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**National Organisation for People who are Blind or Vision Impaired Files Complaint Against NSW Electoral Commission**

Blind Citizens Australia has lodged a complaint against the New South Wales Electoral Commission (NSWEC), alleging the recent decision to stop using iVote amounts to unlawful disability discrimination. The complaint, made to the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), states the decision to cancel the State’s former electronic voting platform infringes on the rights of people who are blind or vision impaired to participate in elections by casting a secret, independent, and verifiable vote.

The NSW Electoral Commission made the decision to decommission iVote earlier this year, and has since confirmed there are no plans to launch an equivalent platform for the 2023 NSW State Election.

In New South Wales, iVote has been the only accessible way for people who are blind or vision impaired to cast their votes secretly and independently.

In the 2019 NSW State Election, over 1100 people who are blind or vision impaired used iVote to cast their vote. More than 94% of these people opted to use the online voting option.

“Other forms of voting – such as telephone voting – still require us to rely on other people to cast our votes, denying us our right to a secret vote,” said Sally Aurisch, Chief Executive Officer – Blind Citizens Australia.

“After the recent Federal Election, we heard from members who were uncomfortable using telephone voting. Not only do they have to declare their voting intentions to a stranger, but there is no way of confirming that their votes are being accurately represented.”

“People who are blind or vision impaired have a right to participate equally and freely in elections. The decision to scrap the only voting platform which truly allowed us to participate equally clearly disregards this right,” she said.

The decision disregards Australia’s commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which states that Governments must ensure people with disability can effectively and fully participate in elections.

The CRPD protects the rights of people with disability to a secret ballot through accessible and appropriate voting procedures, with the use of assistive technologies when necessary.

BCA’s complaint states that the rights of people who are blind and vision impaired must be fulfilled, through the reinstatement of a fit-for-purpose online voting platform to be made available at the 2023 NSW State Election.

“We have consistently advocated to ensure equal access to voting for our community. We look forward to continuing this work in the Australian Human Rights Commission,” said Sally Aurisch.

## 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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