

# A screenshot of a virtual Zoom call to celebrate the end of the 2021 Executive Leadership program. Blind Citizens Australia July 2021 - June 2022 Year in review

# Claire Tellefson smiles and poses holding up her BCA David Blyth award.

# A group of people smile and pose on a stage in front of a large "Vivid" sign and purple background.

Mailing Address:

247 Flinders Lane Melbourne Victoria 3000

Tel: 1800 033 660 SMS: 0436 446 780

[bca@bca.org.au](mailto:bca@bca.org.au) Website: [www.bca.org.au](http://www.bca.org.au/)

ABN: 90 006 985 226

Cover Image Description: A collage of three images. Top left: a screenshot of a virtual Zoom call celebrating the end of the 2021 Executive Leadership Program. Top right: Claire Tellefson smiles and poses holding up her BCA David Blyth award. Bottom: A large group of people, including Sally Aurisch, CEO and Angela Jaeschke, General Manager Operations, pose on a stage in front of a large “Vivid” sign at the Vivid Sydney Audio Drama event.

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## Overview

The 2021-2022 financial year saw a lot of change within BCA. The departure of our former Chief Executive Officer and President provided the opportunity to reflect on and celebrate the organisation's recent achievements. The board determined that our incoming CEO must be a person who is blind or vision impaired and committed resources to a rigorous and extensive search process, to ensure that we found the best person for the role. The board was delighted that the successful candidate was a current member of staff and BCA. The new CEO and President are future-focussed, launching our new Strategic Plan 2022-25 within the first six months of their appointment.  
  
The COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact our staff and members, with lockdowns re-enforcing the organisation's relevance in informing, connecting, and empowering people who are blind or vision impaired and the wider community. Resources were deployed to assist our community to deal with novel barriers to access such as sign-in protocols, proof of vaccination requirements and rapid antigen tests. Our virtual workplace continued to serve us well, with new directors and staff being welcomed into teams whose members have often never met in person.   
  
The 2022 Federal Election saw BCA launch a highly engaging election platform, which was enthusiastically received by members and allies, as well as other blindness sector organisations and, importantly, federal politicians of all persuasions. This campaign provides BCA with a strong foundation to maintain its advocacy work into the 2022-2023 financial year and beyond.  
  
BCA has continued to develop and expand opportunities for members to connect with each other, with the launch of several interest-based Peer Connect groups. Local and special interest branches continued to offer virtual meeting opportunities, before cautiously returning to face to face events, hosting several in-person social gatherings in multiple states.   
  
BCA has renewed its vision, purpose, values, and goals. It is well placed to continue its work of informing, connecting and empowering people who are blind or vision impaired and the wider community into the future.

## Staffing

Over the 2021-22 financial year, BCA employed 27 staff, across six states, of which 17 are either blind or vision impaired, have disability, or lived experience.

In February 2022, BCA farewelled Emma Bennison, who had served in the role of CEO for five years. Under Emma’s leadership, among other achievements, BCA moved to a remote workplace, was successful in securing significant three-year funding, renegotiated partnership agreements with key blindness service provider organisations, and had a focus on leadership development for staff and members.

Sally Aurisch was appointed CEO in January 2022; and BCA welcomed Deb Deshayes as General Manager Projects and Engagement in late January.

Following the success of another Independence, Linkages and Capacity-building (ILC) grant, through Department of Social Services, BCA was able to reinvigorate and expand the Eye to the Future (E2F) Employment project. Starting in October 2021, this twelve-month project employed Nicole Willing as Project Manager, three project officers, and an admin assistant, later also engaging a Business Support Officer to support BCA’s E2F and projects and engagement teams.

Although state borders did reopen over this twelve-month period, Covid and other health and safety considerations prevented the staff group from meeting in person again this year. The Executive Leadership Team were able to have a two-day planning session together in Melbourne in April. There has been some opportunity for staff to meet socially on occasion.

BCA’s training and wellbeing sessions throughout the year has provided connection and social interaction for the team.

BCA would like to thank all staff, contractors, and volunteers for their significant efforts in supporting BCA’s work in this past year.

## Sustainability and Growth

### Funding and Finance

BCA again convened a Finance Audit and Risk Management (FARM) committee in this financial year, overseeing BCA’s finances and investments. BCA extends its thanks to Doug McGinn, for chairing the FARM until December 2021, and thereafter, Andrew Webster for assuming the role of chair. Thank you also to Mick Baker and Rocco Cutrie, for continuing as external representatives on the FARM.

Full details of BCA’s finances and the Independent Auditors Report are contained in our "Directors and Finance Reports 2021 - 22" available on our website, or in your preferred format on request.

### Funding Partners

BCA thanks and acknowledges the following departments, organisations and individuals for their support and commitment to the work of BCA.

* Jeffrey Blyth Foundation
* Shirley Fund
* Vision Australia
* Guide Dogs Australia
* EverAbility
* Australian Federation of Disability Organisations – Disability Royal Commission Funding through Department of Social Services; Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Disability Representative Organisations Consortium
* Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) Individual Capacity Building Grant through Department of Social Services (3 year funding)
* Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) – Economic Participation grant, through Department of Social Services.
* Victorian Government through Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
* NSW Government through Department of Communities and Justice
* Aged Persons Welfare Foundation
* Department of Social Services Volunteer Grant Australia
* The Goodwill Collective – consultation support
* Intopia
* BCA Backers – regular donations program
* Members who donated in response to member and Giving Day appeals

### Partnerships and Collaborations

During the year, the Board maintained its strong commitment to building and maintaining strategic relationships.

BCA continued to work with partner organisations in the blindness sector, meeting with the CEOs and their representatives, to work towards a common aim of upholding and enhancing the rights of people who are blind or vision impaired. BCA maintained memoranda of understanding with:

* Vision Australia
* Guide Dogs Australia
* EverAbility

BCA also enjoyed collaborations and with the broader blindness sector and beyond:

* Vision 2020 Australia is the Australian arm of an international alliance that brings together eye health professionals, blindness service providers and consumer representative organisations to address issues of blindness prevention, sight restoration and specialist service provision. BCA is an active participant in the Vision 2020 Independence and Participation Committee. BCA also contributes to sector submissions.
* AFDO, the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, brings together nineteen disability-specific peak organisations and a range of state-based "Disabled Persons Organisations" to represent the views of people with disability to Government and to the corporate and community sectors. BCA has been an active member of AFDO since its formation in 2002. Focus areas for this year have been the Disability Royal Commission, review of the Disability Support Pension, NDIS reform, and Australia’s Disability Strategy. During the year under review we continued to both contribute to and benefit from this collaboration.
* Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN). BCA worked collaboratively again with ACCAN on furthering audio description, and supported the campaign “No Australian Left Offline”.

## How we Informed

Our commitment to providing high-quality, accessible information that meets the needs of our members was stronger than ever this year as demonstrated by the following highlights.

### BCA Websites

This year, BCA’s websites continued to provide updated information, resources and updates to members and the wider community.

On average, BCA’s website [www.bca.org.au](http://www.bca.org.au) received 4,562 views every month, with the highest monthly visit for this 12-month period being 5,917 in October 2021.The average number of homepage visits per month was 1,257, with the highest also being in October at 1,473.

The pages that were visited the most over the year (after the homepage) were:

* Accepted forms of ID
* Our Team
* Contact us
* Member Update

BCA’s An Eye to the Future project continued to expand. It’s website, [www.eyetothefuture.com.au](http://www.eyetothefuture.com.au), functions as a resource and information hub for employers and jobseekers who are blind or vision impaired.

The average monthly engagement with the An Eye to the Future website was 367, with the highest number of visits being 1,211 in February of 2022.

The pages on the E2F website with the most engagement were:

* Internship project
* Career Resources page: Getting the work

Our TV4All website, [www.tv4all.com.au](http://www.tv4all.com.au) continued as a platform for our audio description campaign work, offering information and calls to action tailored to increase awareness in the broader community.

### Social Media

This year, BCA continued to promote our programs, projects, communications and sector success via Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. We also introduced the use of LinkedIn to promote our employment related projects and other business-related content. Across all platforms, we engaged with members and promoted awareness in the broader community on a range of policy and advocacy issues. At the end of this reporting period, BCA’s Facebook page had 1,425 page likes and 1,594 followers. BCA’s Twitter account had 2,338 followers and LinkedIn had 170 followers.

Across our social media, the posts with the most engagement were related to major BCA changes, and or significant policy related posts.

# Media Engagement

## Media Releases

17 May 2022 – [BCA Launches Entreprenurial Mindset Project](https://www.bca.org.au/2022/08/30/bca-launches-the-entreprenurial-mindset-project/)

25 March 2022 – [NSW Electoral Commission’s decision to decommission iVote](https://www.bca.org.au/2022/03/28/decision-to-decommission-ivote-is-a-violation-on-the-rights-of-people-who-are-blind-or-vision-impaired/)

31 August 2021 – [Hugh Jeffery Scholarship recipients announced](https://www.bca.org.au/2021/05/26/media-release-bca-hugh-jeffrey-scholarship-program/)

## Interviews and Mentions

[Blue Mountains Gazette - New local head of national blindness organisation](https://www.bluemountainsgazette.com.au/story/7571219/glenbrook-resident-new-head-of-blind-citizens-australia/)

[Innovation Aus - Accessibility issues: RAT tests and the vision impaired](https://www.innovationaus.com/accessibility-issues-rat-tests-and-the-vision-impaired/)

[News.com.au - Vision-impaired university student rejected for up to 100 jobs over five years in Sydney](https://www.news.com.au/finance/work/careers/visionimpaired-university-student-rejected-for-up-to-100-jobs-over-five-years-in-sydney/news-story/5d6bb1d7f2818e147ec1f8ee8306b744)

[Republic World - Aus: Blind Man Gets Licence To Ride Dirt Bike, Says 'don't Listen To Those Who Say No'](https://www.republicworld.com/world-news/australia/aus-bilnd-man-gets-licence-to-ride-dirt-bike-says-dont-listen-to-those-who-say-no.html)

### Blind Citizens News

Blind Citizens News is BCA’s flagship publication, which is sent to all members in their preferred format.

There were two editions published in this financial year. The Spring 2021 edition was edited by Jonathan Craig. The Autumn 2022 edition featured guest editor, Ben Clare.

BC News can be accessed on BCA’s website in text or audio versions, and is also available as a podcast.

### New Horizons

New Horizons is BCA’s national, weekly radio program and podcast. It covers topics relevant to people who are blind or vision impaired.

Hosted by Vaughn Bennison, New Horizons featured regular updates from BCA on staffing changes, programs, events and areas of focus throughout the year. New Horizons also welcomed members who shared their stories and experiences through interviews.

BCA partner organisations and guests also joined us for important updates on their services and projects.

New Horizons is available as a podcast, on BCA’s website and through the Vision Australia Library service. It is also broadcast via the RPH Network and community radio stations across Australia.

### Member Updates

With BCA’s focus on member engagement and information sharing, BCA’s weekly Member Updates informed its 1,639 subscribers to BCA’s announcements email list, with weekly CEO video updates, information from BCA highlighting news, events and projects, and branch activities, as well as updates from the sector, accessible community events and other items of interest. The announcements email list grew by approximately 150 subscribers in this year.

### Phone-based Information

BCA’s inbound and outbound text messaging service continued to enable members to receive immediate and timely information about current BCA activities and to provide us with feedback and ask questions via text message. This is particularly critical for people who are Deafblind and those with speech impairments.

BCA’s internet-based phone system not only facilitates remote working for our staff, but also provides members and other stakeholders with information about current BCA activities, campaigns and events via the interactive menu. Information about audio described programming on SBS was also available on BCA’s phone system. Callers can also provide anonymous feedback via the system.

### BCA Inform Events

A platform for members to come together to learn about and discuss issues of importance to the sector, BCA Inform continued in this financial year. As well as updates from BCA, guest presenters provided a unique insight to partnerships and work being done to improve access. There was an average attendance of 22 people per session, and a total attendance of 262 over the year

BCA Informs were held monthly, with topics including:

* Wayfinding: Let the adventures begin… Again
* Policy, projects and future prospects update
* BCA Recommendations
* Standing for election (prior to BCA’s AGM)
* Employment
* Transport and pedestrian safety
* NDIS Update – My NDIS Mobile App, and participant portal
* Improving accessibility in tertiary education
* An Eye to the Future – Experiences in employment
* BCA’s Constitution
* BCA’s Federal Election Platform
* Concessions for people who are blind or vision impaired

### New Member Welcome Forums

BCA hosted New Member Welcome Forums, to provide information to new and re-engaged members on how they can connect to BCA projects, programs, events and committees.

### Aboriginal Blind People’s Forum

In partnership with First People’s Disability Network, BCA hosted two forums for people who are blind or vision impaired, and first nations people, to promote reconciliation, and connection.

The themes of these forums were Heal Country and Way Forward.

### [An Eye to the Future of Employment](https://eyetothefuture.com.au/accessibility-and-inclusion-beyond-2020/)

The Eye to the Future Project Team have enjoyed a very busy and productive year, with the most exciting news being successful placement of Interns into employment.

Connecting with businesses and building relationships with them so they felt comfortable and capable to take on an intern took time, however our efforts were rewarded. Throughout the course of the project year to date (October 2021 – June 2022), the project has successfully placed two interns, one intern has a six month placement and one intern enjoyed a three month placement and has since been offered a twelve month extension to his contract. We are hopeful that all other interns who participate in the project enjoy similar successes in their roles. Through the course of our work this year, we have directly and indirectly influenced businesses and organisations to reconsider their employment options when it comes to hiring people who are blind or vision impaired. Moving into the third iteration of the project into 2023, we are confident of successful placement of more interns with the hope of ongoing work.

Throughout the year the project team have run a series of online workshops. The titles of the workshops have included Job Readiness, helping people who wish to look for roles be ready for the job, Business Round Tables, speaking with Businesses and Organisations to demystify any pre-conceived thinking that may exist around employing someone who is blind or vision impaired, along with providing information about assistive technology and financial assistance that is available when employing a person who is blind or vision impaired. These workshop offerings are gaining good traction with our members each time they are run, our feedback continues to be positive and the team have enjoyed changing and enhancing the content for each workshop prior to their delivery, ensuring fresh information is delivered and shared. In October this year, we look forward to the online Employment Symposium. This Symposium will showcase many guest speakers including Graeme Innes AOM and we will share talks from organisations including Qantum, Guide Dogs, Bindi Maps, to name a few.

The Eye to the Future website is developing as an excellent resource, providing tools and resources to employers, employees and job seekers around remote working, inclusion, accessibility & adaptive technology, along with information about work placements and internships through our Internship Program.

Running alongside the Eye to the Future project this year has been a joint venture with Vision Australia called The Entrepreneurial Mindset Project, consisting of a series of webinars and podcasts. Titled ‘An Eye on Business’ and with its own website of resources, the webinars and podcasts will also be available on the website once completed.

The webinar series will focus on different topics to assist budding entrepreneurs who are blind or vision impaired to gain valuable insights from subject matter experts, including successful business owners who are blind or vision impaired. Interested participants can sign up for a single webinar or the whole series for a greater understanding of what is needed to succeed in business as a person who is blind or vision impaired.

The podcasts series focuses on the success stories of entrepreneurs who are blind or vision impaired, including how they got started, motivations, challenges and who and what helped them along the way. Interviewees include business owners from a variety of sectors, including the entertainment industry, the arts, hospitality, assistive technology, health services, and more. The podcast series will be released from September to December 2022 alongside the educational webinar series.

## How we Connected

### Events

We continued Happy Hour conversations, an opportunity for members to connect with peers and with BCA, with a different topic each week. An average of 9 members came together weekly for these Happy Hours.

Trivia nights on Saturdays were a popular way of connecting in a social setting, with between 9 – 19 attendees, with an average of 14 attendees each week. We thank all hosts – staff, board and members who made this possible.

### Peer Connect Groups

BCA’s Peer Connect groups are designed to enable members to catch up with others online to discuss a shared interest, hobby, or passion, and tips and tricks on particular topics.

While we may be physically dispersed and the current conditions make travel challenging, there are still plenty of ways we can connect with each other.

There were six groups, each hosted by a BCA member, meeting once a month. Most groups also have an email list, to promote discussion and information sharing between sessions. Topics included music, gardening, assistive technology, guitar, parenting, and acquired sight loss.

### BCA Awards

Blind Citizens Australia continued its tradition of acknowledging and celebrating contributions to the blind and vision impaired community, in an online awards ceremony on Friday 15th October 2021, coinciding with White Cane Day.

With over 70 people in attendance via Zoom, we enjoyed a live performance, honoured the BCA awards recipients, celebrated long term service from BCA staff, and had a great post-event catch-up. Julee-Anne Bell, BCA member and recent contestant on The Voice, started the celebrations off with a wonderful live performance of ‘Time After Time’.

We announced, honoured and heard from the 2021 BCA Awards recipients. BCA and its member celebrated the recipients’ incredible contributions to the blind and vision-impaired community.

**Diana Braun Aspiration Award**:

Awarded to Valerie Mudie – passionate cook, gardener, and advocate; currently with Beyond Blindness.

**BCA Certificates of Appreciation:**

Awarded to Janene Sadhu – President of the BCA National Women’s Branch.

Awarded to Vaughn Bennison – President of the BCA Tasmanian Branch and director of New Horizons.

**David Blyth Award:**

Awarded to Claire Tellefson – multi-skilled, passionate advocate for people who are vision-impaired and hearing-impaired.

We also honoured long-standing BCA staff member, Samantha Marsh, for her 10 year contribution at BCA. Sam has been an asset to BCA over the past decade and has seen many changes here over that time. Sam’s consistent, friendly and caring nature has been a strength to the organisation and to the membership.

### Branches

* BCA has eleven branches around Australia, each serving the needs of members in particular regions or with special interests. Some branches have focused on peer support activities which bring people who are blind or vision impaired together, while others have concentrated their efforts primarily on advocacy work and some have managed to do both. While some branches have returned to in-person meetings and social events, virtual meetings have continued for many branches, following the necessity due to covid restrictions. This virtual connection has enabled participation for those who are unable to travel, and has also prompted consideration of state-based branches, for some locations.
* BCA’s Adelaide branch went into recess at the end of 2021. Consultation and meetings with members in South Australia were held, where there was an appetite for the re-establishment as a state-wide branch under a co-ordinator model.
* BCA’s Women’s branch provided connections and support to its members through regular telephone catch ups and activities, and email list conversations.
* The NSW/ACT State Division serves as an important link to our branches and members in NSW and the ACT. Activities like Spring Into Action month, advocacy and representation work in NSW and the ACT, and support for branches ensures the valuable work previously undertaken by Blind Citizens NSW continues.
* We convened regular branch president’s meetings and our branch presidents email list was used to share information among the group.
* Our sincere thanks to branch presidents, committee members and to all those who contribute to the work of our branches. In doing so, you provide our members with opportunities to connect with and learn from one another and to collectively advocate for the changes which make a tangible difference in their local communities.

### Committees

BCA would like to thank and acknowledge members, staff and board who participated in our committees over the year.

Committees included: Finance, Audit and Risk Management; National Policy Council; Communications; Branch Presidents; Stakeholder Engagement; Cultural Diversity; Fee for Service; International Engagement; Business Continuity; and CEO Selection Committee.

These committees are integral to BCA’s operations, and promote our values, as outlined in BCA’s 2022-25 Business Plan: Transparency; empathy, compassion and kindness; diversity and inclusion; continuous learning, ingenuity and innovation; and collaboration and teamwork.

### Covid Response

BCA continued to support members through the coronavirus pandemic and the changing rules and regulations in navigating life with covid, and with the introduction of vaccines.

BCA’s Business Continuity Committee continued to meet to ensure risk management and stability for the organisation in the time of a global pandemic, and for the future.

BCA connected with the blindness sector by developing an email list, with the aim to share experiences, feedback and areas of most concern within the sector.

BCA attended regular meetings with the Department of Social Services, the Department of Health, and Services Australia to discuss and identify issues affecting the disability sector.

### Meetings and Forums

BCA received many invitations to present at and participate in meetings and forums. These forums engage the disability sector in a conversation on accessibility in a range of government and business sectors and projects.

These included:

* Australian Banking Association (ABA) consumer outcomes group.
* Australian Electoral Commission
* Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) working groups and member forums
* Assistive Technology for All working group
* ADCET Education Guidelines Advisory Group
* National Disability Gateway Reference Group
* National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)
  + Disability Representative and Carer Organisation Forum
  + Working group on Independent Assessments
  + Community Stakeholder Update
* Covid 19 Disability Community of Practice
* Disability and Health Sector Consultation Committee
* Disability Support Pension review – Disability Representative Organisations, with Department Social Services, Services Australia
* Disability Royal Commission Operational Meetings
* Policy Interagency Meeting
* Uber Australia/NZ
* WooliesX – the digital arm of Woolworths
* Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman
* Telstra Access Forum
* Vision 2020 Australia
  + Independence and Participation Committee
  + Referral Pathways Working Group
* Quarterly catch ups with Australian banks
* Quarterly catch ups with Virgin Australia and advocacy with other airlines
* Coordination of Audio Description Sector Working Group.
* Expert Advisory Group for the 3D Printing for Accessible Graphics project
* Representation on Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities
* NSW Interagency Policy and Advocacy group
* NSW Department of Community Justice
* NSW Electoral Commission
* NSW Health Community of Practice
* NSW Accessible Transport Advisory Committee
* Victorian Electoral Commission
* Victorian Public Transport access committees – including Yarra Trams and Metro
* Victorian Infrastructure Accessibility Needs Focus Group
* Victorian Police Disability Access Committee
* Victorian Department of Education Disability Advisory Committee
* Queensland Translink – platform wide access gate design / smart ticketing consultation
* Pacific Disability Forum
* World Blind Union

## How we Empowered

### Advocacy

BCA’s advocacy service assisted to resolve 96 cases in the 2021-22 financial year.

Advocacy support covered a range of areas; some of the key themes were:

* Dog Guide refusals: taxi, rideshare, accommodation
* Access to information, including banking, council rates, smartphone apps and websites
* Access to QR codes to sign in to venues (covid safety requirement)
* Access to Taxi Subsidy Schemes
* Workplace Relations
* Pedestrian access
* Australia Post services
* Telecommunications
* Access to mental health services
* Education
* Parenting

### NDIS / My Aged Care

NDIS:

There was a significant increase in support provided to people who are blind or vision impaired to access, and to review decisions within the NDIS, with 20 cases opened in this financial year. Many of these decision reviews escalated to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

My Aged Care:

BCA supported people who are blind or vision impaired to access My Aged Care, and to access disability-specific supports. Information was provided about funding and co-contribution payments for Aged Care.

### National Policy Council

Thank you to Helen Freris, who chaired the National Policy Council from November 2020 until December 2021. Prue Watt chaired the NPC thereafter.

In 2021-22, the NPC launched BCA’s updated Education Policy. They also consulted broadly in the development of the Pedestrian Safety Policy.

The NPC developed a position statements on QR code accessibility, and updated the position statement on touchscreen EFTPOS accessibility.

All position and policy statements were developed in consultation with members.

Thank you to members of the NPC and the many members who provided feedback to our consultations for ensuring our policies reflect the needs and interests of Australians who are blind or vision impaired.

Position and Policy statements are available on BCA’s website, and can be used by BCA and its members, to promote best practice in accessibility and equity, and to advocate for change.

### Executive Leadership Program

BCA expanded its previous work on leadership development and succession planning, through an Executive Leadership Program.

This program is unique, with all participants being blind or vision impaired, and bringing together mentors, leaders from BCA and the sector, and program participants.

Six participants were selected via an application process. A combination of seminars, group discussions, individual mentoring, opportunities to step into leadership positions, and observation of external board meetings and AGMs, provided a remarkable experience for growth and development for emerging leaders to develop skills which will enable them to take up leadership roles within BCA and in the wider community.

This program was completed in November 2021. A significant outcome of this program was the appointment of two participants of the roles of President and CEO of BCA in late 2021.

### BCA Hugh Jeffrey Scholarships

To address the financial barriers to tertiary education, BCA launched the BCA Hugh Jeffrey Scholarship Program, exclusively available to students who are blind or vision impaired. In the 2021-22 financial year, BCA administered three rounds of BCA Jeffrey Blyth Scholarships.

20% of people in Australia identify as having a disability yet people with disability make up only 7.3% of higher education enrolments. On top of this, students with disability are the second lowest funded equity group attending tertiary institutions.

While the Australian Government is committed to ensuring that students with disability can access and participate in higher education by promoting accessible teaching and supporting students by funding adaptive technology, until now there has been little financial support provided exclusively to people who are blind or vision impaired to pursue further study.

Funded by the Department of Social Services and the Jeffrey Blyth Foundation, this Scholarship Program seeks to increase the opportunities available to people who are blind or vision impaired to participate in tertiary or further education and provide support for both the recipient and their chosen educational institution.

These scholarships were open to applicants who were enrolled in a post-secondary educational program that results in a recognised qualification. Funds could be requested for specific educational expenses, including assistive technology, course materials or other expenses directly relevant to support their ability to be successful in their course of study.

The BCA Hugh Jeffrey Scholarship Program offered five scholarships of up to $5,000 each per semester for Semester 2 of 2021, and Semester 1 of 2022. Four scholarships were awarded in Semester 2 of 2022.

### Campaigns

**Audio Description**

Following the introduction of audio description on ABC and SBS broadcast channels, BCA, together with the sector, had a continued dialog with both public broadcasters, and the general public to further raise awareness of and promote the ongoing funding and expansion of audio description on Australian TV.

Audio description was showcased at Vivid Sydney, as part of the Vivid Ideas Exchange on 9th June 2022. Audio Drama clips from popular TV shows were shown, followed by a panel discussion with AD experts, fans and filmmakers.

This Vivid Sydney event was presented in collaboration with the ABC, SBS, Accessible Arts, Blind Citizens Australia, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, The Fred Hollows Foundation and The SubStation.

**Banking**

Accessibility of touchscreen EFTPOS Devices:

BCA continued conversations with various banks to ensure they implement accessible solutions to touchscreen EFTPOS devices.

BCA had regular meetings with Australian banks and the Australian Banking Association to promote accessibility in banking products and services more generally.

**E-scooters and electric vehicles**

In this financial year, we saw an increase in local and state governments trialling e-scooters, for rent by the public in pedestrian and shared spaces

BCA engaged with e-scooter rental companies to promote safety and awareness of the risks and dangers of scooter use in spaces designed for pedestrian use, including unsafe and hazardous parking.

**Elections and Voting**

Following the NSW state government’s decision to discontinue the iVote online and telephone voting system for people who are blind or vision impaired, BCA partnered with the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) to make a complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission, on the basis that this decision infringes on the rights of people who are blind or vision impaired to participate in elections by casting a secret, independent, and verifiable vote.

### Submissions

The following is a summary of submissions made by BCA during the reporting period:

* Department of Social Services (DSS) consultation on the new Disability Employment Scheme (DES) model;
* Draft National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032;
* Review of the purpose, intent, and adequacy of the Disability Support Pension;
* Taxi Fare Review;
* Review of Victoria’s Disability Act;
* Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS ‘General Issues Inquiry’;
* NDIS legislation reform for the Joint Standing Committee on Community Affairs;
* Department of Social Services Assistance Animal Survey;
* Federal Election Policy Platform;
* Accessibility of state and federal elections;
* Response to application by City of Ryde in NSW for a five-year exemption from the requirements of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport.

Disability Royal Commission Submissions

* Institutional Economic Neglect, based on our previous submission about the Disability Support Pension;
* Response to Issues Paper: Promoting Inclusion. BCA made several submissions within the “Promoting Inclusion” heading, including Hospitals, Education, Public Transport, Technology and Employment.
* BCA supported individuals to make submissions and share their stories with the Disability Royal Commission.

### Feedback

BCA welcomes feedback on all of its work, including advocacy, services, projects, events, publications and communications.

BCA evaluates its projects and events via surveys and collation of feedback from participants, volunteers and organisers.

## Closing Remarks

In a year of change, Blind Citizens Australia demonstrated its resilience and strength, by continuing to provide opportunities, information, connections and support to its members and the broader community.

BCA’s focus on leadership development and succession planning came to the fore with the appointment of a new CEO and President, within its existing leadership team.

BCA could not achieve all of its successes this year without the tireless work and support of the BCA team: staff, directors and committee members – thank you.

We sincerely appreciate the input and contributions of members throughout the year, as we strive to promote the rights of people who are blind or vision impaired in Australia.

We look forward to working with you in another year of growth, challenge and opportunity in 2022-23.

## The BCA Team

### BCA Directors who served in 2021 - 22

Stephen Belbin

Julee-Anne Bell (from Dec 2021)

Joanne Chua

Helen Freris (NPC Chair until Dec 2021)

Lauren Henley (until October 2021)

Francois Jacobs (from Dec 2021)

Doug McGinn (FARM chair until Dec 2021)

John Simpson, President (until Dec 2021) (Immediate Past President until 11 June 2022)

Prue Watt (NPC chair from Dec 2021)

Andrew Webster (FARM chair from Dec 2021)

Fiona Woods, President (from Dec 2021)

Emma Bennison (non-voting member until January 2022)

Sally Aurisch (non-voting member from January 2022)

### Finance, Audit and Risk Management Committee (FARM) members who served in 2021-22

Sally Aurisch BCA staff (from January 2022)

Mick Baker

Emma Bennison BCA staff (until January 2022)

Sue Cutler BCA staff (from August 2021)

Rocco Cutri

Tony Grant BCA staff (until February 2022)

Angela Jaeschke BCA staff

Doug McGinn Chair (until December 2021)

Andrew Webster Chair (from December 2021)

### National Policy Council Members who served in 2020-21

Helen Freris, board, Chair (until Dec 2021)

Jane Britt BCA staff representative (until August 2021)

Lynne Davis New South Wales

Lauren Henley Board rep (until Oct 2021)

John Danesh Krishnan Tasmania

Sean McLaughlin Western Australia

Paul Price Queensland (until Dec 2021)

Jackson Reynolds-Ryan BCA staff representative (from August 2021)

David Squirrel South Australia (Until Dec 2021)

Sean Tyrell Victoria (until Dec 2021)

Neale Huth Qld, (from Dec 2021)

Robert Altamore, ACT (from Dec 2021)

Michael Janes Vic (from Dec 2021)

Prue Watt, board, Chair (from Dec 2021)

Francois Jacobs, board rep (from Dec 2021)

Julee-Anne Bell, board rep (from Dec 2021)

### BCA Staff 2021-22

Executive Leadership Team

Sally Aurisch, CEO from January 2022, GM Projects and Engagement until January 2022.

Deb Deshayes, General Manager Projects and Engagement

Angela Jaeschke, General Manger Operations

Naomi Barber, Executive Assistant

Communications

Adriana Malavisi, Communications Co-ordinator

Administration Team

Sue Cutler, Finance Manager

Samantha Marsh, Information and Administration Officer

Projects and Engagement Team

Tim Haggis, Membership Engagement Officer

Joelene Scot, Project Assistant

Danielle Verhoeven, Projects and Initiatives Officer

Christina Micallef, Business Support Officer

Eye to the Future Team

Nicole Willing, Project Manager

Madison Braim, Project Officer

Renee Solomon, Project Officer

Conor Smith, Project Officer (formerly Peer Support Project Officer)

Cheryl Gration, Admin Assistant

Policy and Advocacy Team

Jane Britt, Policy and Advocacy Team Leader

Peta Hogan, Advocacy Projects Officer

Jennifer Parry, NSW Advocacy Projects Officer

Jackson Reynolds-Ryan, Policy Officer

Martin Stewart, Advocacy Officer

Former BCA Staff who served in the 2021-2022 financial year

Emma Bennison, CEO (Until February 2022)

Jaci Armstrong, Advocacy Projects Officer (until October 2021)

Anna Briggs, Communications Assistant (until Sept 2021)

Kathie Elliott (until July 2021)

Tony Grant, Finance Manager (until February 2022)

Jill McKee, Communications Coordinator (until Oct 2021)

BCA would also like to acknowledge and thank our volunteers for their work and commitment to the organisation.