consider your own health a nd the health of the person you will be guiding. You can choose not to act as a sighted guide if you or the person you will be guiding appear to be unwell.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth, or shaking hands with others.

Make sure you follow good hygiene and encourage others to do the same. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze and disposing of used tissues immediately.

Stay home if you feel unwell.

Keep up to date on the latest hotspots (cities or local areas where the pandemic or epidemic is spreading widely). If possible, avoid traveling to places - especially if you are more at risk.

If you are, or are likely to be, contagious, notify an appropriate person as soon as possible. It may be possible or necessary for you to self-isolate by staying at home until you recover.

Seek medical advice promptly and follow the directions of health authorities in your area.

### Cancelling and Postponing Face to Face Events

Blind Citizens Australia reserves the right to cancel or postpone any or all face to face events and meetings, including meetings of local branches. Where, based on public health advice Blind Citizens Australia determines it necessary to cancel a branch or state division activity BCA will work with the activity organizers to address issues of cost.

If an event or meeting is cancelled, Blind Citizens Australia will make every effort to support the event organiser to contact attendees and advise them of the change.

Where practical, Blind Citizens Australia will endeavour to offer an alternative event online and via teleconference. Blind Citizens Australia members should make every effort to ensure they provide up-to-date contact information, (including a mobile phone number and E-mail address where possible) to facilitate communication regarding event cancelations.

## 4. Other relevant policies

None

## 5. Glossary of key terms

Epidemic means a widespread occurrence of an infectious disease in a community at a particular time.

Pandemic (of a disease) means prevalent over a whole country or the world.

Infectious diseases means diseases caused by pathogenic microorganisms, such as bacteria, viruses, parasites or fungi; the diseases can be spread, directly or indirectly, from one person to another.