22 November 2022

**NSW Electoral Commission commits to explore technology assisted voting options to replace iVote**

***What happened to iVote***

From 2011 to 2021, iVote allowed voters who are blind or vision impaired, and other eligible voters, to vote in NSW state elections online or over the telephone. The system used specially adapted internet voting software.

In March 2022, the NSW Electoral Commissioner determined the iVote voting system would not be used for the March 2023 NSW State election. The determination was made because the current software version in use was being phased out during 2022 and the Electoral Commissioner was not confident an updated system adapted for elections in NSW would be ready in time. The Electoral Commissioner determined this timing posed unacceptable risks to the conduct of the 2023 State election.

NSW Parliament has since passed the *Electoral Legislation Amendment Act 2022* which limits access to technology-assisted voting at the State election in March to telephone voting by electors who are blind or vision impaired.

***The impact on blind and vision impaired voters in NSW***

The unavailability of iVote for the State election is a disappointing development for NSW voters who are blind or vision impaired, many of whom have relied on the assisted voting system to cast their votes independently, secretly and verifiably.

Blind Citizens Australia (BCA), on behalf of its members who are blind and vision impaired, expressed deep disappointment and concern about the loss of iVote. BCA also lodged a disability discrimination complaint with the Australian Human Rights Commission in July 2022. BCA complained that other assisted voting methods had not provided the same independence and secrecy for people who have difficulty accessing printed material like ballot papers.

***What is being done?***

The NSW Electoral Commission has commenced a review of technology-assisted voting in NSW elections and aims to report its findings to the NSW Government by August 2023.

BCA and the NSW Electoral Commission have agreed to work together in the review process, to explore and consider accessible voting options that could replace iVote for elections beyond 2023. In particular, the NSW Electoral Commission has committed to working closely with BCA to ensure any recommendations made to the NSW Government sufficiently respond to the accessibility requirements of people who are blind or vision impaired.

BCA and the NSW Electoral Commission agree that the review must consider the requirement for accessible voting options for people who are blind or vision impaired and for people with other disabilities, and for people with disability to be directly and closely engaged in the review process.

The NSW Electoral Commission has committed to do all that it can to implement the review recommendations and complete the development of any new technology-assisted voting system in time for the 2027 State election. If a new system is approved and funded, the NSW Electoral Commission will involve people who are blind or vision impaired in its development, including through user testing and providing feedback.

BCA welcomes the NSW Electoral Commission’s commitments and looks forward to seeing accessible voting delivered for all NSW voters at future elections.

BCA and the NSW Electoral Commission encourage people with disability and their representative organisations to engage directly in the review by making a written submission. More information regarding the review including an issues and questions paper can be found at <https://www.elections.nsw.gov.au/technology-assisted-voting-review> The first round of submissions is open until **13 January 2023**.