# BCA Inform: “The Year that Was” - A panel discussion of BCA’s 2020

# Summary Document

On Thursday, 3  December 2020, BCA CEO, Emma Bennison hosted a panel made up of BCA’s leadership team: John Simpson AM, BCA President, Angela Jaeschke, General Manager – Operations, and Sally Aurisch, General Manager - Projects and Engagement to present BCA’s achievements and work of 2020.

Following is a summary of the panel’s presentations.

### Board Priorities

1. Governance and accountability – monitoring BCA’s budget, expenditures and investments, ensuring appropriate working conditions are maintained for staff, and reporting to funding bodies.
2. Planning for the future
3. Sustainability and growth of BCA –creating and maintaining relationships with governmental bodies, funding bodies and other organizations in the sector, as well as financial considerations.
4. Succession planning – John will stand down as BCA President next year, and we anticipate other leadership roles will be recruiting in the near future, therefore it is necessary to ensure suitably qualified leaders are ready and excited to take on senior leadership roles

### Strategic Plan Goals

1. Ensure quality of membership engagement and communications
2. Connection with key community stakeholders
3. Capacity building and leadership development
4. Diverse and sustainable funding
5. High-quality and targeted campaigning, advocacy and peer support

### Board Standing Committees

The National Policy Council focusses on developing public policies that best communicate the needs of people who are blind or vision impaired and is working in the areas of healthcare and will soon take on education as well.

The Finance Audit and Risk Management Committee has been focussed on business continuity in the wake of the pandemic.

### Board Update

At the recent AGM, it was confirmed that BCA’s membership fee will be set at $0 until further notice.

It has been identified that the BCA constitution needs updating and in preparation for this, a discussion on member’s rights and responsibilities is slated to be held in the first half of 2021.

### Organizational Restructure

In early 2020, BCA underwent a restructure that created two General Manager roles and the consolidation of the Policy and Advocacy team, freeing up the CEO to focus on more strategic work as is appropriate to that position.

BCA has grown to include 17 staff across 5 states, who despite all working remotely/from home, report a strong sense of being a part of a cohesive team.

Representing the membership at external forums was a focus this year. This activity is becoming more intensive with such high-level forums as the Disability Royal Commission, the complex nature of NDIS changes and the Coronavirus pandemic. DSS is also consulting more extensively with BCA.

### BCA Partnerships

BCA has enjoyed close collaboration with partners in the blindness and disability sector, as well as business and corporate partners.

Please refer to the Year in Review report https://www.bca.org.au/reports/

### Social Media

Social media engagement has quadrupled in the past year and BCA Facebook page now has over 1,500 followers and lots of engagement. The new weekly CEO videos, and Happy Hour events partly explain this increase in popularity.

### Funding

BCA’s turnover is now approximately $1.6 million, and the organization is being selective in deciding what new funding applications are pursued. Importantly, we continue to ensure we apply for a diverse range of funding and that there is a mix between small and large grants which support our core business.

### BCA’s Advocacy Work

Significant systemic advocacy wins for the year include the inclusion of Audio Description in the ABC and SBS’ programming, Queensland disability parking permits now available for those who are blind or vision impaired, and Disability Royal Commission’s Community Engagement Team participation and individual submissions.

BCA is committed to individual advocacy and has worked on over 120 individual advocacy cases over the past 12 months. Advocacy is at the core of BCA’s mission to empower Australians who are blind or vision impaired and there is no intention to reduce its work on this critically important area.

In order to receive individual advocacy support from BCA, an individual must be blind or vision impaired, or a parent, guardian or carer of a person who is blind or vision impaired.

An individual does not have to be a member of BCA in order to access the organisation’s advocacy service, and can be located anywhere in Australia.

While an individual seeking advocacy support may have additional conditions or impairments, the presenting issue MUST relate directly to blindness or vision impairment in order for it to be addressed by BCA staff.

BCA provides advocacy support for discrimination and unfair treatment under all areas covered by state and federal legislation, including:

* Access to goods, services and facilities
* Access to government programs, including the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and My Aged Care (MAC)
* Access to premises and the built environment
* Access to public transport
* Blindness-related income supports
* Education
* Employment
* Pedestrian access

BCA will communicate with the individual on the information required to further their case. Where this information is not provided, BCA will be unable to assist.

Due to BCA’s remote work set up, and to avoid perceived or real preferential treatment, all BCA advocacy support is provided by phone, video conference or email.

BCA’s advocacy team will prioritise cases based on the impact that the issue has on the individual, and any reporting or complaints timeframes that are in place.

BCA exists to provide advocacy support to individuals facing discrimination or unfair treatment due to blindness or vision impairment. If the matter is not a direct result of blindness or vision impairment, BCA will refer the individual on to a service that may be better-placed to investigate the complaint.

BCA's advocacy service is not designed to replace the need for engagement of lawyers for complex legal matters such as negligence or malpractice claims, even if the outcome specifically relates to blindness or vision impairment. Where advocates cannot provide direct support or representation for legal matters, letters of support may be provided if this is deemed appropriate.

### Organizational Developments

Efforts have been made to support staff through remote working, pre-pandemic and throughout.

Staff and Board training and induction work has been enhanced this year.

BCA’s style guide and document templates have been created to ensure consistency and appropriate use of language, formatting and accessibility.

### Member Engagement

Many planned member events had to be cancelled due to the pandemic, however several new initiatives took their place in 2020, including:

* Happy Hours, which were introduced in response to the pandemic to support social connections in a fun, interesting and informal way.
* Member Updates are now sent weekly to keep members up to date with what is happening at BCA, within the blindness and disability sector and to provide general information that may be of interest to BCA members. Submissions to the Member Update are welcome from the membership.
* Communications were regularly mailed in large-print text and braille for those who do not receive emails and were focussed on informing members on how to access groceries, medicine, and other services at the start of COVID-19 restrictions.
* Aboriginal Blind People’s Forum was hosted in partnership with First People’s Disability Network and focussed on the subject areas of sport and education. Three more forums will be held in 2021.
It was clarified that the intention of these Forums is to create a space and opportunity for First Nations people to gather and share their experiences, and therefore invitations to attend are focussed on this population.
* New Member Welcome Forums were initiated in 2020 and will continue into the new year.
* BCA Connect was our first completely virtual conference and was a great success, welcoming more than 100 participants on the day who attended a series of diverse presentations (link to recording: https://www.bca.org.au/convention-recordings/#connect).

Planning for another BCA Connect in mid-2021 is underway.

BCA Inform is a series of more formal monthly events which are designed to share information about what BCA and other blindness service providers are working on with members and interested parties. BCA Inform will continue in 2021.

### Projects

Individual and organizational capacity building project has been completed and enabled BCA to update website, cleanse and build an accessible database and funded the Member Engagement Coordinator position.

The Eye to the Future of Employment project comprised an internship program, the creation of a website (http://eyetothefuture.com.au/), the ‘Day in the Life’ employment videos (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbytvDAWIIAonUajtm-qqaw) and a symposium for recruiters and employers. The program’s planned in-person symposium was recreated as online workshops that focussed on changing employer’s perspectives on hiring staff who are blind or vision impaired. Workshop transcripts and recordings will be available on the E2F website shortly.

The Executive Leadership Program has recently been announced and will run next year (more information: https://www.bca.org.au/2020/12/02/bca-executive-leadership-program/), as will a Peer Support Network, scholarships program and skills exchange/mentoring program.

### Communications Update

BCA closed its email discussion list BCA-L, as the board determined it was no longer a safe space for members to share their thoughts and experiences with the membership.

BCA has since received feedback from some members via a communications survey, and has formed a reference group to ensure our new discussion forum in the future is well resourced, moderated when required, and is a safe space with room for robust conversation and information sharing within BCA’s membership. We are committed to a consultation and risk management process to ensure we get it right.

We thank all members for your participation, support and connection with BCA in 2020. We look forward to working with you to build on our successes in 2021.

If you have any feedback on any aspect of BCA’s work, please contact us.