

# Blind Citizens NewsAutumn 2022

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Blind Citizens Australia is the National representative organisation of people who are blind or vision impaired.  Our mission 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 Ben Clare

What an honour it is to be asked to do the editorial for this edition of Blind Citizens News!

Just a few quick sentences about me before we dive in.

My name is Ben Clare, I’m 43, totally blind, a long-time member of BCA, originally from Sydney but now living in the small town of Shoal Bay, positioned on the shore of Port Stephens, about 60ks from Newcastle and a little reminder of where I’ve spent a large part of the past 15 years or so, working in several Pacific island countries and East Timor, doing everything from teaching kids in remote villages how to use computers with JAWS or NVDA, braille literacy, fundraising, advocacy, inclusive education advice to government departments, special schools and more. In fact, some of you may have received emails from me, asking for preloved equipment to be sent to the islands. To the many of you who’ve helped and continue to help, I can say every donation is well utilised and helping more blind and low vision kids than ever to attend school, university and/or gain employment.

Anyway, when considering a topic for this little piece, I was initially loathed to talk about the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic; so much has been written about it already, from every angle and from every “expert” point of view. The media continues to explore every perspective and of course, we all shudder when those numbers come in on a daily basis. Apart from formally acknowledging BCA which I believe is doing a fantastic job advocating in exceptionally difficult times, how BCA is flourishing when so many other organisations are not, I didn’t have an appetite for talking more about the pandemic. I wouldn’t have except for what happened over the Christmas/New Year period, what is continuing to happen at the time of writing and which I hope will be a distant memory when you are reading this. I’m referring to how PCR testing centres became overwhelmed in most states and territories, partly due to the increase in demand and also because so many places were shut down over the holidays; the panic this caused and how the government reacted by pivoting to rapid antigen tests, these do it yourself little numbers that I’m told somewhat resemble pregnancy tests, which have been available in most states since October but largely rubbished as being inaccurate or not accurate enough, until there was no alternative and suddenly they were a hot commodity and getting your hands on a single RAT as they are known is like looking for a needle in a haystack.

This frenzy, while also reminding me of the toilet paper fiasco at the beginning of the pandemic also prompted me to think about something that often affects us as blind and vision impaired people, the lag between technology becoming available and when it is accessible to us.

The other day I was thinking about the good old days when I was in year 11 at Northholm Grammar School in Sydney in the mid to late 90’s. Prior to that, I had done my time in blind schools where braille was the norm, along with note takers such as the Eureka, Keynote and for a special treat, we could use the old Apple 2E which had a speech synthesiser attached to it. At that time, I thought blind people had the same access to technology as everyone else, only learning differently when I went to Northholm, being the only blind student there. My Eureka A4 was reliable enough and I thought it was the most advanced form of technology available. The boring laptops the other students were using didn’t have the advanced music composer and they couldn’t get away with playing a game of Aliens during a study period or even in an exam if the actual work was completed early. In fact, most of my friends were quite jealous of me and my Eureka.

I was in for a rude shock when during a history class, the teacher said we were going to the computer lab to do some Internet research about Prohibition in the US. I had only the vaguest notions of what the Internet was at that time and that class became memorable for much more than learning about the Volstead Act. I became fascinated with how the teacher could log onto websites based in other countries, how she used Yahoo! and AltaVista to search for specific information and how she printed information and handed it out to the students (I had to wait for it to be transcribed into braille.)

I fervently hoped the Eureka could connect to this amazing information super highway using the Communications program. It worked on bulletin boards so why not the Internet? Disappointment was immense when I realised my little Eureka was being superseded and for the moment, the Internet was an inaccessible tool for blind people. While the Internet was being utilised as early as 1993, only 4 years after HTML opened the way for web pages we still browse today, it wasn’t until 1999 when browsing the Internet really became accessible with the introduction of the Virtual PC Cursor in JAWS version 3.31, released in October.

Fortunately, the lag in technology becoming accessible has decreased markedly, with more mainstream products than ever before accessible on release or shortly afterward. However, many challenges remain and keep us advocates on our toes; everything from EFTPOS machines, inaccessible websites and apps to assistive equipment affordability continue to pose difficulties and inequality.

The pandemic has brought into sharp focus how this lag can do everything from decreasing independence for blind people to the very real risk of us being unable to access essential services. In this particular case, I refer to the rapid antigen tests which are as inaccessible as you can get. The current design of all versions does not allow for independent testing, a very real issue given the panic surrounding the virus and the possibility of people refusing to assist, lest they become exposed to the virus themselves. Some units are tactile enough for the blind user to actually perform the test independently but would then require assistance to read the results and submit them to state government apps; as is compulsory in some jurisdictions at the time of writing.

Fortunately, Aira, our little American friend who does so much more than just finding lost items on the floor and locating the nearest McDonalds has come to the rescue in a way, offering to interpret test results and provide instructions on carrying out rapid antigen tests, an inadequate solution for some and not through the fault of Aira which is allowing a degree of independence in an area I believe to be very important, given the stigma surrounding the virus. The technology involved in these tests is very simple and it got me to wondering, why wouldn’t manufacturers want to design an accessible version of their product at the outset? Commercial viability is often used as an excuse, certainly the commercial television networks in Australia use this excuse when repeatedly lobbied to provide audio described programming. Apart from the fact Netflix and Amazon Prime have disproved this assumption by providing audio descriptions on all original and some acquired content, the same argument could be used for manufacturers of RATS, given we’re told again and again how the virus is more severe for vulnerable people and the majority of crippling restrictions introduced around the world are aimed at preserving health systems and vulnerable people.

While I don’t necessarily view myself as particularly vulnerable, this word would comfortably be applied to blind people, especially by those who are sighted and despite the risk of the word seeming patronising, a perceived vulnerability could come from the fact blind people rely heavily on touch for mobility and socially distancing can be more difficult.

At a time like this, a time when people are more self-absorbed and when we are repeatedly told RATS are the new answer to getting on with our lives, the lag in technology becoming accessible is very much apparent.

Were there issues with testing prior to RATS coming into vogue? You bet but the issues were quite different; then it was getting transport to the testing location that posed a problem for some. I heard several stories about how when someone ordered a taxi or Uber to collect them, all would be fine until the driver found out they were going to a testing location. Usually, the voyage proceeded because the passenger was already in the vehicle but the friendliness of the driver often changed.

Is it all bad news? Not quite. An extensive Google search came up with an article that had a single sentence about the possibility of an accessible RAT. A Chinese manufacturer is looking to develop such a device that would either give a tactile or audio result and it’s hoped it could be available later this year.

Keep an eye on Google though, technology just might move a little quicker and something might be available sooner than we think; we can but hope! I know BCA has its finger on the pulse as always.

## Are you the next Blind Citizens News Editor?

Blind Citizens News is seeking a new Editor. This is a voluntary position that requires someone with excellent writing and editing skills, as well as the ability to work with others to create content for the magazine, which is published up to four times per year.

To receive a copy of the position description please call 1800 033 660 or email recruitment@bca.org.au

## Reflections on an amazing seven years - by John Simpson

As the year of 2014 passed, my focus on BCA was limited to celebration of our 40th Anniversary and, in particular, a compilation of the significant achievements of the organisation over its history since foundation in 1975.

On the one hand, I saw a history of great accomplishments, tenacious advocacy and above all a demonstrated commitment to constructive and confident representation of the needs and aspirations of people who are blind or vision impaired.

In contrast, I was concerned to note that more recently the organisation appeared to have lost confidence in its ability to represent its community and its willingness to tackle the harder challenges had significantly diminished.

So, when, coincidentally, BCA lost both its Executive Officer and core government funding support in December 2014 it followed that I found myself back in a support role in the short term and then, by early 2015 returning to the Board and leadership responsibilities.

It seemed clear to me that one of the reasons for the organisation’s loss of confidence and more insular approach was caused by the limited interaction that the current leadership was having with our former leaders, many of whom had provided the inspiration and energy needed over the years to sustain the constructive advocacy that had been our hallmark. So, the first challenge I set myself was to gain Board approval and then to organise a leadership summit that brought together around 35 BCA members, including current and former leaders and representatives from across our various branches. Over two and half days of discussions with external stakeholders and intense sessions of internal reflection, we set the course for the reinvigoration of our organisation. 56 recommendations were presented to the Board for further consideration; and just as importantly past, current and future leaders re-committed themselves to ensuring the sustainability and growth of BCA into the future.

Initially as a contributing member of the Board and then as its President from early 2017, I saw my role as a facilitator, to bring together the wealth of corporate knowledge and experience that was our heritage with more modern community attitudes and expectations. I learned quickly that formal processes only have value today if they enable members and other stakeholders to engage in a way that suits their needs and lifestyles. I was also introduced to the world of instant communication facilitated by the 24-hour news cycle and the immediacy of social media. And I learned that consideration of the impact of vision loss has to be understood in the context of changing societal attitudes and expectations.

We set for the organisation a more succinct vision and mission that is expressed in three simple words – Inform, Connect and Empower. These keystones to our strategic direction have served us well and proved to be critical in addressing the challenge of supporting our members and others who are blind or vision impaired during this ongoing Covid Pandemic.

While identification and implementation of the various strategies we have applied during this time of only virtual contact, is largely down to our dedicated staff team and many hard working volunteer members, I have been proud to lead an organisation that was so quickly able to put in place engagement opportunities such as our Happy Hours, BCA Inform Events, our Peer Connect Program and weekly updates to members, delivered via email and video, while maintaining and enhancing our more traditional outreach through New Horizons, BC News and social media.

We have also tackled and succeeded with many advocacy undertakings, both at the individual and systemic levels. Our support for those wishing to make representation to the Disability Royal Commission has been outstanding while our representations to government and the broader community to ensure that the needs of our community are addressed in relation to the pandemic have set the standard for engagement across the disability sector. And for me in particular, after more than twenty-five years of campaigning, achievement of Audio Description on our public broadcast networks was the icing on the cake.

So, where to from here? For me, my role as Immediate Past President will allow me to support the Board by undertaking some projects that might otherwise not get up the priority list. Chief among these will be a review of our Constitution and By-Laws in order to ensure that our Governance processes are as robust as the operational aspects of the organisation.

And for the organisation more broadly, we have fresh leaders at the helm, who, while offering a wealth of experience, can also take a forward-looking approach to ensure that our organisation continues to grow and prosper well into the future.

So, in closing I want to take this opportunity to thank you, our members, for the honour you bestowed on me by allowing me to lead this wonderful organisation. And I want to congratulate and wish Fiona and Sally every success in their new roles. As someone said to me recently, “just remember that BCA is like a family, you might step back from its leadership but you can never leave”. So, like those former leaders who answered the call in 2015 I will be here to provide the support and guidance requested well into the future.

## Reflections of an Outgoing CEO - by Emma Bennison

As I write this, I am preparing to finish up as your CEO. I will leave it to others to comment on my successes and failures. In this article though, I thought it would be timely to reflect on what I have found to be some of the more challenging aspects of the role and how they have shaped my hopes for the future of our organisation.

As regular readers of Blind Citizens News will know, I have written and spoken openly about my mental health issues frequently. I have done so not to garner sympathy, but to open the door for more honest conversations about mental health and its intersection with blindness within and beyond BCA. Though a small minority have used my anxiety against me, most responses have come from people who appreciated my courage, many reflecting on the fact that it had prompted them to speak up and seek help for themselves. This is only the beginning though and I very much hope our organisation continues to find opportunities to normalise conversations about mental health. The decision to talk about my own mental health was not an easy one, but I have no regrets. If even one person has benefitted from my disclosure and felt more welcome in our organisation as a result, then it has been well worth the discomfort.

Being a CEO is not without its challenges. Being the CEO of an organisation of which you are also a member can be a minefield. For instance, there have been a couple of very difficult occasions when I have needed to hold members accountable to the same expectations and standards of behaviour as would be appropriate in broader society. For some, this has been the first time anyone has ever called out their inappropriate behaviour or held them to the same expectations as their sighted counterparts, blindness often being used by well-meaning friends or family members to excuse unacceptable conduct. This matters because it is incumbent on us to model high standards and not to allow disrespectful behaviour or inappropriate conduct to go unchallenged. In relation to the process for dealing with misconduct within BCA, I am proud to have played a role in beginning the process of ensuring we have an independent mechanism for members to report inappropriate behaviour. I am confident that in the future, our organisation’s leaders will continue to show courage and integrity to ensure a safe environment for all.

It has been pleasing to me to note that over the past few years, we have begun to have more honest conversations about what independence means to us, acknowledging that every individual defines it slightly differently. Covid has isolated us, whilst also affording us greater online connection than ever before. It has forced many of us to do things differently, to advocate more strongly for the most vulnerable among us and to reconsider our priorities. I am hopeful that as a result of this stronger shared understanding and increased connectedness, we can become less judgmental and more kind to one another, recognising that everyone has unique ways of achieving what’s important to them.

Finally, if you are hoping for an exclusive announcement about what’s next for me, you will be disappointed to learn that, as I write, I have no idea. I’m looking forward to a break though before moving on to new and exciting challenges. As I said at the time I announced my resignation, I am immeasurably grateful to members, board and staff for your support to me in my role. My sincere congratulations and very best wishes to Sally Aurisch, our new CEO. Despite the challenges, leading our organisation is a huge privilege and I have absolute confidence BCA has a bright future ahead with Sally at the helm. In the future, I look forward to contributing to BCA in some other capacity and to seeing some of you at a face-to-face event when possible.

## Personal Recount of Travelling Overseas During the COVID-19 Pandemic - By Cameron Algie

NOTE: Since this article was written, it is likely that travel requirements will have changed. This article highlights one person's experience preparing to travel overseas and return home to Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### The Process

Pursuant to regulations established by the Federal Department of Home Affairs and Border Force in responding to COVID-19, I was required to get permission to depart Australia. There were approximately 6 conditions. The one relevant to me was that I was required to receive ‘urgent medical treatment which was not available in Australia.’

### Preparing for Travel

In preparing to depart Australia, there was an extensive amount of work I was required to undertake. This included:

* Reading the numerous internet sites for Home Affairs as well as the Victorian State Government to fully understand requirements.
* Speaking with the COVID Hot Line phone numbers to cross-check the process.
* Engaging with a Travel Agent to confirm travel restrictions, pricing, and arrangements.
* checking the web site of my country of destination to check travel restrictions of that country and noting they might change.
* Completing my vaccinations, undergoing a PCR test 72 hours prior to travel and return a negative result. On arriving I was required to have a further PCR test within 24 hours of arrival. This meant knowing where and how these PCR tests were carried out.

To begin my travel process, I was required to gain approval of the Federal Government to depart Australia. To do this, it was necessary to complete an on-line form and include evidence. I included three medical letters from my GP, my Australian ophthalmologist and one from my treating overseas ophthalmologist, a draft itinerary plus a copy of my passport.

I also included a flight and travel itinerary from my airline although this was to some degree nonsensical, as I could not formally book a return ticket until I was sure I had the required permissions. So, a draft itinerary was prepared by my Travel Agent.

To my surprise, my application was approved within 24 hours on 12th September 2021. However, to return to Australia, I was then required to have the cap on persons allowed to enter Australia lifted by 1!

Logic might say that, on providing permission to leave Australia, the Federal Government might also automatically provide permission to re-enter. This was not the case. In what I believe was a failure in Government policy, quarantine controls were dealt with by State Governments leading to diverse policies. In addition, the airline was required to approach the Federal Government on my behalf. The Federal Department which controlled the cap was the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications (DITRD&C), which includes Civil Aviation. However, there was no provision on their web site whatsoever, for an application to be made.

Accordingly, I then went back to my local Federal Member of Parliament, a person no less than the Federal Treasurer, the Hon Josh Frydenberg, MP, to approach the DITRD&C. His office responded to advise that such approach must be made by the Airline.

My Travel Agent then approached Emirate Airlines who in turn advised that they would not make such an application. A subsequent approach to the airline including a response from the Federal Member of Parliament’s Office which confirmed the airline must make the application, led to the airline responding by saying that they required ‘a letter of support’ from the State Government that I could return before they would take up the matter with DITRD&C'.

In the interim, I approached the Victorian Government’s Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) COVID Response Team to obtain an exemption from the requirement to undertake compulsory hotel quarantine. This application was required to be made online. The website clearly advised that such applications could be made for urgent reasons with supporting medical advice. I obtained this medical advice from my local GP. My application pointed out that as a blind person, hotel quarantine was in fact dangerous in several respects, including the need for personal support, reading warnings, menus and other instructions and in particular, evacuation of the hotel in the event of emergency, etc. My application was supported by a letter from my local treating GP. This application was rejected within 24 hours without providing any reasons and quoting their website about dangers of COVID, as if I needed to know!

I once again approached my Federal Member asking if they might assist in obtaining the ‘letter of support’. The Federal Member asked my local State Member of Parliament who in turn asked the State Shadow Minister for Health to assist. Within 24 hours, the Shadow Minister for Health had obtained from the Under Secretary for the Minister of Health the letter which finally gave clear authority to the airline that they could approach the Federal DITRD&C, to lift the cap.

Further delays occurred within the airline whose Head Office had to be involved.

The ticket was finally issued only two days before my scheduled departure date. However, I was prepared to travel and arrangements with hotel and medical treatment were in place.

I was expecting to challenge the earlier State Government decline of my application to undertake home, not hotel quarantine, but fortunately, on the 1st November 2021, these requirements were removed for returning travellers who tested negative and who were double vaccinated.

No Travel Insurance covering costs incurred as a result of COVID was available. I had to be prepared for possible additional hotel or airline expenses. (I have since heard insurance covering Covid related expenses is available in Singapore. I do not know of its suitability.)

### Conclusions

My experience identified a number of major issues for people with vision impairment. These included, but are not limited to:

* To have your reasons for travel justified with supporting evidence.
* A capacity to access, read and understand, the many State and Federal websites.
* A capacity to access Federal Government Travel Alerts.
* To access and understand the travel restrictions in my country of destination.
* To contact my country’s Embassy to double check travel requirements.
* To obtain letters from supporting doctors. This included support from my treating GP who had to write several letters on my behalf and sign forms.
* To have the support of a reliable Travel Agent who knows your requirements.
* Maintain a capacity to write complex letters to Federal and State Parliamentarians and attach relevant supporting documents.
* To keep travel limited to only those countries considered essential. (Leave good old sightseeing until the Pandemic settles down).
* To be able to gain the assistance of family, or others who might help with form filling and attaching documents, records, and other details.
* To be capable of reading emails and keeping in touch with travel changes.
* Be financially prepared for additional unforeseen costs.
* Be prepared to travel at a moment’s notice.

## From the National Women’s Branch - by Katrina Taylor

Wow, 2021, what a year!

In spite of the lockdowns and ever-changing restrictions, the National Women’s Branch has continued to thrive with a growing feeling of community and energy amongst its members. This is very heartening to see.

Branch members and other BCA members have connected with each other through our afternoon and gardening chats. Our creative muscles have been given a good workout at Word Wednesdays. At our book club, people got to read books that they might not have otherwise chosen. Our Womens-talk workshops generated a lot of enthusiastic discussion and idea sharing, particularly the November workshop on getting the most out of objects and reducing the usage of single use items.

All of these activities are continuing in 2022. The first Monday of the month is a gardening chat hosted by Anne. The other Mondays are general chats and catch ups. Chire, Debra, Karen, Maree and myself, take it in turn to host Word Wednesday. So come along for some word-based fun with a load of laughter. The sessions start at 3pm AEST and are open to all BCA members. Our book club meets on the last Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm AEST. It's never too late to join.

In March we plan to host a workshop on accessing personal financial information. Then as a follow up in April, we hope to host a workshop in conjunction with Women’s Information Referral Exchange (WIRE), on ways to help women to take more control of their finances. Workshop details will be posted on the branch’s email list and in BCA member update.

At our AGM in late November held via Zoom we had over 20 people attend which was great. The new branch committee was announced, President Katrina Taylor [new], Vice President Debra Simons [new], Secretary Joyce Jones [continuing], Treasurer Maree Fenech [continuing], General Member Chire Fulford [continuing], and General Member Nicola Stowe [new]. Janene Sadhu will remain on the committee for 2022 as Immediate Past President. Carmel Jolley will continue as Aspirations Editor but not as a committee member. The committee would like to thank outgoing general members Lana Thompson and Annette Sims for their contributions. Finally, a huge thank you to both Janene Sadhu our outgoing president and Leonie Barber our outgoing vice president for your leadership over the last six years. With particular note to both your individual and combined work during the last two years. We, the new committee will continue to expand upon your work to support and empower women who are blind and vision impaired.

Currently there is a vacancy for a general member on the branch committee. If you are female, a branch member and interested in joining the committee either leave a message at the BCA office or email Katrina nwb@bca.org.au

On behalf of the Women’s Branch, I would like to give a massive thanks to Jenny Dawson for setting up and then moderating our email list for all these years. The list enables branch members regardless of where they live to keep in touch, ask questions and share strategies. We wish Jenny success with her future projects. We welcome Nicola Stowe on board as our new moderator and thank her for her willingness to step into the breach.

Want to be more involved in the Women’s Branch? Got ideas for branch activities? Email us nwb@bca.org.au or leave us a message at the BCA office on 1800 033 660.

## Audio Version of the Class for the Partially Sighted - by Bruce C Gillies

In the November 2020 edition of BC News, an article was included regarding a brief history of the special class for the partially sighted, which was located at the Princes Hill Infant School in Carlton North from 1941 to 1961.

At the time of that edition of BC News being published, I could only offer copies with either text and photographs or text only to be sent as an attachment to an email.

I am now pleased to be able to inform readers, that an audio version of the document has been produced for me by Vision Australia with a male human voice reading the text. If members would like to receive a CD copy, please call BCA on 1800 033660 and a copy will be sent to you.

## Update on BCA's 2021 Recommendations Session

BCA has a long-standing tradition of accepting recommendations from members as part of its national and state conventions. We were unable to hold an in-person convention in 2021 but wanted to ensure that members retained the opportunity to share their feedback and ideas. Recommendations were accepted at the September BCA Inform event in 2021.

In total, eight recommendations were proposed with seven of them being adopted. A working group of BCA directors and staff was convened to work through the recommendations and implement them into BCA's operations.

Recommendations included providing peer support, increased access to resources and information, strengthening advocacy efforts on matters relating to COVID-19 and government forms, and increasing BCA's engagement with younger people and people new to vision loss.

While work on many of these recommendations will occur over an extended time period, we have set about increasing the variety of peer connect groups available to ensure everyone has the opportunity to meet with people who share a similar interest. We are also continuing our advocacy on all health-related matters, including COVID-19 and ensuring we continue to highlight and petition for the unique needs of people who are blind or vision impaired to be addressed by state and federal governments.

We continue to investigate new ways of providing information and access to up to date resources to all members. We have introduced several additions to our existing communications channels, including extra mail outs to members without email addresses and increasing the amount of pre-recorded information available on our phone system.

We thank those who submitted recommendations for your interest in BCA's work and for your contributions to helping us to reflect our members' concerns.

BCA will host another recommendations session later in 2022. We will provide more information as the date approaches. We encourage all members to consider submitting their recommendations and look forward to working with members to ensure all views are heard and our work is lead by our membership.

## National Policy Council: Recent Work and Priorities for 2022 - by Jack Reynolds-Ryan & Prue Watt

The National Policy Council (NPC) is a sub-committee of the BCA Board, focused on the development and review of BCA’s policy positions. The NPC is made up of a Chair appointed by the Board, two other Board members appointed by the Board, a representative from each State who is elected by the members in that State, plus up to two members ‘co-opted’ by the Board at its discretion to help ensure gender balance and diversity of lived experience. The National Policy Officer, as the delegate of the CEO, also serves as a non-voting member of the Committee.

As an internal body, the role of the NPC is to help articulate to the Board the views of the BCA Membership across a range of public policy areas, and in 2021, the NPC tackled some big policy topics. In the first half of the year the focus was on Education. In a major update, the Education Policy from 2009 was overhauled, with all sections of the policy edited. The new policy reflects shifts in the education environment, particularly in an age of increased online and remote learning, including a focus on planning and response to emergencies.

Following the success of this approach, in the latter half of the year the NPC turned its attention to a substantial re-write of BCA’s pedestrian safety policy, which was also last updated in 2009.

There have been significant changes to the pedestrian safety landscape in that time, most significantly with the rise of Personal Mobility Devices or ‘e-rideables’ - referring to a wide range of electric powered devices including e-scooters, e-bikes, electric skateboards, segways, and self-balancing hoverboards. These devices have exploded in popularity in recent years, as people look for practical, ecological and economical alternatives to city traffic, and for “last-mile” solutions to help bridge connections with public transport; but pose significant risks to people who are blind or vision impaired – running almost silently and capable of speeds of at least 25km/h.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also left its mark on pedestrian safety, with many restaurants and cafes being supported through government funding to increase their use of outdoor dining. While this is an understandable response to help minimise the risk of exposure to the virus, the encroachment of tables and chairs – along with large items such as pot plants and heaters – into the public space has created additional risks to the safety of people who are blind or vision impaired.

As we began 2022, the NPC conducted a series of member engagement sessions to help inform the final form of this Pedestrian Safety Policy update. These sessions each focused on an area of pedestrian safety: residential (including branches, garbage bins, footpaths, unrestrained dogs etc), commercial (al fresco dining, advertising and signage, street vendors), and road (including silent vehicles, curbs, tactile indicators, audible traffic crossings etc).

The ongoing work of the NPC helps to ensure that BCA’s position statements and policies continue to be an effective education and advocacy tool, in order to leverage change and promote the rights of people who are blind or vision impaired. It also looks to identify new ways in which these important and supportive resources may be useful in our self-advocacy experiences. We are always keen to hear from members with suggestions of areas or topics where you think a policy or position statement may be useful, as well as any feedback you have on your experience using any of the existing policy statements.

This year, we look forward to providing many opportunities for collaboration on various policy issues and for members to share their thoughts, experiences and views. It is already set to be a year of change and renewal for BCA, with a new President, new CEO, and new NPC Chair.

While we are excited for the work ahead, we also wish to note our thanks to Helen Freris as the outgoing NPC chair for providing her leadership, wisdom, energy and commitment to the NPC, as well as our gratitude and appreciation to the outgoing NPC Representatives for their contributions.

Finally, it is also an election year, with a Federal Election due before May as well as State Elections in South Australia and Victoria. This is going to be a big year for policy - watch this space!

## An Eye to the Future - by Nicole Willing

As we all know, work is the cornerstone of social inclusion. However, a 2018 Vision Australia survey showed that only 24 per cent of Australians who are blind or vision impaired were employed full-time, compared to nearly 60 per cent of Australians without a disability.

Blind Citizens Australia launched the Eye to the Future project in 2019, to change employer perceptions about hiring someone who is blind or vision impaired, and highlight the skills, knowledge and diversity they can bring to a workplace. The project was paused in early 2020 due to COVID-19.

BCA is very pleased to announce that the Eye to the Future project 2.0 was re-launched just before Christmas, which was made possible by a grant from the Department of Social Services Information, Linkages, and Capacity Building Grant Program. The project will run throughout 2022 in NSW, Queensland, Victoria, and Tasmania.

We have employed Nicole Willing as the Project Manager. Nicole will lead the Eye to the Future team over the next twelve months as they work with industry leaders and employers to promote the benefits of hiring people who are blind or vision impaired. The aims of the project are to reduce the stigma surrounding employing a person with disability, to create more disability confident businesses and to connect with students transitioning into the workforce who may benefit from being connected to employers, being mentored, or being assisted into internships.

The project has its own [Eye to the Future website](https://eyetothefuture.com.au/) with a range of resources and information for employers and students who are blind or vision impaired. Over the coming months, we will build on these resources to include more information, fact sheets and videos to benefit businesses, students or anyone who is blind or vision impaired and interested in starting their own business.

We will be creating a paid Internship Program for high-school, TAFE, and university students transitioning into the workforce. The Internship Program will connect students to employers offering 6-month internships, and we will support the employer and intern through the recruitment process, provide guidance around accessibility and assistive technology options and will remain in contact with the employer and employee throughout the duration of the internship.

We are excited to announce that we have set a date for the Eye to the Future Symposium which will be a full-day conference for employers, recruiters, and human resources professionals.

This event will be held in Sydney on Monday, 15th August 2022. The Symposium will be live streamed, enabling businesses in other states to participate. More information on this event will be circulated in coming months.

For students transitioning into the workforce, we will be hosting Roundtables on a range of different topics later in the year. We will also be developing a Mentoring Program where experienced staff who are blind or vision impaired can mentor students moving into the workforce.

It will be an exciting year for Blind Citizens Australia and for the Eye to the Future team. If you are an employer interested in diversity and inclusion; a student interested in joining our Internship Program; or an experienced employee looking for a new job opportunity, we would love to hear from you.

If you have any questions or would just like to learn more about the Eye to the Future project, please contact Nicole Willing - Project Manager at nicole.willing@bca.org.au or call 1800 033 660.

If you’re on Facebook, you can follow the project on the [Eye to the Future Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/EyeToTheFutureBCA/)

## 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.

We would also like to acknowledge our funding partners: the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) NSW, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Victoria, the Federal Department of Social Services (DSS), the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO), Vision Australia, Guide Dogs Australia, Everability and our generous members.

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 13th May 2022. Contributions can be submitted in braille, print, audio CD or electronic format (in Word or text format). Send emails to bca@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. 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

* Audio copies of the articles Class for the Partially Sighted can be obtained from Bruce Gillies by phoning 0418 366 783
* 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 and IHeartradio app)

Times: 2.00pm Fridays

### 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 89.5M, 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 6.30pm Sunday.

### Tasmania

Hobart, Print Radio Tasmania 864AM

Launceston, 106.9FM

Devonport, 96.1FM

Week 1 Times: 5.15pm Wednesday, repeated 8.45am Friday

Week 2 Times: 5.15pm 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 6.30pm Sunday

### Western Australia

Perth, 6RPH 990AM

Times: 4.30pm Wednesday: Repeated 6.30pm Sundays