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# BLIND CITIZENS AUSTRALIA

# By-Laws for the National Policy Council

1. Introduction

These by-laws are made to regulate the operation of the National Policy Council (NPC) of Blind Citizens Australia "BCA". They provide for the functioning and procedures of the NPC as a standing committee of the Board of BCA.

1. Definitions

In these by-laws, these words have these meanings:

"Accessible Format" includes audio, braille, electronic and large print formats.

"State Representative" - a person who applies to be, and is appointed as, a Representative to the NPC in the state or territory that they usually reside.

Note, BCA does not currently have a membership base in the Northern Territory that supports a representative position on the NPC but will endeavour to engage members and people who are blind or vision impaired in the Northern Territory wherever possible.

Words used in these by-laws have the meanings given to them by the clauses and definitions of the BCA Constitution.

1. Purpose and function of the national policy council
	1. As provided for by the BCA Constitution, the NPC is established and functions as a standing committee of the BCA Board.
	2. The role of the NPC is internal and is centered on the development and review of BCA's various Public Policies - BCA's agreed policy positions in relation to the rights, needs and expectations of people who are blind or vision impaired. The role of the NPC is to articulate to the Board the views of the BCA membership on matters of Public Policy. The NPC and its members do not have a role in responding to external requests for BCA's position on particular matters. It will not usually be the role of the NPC or its members to write the Policy statements. Members may have a role in drafting statements under the direction of the Chair and oversight of the national policy officer.
	3. The NPC works through a process of referral and report back of specific assignments by the Board. the NPC or Chief Executive Officer of BCA can recommend to the Board identified needs and workload priorities that might be addressed by the NPC.
	4. When the NPC is developing and reviewing BCA Public Policies, its processes shall include:
		* Reference to the BCA Strategic Plan;
		* Consultation with BCA Directors, staff and the general membership, through BCA Branches, various communications media and directly.
		* Gathering and analysing of information and related policies of other organisations, with which to align or differ;
		* Consideration of recommendations from BCA member forums.

Definitions of policy documents produced by BCA, and their uses:

Position Statement:

A short document of 1-2 pages clearly identifying BCA’s position on a particular topic.

It states the background to the topic, what the issue is for people who are blind or vision impaired, and solutions or recommendations to resolve the issue. The position statement must be based on the views of members and can be developed quickly and efficiently by BCA’s Policy and Advocacy Team.

A position statement can be used as a brief response to an enquiry, or in communications to government or business. It can be used as a guide, or background document in developing a larger submission.

It could also be used as a basis for a campaign or a policy briefing document.

Environmental Scan:

Identifies what the situation is on a particular topic at a moment in time.

It may go into detail about differences or similarities in the state of play between states or territories, where relevant.

It provides more specific detail to the background of a position statement, and what action is required to promote change.

It can be used to analyse change over time, as a result of a campaign or other action.

It should be used alongside a Position Statement, to provide further context and information, where relevant.

Eg. In the accessible voting space, an environmental scan identifies which states need to change legislation to allow remote voting, including telephone voting.

Policy:

This is a more detailed document, which outlines issues of concern, and solutions to the issues. It provides researched and quantified information on the issue and its impact.

A policy generally has an overarching topic, and goes into detail, via sub-headings on related topics, on how the issues impact people who are blind or vision impaired. The detail should include rules and regulations, and link back to the impact on people who are blind or vision impaired.

It is based on human rights, and disability rights.

It should also provide solutions and recommendations.

Any policy that is developed must involve significant and targeted consultation with members, under the direction of the NPC.

It may have a direct link to how broader Australian policies, fatherrameworks, practices, legislation and guidelines can be more specifically relevant to people who are blind or vision impaired.

Eg. BCA’s Healthcare Policy details the rights to which all users of healthcare settings are entitled under the Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights and how these rights can be given meaning when applied to people who are blind or vision impaired.

A policy can be used in the resolution of individual advocacy cases, providing the background information and research on a particular topic. It can be used by individuals, or within BCA’s Advocacy space.

A policy can also be sent directly to government or business, to provide more detailed information on the issue, its impact on people who are blind or vision impaired, and solutions.

1. Composition of the NPC

A. The Council shall consist of:

i. The Chair, being a Director, appointed to this role by the Board;

ii. Up to two other Board members, appointed to the role by the Board;

iii. At least one representative from each State and the ACT;

iv. Up to two co-opted members appointed by the Board at its discretion, to increase the NPC's ability to represent the diversity of BCA's membership.

v. The NPC's work is assisted by staff from BCA's Policy and Advocacy Team. Their work, time and availability is determined and supervised by the CEO’s delegate.

B. The board will ensure there are alternative ways for the views of Northern Territory members to be represented.

1. Appointment of state representatives to the NPC

5.1 As part of BCA's notice of annual general meeting in each calendar year, full BCA members shall be invited to express interest in becoming State or Territory representatives of the NPC.

A. Applications should include details of personal information and describe the applicant's experience, skills and interest in policy development.

B. Terms of NPC members are for two years, with half of the state representative positions being vacant one calendar year, and the other half of the positions, and the ACT position being vacant the next year.

C. To be eligible to become a State or Territory Representative, a member must be a full member of BCA and ordinarily reside in the State or Territory they seek to represent.

5.2 The board shall appoint a nominations committee to assess expressions of interest and recommend to the board who should be appointed.

A. In making recommendations, the committee shall take into account the need for the NPC to represent the diversity of BCA's membership, having regard to geography, lived experience of blindness and vision impairment as well as additional disabilities, demographics, and the desirability of engaging with groups which have traditionally been under-represented among BCA's membership.

B. The committee may recommend the appointment of more than one person from a State or Territory, if more than one person is appropriately qualified. The total number of members of the NPC shall not exceed 12.

C. The appointments of NPC representatives will be formalised at BCA’s Annual General Meeting every year.

5.3 When a casual vacancy is to be filled, members from the State in which the vacancy has occurred shall be invited to express interest and clause 5.2 shall apply.

5.4 If insufficient expressions of interest are received and positions of State Representatives remain unfilled, the board may seek expressions of interest from members nationally and apply clause 5.2. The board may appoint appropriately qualified members irrespective of their normal place of residence.

5.5 People expressing interest in or being co-opted to the NPC shall be provided with a copy, in an accessible format, of the NPC Position Description, BCA Code of Conduct, and Appropriate Behaviour Policy and shall be required to agree in writing to the terms of these documents before taking up a role on the NPC.

1. Terms of office of NPC members

A. The NPC Chair and other Directors appointed to the NPC shall serve for a minimum of one year, with appointments normally made at the first board meeting following the BCA Annual General Meeting. Consideration will be given to the advantages of maintaining the continuity of the chair and board representation on the NPC.

B. State Representatives shall hold office for a period of two years. The term of office shall commence at the close of the Annual General Meeting at which they are appointed and shall conclude at the close of the second Annual General Meeting following. State Representatives shall be eligible for re-appointment.

C. The term of office of a co-opted NPC Member shall commence at the close of the board meeting at which they are appointed and shall conclude at the close of the second Annual General Meeting after their appointment. A co-opted NPC member shall be eligible for re-appointment.

D. A person who is appointed to fill a casual vacancy shall serve for the remainder of the term of the person being replaced and is eligible for re-appointment.

1. Ceasing to be an NPC member

A. The office of an NPC Member, who is a director, shall become vacant if they cease to be a director, in accordance with the BCA Constitution.

B. The office of a State Representative shall become vacant if the member:

i. resigns their office by notice in writing to the chair.

ii. is absent, without permission of the Board, from three consecutive meetings of the NPC;

iii. ceases to be a full member of BCA.

1. NPC meetings

A. The Board shall convene at least four meetings of the NPC in each calendar year The times and places for the meetings will be determined by the NPC Chair and members, with the approval of the board. Meetings may be held in person, but will usually be held by an appropriate means of telecommunications or electronic media.

B. At least fourteen days' notice shall be given for meetings.

C. A quorum for an NPC meeting shall be a majority of NPC members.

D. Subject to these by-laws, the decisions of the Board and the BCA Constitution; the NPC may meet and conduct its meetings as it considers appropriate.

E. So far as applicable, the procedures outlined in the BCA Constitution for the conduct of Board meetings and the making and keeping of minutes and other records shall apply to meetings of the NPC.

1. Observers at NPC meetings

A. The Chair of the NPC may invite staff, consultants, or other relevant or interested people to attend particular sessions of NPC meetings, to provide input and information on particular issues or to observe the work of the NPC. Invited observers shall have speaking rights but shall not vote at NPC meetings.

B. An invitation from the NPC to attend and participate in an NPC meeting shall be conditional on the invitee agreeing to respect the confidentiality of all NPC discussions.

1. Sub-committees and working parties

The NPC may establish working parties or sub-committees to work on specific public policies or aspects of them or particular subject areas. These working parties may include BCA members who are not NPC members, but who agree in writing to be bound by BCA's Code of Conduct.

1. Expenses

NPC members shall be entitled to reimbursement of expenses incurred in the performance of their duties as NPC Members, with prior approval. These entitlements shall be governed by BCA's travel policy.

1. Amendment

A. The Board may, by a majority vote, amend these by-laws as it considers necessary for the effective functioning of the NPC and the best interest of BCA.

B. These by-laws take effect from the date they are approved by the BCA Board and shall be reviewed within two years from that date.

Approved by the BCA Board

September 2022