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# BCA Executive Leadership Program Media Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

# Taking the Lead on Disability Leadership

One in seven people have a disability, but fewer than 1 in 14 of board level executives identify as a person with disability.

Of those, 1 in 5 do not feel comfortable disclosing their disability to colleagues, according to a 2019 study by Ernst and Young and The Valuable.

Whilst there is support for people with disability to participate in entry-level roles in corporate and not for profit organisations, there are very few opportunities for people with disability to take on managerial and executive positions.

In order to address the systemic barriers to disability leadership, Blind Citizens Australia (BCA) has launched an Executive Leadership Program that is exclusively available to Australians who are blind or vision impaired.

Funded by Department of Social Services, Blind Citizens Australia’s 2021 Executive Leadership Program seeks to build the capacity and skills of leaders who are blind or vision impaired and increase the prevalence of people who are blind or vision impaired in leadership roles within the disability sector and in the broader community.

Emma Bennison, CEO of BCA, is passionate about developing and supporting future leaders, having experienced the challenges of disability leadership herself. As the first person with disability to be appointed as CEO of Arts Access Australia, Emma implemented an international online discussion forum for arts and cultural leaders with disability and worked with the Australia Council for the Arts to bring the Sync Leadership Program to develop the capacity of artists and arts workers with disability to Australia.

“We need more people with disability in leadership positions, influencing strategic direction and championing inclusive design. Quite simply, it makes good business sense to encourage diversity within executive teams and throughout an organisation. It should not just be an add on or a box to tick,” she said.

“That’s why we’ve developed the ELP and are committed to providing opportunities for program participants to have direct executive leadership experience. This starts within BCA itself. I will take study leave for two six-week periods which will enable two of the ELP participants to act in my role during 2021.”

The BCA Executive Leadership Program is training seven leaders who are blind or vision-impaired in governance, coaching, and experiential and operational leadership.

The 2021 BCA Executive Leadership Program participants are: Jane Britt, BCA National Policy Officer, Sally Aurisch, BCA General Manager – Projects and Engagement, Rikki Chaplin, BCA Policy and Advocacy Team Leader, Fiona Woods, BCA Vice President, Helen Freris, BCA Board Member and Health Services Manager at Women with Disabilities Victoria, Prue Watt, Senior Policy Officer at Safe Work Australia and member of the NSW Disability Council, and Associate Professor Linda Agnew, Head of School of Science and Technology, University of New England.

Former Paralympian and BCA Board Member Prue Watt is looking forward to the program and was attracted by the curriculum.

“This is a practical opportunity to strengthen my leadership skills and take me out of my comfort zone. I’m excited to work with and observe other leaders who are blind or vision impaired who each have incredible achievements to their name,” she said.

For more information/interviews please contact:

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**Background Info**

**Who is Blind Citizens Australia?**

Blind Citizens Australia (BCA) is the national organisation of people who are blind or vision impaired and is recognised as the major peak representative body for this constituency. Since 1975, BCA has provided information, peer support, individual and systemic advocacy, and consultancy services to its members and the wider community.

BCA Branches act as local representative groups and provide opportunities for social interaction for members. It has grown to an organisation of 3000 individual members and seven affiliated organisations.

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

With over forty years of history, BCA has worked tirelessly “To Change What it Means to be Blind” both for Australians who experience vision loss and for blind and vision impaired people throughout the world.

Specifically, this has included:

• providing peer support

• providing individual and systemic advocacy

• facilitating information exchange

• empowering its members

• promoting positive community attitudes

• striving for high quality and accessible services which meet individual needs

• promoting research into the causes and amelioration of the impact of blindness and vision impairment

As the national voice of people who are blind or vision impaired BCA has a seat on many Government, commercial and community sector advisory bodies. BCA’s individual advocacy service is available to all Australians who experience vision loss. With a focus on issues that impact on the individual because of their blindness/vision impairment, BCA works both directly and through specialist community advocates, to resolve issues in a constructive and educative manner and draws on more formal processes where a mutually agreeable solution cannot be found.

BCA has been an active member of the World Blind Union at both the World and Regional levels since its creation in 1984. Over that period two of the senior members have held office as World President and several more have served on the World and Regional Executives and various standing committees. In November 2000 BCA was the lead organisation for the hosting in Melbourne of the WBU 5th General Assembly. BCA has also lead capacity building projects in Fiji and Vietnam and has participated in many international conferences and forums.

In association with its policy development and advocacy work, BCA has undertaken a range of blindness related research projects. Several of these resulted in published papers.

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