**BCA Inform: February, Inclusive and Accessible Procurement**

On Tuesday, 4th February 2025, BCA Inform was held to discuss Inclusive and Accessible Procurement. The session began with BCA’s Senior Policy Officer, Jackson Reynalds-Ryan, who provided an overview of procurement - explaining its significance and how it affects the daily lives of people who are blind or vision impaired.

Jackson highlighted the importance of procurement, especially in relation to the Royal Commission's report on disability. He also discussed the current frameworks and policies in place, noting that while there are some, they are not comprehensive. It was also mentioned that BCA will be producing a position paper on accessible procurement by the end of June and a detailed policy report on inclusive and accessible communication in the future.

The session then moved to a discussion about improving user experiences in employment situations, focusing on the role of technology and procurement practices. Participants were encouraged to share their experiences and insights.

An attendee shared their encounter with inaccessible software and web environments, highlighting the lack of understanding and training from employers. They gave an example of a local council in Queensland that signed a 10-year contract with a company for a new telephone system without consulting the access and inclusion team, resulting in the system being inaccessible to blind employees. Another example mentioned is inaccessible printers with touchscreen interfaces in workplace and public library settings.

Then, there was a group discussion regarding various accessibility issues in government and workplace settings. The importance of accessible procurement, not solely for public service employees but also for citizens interacting with government services was noted. Other compelling points raised included the importance of promoting soft copy documents over paper to improve accessibility and promote environmental sustainability as well as consideration of proper colour contrast in office furniture selections which would help vision impaired people.

An attendee then stated how Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) is more easily accessible to those without Microsoft Word subscriptions, and how it offers an accessible format compared to other formats. Attendees shared their experiences with inaccessible digital displays and participation tools in employment settings, emphasizing the need for inclusive technology to facilitate participation and creativity.

Positive experiences were also shared by attendees such as when employers encourage employees to interact with software engineers and provide feedback on accessibility issues, leading to genuine improvements.

During the session participants raised concerns about the accessibility of digital platforms, particularly job application forms, which often fail to function properly with screen readers. Jackson noted that the government's role in setting best practices could encourage private employers to follow suit.

The session concluded with a focus on universal access design, its challenges, and the need for genuine co-design and consultation with people who are blind or vision impaired to ensure that systems work as intended.