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**Decision to decommission iVote is a violation on the rights of people who are blind or vision impaired**

Last week the New South Wales Electoral Commission announced that the iVote platform will be discontinued. The decision to scrap the online voting platform will deny NSW’s blind and vision impaired community the fundamental democratic right to vote in a secret, verifiable, and independent manner.

Blind Citizens Australia condemn this decision, and as the national representative organisation for people who are blind or vision impaired has published [an open letter detailing the concerns of the community](https://blindcitizensaustralia.sharepoint.com/Shared%20Documents/Operations/Communications,%20Publications%20&%20Media/Media/BCA%20Media%20Releases/iVote%20Open%20Letter%20.docx).

“The decision to decommission iVote from future NSW Elections is disappointing and distressing. The blind and vision impaired community are bearing the brunt of the NSW Government’s clear failure to sufficiently invest in the development and sustainability of the operation of the platform. The decision serves to widen inequality by denying voters who are blind or vision impaired the right to vote in the same manner as other members of the community” said CEO of Blind Citizens Australia, Sally Aurisch.

“iVote was introduced by the NSW Government in 2011. Since then, it has provided people who are blind or vision impaired with a mechanism for lodging a secret, independent, and verifiable vote. The platform must be reinstated immediately and as a matter of urgency. We are asking the NSW Government to commit to ensuring the iVote platform is made available to blind and vision impaired voters in NSW for the March 2023 election.”

“Beyond the state election, a replacement online platform that balances access and security must be created, and it must be co-designed and developed in consultation with people who are blind or vision impaired”

It is fundamental in every democracy that there be equal access to secret, independent, and verifiable voting.

“Our community has a right to participate freely in electing our representatives. The removal of the only suitable voting mechanism for people who are blind or vision impaired violates this right and further disenfranchises voters.”

The decision to remove the iVote platform discriminates against people who are blind or vision impaired and infringes on their right to freely and equally participate in the electoral process. This is a right upheld within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disability which Australia has committed to.

Failure to uphold this right is a failure to our community.

## Media Contact

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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