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# Federal Election 2022: Conversations with Candidates

With only three weeks remaining of the Federal Election campaign, you may have already met candidates, or their supporters and volunteers, out in the community asking for your vote. In a modern election campaign, this includes going door to door talking to local residents, or speaking to them over the phone; but you may also encounter them at shopping centres and street stalls, or at candidate forums.

While many people find the idea of being contacted by candidates irritating (“I just want to eat my dinner in peace!”), this type of candidate engagement plays an important role in our democratic system. These candidates, activists and volunteers are there not only to communicate the ideas and policies of their party to you, the voter, but also to feed back the views and feelings of the people in the community back to their Parties.

In our Election Platform 2022, we identified three key themes covering a range of policy areas we would like to see all parties and candidates focus their attention. Below are some questions you can ask candidates and their supporters to help bring attention to these issues during the election.

## Talking About BCA’s Platform

### Making Technology Work for Everyone

#### Accessible Voting

For many people who are blind or vision impaired, casting a truly secret and anonymous ballot remains out of reach. An electoral system that relies on pencil and paper means that people who are blind or vision impaired often have to rely on another person, whether that is a support worker, a spouse or other family member, or electoral commission staff, to assist them to vote – and trust that they have completed the ballot paper accurately according to their wishes. Some State Governments have trialled various forms of electric and online voting, we believe it is time for the Federal Government to do the same.

**Question For Candidates:** If elected what will you (or your party) do to improve the accessibility of the voting process?

Open ended questions like this are more likely to elicit an honest response, as opposed to what the candidate thinks you want to hear. However, if you feel they are being too vague, feel free to ask them directly!

**Alternative Question:** If elected, will you commit to supporting the development and implementation of a truly secret, independent, verifiable voting platform that includes a combination of internet and telephone (with an automated key prompt system) voting?

#### Assistive Technology for All

Blind Citizens Australia believes all Australians with disability should have equal access to the life-changing assistive technology (AT) they need, regardless of NDIS eligibility. Yet people with disability who do not qualify for the NDIS continue to fall through the cracks in relation to AT, frequently forced to wait more than 12 months to access funding under various State Government schemes, partly fund or fully fund it themselves, or simply go without.

**Question:** Will you commit to working with your parliamentary colleagues to establish a single, harmonised and nationally consistent assistive technology program to support Australians with disability who are excluded from the NDIS?

#### Maintain and Extend Audio Description

In 2020, audio description (AD) was launched on the national broadcast channels (ABC and SBS), allowing Australians who are blind or vision impaired to access TV in an equal way to their peers for the first time. We can’t stop here though, and it is important these national broadcasters have the appropriate funding to ensure the ongoing provision and expansion of AD, including AD on video-on-demand platforms (such as ABC iView).

**Question:** What will you do to support the expansion of Audio Description across Free to Air networks?

**Alternative Question:** Will you commit to updating the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 to set minimum targets for audio description?

#### Setting Standards for Electric Vehicles, E-scooters and E-bikes

While electric vehicles (EVs) are an important element of a shift to more sustainable and environmentally friendly transport, BCA has concerns about the safety of pedestrians who are blind or vision impaired. These vehicles and devices run almost silently which can lead to increased risks of collision or near misses with people who are blind or vision impaired.

**Question:** Will you support the recommendations contained in the 2020 report of the National Transport Commission, to ensure national standards regulating the speed limit and watt capacity for e-scooters, e-bikes and other personal mobility devices (PMDs)?

**Alternative Questions:** Will you commit to supporting the adoption and inclusion of UN Regulation 138-01 in the Australian Design Rules and the Motor Vehicle Standards Act 1989 to mandate the inclusion of an Acoustic Vehicle Alerting System (AVAS) in electric and hybrid vehicles?

#### Better access to banking

In recent years, we have seen an increase in the number of people who are blind or vision impaired struggling to use an EFTPOS machine because it has a touch-only interface. We believe the only way to guarantee people who are blind or vision impaired have a legal, confidential, and consistent method of entering their PIN independently is to ensuring all EFTPOS machines retain physical buttons.

**Question:** Will you support the introduction of standards across the banking and financial services industry to require all products and devices are designed according to universal design principles?

### Improving Government Services and Support

#### Defending the National Disability Insurance Scheme

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of people with disability across Australia. However, there remain many ongoing issues with the Scheme, including inconsistencies in both information – such as the evidence required for the approval of blindness or vision impairment caused by a neurological condition (e.g., acquired vision loss from a brain injury or stroke) – and in decisions such as approval for dog guides or plan reviews.

**Question:** If elected, what will you do to improve the NDIS?

**Alternative Question:** Will you commit to supporting a full and independent review of the NDIS, in consultation with people with disability?

#### Improving our Aged Care system

According to the Vision Initiative, around 80% of vision loss in Australia is caused by conditions that become more common as people age. This raises numerous 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.

Yet disability specific supports for people who are 65 and over are inconsistent and unequal to those who receive supports from the NDIS.

**Question:** Will you commit to supporting the implementation of all recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care to ensure that every person receiving aged care who is living with disability receives daily living supports and outcomes (including assistive technologies, aids and equipment) equivalent to those that would be available under the NDIS?

#### Quality Healthcare

In this election, we want to see all parties and candidates support healthcare service reforms to ensure people who are blind or vision impaired are treated with dignity and respect through the provision of safe and accessible healthcare options. This includes the operation of Covid treatments and vaccines, the physical accessibility of hospitals and other healthcare locations, privacy, telehealth extension, and accessibility of all health communications.

**Question:** If elected, will you support reforms to require the development of disability action plans for all medical centres and hospitals, and a focus on accessible and person-centred practices?

#### Responding to the Disability Royal Commission

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability is a once in a lifetime opportunity for many people with disability to share their stories. It has already shone a light on the experiences of people with disability is likely to influence significant government policy reform and attitudinal change.

At the conclusion of the Royal Commission, we believe the Government has a responsibility to take meaningful action in the areas identified in the final report and must not ‘cherry pick’ reforms.

**Question:** Will you commit to accept and implement all recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission?

#### A Fairer Disability Support Pension

Australia is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which stipulates clearly that people with disability have a right to an adequate standard of living and social protection. The Disability Support Pension (DSP) is a crucial mechanism to protect the rights of people with disability to an adequate standard of living, social protection, and social participation. We believe it should not be considered purely as welfare.

**Question:** Will you commit to ensure the DSP is available and accessible for all people with disability who require it?

### A Fairer Future

#### Australia’s Disability Strategy

We have welcomed the release of the new Australian Disability Strategy 2021 – 2031, which replaces the previous National Disability Strategy. The new Strategy includes seven outcome areas: Employment and financial security, Education and learning; Inclusive homes and communities; Health and wellbeing; Safety, rights and justice; Community attitudes; and Personal and community support.

However, for this new strategy to be meaningful and impactful for all Australians with disability, it must be adequately funded, and remedial action must be taken for reporting that falls short of identified targets.

**Question:** Will you commit to supporting continued funding for Australia’s Disability Strategy 2021 – 2031 to ensure the development of robust action plans?

#### Better Emergency Response

The last two years has been challenging for all Australians, but especially those with disability. Unprecedented bushfire and flood emergencies have seen people who are blind or vision impaired, and people with disability more broadly, experience further barriers to safety and to effective recovery from these natural disasters.

In addition, the measures introduced to prevent the spread of Covid-19 have often inadverntently caused people with disability to experience further isolation and created new areas of discrimination and access barriers.

**Question:** What will you do to ensure better support for people with disability during emergencies and natural disasters?

**Alternative Question:** Will you support the establishment of a disability inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction Reference Group to be tasked with developing a National Plan and Roadmap for Disability Inclusive Disaster Preparedness, Resilience and Recovery?

#### Encouraging Meaningful Employment

Employment was included as a key outcome area in the new Australian Disability Strategy (2021-31); however, we note that while employment was also a focus area in the previous 10 year National Disability Strategy, the reporting showed very little outcome and improvement in that decade. To ensure real progress and outcomes in the employment space for Australians with disability, the new Australian Disability Strategy must be closely monitored – with improved data collection, transparent reporting and ongoing tracking of outcomes and results – and the Australian government must set targets, quotas and demonstrate best practice.

**Question:** Will you support reforms to DES to ensure that a person’s qualifications, employment history and overall capability should be properly considered by DES providers when they are seeking employment opportunities for clients?

We also would like to see the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) arm of the NDIS, continue its focus on resource employment projects with the aim to break down barriers to access to employment for Australians with disability.

**Question:** Will you commit to ensuring ILC is appropriately funded to support targeted and disability-specific employment resources to be developed and deployed?

#### Ensuring Equitable Education

In the quick transition to online learning in the Covid-19 pandemic, many students who are blind or vision impaired were left behind across all levels of education due to the inaccessibility of online learning platforms, and learning resources.

**Question:** Will you support the introduction of procurement standards and guidelines, where accessibility is included as a criteria for those making a tender as supplier to education and broader government services?

**Alternative Question:** Will you support the adoption of the 2020 Review of Disability Standards for Education?

## Next Steps

When talking to candidates or volunteers, sharing your own personal story of the barriers or discrimination you have faced in everyday life is going to be the strongest way to get them to listen and take action. This resource has been prepared to give some suggestion and guidance on the types of questions that will help us to understand the level of support a candidate will give a particular topic; but feel free to make the words your own!

If you have a candidate forum or know that you’ll be seeing candidates in your local area soon and want some support planning what you might say, please do get in touch. We’d also like to hear of any examples where candidates have given a firm commitment (or have refused to commit) on a topic area. You can call us on 1800 033 660 or email Jack Reynolds-Ryan (National Policy Officer) at [jackson.reynolds-ryan@bca.org.au](mailto:jackson.reynolds-ryan@bca.org.au)