**BCA Inform: March - 2025 Australian Federal Election**

On Tuesday, 4th March 2025, BCA Inform was held to discuss the upcoming Australian Federal Election. BCA’s Senior Policy Officer, Jackson Reynalds-Ryan, led a discussion on the priorities and policy asks from the previous election, providing an overview of the progress made and the outcomes of those requests. The session then transitioned to Vaughn Bennison, BCA President, who spoke about strategies for advancing key priority areas and effective approaches for engaging candidates to secure commitments.

The session commenced with Jackson acknowledging that while the election date had not yet been announced, it must take place by 17 May 2025. He shared insights into the current political climate, noting the likelihood of major policy announcements in the lead-up to the election. He also revisited BCA’s 2022 platform document and outlined BCA’s intention to release a new set of policy asks. Attendees were encouraged to contribute their perspectives on key election priorities.

Reflecting on the outcomes of the 2022 election, he reviewed the 18 key recommendations BCA had put forward. While some progress had been made in areas such as accessible voting, assistive technology, and electric vehicle standards, other areas, including audio description and banking accessibility, had seen little to no progress.

Jackson underscored the importance of establishing minimum targets for audio description services. While there had been some success in expanding audio description services on ABC and SBS, progress at the federal level remained limited. He also pointed out the lack of a consistent approach across commercial free to air television networks, stressing the need for stronger policy intervention.

Turning to broader disability policy, Jackson spoke about the necessity of improving the NDIS experience by increasing transparency and ensuring guaranteed ongoing funding. He also addressed concerns about Aged Care, referencing recommendations from the Royal Commission and the lack of meaningful progress, as identified by the Inspector General of Aged Care.

Healthcare accessibility was another focal point, with Jackson highlighting the importance of introducing disability action plans for medical centers and hospitals. He noted that while many healthcare facilities had begun adopting these plans, more needed to be done to ensure consistent implementation.

Jackson went on to discuss the development of a national plan and roadmap for disability inclusive disaster preparedness, resilience, and recovery. He also noted the upcoming reform of disability employment services, with a new program set to launch in July. In the realm of education, he stressed the need for equitable access, advocating for stronger procurement standards and guidelines to ensure accessibility in educational services.

During the discussion, an attendee raised the issue of audio description in commercial networks and the role of government in funding it. Jackson clarified that while commercial networks acknowledged the need for audio description, they remain reluctant to fund it themselves. The idea of legislative intervention, such as amending the Broadcasting Services Act, was suggested as a potential solution.

Attendees also highlighted the need for a federal approach to regulating e-scooters and e-bikes, along with concerns over the ongoing issue of inaccessible communications from government agencies such as Medicare and Centrelink. In response, Jackson mentioned the development of an Associated Plan for Accessible Communications, which aims to improve the accessibility of government information by 2027. He stressed the need for bipartisan support to ensure its successful implementation.

The discussion then shifted to the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), with attendees noting that the complaints process was often too lengthy and complex. Some suggested that a Human Rights Act could provide greater authority to initiate cases, though concerns were raised about its effectiveness in certain jurisdictions. Jackson reiterated the importance of strengthening legal frameworks to ensure greater accessibility and protection for people with disabilities.

Then, Vaughn Bennison, BCA President, led a discussion on strategies for engaging with political candidates and parties ahead of the upcoming election. He highlighted the importance of researching party platforms, directly contacting candidates, engaging with the media on disability issues, and voting conscientiously. Attendees were encouraged to share their personal experiences when communicating with candidates to emphasize the need for substantial reforms in the disability sector.

At the end of the session, Jackson noted that BCA would provide resources, including a "Conversations with Candidates" toolkit, to help members engage with political candidates. He also mentioned that links would be shared to assist members in researching candidate policies and positions.