# Blind Citizens Australia logo

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# Position Paper on the Uluru Statement from the Heart and a Voice to Parliament

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## Background

The Uluru Statement from the Heart is an invitation from First Nation Australians to the Australian people, to walk with First Nations peoples in a movement for a better future. It calls for all Australians to support:

* a First Nations Voice in the Australian Constitution – this means giving First Nations people the right to give advice on the laws that affect First Nations peoples; and
* a Makarrata Commission – to oversee agreement-making and truth-telling between governments and First Nations people.

On Saturday, 14 October 2023, a referendum will be held on whether to change the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.

## Our Position

The BCA Board has accepted the invitation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart to walk with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a movement of the Australian people for a better future. We take the view that supporting the YES23 campaign is a tangible way of advancing Goal 2 of BCA's Strategic Plan 2022-25:

“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."

We believe that endorsing the Uluru Statement is the best way of advancing the human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and of creating an inclusive and welcoming Australia.

As such, BCA calls for an Indigenous Voice to Parliament to be established and enshrined in the Australian Constitution, and for all governments across Australia to move towards Treaty and Makarrata (the truth telling commission) – the other requests made in the Uluru Statement.

We accept that not all people support the Voice, or the model currently proposed. The board affirms the right of each individual to choose whether to vote for or against the proposal.

## Information and Voting in the Referendum

BCA continues to advocate to ensure that all people who are blind or vision impaired are able to exercise their vote in the referendum in a manner that is as secret, verifiable, and independent as possible.

A range of voting options will be available at the referendum. If a person who is blind or vision impaired chooses to vote at a polling place, they may ask for help to complete their ballot paper. This can be from a family member, friend, support worker, a scrutineer, a campaign worker or a polling official. Text to speech pens, and hearing loops, will be offered in at least one polling place in every electoral division nationally.

In addition, an operator-assisted telephone voting service will be available for people who are blind or vision impaired. As was the case for the 2022 Federal Election, this is a two-step process whereby the elector does not give their name, but instead uses their unique telephone voting registration number and chosen PIN. The system then automatically marks them off the electoral roll, allowing them to vote anonymously. More information is available at [Referendum 2023 - Telephone voting (aec.gov.au)](https://www.aec.gov.au/referendums/vote/blv-voters.html)

During the campaign, all voters across Australia will receive the official Referendum Booklet, which will contain the Yes / No pamphlets, as well as the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) official guide, which provides information on when and where to vote and what happens at the polling place. BCA has advocated for the importance of ensuring this information about the "yes" and "no" campaigns is available in a range of accessible formats.

We have been advised by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) that accessible versions of the referendum booklet will be available:

* online in e-Braille, large print, and audio file, and,
* hard copy versions in Braille and large print and can be requested by calling 13 23 26.
* An Easy Read version of the official guide will be available, as will versions in CALD and First Nations languages.

Information about the referendum will be advertised on the Radio Reading Network channels. This will cover information on enrolment, about referendums, voter services and how to correctly complete a ballot paper.