

# Blind Citizens NewsSpring 2022

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Blind Citizens Australia is the National representative organisation of people who are blind or vision impaired.  Our purpose is to inform, connect, and empower Australians who are blind or vision impaired and the broader community.

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### Other Publications

[New Horizons Radio Programme and Podcast](https://www.bca.org.au/new-horizons/)

[Blind Citizens Australia Annual Report](https://www.bca.org.au/reports/)

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## Editor's Note

Blind Citizens Australia refers to our members as people who are blind or vision impaired. However, we respect the right of individual authors to use whatever language is most comfortable for them.

## Editorial - By Andrew Webster

The launch of the NSW/ACT State Division in July 2018 was the first large scale BCA event I attended. At the time, I was the newly-minted ACT representative on the National Policy Council. One strong impression I took back from Newcastle, along with the warm glow of meeting many wonderful people, was the way many of those I met were using technology, especially mobile phones and electronic braille devices, so effectively. That is, so much more effectively than I was. I returned to Canberra on a mission – determined to skill up. I’ve been on that mission, or perhaps journey, ever since, assisted through training from Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, Vision Australia and regular computer support through Hire-Up. And yes, just as I come to grips with the latest assistive technology the underlying mainstream technology surges ahead and the cycle begins all over again.

Information and communication technology certainly offers many benefits for people with disability. Among other things, BCA's election platform for 2022 asked politicians to make technology work for everyone, especially people who are blind or vision impaired. We called on all parties to implement a nationally consistent program so that all people who need assistive technology can access it. We asked for technology to be used to achieve equal access to voting, banking, government services and products and much more.

We are a community with varying levels of competence with technology. This arises due to external barriers that can be influenced by government, such as cost, training availability and the limited scope of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. There are also personal challenges that we carry around inside, such as varying levels of comfort – it’s just too scary; self-belief – I’m too old to learn new tricks; or ignorance – I just didn’t know that was possible.

We don’t all need to be experts. BCA believes in a future in which our trusted leadership and positive influence achieve equity for people who are blind or vision impaired, where we can live our lives in any way we choose, in a place that respects, recognises and responds to our uniqueness and diversity (BCA Strategic Plan 2022–2025). To that end, BCA is and always will be committed to ensuring that people who are blind or vision impaired can access information about ours and other services in many ways. In addition to our frequent emails and social media posts, we regularly add recorded content to our telephone service at 1800 033 660, we publish a brief update with this magazine, in members’ preferred format and, for the latest news, you can tune in each week to our radio program, New Horizons.

The challenge rests with each of us. While BCA will always advocate for alternative services for people who are unable to use digital technology, irrespective of our stridency, a whole range of services can now only be used with a mobile phone or computer. Remaining phone-based services are often poorly funded and insufficiently staffed.

In this issue of BC News, Fiona Woods explores the theme of self-imposed barriers to technology and share some of her discomfort that may ring true for you as well and even help you to take the next steps towards a new approach.

In addition, Chire Fulford muses on Cyclone Larry - lessons learned in 2006 that are equally applicable today. Bethany Cody describes the challenges of progressive sight loss and puts out a call to action for flexibility and further reform to the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Bill Jolley says farewell to Peter Goebel, physiotherapist and founding member of BCA, who passed away in April, aged 70. And John Simpson pens a tribute to long-serving member and mentor to many, Ivan Molloy, who passed away in July, aged 95. In her regular update, Fiona Woods writes as President about some of the activities she and the BCA Board have been up to on our behalf, including as it turns out, policy development on emergency preparedness and disaster response. CEO Sally Aurisch steps through BCA’s new strategic plan, quoted above and which sets our agenda as an organisation from 2022 to 2025.

Feeling creative? Have something to say? We’d love to hear from you. Articles for the Autumn 2023 edition of BC News can be sent to bca@bca.org.au by 20th January 2023. We’re still looking for someone to fill the role of editor of this magazine. If you’d like to talk about either writing an article or being considered for editor, please contact BCA on BCNews@bca.org.au or call 1800 033 660.

## BCA Complaints Policy Update

In late 2021, BCA wrote an open letter to members, in light of allegations of serious misconduct within the National Federation of the Blind in the USA.

This letter outlined BCA’s commitment to responding to all reported incidents and areas of concern confidentially and promptly. This letter can be accessed on BCA’s website, or in your preferred format, on request.

Since this time, BCA’s complaints process has been open, and is accessible via the website.

In order to strengthen the complaints process, and undertake any required investigation thoroughly and without prejudice, BCA has set up an independent complaints process, engaging Susan Halliday AM as independent investigator.

Our first step to ensuring our expectations of staff, board, contractors and volunteers are set clearly, was to ensure key internal policies and procedures are up to date and robust.

This process included the update of BCA’s Internal Complaints policy and procedure, where staff, board and volunteers can raise issues of concern within the workplace. We also reviewed the Code of Conduct, and Social Media Policy, and created new policies: Appropriate Behaviour, Alcohol and Drugs, and Child Safety and Wellbeing. BCA also has a Service Charter, outlining BCA’s commitment to providing high quality and accessible services to Australians who are blind or vision impaired.

BCA staff have had induction sessions on these new policies, and this induction will soon be extended to volunteers, board and branch leaders.

The second aspect of the development of a robust, confidential and supportive independent complaints process, was the significant update of BCA’s External Complaints process. This is the mechanism by which members and all service users can share their concerns about BCA. A new aspect of this procedure is the external pathway of raising a complaint if the concern is of a serious nature, regarding unacceptable behaviour.

This Complaints Policy details how members, service users and external parties involved with the organisation can raise concerns and make complaints about:

* communications, events and projects via interaction with BCA staff;
* advocacy and other programs and services via interaction with BCA leaders; and
* unacceptable behaviour via the Independent Complaints Process.

All matters raised under the auspice of the Independent Complaints Process will be reviewed and assessed. Available options to move forward will be identified and these options will be discussed and mapped with the complainant and other relevant parties if required. Options can include, but are not limited to, conciliation to address misunderstandings, mediation and formal investigation.

The Independent Complaints Process adheres to the principles of natural justice. All necessary steps will be taken to ensure fair, reasonable and accessible process prioritising confidentiality to the fullest extent possible.

We have taken some time and much effort to design this process, because BCA values transparency, where we communicate and conduct business in a way that develops trust between staff, board, members, volunteers, partners and the community, and that strengthens our reputation.

The full complaints process is available on BCA’s website, and is also available in your preferred format, on request.

## From the President by Fiona Woods

So much has happened since I made my speech as incoming BCA President at the 2021 Annual General Meeting. After many cancellations, we planned and held our first face-to-face board meeting since 2019. This has been a much-anticipated event, with three of our directors joining the board since our last in-person meeting. It was also the first such meeting I have attended without John Simpson, as John decided the time had come for him to step back from the board in June. The board and I wish John well in whatever he takes on next, feeling quite sure that, that won't be the restful retirement he has earned.

As President, I have had the honour of hosting an event to farewell our outgoing Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Emma Bennison and the delight of working with our new CEO, Sally Aurisch. Having reflected on and celebrated BCA's achievements under its previous leadership, Sally and I have been concentrating on maintaining BCA's course towards a positive future. We have prepared for and written BCA's new Strategic Plan 2022-25 and are examining the ways in which BCA's Constitution can most effectively reflect BCA's corporate responsibilities and the modern organisation it has become. All of these plans are founded on my commitment to an organisation of people who are blind or vision impaired, which is led by members, driven by members and accountable to members.

Much of my work as President goes on behind the scenes, where I am assisted by Vice-President, Stephen Belbin. I am supported by the Financial Audit and Risk Management committee, led by Treasurer, Andrew Webster. It competently oversees our financial affairs and preserves our resources to secure our future. The National Policy Council, led by Prue Watt, has updated our Pedestrian Safety Policy and is now turning its attention to emergency preparedness and disaster response areas where all too many people who are blind or vision impaired have experienced being overlooked. The board has a new committee, BCA Engage. Under the guidance of Helen Freris, its aim is to increase BCA's connection and outreach with specific groups of people who are blind or vision impaired, to ensure that our membership and advocacy is as representative of the broader community as possible. If you are an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, are from a culturally or linguistically diverse background or identify as LGBTIQA+, or are an ally, and have ideas or connections to suggest, please send them to bca@bca.org.au.

I relish attending BCA events. When the BCA staff who are presenting are people who are blind or vision impaired, I take pride in an organisation which has been able to give meaningful employment to so many accomplished people and in the knowledge that they are role models and ambassadors for all of us. When the staff presenting are people who have sight, I am proud, and feel grateful relief, that we have such talented, passionate individuals demonstrating that our issues are issues that can matter to everyone and that the whole of society is responsible for understanding and meeting our needs.

The thing I have always enjoyed most about BCA has been its people. I have been able to attend several BCA Conversations (formerly known as Happy Hours), BCA Informs, BCA Welcome (previously New Member) forums and other meetings with branch leaders and members. I have especially valued learning from our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members and from those members who have recently become blind or vision impaired. The value of listening can never be overstated. Although as has happened so often in recent years, illness prevented my trip to Canberra, I have welcomed the opportunity to meet with members in Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne. I hope to visit other Branches and more States and the ACT in coming months.

With so much going on at BCA, it seems unfair to nominate highlights. Our innovative project, Eye to the Future, has provided opportunities for employers and employees to change the world of work, one job placement at a time. BCA and members had the opportunity to get involved with the election process and we have exciting plans to continue our engagement with the new parliament. I attended Audio Drama, a Vivid Sydney event, designed and hosted by a range of organisations including BCA, which demonstrated the value and possibilities of audio description to a large and diverse audience.

For me, one of the constant highlights of BCA is the hard work and dedication of our volunteers. I value generosity, excellence and enthusiasm, but I know these qualities are not infinite. No doubt like many of you and our staff, in the past six months, most of the board, including myself, have been ill with COVID19. Every director, the members of the committees I mentioned earlier, Branch officers, peer group leaders and all the other volunteers who keep BCA and its events happening, are individuals. In a voluntary job, one of the hardest things is deciding which things to take on and which things can be left. Another challenge is learning to accept that things will not always, or even often, turn out as perfectly as planned. Each of us is also taking care of our physical and mental well-being and playing our role in our household, family, work and community. My thanks and admiration go to every one of you who is doing your best to inform, connect and empower people who are blind or vision impaired and the wider community.

I welcome feedback, positive and negative, and suggestions. The thing that is most welcome of all is your offer to get involved. That can start with this publication. We know our readers love hearing from a range of voices, so get writing! I am sure that the next time I write, I will have enjoyed more interactions with more of you and will have new highlights to share.

## BCA's Strategic Plan 2022-2025 - By Sally Aurisch

BCA has a new Strategic Plan. Such plans have guided our operations for several years now. To be useful, a strategic plan must be realistic, with goals that can be achieved within the plan's timeframe, flexible, so that the organisation is not prevented from responding to changing circumstances, and aspirational, so that the organisation is motivated to grow and improve.

BCA's Strategic Plan 2022-2025 was developed after discussions held with the board and staff. We examined what we love about BCA, the context in which we work and our priorities. We asked ourselves what the world would be like if BCA did not exist. It was gratifying to realise that each of us values similar things about BCA and believes that it stands for particular values. We have shared a vision, which states why we do what we do. We have a purpose, which explains what we do to achieve our vision. We have set goals that we will all work together to achieve.

The principles upon which BCA was founded in 1975 have not changed. The 2022- 2025 Strategic Plan is founded upon these:

* People who are blind or vision impaired are best placed to advocate for their needs in all aspects of life.
* People who are blind or vision impaired can derive significant benefits from connecting with their peers and learning by sharing lived experience, skills and knowledge.
* People who are blind or vision impaired have the right to receive high quality, accessible services which meet their needs.
* People who are blind or vision impaired can foster positive community attitudes towards blindness, vision impairment and disability in the broader Australian community.

### BCA's Vision:

BCA believes in a future in which our trusted leadership and positive influence achieve equity for people who are blind or vision impaired, where we can live our lives in any way we choose, in a place that respects, recognises and responds to our uniqueness and diversity.

### BCA's Purpose

BCA informs, connects and empowers people who are blind or vision impaired and the wider community.

We represent and advocate for our interests, provide high quality support, services, projects and events and increase access, awareness, and expectations within the broader community.

We are a sustainable, credible, and independent organisation led by our strong and diverse community of people who are blind or vision impaired.

The Strategic Plan sets out the values which underpin everything we do at BCA: transparency; empathy, compassion and kindness; diversity and inclusion; continuous learning, ingenuity and innovation; teamwork and collaboration.

We have set ourselves five goals for the next three years:

1: BCA will continue to deliver quality, targeted individual and systemic advocacy and campaigns, including advocating for services that meet our needs, based on consultation with our diverse community, data and research.

2: Continue to improve our reach and representation to ensure our services, opportunities and conversations are inclusive of everyone in the blind and vision impaired community.

3: Continue to raise awareness of our work in order to grow our reputation as a leading advocacy organisation and credible source of information for people who are blind or vision impaired, stakeholders and the broader community.

4: Continue to diversify income streams and improve internal processes to ensure our long-term ability to achieve our vision.

5: Continue to provide opportunities that maintain a positive and productive working culture, which values and prioritises the wellbeing of our people.

For each of these goals, there are key strategies which we will implement and which we will use to measure and report on our achievements. Our CEO, Sally Aurisch, and her staff have an operational plan with key performance indicators to track progress across the three years of the plan.

While strategic planning might not be everyone's favourite form of exercise, for BCA this has been an opportunity to review how much we have achieved over forty-seven years, to reaffirm our shared commitment and passion and to move forward with a renewed purpose and vision.

To read the Strategic Plan 2022 - 2025, go to <https://www.bca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/BCA-Strategic-Plan-220528-003-002.docx>, or call BCA on 1800 033 660 to request a copy in your preferred format.

## Happy as Larry - By Chire Fulford

Editor’s note: While this article takes us back to 2006, natural disasters are becoming an all-too-common fact of life in Australia and the world at large. Many of you may have experienced hardship as a consequence of the summer bush fires of 2020–21 or the recent winter floods. While adequate access to timely information is also a critical requirement, read on to discover some tips to enhance your personal preparedness for an emergency.

Happy as Larry..., yeah right! Where did that saying come from anyway? The Larry I encountered in 2006 was harsh, full of wind and bellowed angrily. It was March and Cyclone Larry was coming. I'd been waiting for it. I had a feeling we’d get a big one this year. "Quick, put my processing cap on, delve into the deep recesses of my mind, and remember everything I need to do in the case of a natural disaster. It shouldn't be too far down, because I was pondering it recently." I do try to be organized because I am legally blind. Suddenly, it all came flooding back.

When I saw how long the list was, I wanted to close my eyes, block my ears, and quite frankly run away. But guess what? There was nowhere to run, so I decided I’d better get those limbs and brain into action.

"Ok, I removed all furniture from the indoor/outdoor area. There was floor to ceiling screens in that room, without glass, and the wind would blow straight in". An easy task you may think; "but where am I going to put it all? First, I placed everything in the lounge against the wall, so I could move more items into the room - I'm on a roll now! I lifted, carried and deposited items so many times that I lost count."

That room was nearly full, I even remembered to leave a pathway to the garage for our final escape.

"But before then, I had to move some gear to the garage. Anything that was high off the ground as the garage flooded when it rained, the BBQ, the massage table.

"Now, where to put those small things? Ah brainwave, on my bed! Again, I lifted, carried, on the bed went, the 3ft square mirror, keyboard, lamps, futon mattress, two single mattresses and cushions. Soon the bed was full. I cast a suspicious eye over the remaining items in the indoor/outdoor area, two freezers, a cupboard, and large computer desk. They will have to stay put, there was nowhere else to move them to. I turned the cupboard to the wall, and ensured that the freezers’ cords were off the floor.

"Right, next, tape the windows, but oh, to find the tape, mmmm, of course, it’s in one of the cupboards closest to the wall." I needed to display a few acrobatic and contortionist tricks (especially that old South African trick number 39) to get to the cupboard to acquire the tape." I taped up all the windows that don't have security screens." Now, don't you just love working with tape, especially long bits? Apart from sticking myself to the door a few times and to the windows, I also managed to stick myself to myself. Plus, the tape to itself, this job was a breeze, it only took me twice as long.

“Next, pack what we will need to take. We were escaping to the high ground because tidal surges are expected, and we live a hop skip and jump from the beach". I threw a few clothes together - remembering sand shoes and jumper. I had candles, batteries, radio, mobile with charger, gas bottle, water and food that we could live on for a week if necessary. I said a quick "goodbye" to the house then headed with my daughter for the hills, the Atherton Tablelands.

She’d recently gotten her driver's license and had never driven the Kuranda Range. She definitely wasn’t confident. Actually, she would have preferred not to drive to the tablelands but didn't want to leave her car behind. A good start?

"Everything was fine, until we reached the initial winding climb. The car ahead drove at a snail’s pace, either a tourist or someone who hadn’t driven the range before. They moved well over to the left so she could overtake, but it was a double white line with too much oncoming traffic. I talked her through it, not to overtake until there was an overtaking lane. In the meantime, if we went any slower, we'd have stopped. My heart pounded, my daughter was nearly ready to pull over and burst into tears, when an overtaking lane loomed ahead. Go go go! we're off." We both started to breathe easier.

Finally, we made it to our friend’s vacated house. We settled ourselves in nicely and waited for the onslaught.

"Around midnight the winds picked up, howling. Occasionally the house moved." It sounded much worse than it was, because every noise echoed throughout the empty house. We heard tin flapping somewhere downstairs. It rained from time to time. Rain came horizontally through the closed louvers.

We listened to the radio all night as people rang up telling their stories. That in itself was hard to take. Roofs off, rain pouring in, whole houses lifted and dumped, huge trees snapped in half, cane fields that no longer existed, ranges blocked, power lines down. All we could do was huddle closer together and wonder when our turn would come.

We must have both fallen asleep, because next thing it was the early hours of the morning, and all was quiet, dead quiet! "This was when the eye moved across the coast. There were no noises, no birds and the atmosphere felt eerie. It was even sunny in places with slight drizzle."

It wasn’t over, we had to wait for the calm before the storm, once the cyclone’s eye passed the weather could get just as furious but from the opposite direction.

We couldn't leave there was too much destruction, and the Range was blocked. Therefore, we spent the day playing games, drinking cups of tea and making up for lost sleep.

Eventually, the Range reopened, and we headed back to Cairns; amazed at the devastation, especially since Larry crossed the coast 100km away at Innisfail. We arrived home late at night to no power and all I wanted to do was sleep. It had been an emotional trip, I was exhausted. "I felt my way to my bedroom and went to lay down. Ah, and then I remember the mirror, keyboard, lamps, cushions and mattresses etc. I removed what I could, stored things all around my bedroom floor and got into bed."

It took a week to recover. Firstly, because there was another cyclone sitting off the coast, so I didn't see the point in putting everything back where it belonged until I knew what that cyclone was doing. Three days later, I started to put the house back to how it was and got into some sort of old routine. This wasn’t easy as I still had no electricity.

The pool needed cleaning; it was full of yard debris. All the meat in the freezer had defrosted, it needed to be cooked up.

The list of chores was endless, regardless of where I went around my home.

The Cairns beaches had little water damage due to being north of the cyclone’s path. Cairns hardly had any rain. The expected tidal surge didn’t happen. But really, we could count our lucky stars.

We updated our natural disaster plan.

"Make sure where we are running to is not worse than where we have left.

When taping up windows, remember to tape ALL of them." I’d forgotten the two sets of double glass doors in the garage.

"PS, I don't like cereal that much that I want to live on it for a week."

"Ha, ha! one small consolation, the wet carpet in my bedroom was now dry, because the waterbed base had soaked it up…" And yes, you guessed it, it was a chipboard base, but that's another story...!

## Blindness is a Spectrum - By Bethany Cody

Editor’s note: This article was written prior to the recent Federal election in May. While we may now have a new government and the prospect of improved disability services, the author’s call to action on NDIS reform remains just as relevant today, especially so with the recent threat to funding for Orientation and Mobility (O&M) services. But what do you do if you can’t even obtain a white cane?

Blindness is a spectrum. In 2018, I was diagnosed with an inherited retinal disease called Retinitis Pigmentosa. RP causes progressive, permanent sight loss and comes with a range of symptoms such as night blindness, tunnel vision or peripheral vision loss as your field of vision shrinks, light sensitivity, visual snow and can lead to glaucoma and cataracts. Glaucoma and cataracts are manageable with regular monitoring and surgery; however, RP causes irreversible damage and often leads to legal blindness. There are over 150 known genes which cause it, and the speed of vision loss varies greatly from person to person. There is no cure.

Going blind was one of my biggest fears growing up and in some strange twist of irony, I’ve been quietly living with it my whole life. I first started noticing that my vision was changing when I was around 13-15 years old. I began to find it difficult to see at night and in dimly lit places. I had a few seemingly random accidents, missing a few steps on the stairs, walking into a stop sign, the kind of things you can brush off as ‘being clumsy’ or not paying attention. But these incidents continued to happen and in 2018, I finally admitted that my sight was changing and shortly after, received my diagnosis.

In the last four years, I’ve been living relatively independently, although I can’t legally drive. But something happened recently that has made me question my capability. As the AFL season is upon us, my fiancé and I have been visiting Adelaide Oval to see our favourite team play and I’ve found navigating the stadium grounds at night-time very difficult, especially with so much foot traffic and people going in every which direction. I had a run in with an older woman, when Alec and I were heading towards the entrance gates. I didn’t see her in my periphery until we collided.

She spat, “That’s perfectly fine, just keep walking into me, no problem,” in an acidic, sarcastic tone.

I was mortified. I didn’t see her. She stormed off, huffing. What could I say? She’d already decided that I was a bad person. It put a real dampener on the rest of the night. Just two hours earlier, I was almost run over by a cyclist when I got off of a bus and started walking on the footpath. I’m still affected by these events, weeks later – the thought of what could have happened if I’d bumped into the wrong person, if the cyclist didn’t stop.

Vision loss isn’t something you can necessarily see from the outside. To the general public, I look ‘normal’. I don’t use a white cane and I don’t have a guide dog, so I don’t fit into the stereotype of what a blind or visually impaired person looks or acts like. These incidents have made me seriously consider using an ID or identification cane. ID canes are smaller, lightweight canes designed to be a visual clue to members of the public that you have a visual impairment and to take caution when walking near you. They are designed to keep the user visible, independent and safe. The problem is, you can’t just google ‘ID canes’ and buy one from the first website you see. In Australia, you are legally required to undergo some orientation and mobility training before you can use and own an ID cane.

The process so far has been difficult. I rang several organisations for the blind and was told that I need to join the NDIS before they will offer me their services. The National Disability Insurance Scheme is run by the Australian government to fund supports and services needed by people living with disability. After doing my own research, I’ve found that to be considered for vision loss support through the NDIS, you are required to be legally blind (described as having a field of vision less than 20 degrees in diameter), which is a very specific level and sinister expectation of blindness, or you have to have ‘permanent vision loss.’ This gatekeeping of blindness and visual impairment is distressing and prohibitive. There is a large community of people who are not considered legally blind, who desperately need support and aren’t able to access it because of the NDIS’s discrimination and backwards beliefs about blindness.

It’s like they’re asking, ‘How blind *are* you?’ And saying, ‘You’re not disabled *enough*.’

Retinitis Pigmentosa causes permanent and progressive vision loss, however it can take many years for your vision to deteriorate before you are diagnosed as legally blind. This is also true for many other conditions and causes of sight loss. Before this stage, you may have to give up your driver’s license (like I did), you may find it difficult to keep working, or have issues with mobility and experience accidents or injuries in your home, workplace or in public. The fact that the NDIS doesn’t recognise or care that people need supports and services before being labelled legally blind is insulting and dehumanising.

While the NDIS has great potential and has positively impacted the lives of many people living with disability, the current system actively discriminates against the same people it claims to help. There is a culture of ignorance, stereotyping, lack of understanding of the complexities of disability and overall apathy. Despite these glaring issues within the current system, abolishing the scheme altogether would be an indescribable loss for hundreds of thousands of people living with disability across the nation, stripping us of our independence and right to lead full, healthy, safe lives.

In the last month, I’ve joined the Defend Our NDIS campaign, organised by Every Australian Counts organisation – the very same community which fought for the introduction of the NDIS back in 2011, two years before it was first rolled out. As the election looms, they are calling for support from members of the public and parliament to get involved in defending and protecting the NDIS from damaging budget cuts. There is an online petition you can sign, as well as several online and in-person community events you can register for in your state and t-shirts and stickers available to purchase to show your support.

I have my t-shirt and plan to make several awareness posts across my social media in the hopes that we will be heard loud and clear, that people with disability won’t be cast to the side and forgotten.

As a visually impaired person, I am fiercely passionate about dismantling the harmful and outdated stereotypes that society perpetuates about blindness, to change societal attitudes and create an accessible, equitable and inclusive world. I believe that the NDIS has great potential, but severely needs improving so that people with disability can access the supports they need without fear of rejection or the burden of ‘not being disabled enough’.

## Exploring our Discomfort with Technology - by Fiona Woods

BCA's election platform for 2022 asked politicians to make technology work for everyone, especially people who are blind or vision impaired. We called on all parties to implement a nationally consistent program so that all people who need assistive technology can access it. We asked for technology to be used to achieve equal access to voting, banking, government services and products and much more. While part of BCA's purpose is to remove the many barriers to people who are blind or vision impaired accessing the services we need, I believe that sometimes we create our own barriers. One of the major obstacles I needed to overcome before I was ready to stand for election as your President was my unfamiliarity with and level of discomfort in using technology. I am sharing some of my feelings about it here, because I am sure many of you will identify with them. While I don't expect all of you dream of becoming BCA President, I trust a few of you do and I hope others will be encouraged to examine and accept your own feelings about technology and acknowledge how they might be preventing you from exploring the opportunities it offers.

These are some of the feelings you might experience when you think about learning to use a new phone, computer, website, app or program:

### ‘I feel the world has left me behind’

Personally, I was never the first to have every new device on the market, but, as a young woman, I needed to learn and use technology for my study and work. I had a Versabraille, a braille device which connected to a computer, and stored its data on cassette tapes. I also used an Optacon, a device which used a hand-operated camera and an array of pins to reproduce print shapes which could be read with a finger. These devices were expensive, unreliable, time-consuming and required lots of concentration, but they enabled me to get my work done. When I left work to have my first child, the Windows operating system, without any numbers or dates, was just launching. As many of you will know, if you are not involved in work or study, there are limited means of accessing technology or training in how to use it. My volunteer roles were performed in-person or over the phone. I considered myself unqualified for part-time jobs for which I might otherwise have applied, because I lacked computer skills. I found we were turning up to early morning soccer matches which had been cancelled at short notice, because I wasn't able to receive text messages. Where once I could call the relevant member of my fruit and vegetable co-op to place my order, I was relying on friends to send email orders on my behalf. I decided to get a mobile phone and to learn to use it independently.

### ‘I feel fearful’

People who grow up using computers seem to have a natural curiosity about them. They will press buttons and open tabs, just to see what happens. I grew up being told that computers were for experts and involved special languages and that one day they would rule the world. I still worry about what will happen if I accidentally leave a page or enter an unintended field. In my workdays, it was all too easy to delete or lose whole slabs of text. When I first started exploring with my daughter's rejected iPad, I used to disconnect it from the internet, so I could be confident I would not upload or buy something without meaning to. I realise now it's not quite that easy.

### ‘I feel overwhelmed’

Everyone knows that the one truth about technology is that it keeps changing. This is particularly challenging for people who are blind or vision impaired, as new updates too often impact accessibility. No sooner was I reasonably comfortable with email than my soccer team and fruit and vegetable co-op decided to conduct their business on Facebook. One of my children also moved overseas and I wanted to share in their adventures. Joining Facebook made me anxious, as it made my information public in a way it never had been before. I asked my elder children to check all my settings and profile information and those of people who requested to be my friends; I still have them vet those. Facebook has seriously damaged some people and has an obscene amount of unfettered power, but for me it has been the source of information, connection and fun. I know more about some of my friends and relatives and can talk to them more freely than I would if we were in the same room. I have joined groups discussing parenting, baking, fitness and assistive technology for people who are blind or vision impaired. Beyond disability, I am part of my local community discussion group. Through my posts, I can give feedback about an event, recommend a book or tradesperson or ask why there are helicopters flying overhead, just like anyone else. If I choose to, I can offer a disability perspective to a discussion where it might otherwise be absent.

### ‘I feel out of my depth’

When I got my first iPhone, a 4S which was not the latest then, all I knew was to ask the Apple salesperson to turn on voice-over; they had to consult instructions to do this. Everything I learned was from the phone manual, YouTube, Applevis.com or from other people who are blind or vision impaired. It wasn't long before I felt confident to dictate short messages and emails. I acquired a Bluetooth keyboard, which allowed me to type more quickly and accurately, and I started to write and edit longer emails. As I have the good fortune to be a NDIS Participant, I was able to use some funds to acquire a braille note-taker. Learning to use the note-taker was hard. It was my first such device. I was not familiar with the elements of a webpage or much beyond basic word processing. If I had not by then been a director of BCA, I might not have found the motivation to persist.

### ‘I don't know where to start’

If you have used a computer or phone before with sight, you might be able to do more than you think. There are many online resources, although you may need help to locate these. You can use your voice to search or type in some key words. There are many places that offer training in technology; for seniors there is beconnectednetwork.org.au. Local connectors are unlikely to be experts in screen-readers or voice-over, but they will be curious about technology, and they may be willing to learn along with you.

Specialised help and training is available from most blindness service providers and you can receive personalised training from some independent consultants. You could use NDIS or My Aged Care funds or negotiate an hourly rate.

### ‘I can't afford it’

Until Parliament provides technology for all, I sadly don't have any clever answers for this one. It can be hard to use NDIS or My Aged Care funds for computers or mobile phones, as these are considered standard items that all members of the public need to buy. It's not necessary to have the latest versions, especially while you are first learning. I am still using an IPhone6S. Ask your friends and relatives to give you their old phones or computers when they upgrade and to turn on their in-built voices and accessibility features. Take the plunge and start exploring.

I know many of you reading this are thinking "it's all very well for her". Despite my perfectly rational fears, I have not been hacked or stalked. I have been followed home from a train station and I received prank calls on my old landline. Fear did not stop me walking home or using the phone, but it taught me to use precautions. Similar prudence can be reassuring when exploring the internet. The E-safety Commission has some useful resources at [www.esafety.gov.au/](http://www.esafety.gov.au/). I have taught myself new skills and added new apps gradually, over years, as I needed to or felt adventurous. I am still working to become a competent JAWS user.

I feel included, competent, confident and courageous: Now I can order and pay for my shopping, set my heater to the ideal temperature, find and make a new recipe, select appropriate music, and video call my mum all by myself, using my phone. To many of you reading this, these achievements will seem minimal, but they are hard won.

Although technology offers so many useful and worthy opportunities, what I most relish is the way I can use it for completely frivolous activities, like finding out who caused the latest celebrity break-up or watching the latest video of someone opening a box.

BCA is and always will be committed to ensuring that people who are blind or vision impaired can access information about ours and other services in many ways. In addition to our frequent emails and social media posts, we regularly add recorded content to our telephone service at 1800 033 660, we publish a brief update in members’ preferred format with this magazine and, for the latest news, you can tune in each week to our radio programme, New Horizons. BCA will always advocate for alternative services for people who are unable to use technology. Irrespective of our stridency, a whole range of services can now only be used with a mobile phone or computer. Remaining phone-based services are often poorly funded and insufficiently staffed. When I was a child, it was relatively common for neighbours to ask to use our phone or to walk to a nearby public phone box, because they did not have their own landline. By the time I had finished school, this was almost unheard-of. It is fast becoming the same with mobile phone numbers and email addresses. There are enough things preventing people who are blind or vision impaired participating fully in the world of technology. I have written this in the hope of encouraging some of you to examine which feelings may be holding you back.

For me, access to the internet has enabled me to participate in my many communities in ways which would not otherwise have been possible. If you have discovered new worlds through technology, please write and tell us about them. If you disagree with everything I have said here, please write and tell us about that as well.

## Vale Peter Goebel - January 1952 – April 2022 - By Bill Jolley

Peter Goebel died suddenly from a heart attack on Easter Monday morning, collapsing in the street whilst on his way to his local train station. He was a founding member of Blind Citizens Australia, a regular attendee at national conventions and the founding leader of the Footscray branch in Melbourne. He did not seek national leadership of BCA, focusing his efforts on building his chiropractic business and supporting his young family.

Although Peter had low vision from birth and great difficulty in reading print, he was not taught braille at school. He mastered braille as an adult, using it as the literacy medium for record-keeping (including patient notes) in his demanding medical practice and associated wellness products business.

Peter was a tenacious advocate and an active member of his communities of interest, including the free masons and blind cricket.

Peter received most of his schooling at the Carrombank Sight-Saving School and completed his secondary education by correspondence at the Yooralla Hospital School for Crippled Children. Peter was gifted with a dogged determination and a meticulous diligence, enabling him to complete a Diploma of Chiropractic’s and associated further qualifications, becoming the first blind person to complete such training in Australia.

Peter was respected as an early success story of the RVIB tertiary resource service which pioneered the dissemination of textbook materials on reel-to-reel tape and then cassette. He was critically dependent on the audio format since he could not read print or braille fluently.

Peter experienced significant challenge and deep personal tragedy as he nurtured his young family and worked long hours to build his business. In 1974 he married Dawn, who was also blind, and they soon were taking care of three young children. Dawn was kept busy as the primary caregiver for their children, but she also worked in the clinic maintaining the records in braille and taking responsibility for general administration. Their eldest daughter, Emma, suffered a traumatic episode during eye surgery as a baby which left her profoundly disabled.

Peter and Dawn soon realised that their house and practice in Spotswood was unsuitable for a child with profound disabilities, so Peter project-managed the design and build of a new accessible dwelling with home, business and hydrotherapy pool in the neighbouring suburb of Newport where they lived for many years. Integral to his design process for the building was his construction of a scale model using Lego showing the layout of all of the rooms.

In 1995, aged just forty, Dawn died after a short illness from cancer; and just a few months later Emma died.

In 1986 Peter led a group of concerned blind people who worked hard and were successful in gaining three seats on the board of the RVIB. Their involvement over the next ten years was significant in modernising RVIB’s approach to service delivery and fundraising, although significant reform of the education and young adult support services had already begun.

Peter later obtained a qualification as an O&M instructor and in 2001 was invited to join the board of Seeing Eye Dogs Australia. Over the next four years he served as chair of the board and as acting CEO.

Peter was a high achiever, devoted to his family, community-minded and generous. He made major efforts to improve the quality of life of people who are blind or have low vision. On behalf of our self-help community, I thank Peter Goebel for his commendable efforts and contributions over many years; and I extend our deepest sympathies to his children, Kevin and Kathryn, and to other family members.

## Vale Ivan Molloy – by John Simpson, Past President

Sadly, I am writing to advise you of the death of long serving BCA leader, Ivan Molloy. Ivan passed away on July 20th, aged 95, after a period of ill health.

Ivan served on the NFBCA Council, the forerunner to the BCA Board, for several years. Ivan was acknowledged for his outstanding contribution to improving the lives of blind people when he was presented with the BCA David Blyth Award in 2005.

Ivan dedicated his life to addressing the needs and aspirations of people who were blind or vision impaired, both within Australia and internationally. When I first met him in around 1957 Ivan was working with the Braille Library of Victoria as a braille teacher and welfare officer. He was later employed in a welfare capacity with the Association for the Blind at the George Vowel Centre in Mornington Victoria. He was highly respected as a tenacious advocate on behalf of the organisation's clients, as much within the organisation as externally.

Ivan was also among those who understood the value of social and sporting interaction among people who were blind and many of us benefitted from his work in encouraging teenagers to take up blind cricket and then valued his wise guidance to ensure that we fully enjoyed the social activity that surrounded the game, but in a way where we rarely overstepped the mark.

Ivan served as President of the Victorian Blind Cricket Association in the 1960s and was active with the game and its administration at the national level.

In 1981 Ivan led a group of 16 to Sri Lanka where he had already developed close connections with the local blind community This tour, which incorporated blind cricket, swish (blind table tennis) and many opportunities to experience the local culture, formed the basis for Ivan's long running commitment to supporting blind people in Sri Lanka and in other Asian counties.

With his life-long partner Lorraine, Ivan worked tirelessly to provide financial support and material aid to the Ratmalana School for the Blind and to similar organisations. Much of this work was undertaken through the BCA Overseas Cultural Branch, which Ivan led until its closure in 2016. The branch's major project over many years was to cut to size and package paper that was provided by the then photo processing company Kodak. To accommodate this work Ivan gave over the workshop at his Mount Martha home and had his driveway reinforced to accommodate the heavy vehicles that delivered the paper as weighty rolls.

Our thoughts are with Ivan's wife Lorraine and their family and friends.

## Feedback for BCA

Do you have any compliments, suggestions or concerns you wanted to let BCA know about? You can do this anonymously by going to our website [www.bca.org.au/feedback](http://www.bca.org.au/feedback) and completing a feedback form or you can call the BCA Office toll free on 1800 033 660. Your feedback will be used to improve our services to better meet the needs of our membership.

## How to Make a Complaint About BCA

Any member, client, volunteer, or their advocate, can lodge a complaint about the services provided by BCA. Complaints can be made in the following ways:

Phone: 1800 033 660
Email: bca@bca.org.au
Website: www.bca.org.au/feedback

Post: Blind Citizens Australia, Level 3, Ross House
247 – 251 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, Vic 3000

If there are complaints of a serious nature, the Chief Executive Officer will ask that the complaint be put in writing.

Complaints will be recorded in accordance with the requirements for complaints management outlined by The Office of Disability Services Commissioner. Member and client privacy will be respected and protected in relation to the recording, management and resolution of the complaint. For a full copy of BCA's complaints policy, please go to our website [www.bca.org.au/feedback](http://www.bca.org.au/feedback) or call BCA.

## Funding and Donations for BCA

BCA would like to acknowledge the generous work of the Jeffrey Blyth Foundation. The Foundation was formed in 1995 with BCA being the primary beneficiary. And the Shirley Fund, which now sits with the Jeffrey Blyth Foundation following the merger of BCNSW with BCA.

We would also like to acknowledge our funding partners: the Federal Department of Social Services (DSS), the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) NSW; the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Victoria, the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO), Vision Australia, Guide Dogs Australia, EverAbility, the Aged Peoples Welfare Foundation, the Goodwill Collective, and our generous members and BCA Backers.

If you would like to make a donation to Blind Citizens Australia, you can call 1800 033 660, and use your credit card. You can also donate online using the “Donate Tab” on the BCA Website. All donations over $2 are tax deductible.

## Submit Your Writing to Blind Citizens News

The Editor welcomes your submissions for Blind Citizens News. Submissions for the next edition close on Friday 20th January 2023. Contributions can be submitted in braille, print, audio CD or electronic format (in Word or text format). Send emails to bcnews@bca.org.au and write “Blind Citizens News Submission” in the subject line. For all other format contributions, please send the document to the BCA Office or phone 1800 033 660 for enquiries. Submissions should be between 500 and 1200 words in length. Submissions cannot be made anonymously, and the Editor must be made aware of any conflict of interest which may be relevant to the author's work.

## Directory of Contact Details

* BCA Strategic Plan: <https://www.bca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/BCA-Strategic-Plan-220528-003-002.docx>
* Esafety Commissioner at [www.esafety.gov.au/](http://www.esafety.gov.au/)
* Further information on the Eye to the Future of Employment Project Contact: Nicole Willing, email: nicole.willing@bca.org.au Eye to the Future website: [www.eyetothefuture.com.au](http://www.eyetothefuture.com.au) Facebook: [www.facebook.com/EyeToTheFutureBCA/](http://www.facebook.com/EyeToTheFutureBCA/)
* find out more about BCA’s next steps with Audio Description, visit [www.tv4all.com.au](http://www.tv4all.com.au). Recorded information regarding scheduled programs on SBS containing AD is available via BCA's telephone system which can be accessed by calling 1800 033 660.
* National Women's Branch (including Womentalks)
Contact: Katrina Taylor. Email: nwb@bca.org.au
* National Women’s Branch (Aspirations Magazine)
Contact: Carmel Jolley. Email: carmeljolley@bigpond.com
* National Policy Council
Contact: Prue Watt. Email: npc@bca.org.au
* NSW/ACT State Division
Contact: Suzy Hudson. Email: suzannehudson23@gmail.com
* NDIS / NDIA Phone: 1800 800 110
* My Aged Care Contact Centre Phone: 1800 200 422

## New Horizons Radio Broadcast Schedule

### South Australia

Adelaide, 5RPH 1197AM and on RPH Adelaide digital

Times: 4.30pm Wednesday; Repeated 8.15am Sunday

### Queensland

Brisbane, Reading Radio 1296AM

(Can also be heard on DAB Radio station and IHeartradio, Community Radio Plus, 4RP and TuneInRadio apps – details found at <https://readingradio.org.au/>

Times: 2.00pm Fridays. Repeated Friday 11.45pm and Saturday 4.45pm

### NSW and ACT

Sydney, 2RPH 1224AM, Sydney East 100.5FM

Newcastle/Lower Hunter 100.5FM

Times: 3.00pm Thursday; Repeated Saturday 2.00pm

Canberra, 1RPH 1125AM, Wagga Wagga 89.5FM, Junee 99.5FM

Times: Tuesday 9.15am: Repeated 8.00pm Tuesday, 9.30am Saturday.

### Northern Territory

Darwin VAR digital service (DAB+) and the Darwin web streaming service. Times: 4.30pm Wednesday; Repeated 8.15am Sunday.

### Tasmania

Hobart Print Radio Tasmania 864AM, Launceston 106.9FM, Devonport 96.1FM

Week 1 Times: 3.45pm Wednesday, repeated 8.45am Friday

Week 2 Times: 3.45pm Wednesday, repeated 8.45am Friday

### Victoria

Melbourne, 3RPH 1179AM and Vision Australia Radio regional stations; RPH Albury 101.7FM, RPH Bendigo 88.7FM, RPH Geelong 99.5FM, RPH Mildura 107.5FM, RPH Shepparton 100.1FM, RPH Warragul 93.5FM, RPH Warrnambool 882AM

Times: 4.30pm Wednesday; Repeated 8.15am Sunday

### Western Australia

Perth, 6RPH 990AM

Times: 4.30pm Wednesday: Repeated 8.15am Sundays