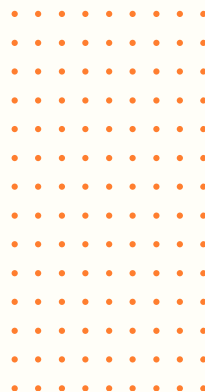


STATEMENT OF ASKS

AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL ELECTION 2025





INTRODUCTION

All Australians deserve to live in an inclusive society that supports them to live well. But attitudes, practices, and structures across society create barriers that can make this harder for some Australians than others.

Australians with sensory disabilities – people who are D/deaf*, Deafblind, Blind/low vision, and those with hearing loss face barriers to accessibility every day and while supports such as the National Disability Insurance Agency and the Hearing Services Program go some way towards reducing these barriers, we’ve still got a long way to go before people with sensory disability can realise their full rights as equal citizens and community members.

As a coalition of national peak bodies representing the interests of Australians with sensory disability, we have the specialist expertise, knowledge, and experience to work with governments to continue progress towards addressing these barriers. We know that access to assistive technology, inclusive communication practices – including Auslan language and audio description – Deaf culture, and broad community awareness can make all the difference.

Across the 2025 Federal Election, we are asking all candidates and political parties to commit to the vision of a fully inclusive, accessible Australia where every Australian with sensory disability can reach their full potential.

Our statement of asks sets out the tangible ways that the government can provide practical support here and now for the communities we collectively represent.

** Deaf represents all culturally Deaf and hard of hearing people.*



OUR KEY ASKS



1. A commitment to support existing community-based specialist support services transition to the Foundational Supports Framework



2. Increased funding for sensory disability organisations under the National Disability Insurance Scheme Disability Representative and Carers Organisation Contract to address the additional cost-burden of communications accessibility



3. A process of reform, lead by the Federal Government in partnership with the States and Territories, to develop nationally consistent approach for the development and implementation of Technology Assisted Voting (TAV) at all elections



4. Legislative change to enshrine Audio Description (AD) as part of Australia's Broadcast Services Act, to ensure AD is provided on all broadcast and streaming platforms

OUR KEY ASKS *CONT.*



5. 12 months secured funding to allow Deaf Australia to pilot an accessible and culturally inclusive, 'Deaf-friendly' national individual advocacy support service for members of the signing Deaf Community



6. 12 months secured funding to support Deaf Australia's Deaf Community Expert Advisory Group



7. Reinstating conference attendance as an NDIS-funded support for participants with sensory disabilities

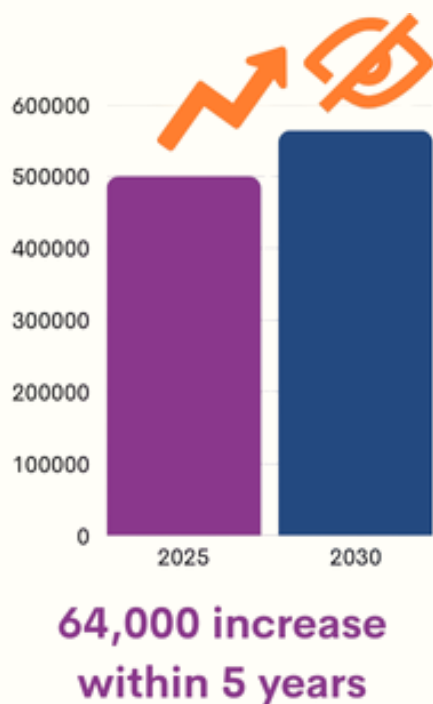
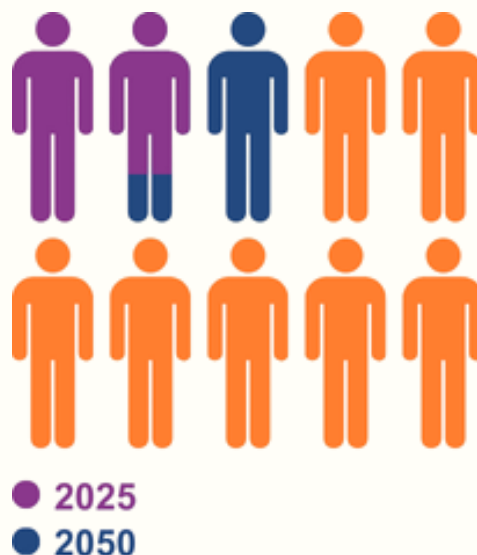


8. Provide critical advocacy funding for Deafblind Australia as a key matter of urgency, and provide ongoing fair and equitable systemic advocacy funding for all Coalition member organisations

Taking Action to Improve the Lives of People with Sensory Disabilities

Around one in six Australians – roughly 3.6 million people, have some form of hearing loss, ranging from mild to complete D/deafness.^[i] By 2050, it's estimated that that figure could be as high as one in four, due in large part to our aging population.^[ii]

An estimated 30,000 Australians identify as Deaf*, while DeafBlindness, a combination of sight and hearing loss, sometimes known as dual sensory loss has been estimated to affect 0.2-2% of the Australian population – **50,000-500,000 people**.^[iii]



There are currently more than 500,000 people who are blind or vision impaired in Australia; with estimates that this will rise to 564,000 by 2030. According to the Vision Initiative, around 80% of vision loss in Australia is caused by conditions that become more common as people age^[iv]

Vision and hearing are important senses for communication, mobility, and learning.^[v] Without appropriate supports, hearing or vision loss can have negative impacts across all areas of life, including education, employment, social participation and independent living.^[vi]

The 2025 Federal Election provides an opportunity for all parties and candidates to show their commitment to the independence and wellbeing of people with disability. A specific focus on meaningful reform in the following policy areas over the term of the next Parliament would significantly improve the lives of people with sensory disabilities across Australia.



1. A commitment to support existing community-based specialist support services transition to the Foundational Supports Framework

Access to local disability-related support and services is critical for Australians with hearing loss, D/deafness, and those who are Deafblind, many of whom will never be able to access support under the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Often supports and services can be highly specialised, reflective of the diversity across our communities. This diverse support landscape works, since it is responsive to both the general and specific needs of individuals.

We ask that the federal government, states, and territories commit to supporting the organisations that are currently providing supports to people who are D/Deaf, have hearing, or are Deafblind across the transition to the new Foundational Supports framework.

Our communities value these organisations and want to know they won't lose the supports they need across this transition period. Investing in supporting these highly valued organisations to transition effectively into the new framework is an efficient and cost-effective way to support the timely realisation of a more comprehensive Australian disability support system.



2. Increased funding for sensory disability organisations under the NDIS Disability Representative and Carers Organisation Contract to address the additional cost-burden of communications accessibility

Sensory peaks have additional costs associated with meeting the communication accessibility needs of our cohorts that can't often be met in-house, for example live captioning or Auslan interpreting.

This expense is not borne equitably across all Disability Representative and Carer Organisations funded and can represent a significant proportion of overall funding. This places sensory organisations in the position of having to offset this cost against other expenses such as staffing and salaries – we need to do the same work, but with less resources to do it. This additional cost-burden was previously recognized via a discrete separate payment for sensory organisations, which was discontinued at some point without explanation.

Sensory organisations need sufficient resources to consult with their communities. Having additional funding to support this work would help us contribute across the reform of the National Disability Insurance Scheme more effectively.



3. A process of reform, lead by the Federal Government in partnership with the States and Territories, to develop nationally consistent approach for the development and implementation of Technology Assisted Voting (TAV) at all elections

Australia was the first country in the world to allow citizens to cast their vote anonymously, indeed the secret ballot is also sometimes known as the ‘Australian Ballot’. And yet, for a sizeable proportion of our population, that noble ideal remains out of reach. An electoral system that relies on pencil and paper means that people who are blind or vision impaired have for too long had to rely on another person to assist them to vote – whether that is a support worker, a spouse or other family member, or electoral commission staff (in person or via telephone voting) – and trust that they have completed the ballot paper accurately according to their wishes.

While telephone voting has improved access to the electoral process, this falls well short of the democratic rights of people who are blind or vision impaired. We are calling on all parties and candidates to commit to supporting the development and implementation of a nationally consistent approach to Technology Assisted Voting (TAV) that will ensure a truly secret, independent, verifiable voting platform that allows for a multifaceted approach to voting. This system should include a combination of internet and telephone (with an automated key prompt system) voting, along with an increased focus on improving the accessibility of the paper ballot through the provision of voting information and ballot papers in the voter’s preferred format.



4. Legislative change to enshrine Audio Description (AD) as part of Australia’s Broadcast Services Act, to ensure AD is provided on all broadcast and streaming platforms

Audio description (AD) is a service that facilitates access to film, television, live performances or other live events for people who are blind or vision impaired. It involves providing verbal narration during natural gaps in dialogue to communicate information about visual elements – such as scenes, settings, actions, costumes and on-screen text, including credits.

Australia lags behind much of the developed world in the provision of AD. It was introduced to New Zealand television in 2011, the United States introduced it in 2010, and the United Kingdom has the most developed and regulated laws, with AD featuring on both free to air and subscription channels since 2003.



We urge the next parliament to legislate to mandate the provision of audio description on free-to-air television and online streaming platforms to give effect to Australia's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).



5. Twelve (12) months secured funding to allow Deaf Australia to pilot an accessible and culturally inclusive, 'Deaf-friendly' national individual advocacy support service for members of the signing Deaf Community

Deaf Australia receives multiple requests every month for individual advocacy support in Auslan. Existing national independent advocacy support services are insufficient as most individual advocates cannot sign Auslan and are often unaware of the culture, mores and values of the Deaf Community.

Deaf Australia seeks assistance to provide national Deaf-friendly individual advocacy support for an initial period of 12 months. This will be crucial to allow Auslan users who are D/deaf and hard of hearing to receive culturally-appropriate national individual advocacy services directly in Auslan.



6. Twelve (12) months secured funding to support Deaf Australia's Deaf Community Expert Advisory Group

Deaf Australia receives multiple requests every month for individual advocacy support in Auslan. Existing national independent advocacy support services are insufficient as most individual advocates cannot sign Auslan and are often unaware of the culture, mores and values of the Deaf Community.

Deaf Australia seeks assistance to provide national Deaf-friendly individual advocacy support for an initial period of 12 months. This will be crucial to allow Auslan users who are D/deaf and hard of hearing to receive culturally-appropriate national individual advocacy services directly in Auslan.



7. Reinstating conference attendance as an NDIS-funded support for participants with sensory disability

People with sensory disabilities and their families report a consistent struggle to access relevant advice, practical assistance, and useful information and frequently describe feeling helpless, overwhelmed, abandoned, and misunderstood by the medical establishment. This can particularly be the case for families of young children who can struggle to navigate the wide range of therapeutic supports and options available and make informed choices on how to best support their child’s developmental, social, and cultural needs.

Conference attendance is one way by which parents connect with other families, academics, and medical practitioners to have access to the latest relevant information and research that may be of benefit to their families. Conferences that provide opportunities for families especially those experiencing rare or little-researched conditions, must be given the respect and support befitting the role they play in the lives of many families. These conferences are funded by attendees and must be sustainably resourced to ensure not only their continuance but also their growth and expansion.

We ask that conference attendance be reinstated as a permissible NDIS support, in recognition of the vital function of conferences for our collective community.



8. Provide critical advocacy funding for Deafblind Australia as a key matter of urgency, and provide ongoing fair and equitable systemic advocacy funding for all Coalition member organisations

We call on the Government to provide critical funding for Deafblind Australia, as the only national systemic peak body offering dedicated representation at the national level to ensure that Deafblind people’s needs and preferences are represented in the decision-making processes that directly impact their lives.

Deafblind people have diverse and nuanced support needs that cannot be addressed through generalist services at both systemic and individual levels. Despite being the only peak with the specialised knowledge and expertise to represent the interests of the Deafblind community, Deafblind Australia is currently unfunded as a Disability Representative and Carer Organisation.

In addition, we ask for a restructuring of existing disability advocacy funding to ensure fair and equitable funding for all Coalition organisations. We need long -term funding security and increased resourcing to continue to fulfil our core functions and responsibilities as national systemic advocacy peaks.

Our Coalition



Blind Citizens Australia (BCA) is the national representative organisation of people who are blind or vision impaired. BCA is governed and managed by people who are blind or vision impaired, with at least 75% of employees and 100% of the board with lived experience.

Our mission is to inform, connect, and empower Australians who are blind or vision impaired and the broader community.



Deaf Australia is the Deaf-led peak organisation representing Deaf* people in Australia.

Deaf Australia's mission and vision guides us in striving to ensure every deaf person as citizens in Australia has the right to full participation in their communities with Auslan as the preferred choice of language.



Deafblind Australia represents and advocates for Deafblind people around the country. We are committed to diversity, inclusiveness, self-determination, and advocacy. Deafblind Australia's mission is to improve services and provide capacity-building support for Deafblind people and their families and networks in Australia, and to empower Deafblind people to be self-determining and self-advocating so that they can achieve their goals.



Deafness Forum Australia is the national independent citizen representative peak body for all Australians with hearing challenges, ear or balance disorders, and their families and supporters.

Deafness Forum Australia's mission is to support all Australians who are deaf or hard of hearing to live well in the community by making hearing health & wellbeing a national priority.

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[i] [About ear health](#) | [Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)

[ii] [Hearing loss is twice as common in Australia's lowest income groups, our research shows](#)

[iii] [Leading deafblindness bodies call for urgent action to assist growing deafblind population](#) | [Vision Australia. Blindness and low vision services](#)

[iv] [Eye Health in Australia](#) | [Vision2020](#)

[v] [3.15 Vision and hearing disorders \(Australia's health 2016\)](#) (AIHW).

[vi] [3.15 Vision and hearing disorders \(Australia's health 2016\)](#) (AIHW).

