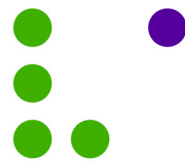


# Invitation for candidates to commit to Queenslanders who are blind or have low vision



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There are approximately 70,000 Queenslanders who are blind or have low vision, including 65,000 people of voting age. Due to our ageing population, this number is expected to rise significantly during the term of the next Queensland Government.

Vision Australia has a long and proud history of advocating for, and supporting Queenslanders who are blind or have low vision. With the help of Queensland politicians and government agencies improvements to transport, accessible voting, and Seeing Eye Dogs services have been made. But there is more to be done.

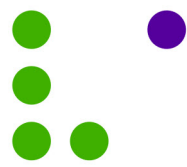
**This document outlines key priorities for the 2015 state election. Vision Australia seeks a commitment on these priorities from you and your party to keep improving this State for Queenslanders who are blind or have low vision.**

## Funding

Vision Australia, with the support of public donations from across Australia, spends \$7.9 million each year providing services to Queenslanders. We employ more than 70 staff at our four Queensland sites in Brisbane, Gold Coast, Cairns and Maroochydore, with extra outreach centres located throughout Queensland.

Our sole purpose and commitment is to provide services to people who are blind or have low vision. We contribute nearly 80 per cent of the cost of services to Queenslanders.

**Without ongoing contracted funding from the Queensland Government, Vision Australia will be unable to provide our current level of services and support to Queenslanders who are blind or have low vision. We are particularly concerned about how services for people living in country Queensland and people over the age of 65 will be funded.**



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## **National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and Aged Care**

Every other state and territory has started the NDIS journey. Vision Australia is participating in the NDIS launch sites, gaining valuable experience and information on this new world of disability funding that is providing much needed control and choice for people with disability.

As the major provider of blindness and low vision services in Queensland, we know that the \$1.8m contribution from the Queensland Government towards our services is not sufficient to meet the needs of the many thousands of people in this state who are blind or have low vision.

**Vision Australia calls on the next Queensland Government to sign a Heads of Agreement for the implementation of the NDIS in Queensland. This will provide certainty to Queenslanders with disability, and will enable service providers, like Vision Australia, to plan better services for the future.**

The NDIS does not provide for people over the age of 65 and yet blindness impacts seniors at a higher rate than their younger peers.

Vision Australia receives only \$80,000 from the Commonwealth Government to provide information to seniors in Queensland.

No additional funds are received from government to provide training in the practical skills that support people to remain independent and stay active, allied health, and low vision clinics services to those over the age of 65. These services are funded solely through Vision Australia's fundraising efforts.

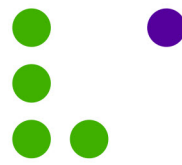
**Vision Australia calls on you and your party to fight for a better deal for Queensland seniors living with disability, and show leadership on behalf of the tens of thousands of constituents over the age of 65 who are living with deteriorating sight and blindness.**

## **Getting Around - Trains, buses and taxis**

Vision Australia has been working with the Queensland Government on the trial of the Vision Impairment Travel Pass. The pass contains a microchip that allows commuters who are blind or have low vision to pass through fare gates at train stations without assistance from Queensland Rail staff. The trial is working well to provide basic independence to commuters who are blind or have low vision.

**Vision Australia seeks a commitment from you and your party to fully implement the Vision Impairment Travel Pass in the next term of the Queensland Parliament.**

The Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme (TTSS) provides financial assistance for taxi fares for people with disability. The amount provided through the TTSS has not increased over the



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past 23 years, and for a person who is blind or has low vision, catching a taxi is a non-optional cost of living. The Queensland TTSS pays up to \$25 per trip however in Victoria it pays up to \$60 per trip.

**Vision Australia calls on you and your party to commit to increasing the TTSS to help Queenslanders who are blind or have low vision overcome gross financial inequity compared with their interstate counterparts.**

'Nextbus' real time technology on Queensland buses helps commuters know where the bus they wish to catch is located on the network. But it doesn't let commuters know where they are on their journey, or when their stop is approaching. Also, bus interchanges where several buses line up behind each other at the same stop leave little chance to determine the right bus number or destination.

**Vision Australia calls on you and your party to implement a comprehensive tracking system with audio announcements for bus transport, including at interchanges in Queensland.**

On many bus and train routes, people who are blind or have low vision need to count stops (which are often skipped) or make a 'best guess' as to when to alight.

For the benefit of all travellers, **Vision Australia calls on you and your party to commit to mandate that clear, audible announcements be made on all public transport journeys in this state.**

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

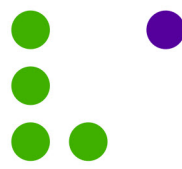
Vision Australia is investing to better meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Queenslanders who are blind or have low vision. With blindness at levels six times greater than non-indigenous populations, we know our services can help. We have employed an ATSI community engagement worker on the Gold Coast to increase our capacity to reach communities and develop better targeted individual and community plans. However more investment is needed.

**Vision Australia calls on you and your party to fund additional ATSI community engagement workers.**

## Employment

There has been much focus in the lead up to the Queensland election on the creation of jobs, but no talk of jobs for people with disability.

The unemployment level for people who are blind or have low vision is 58 per cent. This is four times higher than the unemployment rate of the sighted population. Jobs are key to a person's independence and prosperity.



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There should be better employment pathways for people with disability, as part of recognising the benefits of a vibrant and diverse workforce and the impact of employment on individuals and families.

**Vision Australia calls on you and your party to double the workforce participation rate of people with disability within the next term of parliament with targeted plans that lift public sector participation, and deliver private sector job opportunities in partnership with employers.**

## Support for school leavers

The transition from school to work is an important stage of life. For a young person who is blind or has low vision living in Queensland, there is a lack of opportunity for those who cannot connect with the TAFE or university system. The Queensland Government's 'Support for school leavers' program funding is not finding its way to young people who are blind or have low vision.

**Vision Australia calls on you and your party to ensure the 'Support for school leavers' program is enhanced to better provide for the needs of people with disability just out of school and trying to find their way in the world.**

## Accessible voting

Compulsory voting was introduced in Queensland in 1915. For the first time at the 2015 state election Queenslanders who are blind or have low vision will be able to vote independently and in secret using e-Assist. e-Assist will be available at a small number of pre-poll locations across the state, including at Vision Australia's Coorparoo office.

We have lobbied long and hard for accessible voting and congratulate the Queensland Government on taking the first step. But there is still a long way to go. In other states, accessible voting is available to all voters and votes can be placed at any location using the telephone or internet.

**Vision Australia calls on you and your party to ensure that the Electoral Commission Queensland can offer an online voting system for the next election that is available to, and can cater for the needs of, all Queenslanders.**

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