

Ph 1800 033 660 | E [bca@bca.org.au](mailto:bca@bca.org.au) | W [bca.org.au](http://www.bca.org.au/) | ABN 90 006 985 226

# Education Policy

Developed in consultation with Blind Citizens Australia’s National Policy Council

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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, Directors, and most 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 several 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 can 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, or have multiple disabilities including being blind, or vision impaired.

## 1. Purpose of this policy

### 1.1 What the policy is about

This policy explores the systemic barriers facing students who are blind, or vision impaired in accessing education at all levels in Australia. It outlines the opportunities to change and improve education outcomes for people who are blind, or vision impaired.

### 1.2 Why the policy has been created

The Education Policy exists to specifically address concerns relating to equitable education access for students who are blind, or vision impaired in engaging with education across pre-primary, primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors in Australia, and beyond in the context of lifelong learning.

### 1.3 How this policy has been created

The policy is informed by extensive consultation with BCA members relating to education, advocacy support to members about education-related issues, and policy consultation and submission work. It has been developed in conjunction with BCA's National Policy Council. BCA has been involved with individual and systemic advocacy in the education space for numerous years.

### 1.4 The target audience for the policy

The Education Policy has been created as a resource for internal and external stakeholders of Blind Citizens Australia. These include students who are blind, or vision impaired, educators including teaching aids all disability support staff, and / or parents, blind, vision impaired, or sighted, who are engaging with education in Australia. It outlines the expectations and recommendations for equitable education for students who are blind, or vision impaired across all levels of education in Australia.

### 1.5 About education and disability in Australia

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), over 4.4 million Australians have some form of disability. This roughly equates to 1 in every 5 Australians having a disability.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Despite gains over the past 30 years, lower rates of school completion persist for people with disability. ABS data indicates that in the age bracket of 20-24, 64% of people with disability had completed Year 12 or equivalent, compared with 81% of people without disability. (50–54, 31% compared with 51%)

The World Blind Union (WBU) substantiates that “children with visual disabilities are among the most excluded group from the education system. The World Report on Disability 2011 by WBU and World Health Organisation (WHO) clearly articulated that education outcomes are lowest among children with sensory disabilities such as visual disability in comparison with children with physical disabilities.”[[2]](#endnote-2)

## 2. Policy context

The key legal and regulatory frameworks that underpin the Education Policy include:

1. Disability Discrimination Act 1992
2. Disability Standards for Education 2005
3. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), namely Article 9, Accessibility and Article 24, Education
4. New National Disability Strategy, section on learning and skills
5. Other states and territories standards or plans

## 3. Glossary of key terms

* Assistive technology - any device, program, software, app, or mobility aid which assists a person with a disability to be able to undertake a function that they cannot do without the technology.
* Blindness service provider - any organisation whose focus is providing services to people who are blind, or vision impaired, or which portrays itself to the public as being in existence to assist people who are blind, or vision impaired.
* Braille - a language system, which is tactile, consisting of formations using 6 tactile dots which are used to spell letters or contractions. There are also braille codes which enable braille readers to use mathematical and scientific symbols and read and write music notation. Braille can be accessed via embossed documents, or refreshable braille displays.
* Codesign - a method of designing which includes a diverse group of people, e.g., including people with disabilities alongside the organisation or company that is developing a new project or product, or as a significant consultant in a new or revised policy.
* Core Curriculum - any part of a school learning program which is part of learning for all students.
* Expanded Core Curriculum - any part of a school learning program that is specifically related to the foundational skills or knowledge relating to vision, that is needed for students who are blind, or vision impaired.
* Disability Liaison Officer (may be also called a Disability Advisor or another similar name) - a person who has the specific role of assisting and organising reasonable adjustments to be made for students with disabilities in an education institution. Usually, this person will assist a student in developing a plan which sets out the reasonable adjustments and accommodations that will be made for a student throughout their learning.
* Harassment - undue pressure or intimidation placed upon one person by another or a group of people.
* Orientation and mobility (O&M) - location or position of a person in a physical space (orientation) and that person's movement within that physical space (mobility).
* National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) - an Australian scheme that provides funds for eligible Australians with disabilities to access supports and services relating to their disability-support needs.
* Reasonable adjustments - legislated action or accommodation which is taken to make learning accessible for students with disabilities.
* Senate - provides oversight for regulatory practices including structures, policies, processes, and planning throughout the education institution.
* Support services - services, including disability support, learning advisory, or other auxiliary services, like counselling or career advisory, which is provided by an education institution to their students.
* Tactile Ground Surface Indicators (TGSIs) - tactile markers, usually solid circles or rectangles on the ground which indicate direction, or an upcoming hazard, such as stairs, for a person who is blind, or vision impaired.
* Victimisation - an act whereby an individual is singled out for cruel or unjust treatment.
* Website Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 (or the latest version) - the guide which sets out the standard for compliance with accessibility for all website content on websites on the internet.

## 4. Statement of principles

### 4.1 Choice in education

* In Australia, students who are blind, or vision impaired are faced with two primary institutional systems when entering primary and secondary education, which are mainstream settings or specialist support schooling.
* Mainstream education settings provide education to both people with disabilities and without disabilities within the same institution, or integrated education.
* Specialist support schooling provide education which is only for people with disabilities.
* An alternate option for students who are blind, or vision impaired is home schooling or distance education, especially if parents or caregivers feel they cannot access an education institution that can adequately support the blindness-specific needs of their child or children.
* Despite having varying options for education, it does not negate the need to provide equity for someone to be able to access their education option of choice. It also does not mean that a student should be forced into one option for schooling over another, e.g., specialist support schooling, because it is stated by the education institution that they cannot be accommodated appropriately elsewhere e.g., mainstream school.
* A student who is placed in home schooling should not be placed at a disadvantage by not being able to access supports available in a mainstream or specialist support school setting. This especially includes online accessibility for education.
* Students and / or their parents who are blind, or vision impaired must have choice and control in a non-discriminatory manner about where they receive their education, without any undue influence to choose one option over the other option.
* Students who are blind, or vision impaired must not be excluded from education based on disability, receiving education on an equal basis to peers in their communities (Article 24 Education, clause 2 UNCRPD; Disability Standards in Education 2005 4.3).
* Parents of children who are blind, or vision impaired and their children who are blind, or vision impaired must be provided with detail to make informed choices in where education is attained.
* Details about education institutions must be provided in an accessible format with robust insight into the provision of education in each institution, and what it entails for students who are blind, or vision impaired, including blindness-specific support practices.

### 4.2 Blindness-specific and other supports in education

* Reasonable adjustment(s) through blindness-specific supports may be required to enable students to participate fully and independently in an education setting. These supports may include assistive technology to access information, orientation and mobility to enable independent movement within the classroom and around campus, provision of learning resources and textbooks in accessible formats, and notetaking support.
* Blindness-specific supports require a level of funding to sufficiently cover each person's individual needs, e.g., assistive technology, orientation and mobility (O&M) support etc. Blindness service providers may be engaged to provide an assessment of supports required.
* It is not incumbent on a student, parents, or educators alone to fund blindness-specific supports. Education institutions need to work with service providers, and funding bodies to identify available financial support. If support is not available through the education institution or the Department of Education in the state or territory, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) should play a role. The NDIS needs to be available particularly to fund supports like assistive technology when they have broad application including education, and meet the participant's goals under their NDIS plan, which may include education roles.
* If a student is ineligible for the NDIS, education institutions need to work with service providers, and funding bodies to identify available financial support.
* Blindness service providers must be allowed to work in parallel with staff responsible for procurement or administration of supports to ensure that provisions are made prior to the commencement of an education period.
* Although some reasonable adjustments require considerable planning, it is crucial that blindness-specific supports are implemented in a timely manner to ensure that students who are blind, or vision impaired do not fall behind.
* All these points also relate to the accommodation of multiple disabilities, including deafblindness. Throughout this policy, it is assumed that many of the points made will be applied equally where a student has additional needs due to multiple disabilities.

### Stages of education in Australia

Australia has multiple stages of education, including pre-primary (early childhood), primary, secondary, and tertiary levels and lifelong learning. The following section of this policy will explore in detail the strategic approach for supporting students who are blind, or vision impaired in each sector.

### 4.3. Early childhood

#### 4.3.1 Early Intervention

* Early infancy and childhood are a significant developmental stage, during which fundamental physical, emotional, psychological, and social development occurs. Therefore, it is important that children who are blind, or vision impaired are supported to develop to their full capacity.
* Comprehensive, multidisciplinary assessment is needed to determine a child’s physical, emotional, psychological, and educational needs, which will inform the provision of support to assist in developing a child to reach their developmental milestones.
* The assessment should be conducted by staff with professional specialist knowledge of the developmental needs of children who are blind, or vision impaired.
* Professionals with specialist training need to be adequately resourced and available to provide support and resources to the learning environments accessed by the child, including early childhood care and education and preschool settings.
* Families of children need to be supported through their emotional responses to the vision impairment diagnosis of their child, and to provide the most favourable environment possible for the child’s development.
* Children require support and adapted activities to facilitate appropriate learning through play, creativity and risk taking.

#### 4.3.2 Early learning and / or pre-school

* Children attending early learning / preschool settings and relevant teaching staff need support and resources to create inclusive and accessible learning environments for the child, and to ensure learning activities are adapted to promote the child’s educational and social development across a range of modalities.
* Comprehensive vision and learning assessments will assist in ensuring learning methods meet the child’s individual needs by providing recommendations for meeting support needs. It is important that the relevant people implement the recommendations that are made to ensure equitable access to learning for a student who is blind, or vision impaired.
* If children are assessed to benefit from learning braille, pre-braille learning activities need to be introduced at the preschool stage to familiarise the child with the tactile skills required for braille acquisition and use (see also sections 4.4.5 and 4.8.1).
* The training of more teachers in braille, and an increase in the support to enable braille resources to be available to students is strongly recommended.

### 4.4 Primary & Secondary Education

#### 4.4.1 Primary & Secondary: National Curriculum

* Each student who is blind, or vision impaired is entitled to a comprehensive and ongoing assessment of his/her general and blindness specific educational needs. This assessment should be conducted as soon as possible after diagnosis of or change in vision impairment.
* Any reports or documentation produced following assessment should be available to the student and/or their parents or caregivers.
* In the case of children who are blind, or vision impaired, an educational needs assessment must be conducted at least annually during early intervention, primary and secondary education. If the child has fluctuating or deteriorating levels of vision, then these assessments need to be conducted more frequently.
* All educational needs assessments must be conducted by persons with appropriate qualifications and/or experience in the field of blindness and vision impairment.
* Persons are regarded as having appropriate qualifications to conduct educational assessments: 1) if they have recognised qualifications in education or rehabilitation studies which have included specific blindness and vision impairment units or 2) they have substantial experience in the field of education or rehabilitation of people who are blind, or vision impaired.
* The option of education in a specialist support school for blindness should be available to those students for whom this option is considered appropriate, where specialist support schools for blindness exist. The appropriateness of education in a specialist support school setting should be determined by an informed decision made by the student and/or the student's family. The informed choice will be determining what education option will best prepare a student who is blind, or vision impaired to have full access to, and participation in Australian society.
* If a child with multiple disabilities is receiving education in a specialist disability education setting, resources need to be provided for their education in blindness specific skills and learning techniques.
* Blindness specific services and support services should be resourced at a sufficient level to enable children who are blind, or vision impaired to achieve their educational goals and to exercise educational choices on a non-discriminatory basis.

#### 4.4.2 Core curriculum

* Students who are blind, or vision impaired should have non-discriminatory access to core curriculum, extra-curricular activities, support services, work experience, sport and recreation and should not be excluded from these activities by reason of their blindness.
* Core curriculum instruction, assessment material and material for extra-curricular activities should be available to students who are blind, or vision impaired, in their preferred format, at the time that it is made available to other students.
* Material in accessible format includes prescribed textbooks, class notes, handouts, PowerPoint Presentations, online course material and required reference material. This material should be available at the time that it is made available to other students. Accessible format means large print hard copy, braille, electronic, or audio formats.
* All prescribed textbooks should be available in braille or in e-text form, suitable for braille production.

#### 4.4.3 Expanded core curriculum

* In addition to the core curriculum, students who are blind, or vision impaired must have access to instruction in the blindness specific skills they require to participate in education.
* Instruction in blindness specific skills should be provided by staff with appropriate training and professional qualifications. Students who are blind, or vision impaired should not have instruction in these vital skills by unqualified staff.
* Training should be provided to all staff, including educators and advisors, across education institutions, about blindness and vision impairment. Additionally, it is important that, where staff possess specialist knowledge or skills relevant to blindness or vision impairment, all members of staff should refer to them if a student requires instruction in blindness specific skills.
* Students who are blind, or vision impaired should have access to a module about blindness and vision impairment covering the human rights model of disability, advocacy, and contributions of Australian and international advocates who are blind, or vision impaired.

#### 4.4.4 Assessments and examinations

* Assessment procedures should include provision for reasonable accommodation, considering a student’s specific needs and the preservation of academic standard.
* If the need for an alternative method of assessment is determined, such assessments need to maintain integrity with course objectives and academic requirements.
* Individualised reasonable adjustments to be provided for examinations and assessments include, but are not limited to, extra time, rest breaks, and separate examination or assessment venues to accommodate environmental needs such as reduced glare. Additionally, if a student requires specific assistive technology to complete an exam or assessment, that should be permitted. Finally, examination or assessments should be made available simultaneously to all students.
* Exam papers and all learning materials are to be provided in a student's preferred format. Students should be able to request a reader and / or scribe for examinations.
* If an examination or assessment has components which are graphical or include pictures, there must be text provided that is sufficient for a student who is blind, or vision impaired, to understand the visual aspects of the examination or assessment.

#### 4.4.5 Support Services

* Students should have access to sufficient hours of support services from qualified persons enabling them to complete the core curriculum, participate in extra-curricular activities and acquire blindness specific skills (see section 4.4.1 regarding qualifications of professionals).
* Supports need to be available for all students who are blind, or vision impaired both inside and outside school to allow students to complete homework, assessments, or assignments. Where a student cannot access such supports through their NDIS plan, alternatives need to be put in place.
* Educators should 1) recognise braille as the key to literacy for students who are blind; 2) i) give braille instruction a high priority; and ii) encourage its use by students who are blind.
* Instruction in braille should be provided by teachers who possess qualifications in Braille instruction, which are recognised by the Australian Braille Authority.
* Access to course materials and information relating to the education of students who are blind should be available in braille.
* Support service staff need to undergo training in blindness specific skills that is provided by staff with appropriate training and professional qualifications.
* If support service staff are responsible for the provision of alternate format material, including braille, large print hard copy, electronic, or audio copies of materials, they must have the requisite training to be able to create genuinely accessible format materials.
* Also see section 4.8.1.

### 4.5 Post-secondary education: Tertiary, TAFE, and vocational training

#### 4.5.1 Education pathways to post school education and employment

* Secondary education can provide platforms to assist in transition between secondary and tertiary institutions, including a formal transition program of skills development, and a peer mentoring program.
* A transition program could include skills training for independence, including orientation and mobility (O&M) training, assistive technology training, occupational therapy (OT) training and any other appropriate skills training.
* A peer mentoring program would pair students who are blind, or vision impaired with peers who are blind, or vision impaired, either peers who are further along in their education, or peers who are employed, to act in the capacity of transferring knowledge, experience and skills to the student being mentored.

#### 4.5.2 Bridging courses

* Accessibility and inclusive practices must be included in bridging courses, to ensure students who are blind, or vision impaired can complete prerequisite study for further education. These measures are outlined in previous sections in 3.5, particularly sections 3.5.1-4.
* Bridging courses often rely on self-pace online modules. Students who are blind, or vision impaired may not have the adequate level of technical knowledge and skills to access this learning, therefore support services will need to assist in providing extra assistance to students to facilitate competent technical skills to access course material.

#### 4.5.3 Choice of institution

* Students who are blind, or vision impaired should have choice of education institution, whether that be university, TAFE (Technical and Further Education), or vocational training, with accommodations to support blindness-specific needs.
* Also see section 4.1

#### 4.5.4 Assessment of needs for support services

* Assessment, identification, and planning for support needs should occur prior to commencing tertiary studies and regularly thereafter.
* The student should be clearly informed about who is responsible for providing the supports and how to access them.
* Supports should be discussed and evaluated on a regular basis, but at least annually to determine their effectiveness and whether improvements could be made.
* Students should have access to a Disability Liaison Officer (Disability Advisor) or similar who may assist with assessing support needs, ensuring supports are implemented, provide support for students in advocating for their needs for equal access to the learning environment, and provide support to promote wellbeing.

#### 4.5.5 Admission and enrolment

* Students who are blind, or vision impaired who meet the criteria for admission or enrolment in a course of study should be admitted and enrolled on the same basis as other students.
* All online enrolment processes, education institution websites and online learning environments need to be hosted on websites that meet the Website Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1. The enrolment process (enrolment system and online forms) needs to be fully accessible and user friendly.
* All enrolment forms that need to be downloaded or completed in the enrolment process need to be provided in the preferred format of students who are blind, or vision impaired.
* All enrolment or learning materials associated with course content need to be provided in preferred format e.g., electronic, large print hardcopy, braille, or audio textbooks etc.
* Staff at admissions centre should be able to assist with accessibility needs and provide advice or referral to other services. Further, staff at admissions centres should be aware that applicants who are blind, or vision impaired, may require extra assistance at times to complete an application.
* All education and training service providers are required to ensure students who are blind, or vision impaired have equal access to and participation in online and physical learning environments and access to educational materials in the students preferred format.
* Individualised accommodations and adjustments are to be made to curriculum, instruction, and learning environments to ensure access to a quality education without discrimination and on the same basis with all students.
* All learning materials should be provided in a students’ preferred format and in a timely manner.
* Access to assistive technology software should be provided on campus computers. This might include screen reading software including JAWS, Zoomtext, JAWS Fusion, and NVDA.
* Education should be inclusive in all learning environments, with reasonable adjustments being made to ensure that a student can access all learning activities, including practical classes, and student placements. Occupational, health and safety (OH&S) risks should be addressed in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of students.

#### 4.5.6 Assessments and examinations

* See section 4.4.4.

#### 4.5.7 Support services

* Education institutions should have accessible student residential accommodation and priority consideration of students with disabilities, considering an individuals’ access needs.
* Auxiliary services for students with disabilities need to include accessible financial planning services to be made available.
* Personal or career counselling services on campus, or via phone, should be available for students with disabilities. If services are accessed by students who are blind, or vision impaired, ideally students would be connected to a counsellor who has knowledge of blindness or vision impairment. Further, it would be ideal for the counsellor to have had training about disabilities, including the human rights model of disability.

#### 4.5.8 Public transport and taxi services

* Students who are blind, or vision impaired should have access to transport subsidies and travel passes for their local jurisdiction to support travel back and forth from education institutions, their accommodation, and any other locations.
* To ensure the safety of all students, education institutions should provide on-campus transport, such a security shuttle bus or security guard support. Information about these services, including stopping points, and timetables, should be provided to students in accessible formats.

### 4.6 Adult learning

* Lifelong learning can be any form of learning that takes place throughout a person's entire life such as University of the Third Age (U3A), community colleges and courses provided by individual providers e.g., pottery courses etc. It is a type of learning that has not been covered by stages of education in previous sections of this policy.
* Being mindful that some types of life-long learning, such as community courses, may be run on small budgets, as far as possible, accessibility and inclusive practices should be supported. Measures that apply to students who are blind, or vision impaired are outlined in previous sections, covering accessibility in admission and enrolment (3.5.3).
* Additional measures for inclusive access to lifelong learning include access to learning material in preferred format for the student, including braille, large print, print, electronic or audio format. If information is provided in an electronic or online format, these measures must include compatibility of online materials with any assistive technology being used.
* Educators need to be aware that people who are blind, or vision impaired, and over the age of 65 will not have access to assistive technology funding options through the NDIS, unless they entered the scheme prior to turning 65. The provision of learning materials in formats that are not electronic will be essential for these people. Further, many people who lose their vision in later life may not have the technical literacy to proficiently use a computer, assistive technology to work with the computer, or other general assistive technology, to complete learning.

### 4.7 Emergency planning and response

* The emergency response in the COVID-19 pandemic and other emergencies affecting Australia has seen remote learning become an increasingly common solution for students and educators sheltering in place. This has highlighted the need for all online learning materials to be compliant with WCAG 2.1 and screenreader compatible. Retrofitting to make online platforms and learning materials accessible during emergencies has consumed time which would otherwise have been spent on learning activities. Educators have reported difficulties in accessing IT professionals who have the knowledge to make the appropriate retrofitting adjustments.
* Contingency plans for accessible online solutions should be worked out before an emergency occurs. It is critical that there are systems in place so that educators know about students' location and movements for them to maintain communication during emergencies. The ability to send alternate format material to students if they are sheltering in place at home may be affected by interruptions in mail services. Educators need to communicate with each student and their family to ascertain how best to teach the student and to send and receive learning materials and accessible resources.
* Education institutions should develop an emergency plan which considers all the support that students who are blind, or vision impaired may require during an emergency, including additional support.

### 4.8 Other issues

#### 4.8.1 Braille literacy

* Students who are blind, or vision impaired should be afforded the opportunity to learn braille from an early age, to encourage literacy. Students should be encouraged to not rely solely on audio because this does not assist in learning grammatical structure, syntax, spelling, and other features of writing like homonyms.
* Also see sections 4.3.2 and 4.4.5.

#### 4.8.2 Assistive technology and funding

* Assistive technology should be funded through either state or territory education systems, the school, or by the NDIS, which is the most appropriate source. It should not be incumbent on the student or their family / caregivers to fund necessary assistive technology.

#### 4.8.3 Online access to education

* All online access and learning materials need to be compliant with WCAG 2.1 and screenreader compatible. If an alternate assessment method is needed for an online assessment, then the integrity of the assessment needs to be preserved by offering the student an equivalent level of testing in another format.
* It is important when implementing any new online platforms for learning that user testing is conducted with people who are blind, or vision impaired. It should cover a variety of screen reading and other assistive technology including braille displays, and a range of vision loss. This needs to be conducted to test vendor claims about accessibility. If third party apps are also used for learning, e.g., Moodle, these need to be user tested.
* Ideally, codesign processes should be used for online learning, whereby people who are blind, or vision impaired, in conjunction with external accessibility consultants, are involved in giving feedback and advice in planning, developing, and implementing a new online platform.

#### 4.8.4 Physical access, safety, and wellbeing

* Education institutions should have regard for physical access for students who are blind, or vision impaired. This includes features of appropriate lighting, glare reduction, marked rises or staircases for navigating a space where depth perception may be required, wheelchair or mobility ramps, and Tactile Ground Surface Indicators (TGSIs).
* Education institutions should have safety features that are marked with tactile indicators or audio cues, to enable students who are blind, or vision impaired to alert security or staff to potential threats or danger. These are generally physically marked points e.g., a pole with a button and / or speaker, where a student can set off an alarm and / or phone for assistance e.g., at accessible toilets, or in remote parts or less well-lit parts of a campus. An app may be able to be used to track a student on campus, and for the student to use it for emergency alerts including their location to staff or security e.g., SafeZone app.
* Additional safety features may include on-campus vehicle transport for night classes, or a security service where a student is accompanied on foot by a guard to public transport.
* Students should have access to services for mental and physical wellbeing such as counselling and psychological support services.
* Any physical access to buildings should comply with the Disability (Access to Premises — Buildings) Standards 2010.4.8.5 Harassment and bullying
* Education institutions need to adopt formal processes for the report of, and response to harassment and victimisation. Ideally, this would have an escalation process if the complainant were unsatisfied by the response of an initial investigation. For example, initially it could involve educator, student, and course coordinator and / or support people including parents. It could then have a next level where the complaint goes to the Head of department or faculty, and then finally, to the Dean of Students or another external body. At tertiary level, it may lead to an investigation by the education institution's Senate.
* Counselling support should be offered to any student who has experienced harassment or bullying.
* Education institutions need to provide education to all staff and students, about what it means to discriminate against, harass, intimidate, or bully a person due to their disability. All educators should have a duty to intervene or to report any conduct which constitutes discrimination, harassment, intimidation, or bullying. All students should be encouraged to report any conduct which constitutes discrimination, harassment, intimidation, or bullying.

#### 4.8.5 Peer support

* A formal program of peer support is recommended for education institutions. This could include one-to-one peer mentoring, where a student who is more experienced is paired with a less experienced student who is blind, or vision impaired. It may also include the creation of a group or society for students with disabilities or chronic illness to participate in social activities and be able to share experiences.

#### 4.8.6 External support for advocacy

* External support for advocacy in education must be continued, through formal funding arrangements for external disability advocacy organisations, including Blind Citizens Australia.
* Additionally, blindness service providers should be supported in continuing to provide adjunct services for students who are blind, or vision impaired, including orientation and mobility (O&M) training, Occupational Therapy {OT), and Assistive Technology {AT) support.

#### 4.8.7 Communication and interaction with parents or caregivers who are blind, or vision impaired

* External communication to parents or caregivers who are blind, or vision impaired needs to be provided in the parent's or caregiver's preferred accessible format.
* Face-to-face meetings should ideally be organised with clear instructions about physical accessibility for parents or caregivers who are blind, or vision impaired for ease of navigating an unfamiliar environment.

## 5. Other relevant policies

* For relevant, adjunct supports, and services, for education that are provided by Blindness Service Providers for students who are blind, or vision impaired, please see Blindness Service Provider Expectations Policy, 2019.

## 6. How this policy should be used

* This policy will be made available on the BCA website, and distributed to relevant organisations e.g., the Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training, the Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities etc., who can distribute it to education institutions working with students who are blind, or vision impaired, for the target audience of educators, students who are blind, or vision impaired, and the students' parents or caregivers.
* People who are working in education institutions, students who are blind, or vision impaired, and their caregivers are encouraged to contact BCA if they have feedback about the policy or if they require assistance where the policy has not been met by educators or an education institution.
* This policy can be used to support advocacy by providing information to educators and education institutions on best practice for providing equitable, and accessible education for students who are blind, or vision impaired.

1. Australian Network on Disability. Disability statistics. <https://www.and.org.au/pages/disability-statistics.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. World Blind Union. (2015). Right to Education UNCRPD WBU ICEVI submission for April 15, 2015 discussions. <http://worldblindunion.org/English/Pages/default.aspx> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)