Submission No 42

INQUIRY INTO VOTING CENTRE ACCESSIBILITY

Organisation: Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand

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Submission overview

This is a joint submission from members of the Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand (ECANZ) to the Victorian Parliament Electoral Matters Committee's inquiry into voting centre accessibility. It sets out information on the various strategies in place across electoral jurisdictions in Australia and New Zealand to aid voters with a disability.

The Victorian Electoral Commission notes that it will be making its own submission directly to the Electoral Matters Committee.

About ECANZ

The Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand (ECANZ) is a consultative and voluntary council of the Electoral Commissioners from electoral authorities of the Commonwealth, States and Territories of Australia and New Zealand.

The purpose of ECANZ is to ensure that the work and role of electoral commissions is better understood and properly resourced at the heart of democratic systems that enjoy the trust and confidence of political participants and citizens alike. ECANZ acts as a forum for electoral commissions to share ideas and initiatives and identify opportunities for interjurisdictional information sharing and collaboration.

ECANZ membership includes:

- The ACT Electoral Commission
- Electoral Commission of Queensland
- Tasmanian Electoral Commission
- Australian Electoral Commission
- New Zealand Electoral Commission
- Victorian Electoral Commission
- Electoral Commission of South Australia
- Northern Territory Electoral Commission
- Western Australian Electoral Commission
- New South Wales Electoral Commission

The ACT Electoral Commission

The ACT Electoral Commission follows the below strategies to address accessibility at voting centres.

Strategic Context

The ACT Electoral Commission's purpose is to deliver *trusted, transparent, secure and accessible* electoral services. Accessibility is embedded across election planning, service design, workforce capability and post-election evaluation, and is guided by principles of **independence, dignity and equal participation.**

Key frameworks include:

- **Accessibility and Inclusion Plan 2024–26 (AIP):** structured commitments for improving accessibility for people with disability, CALD communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and people experiencing homelessness.
- **Accessibility Advisory Committee (est. 2024):** made up of peak disability organisations, service providers, community advocates and members with lived experience. Provides practical guidance, resource testing and co-design (e.g., 2024 Low Sensory Voting Centre).
- **Continuous improvement:** accessibility performance is assessed after every election and directly informs future planning.

Accessible Voting Channels

The Commission (operating as Elections ACT) offers multiple independent and accessible voting options:

Electronic voting (e-voting)

- Dedicated terminals for blind and vision-impaired (BVI) electors with tactile keypads and audio instructions.
- Interfaces offer adjustable text size, high-contrast mode, simplified layout, and support for 12 languages.
- **153,180 electronic votes** were cast in 2024, supporting private and independent voting at scale.

Telephone voting for BVI electors

- Provides secret, unassisted voting without disclosing preferences to polling staff.

Postal and remote voting

- **General Postal Voter** arrangements for electors unable to attend a polling place.
- Door-to-door courier support for overseas electors with mobility/access constraints (2024).

Accessibility in Voting Centres

Polling place assessment

All potential centres are evaluated for:

- step-free access and mobility circulation
- accessible parking
- lighting and high-contrast signage
- accessible toilets where possible

Centres that fail minimum standards are upgraded or excluded. Accessibility ratings are **published** to assist electors in choosing suitable locations.

Low Sensory Voting Centre (2024)

Co-designed with disability and mental health organisations, featuring:

- reduced noise and controlled lighting
- simplified visual layout and reduced queuing
- staff trained in sensory-aware communication

This was widely recognised as a major accessibility advancement in 2024.

On-site support

- Priority queuing, seating and quiet waiting areas
- **In-vehicle voting** for electors unable to leave their car
- Identifiable assistance officers and support protocols
- **Hearing loops** deployed in all early voting centres

Mobile polling

Delivered to hospitals, nursing homes, the Alexander Maconochie Centre, and—expanded in 2024—to **homelessness services**, supporting participation of vulnerable electors.

Accessible Information and Engagement

Elections ACT provides a broad range of accessible resources:

- **Easy English Guide** for electors with low literacy or cognitive disability
- Household election brochure with **audio version** and QR code
- Translated materials in **12 languages**
- Audio information through **Radio 1RPH** and other channels
- Screen-reader-friendly digital content, large print materials and accessible forms

Engagement activities included user testing through the Accessibility Advisory Committee, a pre-election disability sector briefing, and a 2024 accessibility webinar targeting disability, multicultural, Indigenous and homelessness service sectors.

Workforce Capability

- All polling staff received **Hidden Disabilities Sunflower** training.
- Additional disability awareness and communication training was delivered across the election workforce.

- Workforce diversity initiatives support participation of people with disability in election staffing.
- Future focus includes strengthening staff capability regarding cognitive and non-visible disabilities.

2024 Election Performance and Improvement Priorities

Outcomes

- 96% of electors reported satisfaction with electoral services.
- **Informal voting** decreased to approximately **1.9%**.
- 59% of votes were cast early, reducing crowds and physical barriers.
- Strong uptake of accessible channels, with positive feedback on the Low Sensory Voting Centre and expanded mobile polling.

Improvement priorities

- Enhanced accessibility considerations for centre selection and fit-out
- More consistent sensory-friendly adjustments
- Modernisation of e-voting accessibility features
- Improved clarity and accessibility of digital information

Conclusion

Elections ACT's approach to accessibility is comprehensive, evidence-based and strongly informed by structured engagement with disability communities. It integrates multiple accessible voting channels, tailored polling services, inclusive communications and workforce capability, supported by continuous evaluation. This model provides strong material for the ECANZ submission on improving accessibility in voting centres.

Electoral Commission of Queensland

The Electoral Commission of Queensland (ECQ) follows the below strategies to address accessibility at voting centres.

Prior to a state-wide event or a large by-election, the ECQ engages with disability peak organisations within Queensland (or the by-election area) to help determine what information would be useful and necessary for their organisations and members to inform them about different options available during the voting period.

As part of this engagement, the ECQ develops a stakeholder kit with content including social media tiles, posters and newsletter articles. For the 2024 State general election, the stakeholder kit was distributed to 75 peak and regional organisations in Queensland.

In the lead up to the 2024 State general election, the Communication team also developed a variety of accessible communication resources including:

- reviewing and updating the How to Vote section of the ECQ website to simplify the language and make it more readable for all people including those with disability
- creating the Voter Help page to provide easy to find information about voting options and assistance at the polling place
- updating the CAPTCHA function on the ECQ's forms to allow people with disability to submit forms using auditory prompts instead of solely visual.

Additionally, the ECQ commissioned an Easy Read guide 'How to vote in Queensland state elections' and made it available before the 2024 State general election. The guide was produced in collaboration with The Information Group (IAG), a specialist easy read supplier used by many government organisations. The guide is written in simple language to be widely understood by audiences with disability as well as culturally and linguistically diverse communities who speak English as an additional language and people with lower literacy. The ECQ makes the guide available in several formats – online as a PDF, accessible HTML with optional English language voice over and as a hardcopy available to peak disability organisations in Queensland.

The guide was enhanced by photographs from a photoshoot focusing on people with disability commissioned in the lead up to the election. Photos featuring people with disability were also intentionally used as part of our social media campaign to expand the number of people who could see themselves in our photographs.

There are many ways to vote

The ECQ provides a range of strategies during early voting and on election day to ensure Queensland's diverse population has various voting options to meet their needs.

Voting in person

If an elector requires help voting, we encourage them to bring a friend or relative with them to the polling place, and they can also ask an election official to help. The friend or relative or election official are able to act as an interpreter, read the ballot paper to them, complete their ballot paper according to the electors' instructions and place their ballot paper in the ballot box.

Polling place accessibility

The location of polling places and early voting centres are published on the ECQ's website before an election. The ECQ includes information about accessibility for every polling place and early voting centre. There are 3 classifications for polling place accessibility. Polling places are rated:

- fully accessible
- assisted access
- not accessible

If an elector attends a polling place and are not able to access the voting centre, an election official can:

- bring ballot papers to your vehicle
- give you time to complete the ballot paper
- place your ballot paper in the ballot box.

The election official will be accompanied by another person to ensure your ballot paper is submitted correctly. There is a sign outside the polling place located in the carpark with the phone number to call to request this service.

Postal voting

Some electors prefer to read and complete their ballot paper at a safe space like home or school, whilst some people are not able to go to a polling place during voting hours.

In these situations, the elector can a request to receive a postal vote and the ECQ will mail a ballot paper and other election material to them.

Telephone voting

Similarly, electors may be able to vote over the phone, particularly people with disability who need assistance voting or who cannot physically get to a polling place. Information relating to voting by telephone is promoted and a factsheet is available that outlines the eligibility criteria.

Declared institution voting

Additionally, for some elections, the ECQ visits registered declared institutions, such as aged care facilities. This visit allows residents to vote at a voting booth set up in the residence or from their bed if they cannot leave their room.

Tasmanian Electoral Commission

The Tasmanian Electoral Commission (TEC) follows the below strategies to address accessibility at voting centres.

The TEC utilised **seven** core accessibility measures to support electors with a disability to equitably visit pre-polling and polling venues in 2025. The TEC's initiatives to support electors with a disability aligns with goal four of the TEC Strategic Plan 2023 - 2027.

This goal is to:

Broaden elector inclusivity and partner with communities within the TEC's sphere of influence to equip and educate electoral stakeholders on the electoral environment and integrity issues.

The key initiative related to this goal is the *establishment of processes and resources that enable more Tasmanians to learn about, understand and participate in electoral processes.* The following programs are tied to the above goal and initiative.

Quiet Voting Hour was available to electors during pre-polling. This program was implemented to support electors who required a low-sensory environment to cast their vote. Artificial light and noise were lowered to create a calmer and less stimulating environment for one hour per day.

Telephone assisted voting was broadened in 2025 to now enable electors with a print disability to cast their vote via phone.

Print disability was defined to include the following groups: *(see Figure 1).*

- people who live with vision impairment or blindness;
- a person unable to hold or manipulate written material or to focus or move their eyes;
- physical dexterity problems such as multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, arthritis or paralysis;
- a learning disability, such as dyslexia;
- a brain injury or cognitive impairment;
- literacy difficulties; or
- early dementia.

Visual-Impairment (VI) Vote was available during pre-polling and on polling day. VI Vote is an auditory voting system designed for blind and vision impaired people who wish to cast a fully independent and secret vote. Three systems were available and rotated between pre-polling and polling day locations to support the largest number of electors to cast their vote. VI Vote is also fully available to electors who do not live with blindness or vision-impairment.

Car-side voting was available for electors who attended a polling venue but could not leave their vehicle due to mobility constraints. Car-side voting allows electors to be attended to by a polling official and to utilise a portable voting screen to cast an independent and secret vote.

Polling venue accessibility ratings were advertised in mail-out election information cards, newspapers and on the TEC website. These ratings provided electors with insight into the features available at polling venues such as ramps and accessible car parking.

Postal voting was available for electors who were unable to attend a polling place together with registered general postal voters. This form of voting supports electors both living with or

caring for a person with a chronic health condition or disability to cast their vote safely, privately and comfortably.

Impartial assisted voting is also made available for universal postal vote Local Government elections for electors who required support to complete a postal vote. The service utilises a professional and experienced polling officer to assist the elector complete their vote confidentially and impartially during a pre-arranged thirty-minute appointment. This service can also be completed car-side upon request.

Figure 1

	Electors who registered			Electors who voted		
Division	All electors	Those declaring a print disability	%	All electors	Those declaring a print disability	%
Bass	1,433	60	4.18%	1,412	59	4.17 %
Braddon	1,633	60	3.67%	1,613	60	3.71 %
Clark	1,711	74	4.32%	1,690	72	4.26 %
Franklin	1,835	43	2.34%	1,808	42	2.32 %
Lyons	1,775	50	2.81%	1,745	46	2.63 %

Australian Electoral Commission

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) follows the below strategies to address accessibility at voting centres.

The AEC supports electors with disability to participate in federal electoral events and the electoral process by focusing on enrolment, polling place accessibility, assistive technologies, voting options, and inclusive resources.

Enrolment

Accessible enrolment methods include:

- online enrolment service, certified by Vision Australia,
- people who are unable to sign their name may have someone else complete an enrolment form and sign on their behalf,
- Medicare cards can be used as evidence of identity for people who may not have photo ID such as a driver's licence.

Polling place accessibility

Polling place accessibility improved for the 2025 federal election, despite challenges securing venues nationwide on short notice. Polling places rated as either "*fully wheelchair accessible"* or *"assisted wheelchair accessible"* increased from 84.7% (in the 2023 referendum) to **91.2%** for the 2025 federal election. Of the 7,208 polling places used:

- 41.81% (3,014 venues) were rated as fully wheelchair accessible (up from 22.3% in 2023)
- 49.38% (3,560 venues) offered assisted wheelchair access (down from 62.4% in 2023, reflecting a shift toward more fully accessible sites)
- only 8.49% (612 venues) were not wheelchair accessible (improved from 15.2% in 2023).

Locations, hours, accessibility ratings, and available services are published on the AEC's 'Where to Vote' tool after the election is called, enabling voters to make informed choices.

Challenges

Challenges in securing fully wheelchair accessible polling places include:

- There is no fixed date for federal elections and as such, preferred polling places which have been inspected and rated as fully wheelchair accessible or that offer assisted wheelchair access may not be available once the date is known.
- Over 7,000 premises are required to be engaged between announcement of the election date and polling day, which can be as short as 33 days. We must also ensure that we establish sufficient polling places spread across all areas to adequately service the entire population.
- The AEC relies on arrangements with schools, community halls or other locations that are more generally available and in relatively central locations. Existing infrastructure may not support polling place accessibility, such as in areas where public buildings are older or in newer suburbs where the infrastructure has not kept pace with the population growth. While this is a matter for state/territory and local governments, we continue to work with them.

Assistive technologies

The AEC provides assistive technologies and services at polling places:

- virtual Auslan interpreters are available at every polling place,
- hearing loops and text-to-speech pens are provided at select locations in each electoral division.

Voting options

The AEC offers alternative voting options for people unable to attend a polling place, or who cannot vote on election day:

- telephone voting is available for voters who are blind or have low vision,
- postal voting and registration as a general postal voter is available to people with disability and those caring for them,
- early voting is available to people with disability and their carers,
- mobile voting teams visit people living in aged care homes, mental health and disability residential facilities, and some hospitals,
- AEC staff are trained and available at all polling places to assist people where required. In some circumstances, if a voter cannot get out of the car, ballot papers may be brought to them for completion,
- at the polling place people who need assistance to vote can be supported by a person they nominate, such as a family member, friend or carer.

Inclusive resources

The AEC produces information in accessible formats to accommodate a range of disabilities and needs:

- Easy Read guides on how to enrol, how to vote formally, and how to vote by mail,
- Auslan videos that explain how to enrol, voter services, and how to correctly complete a ballot paper,
- Social Stories about voting at a polling place or by mail, presented through short narratives and visuals,
- videos on YouTube (youtube.com/aecgovau) and short-form videos on AEC social media channels, which are captioned and have transcripts, where possible,
- products for people who are blind or have low vision including the *official guide* and candidates lists in large print and e-text, audio files, and Braille formats,
- accessible education webpage with electoral education information that is easy-to-navigate and provides accessible content for people to work through with or without a support person,
- AEC website includes information in accessible formats and aims for WCAG 2.1 Level AA compliance,
- AEC website has a 'Listen' button at the top of each page to hear the page content,
- electors can contact the AEC via the National Relay Service.
- Information on accessible information and services is included in the *official guide.*
- AEC publishes polling place information in the 'Where to vote' tool during the voting period which includes filtering options and information on accessibility features.

Disability Advisory Committee

The AEC's Disability Advisory Committee (the Committee) is the primary mechanism through which the AEC communicates with, and understands issues for, people with disability.

The aim of the Committee is to enable the AEC to promote greater accessibility, inclusion and participation in the electoral process by people with disability. The Committee meets 2-3 times per year to consider areas of focus in the design and delivery of accessible voter services for the next electoral cycle. All state and territory election management bodies are members of the Committee and use this as a mechanism to brief on their respective initiatives, particularly in the lead up to state/territory elections or with lessons from recently held elections.

Committee working groups

In 2024 the AEC established three working groups to consider approaches to improve accessibility at the 2025 federal election. The AEC will maintain the working group model through this election cycle to consider approaches for improving accessibility and services to the disability community for the 2027–28 federal election.

New Zealand Electoral Commission

The New Zealand Electoral Commission (NZEC) follows the below strategies to address accessibility at voting centres.

Strategies and action plan

The Electoral Commission has a Disability Strategy (Access 2020 Disability Strategy) that describes how the Commission will identify and reduce barriers that disabled voters may encounter when enrolling and voting at elections.

The strategy states three main goals:

1. Promote enrolment processes and voting channels that enable all New Zealanders to participate in parliamentary elections, and seek legislation and funding to allow this.
2. Provide information and resources in alternate formats.
3. Maintain strong relationships with the disability sector.

The strategy has principles that supports section 12 of the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990, United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD), Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the New Zealand Disability Strategy and the Electoral Commission's Māori Strategy Ngā Maihiihioterā.

The Commission is looking into updating the current strategy to outline long-term accessibility commitments across different election cycles. This work is scheduled to begin in 2027.

In the meantime, the Commission is developing an accessibility action plan that will support the intention of a future accessible strategy. The action plan will outline the services provided by the Commission to deliver an accessible election in 2026. Areas of focus include internal processes, accessibility in a voting place, and supporting disabled candidates to stand in parliamentary elections through a bespoke fund (the Election Access Fund Te Tomokanga - Pūtea Whakatapoko Pōtitanga).

Terms of reference for different accessibility group

As part of the Commission's planning, we established our internal terms of reference to understand the different types of accessible needs. Two terms used in our planning are disabled and inclusive voters.

Disabled voters refers to voters who are physically disabled who lack the mobility either permanently or temporarily. Disabled voters refer to voters who are physically disabled who lack the mobility either permanently or temporarily. These are people in wheelchairs or on crutches and require help to get through the door.

Inclusive voters refer to groups of people with different disabilities such as intellectual disability, neurodiverse, deaf or partially deaf. Inclusive voters refer to groups of people with different disabilities such as intellectual disability, neurodiverse, deaf or partially deaf. These group of people usually do not have trouble getting into a voting place but require assistance with information and instructions once they are inside a voting place.

Noting that it is not an exclusive group as some voters may have more than one type of disability.

As part of the Commission's planning, it is critical to understand our voters and create the right environment for people with disabilities.

Classification and selection of voting places

Voting places across the country are classified into three categories:

1. Fully accessible
2. Partially accessible
3. No accessibility rating

The list of voting places with different categories are mailed to voters to assist voters with different needs to determine the right voting place for them.

The classification of voting places is most useful for disabled voters who have full or partial mobility needs.

In 2023, the Commission had a total of 2,567 physical voting places across the country. Of the 2,567 voting places, 1,486 met the requirements to be classified as 'fully accessible' and 953 met the requirements to be classified as 'partially accessible' and 128 were not classified as having 'no accessibility rating'.

The Commission also quantified the total number of voting hours at voting places that were opened across the country during the 2023 general election. The Commission offered approximately 69,200 hours of voting. 67,200 of those hours were at voting places classified as 'fully accessible' or 'partially accessible'.

<u>Fully accessible voting place</u>

Under this category, the voting place must be able to be accessed without use of steps. If the entrance is not flat, it must be accessed by a ramp. The ramp must have a gradient of no more than 1:12 with no lip or step greater than 20mm with handrails on both sides.

The voting place must have a disabled carpark or be capable of creating one. The path from the carpark to the ramp must be clear of obstructions, be flat and have no curbs or gutters to navigate.

The doorway into the voting place must be a minimum 760mm wide and capable of being opened with one hand.

Any internal hallways must be a minimum of 1200mm wide.

<u>Partially accessible voting place</u>
If the voting place meets most but not all of the requirements, the voting place will be classified as a partially accessible voting place.

<u>No accessibility rating</u>

If the voting place can only be accessed via steps, even just two or three, it cannot be classified as either fully or partially accessible.

Services inside a voting place

To support our disabled and inclusive voters in a voting place our staff are trained to provide assistance where possible.

Chairs are provided to voters who cannot stand for long periods of time, for example elderly people or people on crutches.

The option to sit is also provided across different activities within a voting place if one has a disability (permanent or temporary) as follows:

- Issuing of ballot paper
- When casting a vote at a desktop voting screen

For voters who have visual impairment, staff will also provide service to assist with reading out the options on the ballot paper as well as marking the ballot paper. Staff follow strict instructions and only at the direction of the voter. To prevent any perception of bias, staff will do the following:

- Read out the names of all the candidates and parties in the order of the ballot.
- Staff cannot engage in any conversation about the candidates or parties, other than the information that is on the ballot.
- Staff member only marks the ballot at the direction of the voter and must verbally confirm that the right mark has been made.

In addition to the above, voters are also welcome to bring along any support person to a voting place. This could be a family member, friend or caregiver. This also applies to voters for whom English is a second language.

Deaf Action voting place

Another type of voting place that the Commission had trialled is a deaf-enabled voting place.

The Commission had set up three deaf voting places in collaboration with Deaf Action New Zealand for the 2023 General Election. These voting places were set up at locations familiar to the deaf community. In Auckland and Christchurch, it was at the local Deaf Action community building. In Wellington it was the Ākau Tangi Sports Centre, where a National Deaf Futsal tournament was held at the time.

These voting places were staffed with members of the deaf community, who undertook voting place training. Working in collaboration with the deaf community, the Commission was able to create the best way to deliver a service for deaf voters.

The project was successful in 2023, and the Commission will be expanding a greater roll out with more coverage for the 2026 General Election.

Prior to the trial collaborating with Deaf Action New Zealand and its community, the Commission had also trialled a partnership in 2020 with New Zealand Video Interpreting Service (NZVIS) to provide ‘on the spot’ digital interpreting for deaf voters. This service was accessed online using a tablet device and connected voters with sign language interpreters via Skype. It provided mixed success as the service required a strong network connection, which ruled out remote sites and even some busy urban sites, as mobile connectivity in urban sites can be poor due to large concrete walls. We discontinued this service for the subsequent general election.

Neurodiverse community – Quiet voting within a voting place

For the 2026 General Election, the Commission will be trialling ‘Quiet voting’ at specific voting places across the country.

These voting places will have specific conditions to allow for a quiet and calm environment for voters with sensory needs that covers a varied and wide community of people. It can include people with autism, ADHD, dyslexia and many other hidden disabilities. In the voting place, the focus is on lowering stimuli, such as lights and noise.

The Commission will roll out a trial service with similar number of voting places as for the deaf community. The trial service will be quiet voting hours where light and sounds will be reduced to make it a friendlier place for the neurodivergent community.

Other option voting services

Takeaway votes are also made available to voters who may not otherwise be able to access a voting service through a voting place or via a voting team.

Advance voting teams will also be providing service during advance voting period to some locations where there is no or limited access such as care homes and hospitals (bed-to-bed service).

The dictation service is a long-established tool used in many elections and by-elections to help enable people to vote. The system is designed for voters who are blind, visually impaired, or unable to mark a ballot paper. Voters must undertake a verbal declaration to this effect. Voters use this service by phoning our Centralised Processing Team, who will establish their identity and register them to vote. They are given a unique reference and provide the answer to a security question, for example, 'What was the name of your first pet?' The voter is told to phone again later. When they make contact again, they do not provide their name or any identifying information, only quoting the reference number earlier. If the team member recognises the voter from the earlier call, or if the voter accidentally reveals their name, the team member transfers the call to another team member, ensuring the secrecy of the vote for the voter. Before proceeding with the vote, the voter must provide the correct answer to the security question established earlier.

When voting, the team member reads through all the options for the voter and confirms their vote with them. Another team member joins the call and repeats back what has been marked on the ballot paper. This ensures the mark is made in accordance with the voters' wishes.

Challenges with voting places

In planning to provide more accessible voting places, the Voting Services team encounters the common project constraints – time, budget and people.

Voting places in general are not the Commission's asset. The selection of voting places is dependent on timing of the real estate market, availability, location, condition of the venue/building and the ability to meet the Commission's need and assessment criteria. On top of that, our staff will also have to work with the proprietor to lease the venue for a short term can be extremely challenging.

Staff engagement and experience working with people with different needs is critical in our service delivery. The Commission has a short time frame to train our staff to engage with people with different accessible needs.

Accessibility across the Commission:

Election Access Fund

Since 2022, the Commission has administered the Election Access Fund Te Tomokanga - Pūtea Whakatapoko Pōtitanga. The purpose of the fund is to remove or reduce cost barriers that only disabled candidates face when standing as a candidate in parliamentary general elections and by-elections. The fund can support disabled candidates to fully participate in the selection and campaigning processes. The fund covers the following list (not a full exhaustive list):

- Equipment and technology
- Communication
- Personal assistance
- Travel, accommodation and venue access

Strategic Engagement & Partnerships

The Commission has a community facing education and engagement team that work across the country meeting with schools, groups and the public sector to support understanding of electoral matters and participation. This work includes regular connection with the disability sector and intersecting cohorts to provide community specific information and gather insights to support our service design and planning.

The engagement team also facilitate the Community Education Fund which is available to community groups and entities to resource 'by community for community' projects that enhance understanding and drive key messages around enrolment and participation.

Accessible communications

The Commission provides a range of accessible communications and public information campaigns to support the disabled community enrol, vote, and understand New Zealand's democracy.

This includes:

- Providing essential information in five alternate formats: audio, Braille, Easy Read, large print, and New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL). These formats are all made available on the Commission's website.
- Providing NZSL interpreters at key announcements (such as the declaration of official results) and providing translations (short videos of interpreters signing information) on the Commission's website vote.nz.
- Engaging with the disabled community as stakeholders, and through a range of digital channels and advertisement placements, to share key information and resources to support their participation in the electoral system.

The efficacy of public information campaigns are measured through pulse surveys, and disabled people are a target audience surveyed. The disabled community are also surveyed as part of the voters and non-voters conducted by Verian during a general election year. This survey measures voter satisfaction and confidence, levels of understanding and barriers to voting. This survey will be conducted as part of the 2026 General Election. Both surveys help the Commission understand the disabled community's experience in the electoral system and identify improvements to better reach and support those communities.

The Commission works with a creative agency, VML, to develop its communications and public information campaigns. VML has a partner organisation, All is for All, which specialises in engaging with the disabled community and accessible communications. This partnership will support the accessibility of the Commission's public information campaigns and communications for the 2026 General Election (and beyond).

Supporting enrolment

The Commission provides accessible options for enrolment:

- Allowing a support person to help complete the enrolment form (or act on behalf).
- Providing a large print enrolment form to support those with low vision or have learning disabilities.
- Providing a Braille guide to completing an enrolment form to support those with blind or low vision.

Electoral Commission of South Australia

The Electoral Commission of South Australia (ECSA) follows the below strategies to address accessibility at voting centres.

Disability Advisory Committee

ECSA facilitates a Disability Engagement Advisory Committee (DEA). The committee's role is to discuss and provide advice on issues and strategies that ensure electors with disability are included, engaged, and empowered to vote through accessible services and information.

The DEA Committee has begun the journey toward delivering accessible and inclusive electoral services for people living with disability, ensuring all South Australians are respectfully included in the democratic process and their voices are heard.

Information is shared through the DEA Committee network to build greater awareness and encourage participation through more targeted and direct communication.

Members of the DEA Committee include:

- Blind Citizens Australia,
- Brain Injury SA,
- Can:Do Group,
- Catalyst Foundation,
- Disability SA
- Mental Health Coalition
- MS SA and NT,
- Office for Autism
- Office of Public Advocate
- Purple Orange
- SeeDifferently

Telephone Assisted Voting for electors with low vision or motor impairment

For the first time at a State Election, Telephone Assisted Voting (TAV) will be available to eligible electors in South Australia for the 2026 State Election and the SA First Nations Voice to Parliament election. This new service is designed to improve accessibility for electors who require assistance to vote.

TAV allows eligible electors to cast their vote over the phone with support ECSA staff.

Who is eligible?

- Blind or sight-impaired electors
- Electors who cannot vote independently due to motor impairment
- For the Voice election, electors must also confirm they are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

TAV will be available from Saturday 14 March to Saturday 21 March 2026 (excluding Sunday 15 March) by calling **1300 951 579**.

Assessing each polling place for accessibility

ECSA has reviewed polling locations to ensure they provide appropriate disability access.

For the 2026 State Election, ECSA will operate **three inclusive voting centres**, designed to improve accessibility and ensure voters with disability, sensory needs or additional support requirements can cast their vote comfortably and independently. Sites have been chosen because they typically offer step-free entry, a set-down area at the entrance, reduced lighting, and carpeted flooring to minimise glare and noise—creating a calmer and more comfortable voting environment.

Selected venues include a set-down or decompression-style internal foyer. These spaces will be staffed, and political party volunteers will not be permitted inside. The exclusion zone at each polling place will help us manage this effectively.

These inclusive locations will not be publicly promoted as such. However, because all designated polling places must be publicly advertised, anyone may attend and cast their vote at these sites.

ECSA will share details of these locations through the DEA Committee network to increase awareness and encourage participation through more targeted and direct communication.

Voting services within a polling place

Services available within a polling place include:

- Magnifying glasses at polling stations to assist voters with low vision.
- Low-seated polling stations to support voters who use a wheelchair or need to be seated while voting.
- A black outline around the desktop and edges of polling stations to help voters with low vision identify where to complete their ballot papers.
- Enrolment and voting materials translated into 21 languages, also available online.
- Audio and video materials—with instructions in English and Pitjantjara—covering how to complete ballot papers for the House of Assembly, Legislative Council, and SA First Nations Voice to Parliament elections.
- Assistance from polling officials for eligible electors who prefer to vote from their car.

Hidden disabilities program

Every voting centre will include staff trained in recognising and supporting people with hidden disabilities. These staff will wear the white Sunflower Lanyard, providing a discreet signal that assistance is available.

Additional supports

ECSA website
The ECSA website has been designed to be more accessible for all users, including people with disability. It meets Level A and AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and includes a web reader feature that allows users with low vision to listen to online text.

Social media – image captioning
ECSA is continuing to improve the accessibility of its social media content by ensuring images include appropriate captions.

Video – text captions
All videos, including those on ECSA TV, include text captions.

‘Plan your day’ form
A downloadable ‘plan your day’ form is being prepared to support people with disability and carers to manage expectations and plan their voting experience.

Northern Territory Electoral Commission

The Northern Territory Electoral Commission (NTEC) follows the below strategies to address accessibility at voting centres.

Voting centre selection

A consideration when selecting voting centres includes accessibility requirements. Accessibility information is published with voting centre location information.

Statutory provisions (expanded below) allowing assistance to be provided in certain circumstances a person is unable to enter a voting centre.

Voter assistance

Legislation in the Northern Territory provides for assistance to be provided to a person who is unable to vote if the person would otherwise be unable to vote. The provisions are mirrored in both local government and territory legislation.

Assistance may be provided to assist a person in the following ways:

- Acting as an interpreter
- Completing or assisting with the completion of a vote
- Explaining the ballot paper and requirements
- By marking or assisting the person to mark the ballot paper at the persons direction
- Folding the ballot paper and placing it in the ballot box or giving it to an authorised officer.

Authorised officers in charge of a voting centre if satisfied that a person cannot enter the voting centre because of a physical or other disability, illness, advanced pregnancy or other condition can assist a person to vote outside the voting centre in accordance with the provisions of the regulations.

Local government elections

Regulation 50, Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2021 – references assistance to certain voters
Regulation 51, Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2021 – references assistance to persons unable to enter a voting centre

Legislative Assembly elections (Territory elections)

Section 87, *Electoral Act (NT)* 2004 – references assistance to certain voters
Section 88, *Electoral Act (NT)* 2004 – references assistance to persons unable to enter a voting centre

Voters with support needs

Physical incapacity, caring responsibilities, language barriers, remoteness and other circumstances can impact on an elector's ability to vote. The NTEC provides a range of support for voters with special needs and electoral officials are trained to provide assistance when needed.

Pre-election day services include:

- early and postal voting available to all electors
- postal vote applications lodged online or by call centre staff
- electors listed as registered postal voters are sent ballot papers by mail as soon as they are available
- NTEC coordinated postal voting for residents at aged care and retirement facilities

Physical access at voting centres is promoted by:

- early and election day voting centres offering full or assisted wheelchair access and, where possible, parking facilities for people with a disability; access is advertised in print and on the website
- allowing electors to vote from their cars or outside voting centres if needed (with assistance from the voting centre manager and scrutineers or voting staff to witness)
- magnifying glasses at voting centres to assist voters with low vision seating at lowered voting screens to support voters who use a wheelchair or need to sit while voting
- mobile voting for patients and prisoners (as well as staff and visitors) at hospitals and correctional centres located in Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine.
- Similar institutions located in remote areas were serviced by remote voting teams including: Gove and Tennant Creek Hospitals, Mala'la Aged Care (Maningrida) and Thamarrurr Aged Care (Wadeye), and Barkly and Datjala (Nhulunbuy) work camps.

Personal assistance to vote is facilitated by:

- any elector who is unable to vote may be assisted by someone they nominate (like a family member), or by voting centre staff (which should be witnessed by scrutineers)
- this assistance can be in the form of completing declaration forms, explaining how to mark a ballot paper, marking the ballot paper at the voter's discretion, folding and placing the ballot paper into ballot box, postal or declaration envelope, or by acting as an interpreter
- local assistants employed to provide interpreter support at remote mobile voting centres.

Communications

For general elections the NTEC develops targeted stakeholder engagement kits bringing together multiple resources for sharing within different voting communities including a kit for people with a disability and the elderly. The kids include posters, flyers, videos, articles, social media posts and FAQs.

Western Australia Electoral Commission

The Western Australia Electoral Commission's (WAEC) Disability Access and Inclusion Plan reflects the ongoing commitment to ensuring people with disability can participate fully in the electoral process and they have the same opportunities as other people to access facilities, polling places and services. This plan requires the WAEC to implement and monitor appropriate initiatives and is supported by the work of the WAEC's Disability Reference Panel.

The WAEC actively engages in this space and works collaboratively with the AEC, other Electoral Commission's and advocacy groups on the Disability Advisory Committee, in the interests of providing the best possible service and experience for electors. The impact is most visibly seen during major electoral events.

State General Election 2025

The WAEC conducted the State General election (SGE) on Saturday 8th March 2025, for the close to 1.9 million electors on the Electoral roll and eligible to vote. The *Electoral Act 1907* is the legislation underpinning how the WAEC conducts all aspects of State General elections.

The WAEC follows the below strategies to address accessibility at voting centres.

Polling Places

- Most polling places utilised at State elections are public schools and colleges, where accessibility standards are routinely incorporated into building design and infrastructure and located on public transport links.
- A comprehensive inspection of every polling place prior to polling day is undertaken by each District Returning Officer. For consistency and quality purposes they complete and return an approved accessibility checklist. This is supported by tools such as pitch and slope locator devices, to ensure the accuracy of accessibility ratings. The availability of accessible parking bays is considered as part of the overall accessibility assessment. Accessibility considerations extend to the placement of voting tables, the use of tabletop voting screens, and table heights.
- Wheelchair accessible polling places are identified in pre-election advertising and on the WAEC website. For SGE 2025 this was approximately 58% of polling places.
- Polling places that have assistive tools are identified and promoted as 'Accessibility Equipment Available'. These locations had devices such as text-to-speech pens, infographic posters, hearing loops, and magnifying sheets
- Signage at polling places is reviewed prior to each election, is clear, and easy to understand, and consistent across polling locations.
- Polling place staff wore bright, labelled vests to increase visibility to electors who may need assistance. The commitment to service and ensuring electors with a disability are offered options in completing their vote safely is covered in induction and training materials.
- Ballot paper design was considered by the Disability reference panel; draft ballot papers were reviewed by Plain Language Australia and rated highest for readability

Other Voting Options (State General election 2025)

At state elections, there are options available beyond voting in person on polling day the Commission offers various options to electors with a disability including –

Postal voting

Postal voting is a convenient option for electors to complete their ballot papers from the their homes or other designated location and send them back in advance of election day. The WAEC sent out 214,743 postal voting packages at the SGE 2025.

Early voting at an in person location

A total of 61 early polling places were established on a short term basis and selected on the basis of having sufficient space, high visible and convenient location and appropriate facilities, parking and accessibility.

Mobile Polling

The WAEC identifies suitable locations for mobile polling in advance of polling day, and this in collaboration with service providers and other agencies and this information is included on the WAEC website. Mobile polling teams visited facilities such as hospitals, aged care homes and prisons on designated days and times to ensure people unable to visit polling places had access to vote in the State election. The mobile polling teams visited 247 locations during the early voting period. A total of 7,243 votes were cast through remote and mobile polling.

Telephone Assisted Voting

This was a service for eligible electors, which are defined under the Act (s 101) to cast their vote secretly with specifically trained phone operators This option was available for voters who are visually impaired, have some other physical impairment, or have reading difficulties. Eligible voters could apply and vote over the phone between 8am, 24 February and 4pm, 8 March. There were 1616 votes cast at SGE 2025.

Low Sensory Polling Place

A new initiative for the 2025 SFE was offering a 'low sensory' polling place in the early voting period to support neurodivergent and sensory-sensitive voters at a suitably identified and resourced location. The aim was to provide voters who experience sensory sensitivity with a quieter, less stimulating polling place experience, and help reduce barriers that might otherwise discourage or prevent someone from voting.

Visibility Polling Place

To service the needs of voters with low or impaired vision, the WAEC collaborated with VisAbility WA to use their Victoria Park office as a polling place. This location was opened on Saturday, 1 March, with VisAbility WA providing specialist staff to assist voters including space and movement specialists, occupational health therapists, and staff specialising in equipment for people with vision

WAEC Disability Reference Panel

The WAEC Disability Reference Panel supports and shapes the strategies the WAEC that may assist electors with a disability. This group is comprised of people with a disability and community and advocacy group advocates, working in consultation and collaboration with WAEC staff and providing valuable support and feedback on WAEC services, programs and facilities, with the aim to enhance voting accessibility for electors with a disability.

Current reference panel membership –

- Autism WA
- Blind Citizens WA
- Council of the Ageing
- Deafblind WA
- Developmental Disability WA
- National Disability Services
- VisAbility
- Youth Disability Advocacy Network
- Deafness Council WA

New South Wales Electoral Commission

The NSW Electoral Commission follows the below strategies to address accessibility at voting centres.

NSW policy context

Aligned with the NSW *Disability Inclusion Act 2014*, the NSW Electoral Commission publishes Disability Inclusion Action Plans (**DIAPs**). These are modelled on the NSW Disability Inclusion Action Plan Guidelines and the NSW Disability Inclusion Plan 2021-2025. The NSW Electoral Commission's DIAPs acknowledge the importance of access to elections for people with disability.

In its recent DIAPs, the NSW Electoral Commission's commitments to support voters living with disability are grouped in four key areas:

(i) increasing disability awareness and supporting positive attitudes and behaviours.
(ii) access to voting and elections
(iii) accessible information and systems
(iv) an election workforce that reflects the population of NSW.

A new DIAP is being developed ahead of the next State general election in March 2027 and the September 2028 Local government elections.

In developing this and other commitments, the NSW Electoral Commission consults with its Equal Access to Democracy Disability Reference Group (Reference Group), which comprises representatives from community groups and peak bodies.

Venue selection

Prior to each election, the NSW Electoral Commission undertakes a detailed review of each proposed voting venue, a two-part process of venue selection and vote projection. The workflow of this review process is in Figure A below.

The NSW Electoral Commission strives to procure venues that meet accessibility standards, referring to Australian Electoral Commission's inspection reports wherever possible. Alternatively, venues are asked to provide images, videos and answer questions regarding accessibility. Where feasible, NSW Electoral Commission staff will also inspect new venues.

Other factors that are relevant to venue selection include:

- **Venue familiarity** – to reduce elector confusion, the NSW Electoral Commission aims to maintain consistency in voting venues (i.e. use and reuse of same venues) across elections for all levels of government, regularly consulting with the Australian Electoral Commission.
- **Venue feedback** – Venue-related responses in each post-election survey, supplemented by feedback from electoral participants, venue hirers, and electors are used to assess venue suitability and identify possible venue changes. The AEC is also consulted regarding experiences with venues and possible alternatives when issues are identified.
- **Voting Centre patronage –** Where a venue has taken fewer than 100 votes for several elections it is considered for abolition. However, factors such as access to other voting options with similar functionalities (e.g. accessibility) in the locality are also considered.

- **Venue availability** – Other than under a MoU with the NSW Department of Education that provides an overriding entitlement to hire school facilities, the NSW Electoral Commission is limited to those venues that are available and open to being hired as voting venues.

Information about accessibility and assistance at venues

To enable people to assess the venue most suitable for them, the NSW Electoral Commission publishes on its website the accessibility level of every polling place, namely:

- fully wheelchair accessible
- partially accessible (assisted access)
- not accessible (no wheelchair access).

The definition of each accessibility classification is also published on the NSW Electoral Commission website and shared with members of the Reference Group. For example, to be fully accessible, a voting venue must also offer designated accessible parking and bathroom facilities that are suitable for wheelchair users. Historically, only a small proportion (23%) of NSW public schools used as voting centres have offered the full suite of such facilities on general election days. This is despite NSW public schools providing approximately 60% of voting venues on general election days. The NSW Electoral Commission and NSW Department of Education are presently working to improve the rate of access to wheelchair accessible facilities in public schools on election days, ahead of the State general election in March 2027. The most recent Memorandum of Understanding with the Department provides that each school (as a priority) must make available to the NSW Electoral Commission all facilities (e.g., parking, toilets) within the school that are suitable for disabled access.

At the most recent state-wide election, the September 2024 NSW Local government elections:

- 26% of voting centres were fully accessible
- 48% per cent of early voting centres were fully accessible
- 41% of returning officer offices were fully accessible

The NSW Electoral Commission provides the following accessibility assistance during state-wide elections in NSW:

- a wheelchair accessible voting screen, maxi pens and magnifiers are provided at every polling place/voting centre
- Auslan interpreter services are available for pre-poll/early voting day and election day, during the opening hours of polling places/voting centres
- the NSW Electoral Commission can be contacted via the National Relay Service during standard office hours of Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm
- telephone assisted voting is made available for voters who are blind or have low vision, as provided for by s 333M of the *Local Government (General) Regulation 2021* and cl 14(2) of Schedule 7 to the *Electoral Act 2017*
- Auslan election video series are developed with Deaf Connect, covering key information on the election, how and where to vote, postal voting, and how to fill out ballot papers.
- Following advice from Vision Australia, audio description opening messages are included on all five awareness videos published on the NSW Electoral Commission YouTube channel and community education resources web page.
- the NSW Electoral Commission partnered with the Council for Intellectual Disability to produce a video tailored for people with intellectual disability about enrolling and

voting at the Local government elections in 2024, and an evergreen homelessness and voting easy-read guide, Homelessness and voting.

- employment opportunities were shared with Reference Group members - 476 election day staff at the Local government elections in 2024 self-declared that they were living with disability, which was 2.46% of the total staff employed.

New accessibility initiative planned for March 2027 - low sensory voting trial

The June 2025 Report of the NSW Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters *Proposals to increase voter engagement, participation and confidence*, noted a "lack of provision for people who need low sensory environments during election events in NSW" (p 13). The NSW Electoral Commission has committed to delivering a low-sensory voting trial at the March 2027 State general election.
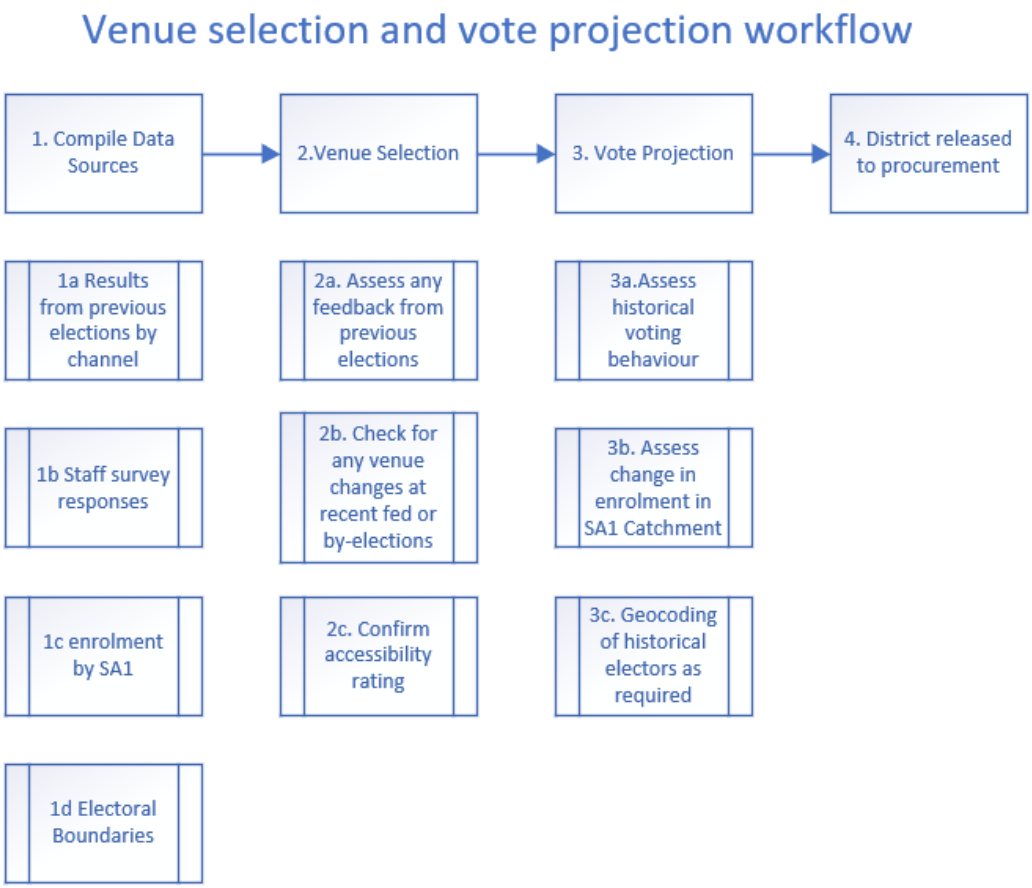
Figure A