

# background image of a hand reading braille Foreground text reads: Inform. Connect. Empower. Call 1800 033 660 visit www.bca.org.auBlind Citizens Australia (BCA) July 2019 - June 2020 Year in review

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## About Blind Citizens Australia

Blind Citizens Australia (BCA) is the national representative organisation of people who are blind or vision impaired.

Our mission is to inform, connect, and empower Australians who are blind or vision impaired and the broader community.

## Overview

During the 2019-20 financial year, BCA continued to mature and expand. In order to keep pace with our continuing growth, we modernised our mission alongside a renewal of our website. Our new mission: Inform, Connect Empower, along with a staffing restructure, enabled us to streamline our operations and communicate more effectively with our members and stakeholders.

Christmas came early to BCA and to many Australians who are blind or vision impaired when we won the twenty-five year battle to get audio description on Australia’s public broadcasters, the ABC and SBS. At the same time, BCA was successful in its application for three year funding as a disabled persons and Families organisation, (DPFO) under the National Disability Insurance Scheme’s Information, Linkages and Capacity-Building grants program. Amongst other things, this allowed us to restructure, creating two General Manager positions to support the work of the CEO in leading and developing our fast-growing organisation.

Mindful that our President and CEO have now served in their current roles for three years, we turned our attention to succession planning. Specifically, we began work on the development of an Executive Leadership Program which will be piloted in 2021 to ensure we have leaders with the skills and confidence to step up. One of our staff, Rikki Chaplin also had the opportunity to act in the CEO role for a six week period whilst Emma Bennison was on leave.

Though the second half of the financial year presented a range of challenges relating to the pandemic, BCA was well placed to respond due to our remote working model. We ramped up our member engagement and peer support opportunities through our Happy Hours and brought forward initiatives already planned such as our CEO weekly video update.

We pay tribute to our staff, past and present, who work tirelessly under the direction of our CEO and General Managers, to ensure members’ needs are met. We also thank our board who work hard, (often behind the scenes), to support staff to deliver significant outcomes and to make sure our organisation is staying true to its mission.

Our board and staff sincerely thank you, our members and stakeholders who have contributed to our campaign work, trusted us to advocate on your behalf, been there to support one another in difficult times and contributed to ensuring BCA’s success in many and varied ways. Our organisation's continued growth and development would simply not be possible without your support.

## Staffing

During the reporting period, BCA employed seventeen staff across five states, eleven of whom were people who are blind or vision impaired. In addition, some experience mental health issues or identify as people with disability.

With a growing and diverse remote-working team, training and development is integral to the organisation’s professionalism and progress.

Online daily catch ups and weekly email updates between staff assist in keeping the team connected. BCA prioritises opportunities for the team to get together in person, for team building and planning. With staff now residing in 5 different states across Australia, team cohesion is more crucial than ever.

Staff were able to connect in location-based hubs in December 2019. Unfortunately, due to travel restrictions resulting from Covid-19, the whole team was not able to meet in person. So instead, we connected for team training and social activity online. Pleasingly, despite the challenges, the team reports feeling more connected than ever.

## Awards and Recognition

BCA would like to congratulate long-term BCA members John Simpson and Jan Miller for their Australia Day honours. John Simpson, BCA President was appointed as a member of the Order of Australia for his outstanding service to Australians who are blind or vision impaired. Tasmanian Branch Committee member and former BCA Board member Jan Miller, also received an Order of Australia medal for services to people who are blind or vision impaired. Congratulations and thank you John and Jan for your contributions to improving the lives of Australians who are blind or vision impaired.

## Sustainability and Growth

### Funding and Finance

BCA ended the year in a strong financial position. The Finance, Audit and Risk Management Committee is responsible for monitoring the organisation’s finances and risk management strategy. The committee was chaired by Rocco Cutri, until December 2019; we thank Mick Baker for taking on the role of chair. Full details of our organisation’s finances and the Independent Auditors Report are contained in our "Directors and Finance Reports 2019-20" available on our website, or in your preferred format on request.

The board and staff have continued to work hard to maintain and diversify our funding.

BCA thanks and acknowledges the following departments, organisations and individuals for their support and commitment to the work of BCA.

* Jeffrey Blyth Foundation
* Shirley Fund
* Vision Australia
* Guide Dogs Victoria
* Guide Dogs NSW/ACT
* Guide Dogs Queensland
* Australian Federation of Disability Organisations – Disability Royal Commission Funding through Department of Social Services
* Economic Participation of People with Disability – Information, Linkages and Capacity Building - through National Disability Insurance Agency for Eye to the Future of Employment project.
* DPFO Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Readiness Grant through National Disability Insurance Agency (3 year funding)
* Victorian Government through Department of Health and Human Services
* NSW Government through Department of Communities and Justice
* Aged Persons Welfare Foundation
* DSS Volunteer Grant Australia
* BCA Backers – regular donations program
* Members who donated in response to member and Giving Day appeals

### Partnerships and Collaborations

* During the year, the Board maintained its strong commitment to building strategic relationships across the blindness sector and beyond.
* Collaborative relationships have been maintained with Vision Australia through a continuation of our long-standing Memorandum of Understanding. We also maintained collaborative agreements with Guide Dogs Victoria, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT and Guide Dogs Queensland.
* BCA began discussions to develop a more formal partnership with VisAbility in WA and Tasmania.
* Vision 2020 Australia is the Australian arm of an international alliance that brings together eye health professionals, blindness service providers and consumer representative organisations to address issues of blindness prevention, sight restoration and specialist service provision. BCA is an active participant in the Vision 2020 Independence and Participation Committee.
* AFDO, the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, brings together eleven disability specific peak organisations and a range of state-based "Disabled Persons Organisations" to represent the views of people with disability to Government and to the corporate and community sectors. BCA has been an active member of AFDO since its formation in 2002 and is represented on the AFDO Board by BCA President John Simpson. During the year under review we continued to both contribute to and benefit from this collaboration.

## How we Informed

Our commitment to providing high-quality, accessible information that meets the needs of our members was stronger than ever this year as demonstrated by the following highlights.

### BCA Websites

* BCA’s new website was launched at our AGM in December 2019. The Information on the new website has been streamlined to create a more user-friendly experience and is updated regularly to ensure it remains relevant and easy to locate.
* For BCA’s employment project Eye to the Future, a new website, [www.eyetothefuture.com.au](http://www.eyetothefuture.com.au) was launched in May 2020, a one-stop website for resources and information on employment of people who are blind or vision impaired.
* Our TV4All website, [www.tv4all.com.au](http://www.tv4all.com.au) continued as a platform for our audio description campaign work offering information and calls to action tailored to the broader community.

### Social Media

* BCA continued to promote our programs, projects, communications and sector success via Facebook, Twitter and You Tube. In doing so, we engaged with members and promoted awareness in the broader community.
* Highlights included
  + Weekly CEO videos – a short update on what’s happening at BCA.
  + Our #BeThatPerson campaign – in partnership with The Kindness Pandemic Facebook page, to promote safety and awareness regarding social distancing for people who are blind or vision impaired.

### Media Engagement

BCA continued to be active in the media through our advocacy campaigns and awareness raising initiatives. In particular, we raised awareness of the need for audio description, the challenges experienced by people wishing to tell their stories of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation to the Disability Royal Commission and highlighting experiences of people who are blind or vision impaired during the pandemic.

### BCA Postcards

Postcards were developed in late 2019, to provide BCA information and contact details in both text and braille. They are proving to be a useful way to share with others, especially potential members.

### Blind Citizens News

* Blind Citizens News is BCA’s flagship publication, which is sent to all members in their preferred format.
* Under editor Jonathan Craig, three editions of BC News were published in 2019/20.
* BC News is able to be accessed on BCA’s website in text version, and is now also available as a podcast.

### New Horizons

* New Horizons is Blind Citizens Australia’s national, weekly radio program and podcast. It covers topics relevant to people who are blind or vision impaired.
* Hosted by Vaughn Bennison, New Horizons features regular updates from BCA on staffing changes, programs, events and areas of focus throughout the year. New Horizons also welcomed members who shared their stories and experiences through interviews.
* BCA partner organisations and guests also joined us for important updates on their services and projects.
* New Horizons is available as a podcast, on BCA’s website and through the Vision Australia library service. It is also broadcast via the RPH Network and community radio stations across Australia.

### Member Updates

* With BCA’s focus on member engagement and information sharing, we implemented regular Member Updates – an email to members via the announcement list, with updates on BCA news, events and projects.

### Email lists

* Members connected via BCA-L, an email distribution list and enjoyed robust discussion about issues that affect them. The lists provide important peer-support and discussion mechanisms.
* BCA’s Announcements list was set up as a platform for BCA to share its news and events. This proved to be an important way to keep members informed and connected throughout 2019-20.

### Phone-based Information

* BCA’s inbound and outbound text messaging service enables members to receive immediate and timely information about current BCA activities and to provide us with feedback and ask questions via text message. This is particularly critical for people who are Deafblind and those with speech impairments.
* BCA’s internet-based phone system not only facilitates remote working for our staff, but also provides members and other stakeholders with information about current BCA activities, campaigns and events via the telephone menus. Callers can also provide anonymous feedback via the system.

### Member Welcome Forums

BCA hosted Member Welcome Forums to provide information to new and re-engaged members on how they can connect to BCA projects, programs, events and committees.

### Aboriginal Blind People’s Forum

In December 2019, BCA and First Peoples Disability Network held the second forum for people who are blind or vision impaired, and of Aboriginal or Torres Strait islander descent. The forum was held exclusively online and attended by people from NSW, NT, QLD, SA, and Victoria.

Stephen Belbin, a Birragal man from NSW and current BCA Director facilitated the forum. With presentations from Nicole Damarra, a Nuranga woman from QLD, and Scott Jones, a Biripi man from NSW. The forum was well attended, and participants expressed interest in more regular opportunities to connect.

### #BeThatPerson Campaign

BCA partnered with The Kindness Pandemic, a global Facebook page, set up to promote acts of kindness in the time of Covid19. Through the Kindness Pandemic, we promoted the #BeThatPerson campaign, to highlight the difficulties people with disability faced when negotiating social distancing requirements, and encouraging the public to ask the individual if assistance is needed.

### Access to National Disability Insurance Scheme and My Aged Care

* BCA supports people who are blind or vision impaired to access the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and My Aged Care. Support provided includes information and resources on each stage of accessing these programs, review of decisions and plans, support with the planning and assessment process.
* BCA ran sessions on how to access My Aged Care, as it is relevant to people who are blind or vision impaired.
* BCA developed and regularly reviews and updates resources on both the NDIS and My Aged Care. These fact sheets are available on our website.

## How we Connected

### Branches

* BCA has thirteen branches around Australia, each serving the needs of members in particular regions or with special interests. Some branches have focused on peer support activities which bring people who are blind or vision impaired together, while others have concentrated their efforts primarily on advocacy work and some have managed to do both. This year has been a particularly challenging one for branches, many of whom have needed to transition to virtual meetings for the first time. However, they have risen to the challenge and some report they will continue meeting virtually in the future.
* The NSW/ACT State Division serves as an important link to our branches and members in NSW and the ACT. Activities like Spring Into Action month, advocacy and representation work in NSW and the ACT and support for branches ensures the valuable work previously undertaken by Blind Citizens NSW continues.
* We convened regular branch presidents meetings and our branch presidents e-mail list was used to share information among the group.
* Our sincere thanks to branch presidents, committee members and to all those who contribute to the work of our branches. In doing so, you provide our members with opportunities to connect with and learn from one another and to collectively advocate for the changes which make a tangible difference in their local communities.

### Committees

* BCA would like to thank and acknowledge members, staff and board who participated in our committees over the year.
* Committees included: Communications; Branch Presidents; Stakeholder Engagement; Cultural Diversity; International Engagement; Business Continuity.

### Covid Response

* BCA was able to respond quickly to support members through the corona virus pandemic.
* We set up regular Happy Hours, an opportunity for members to connect with peers and with BCA.
* Trivia nights on Saturdays were a popular way of connecting in a social setting. We thank all hosts – staff, board and members who made this possible every week.
* CEO video
  + Weekly short video updates to share BCA’s work and priority areas with members and the broader community
* BCA set up a Business Continuity Committee to ensure risk management and stability was considered for the organisation in the time of a global pandemic.
* BCA connected with the blindness sector, convening regular meetings and developed an email list, to share experiences, feedback and areas of most concern within the sector.
* BCA attended regular meetings with the Department of Social Services to discuss and identify issues affecting the disability sector.

## Meetings and Forums

BCA received many invitations to present at and participate in meetings and forums. These included:

* Australian Human Rights Commission – Guidelines for Equivalent Access for Transport
* Rail Accessibility Forum – hosted by Australasian Rail Association
* Uber Australia/NZ
* Australian Bureau of Statistics – census 2021 accessibility
* Australian Consumer Communications Action Network (ACCAN) – Ideal Accessible Communications in Australia
* Victoria Police on inclusive measures in their training centre in Melbourne; their primary focus is on domestic violence response.
* Human Rights and Technology discussions
* AFDO teleconference on “Including the Voices of People with Disability in the Health Interface Principles”.
* Vision 2020 Australia partner organisations and NDIS staff looking at Early Childhood Early Intervention issues.
* NDIS CEO Forum
* Vision 2020 Australia
* Independence and Participation Committee
* Referral Pathways Working Group
* Assistive Technology for All working group
* Quarterly catch ups with Australian banks
* Quarterly catch ups with Virgin Australia and advocacy with other airlines
* Coordination of Audio Description Sector Working Group.
* Accessible Transport Advisory Committee NSW
* Victorian Public Transport access committees – including Trams and Metro
* Victorian Police Disability Access Committee
* Victorian Education Department Disability Advisory Committee
* Qld Translink – platform wide access gate design / smart ticketing consultation
* Expert Advisory Group for the 3D Printing for Accessible Graphics project
* Consumer representative on Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities
* Community Forum for the Aged Care Royal Commission – presented in person on issues facing the sector

## How we Empowered

### Advocacy

* BCA’s advocacy service assisted to resolve 129 issues in 2019-20 financial year.
* Advocacy support covered a range of areas; some of the key themes were:
  + Transport and pedestrian access
  + Access to banking and superannuation
  + Telecommunications
  + Dog guide access
  + Employment and workplace access
  + Education
  + Healthcare

### Eye to the Future of Employment

* Through funding provided to Blind Citizens Australia (BCA) as part of the National Disability Insurance Agency’s (NDIA’s) Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) Grant, BCA created ‘An Eye to the Future’; a program that recognises the potential of people who are blind or vision impaired as reliable, dedicated employees in multiple sectors and with many varied skill sets.
* Part of this project was featuring employment stories of four BCA members Linda Agnew, Steve Sparrow, Pam Spelling and Kristy Fitzgerald. Each person shared their experiences in diversity, inclusivity and changing employer perceptions, through a short video.
* We are building a community that will share information, insights and resources to support both employees and employers.
  + To assist those looking for work with tools and mentoring.
  + To support hiring managers to create a workforce that is diverse and dynamic.
  + To challenge perceptions.

## National Policy Council

* In 2019-20, chaired by Fiona Woods, the National Policy Council, (NPC), refreshed BCA’s Healthcare Policy, basing its content on the Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights, and how these rights can be given meaning when applied to people who are blind or vision impaired.
* The NPC also developed a Silent Vehicle position statement and started work on a position statement on E-scooters and e-bikes
* These position and policy statements were developed in consultation with members.
* Thank you to members of the NPC for ensuring our policies reflect the needs and interests of Australians who are blind or vision impaired.

## Campaigns

* Queensland Disability Parking Permits: BCA and our members worked with other blindness sector organisations to successfully advocate for the inclusion of blindness and vision impairment as an eligibility criteria for the provision of Queensland Disability Parking Permits.
* Audio Description on TV
  + After over twenty-five years of advocacy and campaign work, the Federal Government announced in December 2019, that they would fund the ABC and SBS to provide a minimum of 14 hours per week of audio described content on their broadcast TV channels.
  + BCA worked closely with the ABC, SBS and sector partners Centre for Inclusive Design, ACCAN, and Curtin University, in the development and implementation of the audio description service.
  + Audio description on broadcast TV was officially launched on 28th June 2020.
  + BCA will continue conversations with the networks and government to continue and expand the audio description service in Australia.
* Solutions for Albert touchscreen EFTPOS Device:
  + BCA continues conversations with the Commonwealth Bank to find accessible solutions to the Albert touchscreen EFTPOS device.
  + BCA has regular meetings with Australian banks and the Australian Banking Association to promote accessibility in banking products and services.

## Submissions

The following is a summary of submission made by BCA during the reporting period:

* Elections – federal and state
* Royal Commission – Aged Care Quality and Safety
* NDIS – Planning
* Disability Royal Commission – accessibility and process feedback
* NDIS Act Review and Participant Service Guarantee
* NSW Electric Bus Trial
* NSW Aging and Disability Commission – Disability Advocacy Review
* Victorian State Disability Plan
* Disability Royal Commission submission in response to issues paper on Emergency Planning and Response.
* Submission to Point to Point Transport Industry review concerning taxi and ride share services in NSW.
* NSW Senate Inquiry on Transport – taxi and rideshare services
* Senate Select Committee on Covid19
* Contributed to Vision 2020 Australia’s submission on the review of aged care workforce regulations

### Accessible voting for 2019 BCA AGM

* BCA offered telephone voting for the election of directors, representatives on the National Policy Council, and for the NSW/ACT State Division Committee, in 2019.
* An independent Returning Officer was appointed, who facilitated and administered the voting process in the weeks leading up to the AGM.
* The voting process, with members being able to call or text their vote, with systems in place to confirm current membership and that each person voted once, ensured an accessible and efficient process.

### Feedback

* BCA welcomes feedback on all of its work, including advocacy, services, projects, events, and publications.
* BCA evaluates its projects and events via surveys and collation of feedback from participants, volunteers and organisers.

## Closing Remarks

If the 2019-2020 year has taught us anything, it is that our organisation is most effective when it is united and works collaboratively to achieve outcomes that improve our quality of life. We have been reminded of the impact of peer support and of the power of technology to enable it through our Happy Hours and other online events.

We have been reminded through wins in areas like audio description and access to disability parking permits that advocacy is a slow process, but that tenacity and determination can often achieve results. We have walked the talk where accessibility is concerned, by providing a democratic voting process which allows our members to cast our votes via telephone and to submit nomination forms in accessible formats without the need for physical signatures.

So we should take a moment to celebrate our achievements. We have all had a role to play in making the year such a great success.

## The BCA Team

### BCA Directors who served in 2019-20

* Mick Baker Director
* Stephen Belbin Director
* Joanne Chua Director
* Rocco Cutri Director (Nov 2019)
* Helen Freris Vice-President
* Lauren Henley Director
* Doug McGinn Director
* John Simpson AM President
* Daniel Stubbs Director (Sept 2019)
* Prue Watt OAM Director
* Fiona Woods Director
* Emma Bennison (non-voting Member)

### Finance Audit and Risk Management Committee (FARM) Members who served in 2019-20

* Mick Baker Chair, Secretary
* Emma Bennison BCA staff
* Rocco Cutri Chair to September 2019
* Tony Grant BCA staff
* Angela Jaeschke BCA staff
* William Jolley
* Doug McGinn
* Daniel Stubbs (until September 2019)
* Prue Watt

### National Policy Council Members who served in 2019-20

* Jane Britt BCA staff representative
* Joanne Chua Board rep
* Lynne Davis NSW
* Helen Freris Board rep
* Sean McLaughlin Western Australia
* David Morrell Tasmania
* Paul Price Queensland
* Steve Richardson Queensland (Nov 2019)
* David Squirrel South Australia
* Julie Sutherland National Women's Branch (Nov 2019)
* Sean Tyrell Victoria
* Andrew Webster ACT
* Fiona Woods Chair, board rep

### BCA Staff 2019-20

* Sally Aurisch - NSW/ACT Coordinator; General Manager Projects and Engagement
* Naomi Barber – Project Officer; Executive Assistant
* Emma Barrance - Executive Assistant (former)
* Emma Bennison CEO
* Anna Briggs – Communications Assistant
* Jane Britt - Policy Officer
* Rikki Chaplin – Advocacy Projects Officer
* Kathie Elliott - Strategic Development/Corporate and Community Partnerships
* Tony Grant – Finance & Administration Manager
* Tim Haggis – National Membership Development Coordinator
* Angela Jaeschke – Policy and Advocacy Manager; General Manager Operations
* Diana Kube – Policy and Advocacy Team Leader
* Krystel Malcolm - National Membership Development Coordinator (former)
* Samantha Marsh – Information & Administration Officer
* Jo Marshall - Executive Assistant (former)
* Jennifer Parry – NSW Admin and Communications Officer; NSW/ACT Program Officer
* Martin Stewart – Advocacy Officer

BCA would also like to acknowledge and thank our volunteers for their work and commitment to the organisation.