



Electoral Matters  
Committee

# Voting centre accessibility

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**Inquiry**

September 2026

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# Terms of reference

## Inquiry into voting centre accessibility

On 3 December 2025, the Legislative Assembly agreed to the following motion:

That this House refers an inquiry into the accessibility of voting centres at Victorian State elections, with reference to:

- (a) compliance with disability access standards, including physical access and way finding;
- (b) signage, lighting and safety measures at polling places;
- (c) the provision of information and assistance to voters with accessibility needs;
- (d) examples of best practice from other jurisdictions; and
- (e) recommendations to improve accessibility for voters at future Victorian State elections

to the Electoral Matters Committee for consideration and report no later than 30 September 2026.

# Chair's foreword

Voting should be easy to access, private and dignified for every Victorian. Yet this Inquiry heard that many people with disability face barriers when they go to vote. In recent years, the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) has taken steps to reduce these barriers. This has included finding more wheelchair-accessible venues, engaging a virtual Auslan interpreting service and introducing low-sensory voting. These are positive changes. However, this Inquiry found that significant barriers remain for some voters and more needs to be done.

The evidence presented to this Inquiry indicated several areas where accessibility could be improved. These include how voting centres are selected, how they are operated, what equipment is supplied and how information about voting and voting centres is communicated.

The Committee has recommended multiple improvements in each of these areas. Some of these are simple, such as providing more seating and signage. Others will require more planning and investment, such as developing a system to provide more detailed information about the accessibility of venues and redesigning voting booths.

Staff training is also essential to create inclusive voting experiences. The VEC currently includes information about supporting people with disability in its training, but this should be reviewed and expanded. It also appears that the training is not always implemented in practice and a review of the VEC's training is needed. In addition, the Committee would like to see a trial of specially trained 'accessibility officers' at voting centres. These officers would provide advice to staff, ensure that accessible practices were being implemented and support voters.

Real progress will also require a new approach to how the VEC develops plans and measures performance. Accessibility should be built into systems from the beginning, not treated as a later add-on. The VEC should take a whole-of-journey approach that considers all aspects of the voting experience for people with disability, not just what happens in a voting centre. And the VEC must recognise that disability is diverse. Some disabilities are visible. Many are not. Some voters need physical access. Others need clear information, low-sensory environments, appropriate equipment or assistance from trained staff. For elections to be inclusive, the VEC must take into account all forms of disability and a wide range of needs.

This new approach must be supported by detailed plans, transparent reporting and thorough evaluations of both new and existing practices. These are essential for embedding accessibility into the VEC's practices, understanding what is working and identifying what needs to be improved. Making this information publicly available is important for holding the VEC to account and providing opportunities for the community to have input.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this Inquiry. Many people shared their experiences and ideas through written submissions and at public hearings. These were central to the Committee's understanding of the issues, and we appreciate the time and effort that went into them. The Committee is also grateful for the valuable information provided by people with disability during the inquiry into the 2022 election, which the Committee was able to draw on for this Inquiry.

I would like to thank the other members of the Committee for their work on this Inquiry and their support in producing this report. I also recognise the work of former committee member Dylan Wight, who chaired the Committee through most of this Inquiry.

Finally, I would like to thank the many staff of the Parliament who supported the Committee throughout this Inquiry, especially the Committee's secretariat.

This has been an important inquiry. I encourage the VEC to carefully consider the Committee's recommendations and work towards making voting accessible to every Victorian.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mathew', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**Mathew Hilakari MP**  
**Chair**

# Executive summary

In a healthy democracy, every eligible person should be able to vote. However, people with disability often face barriers when voting. These barriers can make voting difficult or impossible.

In recent years, the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) has introduced several changes to help people with disability vote. Some changes reduce barriers. Others provide alternative ways to vote. The Committee recognises and supports these efforts. Nonetheless, more needs to be done. Accessibility is currently limited and varies between locations. It is too reliant on individual staff members rather than system-wide design.

## A new approach

To better support people with disability, the VEC needs to take a new approach. This should involve:

- changing how the VEC thinks about accessibility
- improving planning with specific actions and targets
- properly evaluating new initiatives and ongoing practices
- publicly reporting on its efforts and their effectiveness.

This new approach should incorporate three new guiding principles:

- an **accessibility-first** approach—systems should be designed to be accessible by default wherever possible; accessibility should not be an add-on to systems that were designed without accessibility in mind
- a **whole-of-journey** approach—accessibility should be considered across the whole voting experience; this includes finding information about an election, travelling to a venue, waiting in line, voting and leaving a voting centre
- understanding **the diversity of disability**—planning must consider the many types of disability and lived experiences; this includes physical conditions, mental/behavioural disorders, psychosocial, cognitive, intellectual and sensory disability; it includes visible and hidden disability; it also means looking at barriers that people may face in addition to barriers related to their disability.

This new approach would help the VEC to prevent and reduce barriers. It would encourage the VEC to consider people's accessibility needs consistently in all parts of election delivery.

This new approach is based on the evidence provided to this Inquiry. Stakeholders identified several aspects of voting centres that should be improved for people with disability.

## Voting centre selection

The VEC's framework for choosing voting centres has limited accessibility criteria. The criteria largely focus on physical access and do not reflect the full range of barriers that voters face. The Committee recommends creating a broader framework. This should incorporate a wider understanding of disability and whole-of-journey considerations. In addition, the need for accessibility should be more thoroughly integrated into planning documents, including the *Election infrastructure location strategy*.

The VEC has also had trouble finding accessible venues for early voting. The Committee has therefore recommended requiring publicly funded venues (such as council community facilities) to be made available for early voting. The Government might consider building new accessible venues as part of other infrastructure projects as well.

## Operating voting centres

The way that voting centres operate can either create barriers or reduce them. This Inquiry identified ways to improve queue management, voting centre layouts and signage. Drop-off zones may make some voting centres more accessible. The VEC should revise its processes for providing voting outside voting centres (such as taking ballot papers to people's cars). The VEC should also make sure that accessibility tools are easy for voters to access.

In New Zealand, 'takeaway voting' allows a person to collect a ballot pack for another person from a voting centre, take it away and then return it. This may be beneficial in Victoria and should be investigated.

## Equipping voting centres

People with disability depend on having suitable equipment to vote. The Committee heard that voting compartments (also called 'voting booths') could be better designed for people with disability. Among other things, better designed compartments should include space for a support person. Some stakeholders called for a larger number of accessible compartments.

More seating should also be available before, during and after the voting process.

Communication aids can be essential for some people to vote accurately and independently. Personal hearing amplifiers are currently provided at early voting centres but should also be provided at election-day voting centres where possible.

Communication boards were available in previous elections but not in 2022. These should be re-introduced.

Some voters need specialised equipment to vote independently and secretly. The Committee recommends exploring assistive reading technology and a wider range of writing tools. The VEC should also make sure that enough equipment is available, that voting centre staff know about it, that voters know what is available and that voters can easily access it.

## Information for voters

The Committee found gaps in the information provided for people with disability. More information needs to be available in a range of formats. Accessible information is important both before voting and at voting centres.

More information is particularly needed about the features of voting centres. Current information is limited to broad categories of wheelchair access. This is not enough detail for many voters to know whether a location will meet their individual needs. The VEC should publish more detailed information about each venue's accessibility features and potential barriers. The VEC also needs to include information in more communication products about what accessibility tools and services are available.

In addition, there may be ways to help voters communicate their needs to staff. One option is a 'voting passport'. This is a form that voters complete to identify their needs. They can then show the form to voting centre staff to indicate what support they need clearly and in a dignified way. The VEC should also explore other systems for voters to register their needs before they vote if they wish.

## Staff training and support

Voting centre staff can have a major impact on a voter's experience. It is therefore essential to train staff to understand accessibility needs and how to support people. The VEC already includes some information about supporting people with disability in its training, but this could be expanded and improved. Accessibility training should also be provided to head office staff so that accessibility is considered in their decisions.

The Committee recognises that training voting centre staff will always be challenging. At a state election, the VEC employs more than 20,000 temporary staff, who must perform many tasks and follow many rules. To ensure that voters' accessibility needs are met, the Committee recommends a trial of specially trained 'accessibility officers' at selected voting centres. These people would support staff, promote accessible practices and assist voters.

## Conclusion

The VEC's stated vision is 'All Victorians actively participating in their democracy.' To achieve this, the barriers faced by people with disability must be understood and addressed. The VEC has made efforts to do this, but more can and should be done.

# Findings and recommendations

## 1 Introduction and guiding principles

**FINDING 1:** The lived experience of people with disability is critical for understanding the barriers they encounter and what should be done to provide more accessible services. **3**

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** That, in responding to and implementing the recommendations in this report, the VEC consult with its Electoral Access Advisory Group, Aboriginal Advisory Group and other stakeholders with lived experience. **3**

**FINDING 2:** A contemporary approach to accessibility builds accessibility into plans from the beginning, considers the whole journey of people using a service and takes account of the diversity of disability. **7**

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** That the VEC develop a new approach to accessibility, guided by three principles:

- an accessibility-first approach, which involves designing systems (including voting centres) to be accessible by default wherever possible, rather than trying to add accessibility into systems that have been designed without accessibility in mind
- a whole-of-journey approach, which takes into account the entire experience of the voter, from finding out that an election is happening through to returning home after casting their vote
- understanding the diversity of disability, which includes visible and invisible disabilities, physical conditions, mental/behavioural disorders, psychosocial, cognitive, intellectual and sensory disability, and recognising that voters with disability may also have other characteristics that result in barriers to electoral participation.

**8**

## 2 Background

**FINDING 3:** It is important to recognise the diversity of people with disability, including the range of physical, psychosocial, intellectual, cognitive and sensory impairments, and the consequent barriers to participation. In addition, some disability is hidden and it may not be obvious from looking at a person that they are facing barriers. **13**

**FINDING 4:** Victorian and Commonwealth legislation contains a number of obligations regarding people with disability that are relevant to the VEC's delivery of elections. These include ensuring that voting centres are accessible, that venues and processes do not discriminate and that reasonable adjustments are made for people with disability. Additional standards are set in the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* which it would be appropriate for the VEC to take into account.

22

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** That the VEC conduct an audit of its policies, decisions and processes in relation to the obligations in legislation and the standards set in international agreements with respect to voters with disability. As part of this, the VEC should identify the barriers to accessibility that need to be removed and develop a short-, mid- and long-term implementation framework of actions to address them. This should be supported by relevant data to justify accessibility-related decision-making, and recommendations for legislative change if required.

22

### 3 How the VEC considers the needs of voters with disability

**FINDING 5:** Mobile voting involves VEC staff travelling to certain locations to allow people to vote in person at that location on a specific day. This can be valuable for some people with disability who find it difficult to travel to voting centres. Some stakeholders have called for mobile voting in more locations at future elections, including inpatient psychiatric units and prisons.

26

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** That the VEC identify opportunities to provide mobile voting at more prisons and inpatient psychiatric units in future elections.

26

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** That the Parliament refer an inquiry into prisoners' access to voting and their access to the information needed for voting to the Electoral Matters Committee.

26

**FINDING 6:** While any elector can apply to vote by post at a specific election, only people meeting certain criteria can become general postal voters (who are automatically sent postal votes at every election). Both the Victorian and Commonwealth electoral acts allow people who are seriously ill or infirm to become general postal voters. However, the Commonwealth act also allows people who cannot travel from their home to a voting centre because of disability or because they care for a person with disability. The difference between eligibility at the state and Commonwealth levels may cause confusion.

27

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** That the Victorian Government introduce legislation amending the Victorian *Electoral Act* so that the eligibility criteria for general postal voting match the criteria in the *Commonwealth Electoral Act*.

28

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** That the Victorian Government work with the Commonwealth Government to expand the eligibility for general postal voting at both the state and Commonwealth levels to include:

- any people with disability who may face barriers at a voting centre (including people with psychosocial disability)
- people who care for a person with disability who may face barriers at a voting centre.

28

**FINDING 7:** Attending a voting centre can be the best option for some people with disability. This is because there are limitations to mobile, postal and telephone-assisted voting that result in them not meeting some people's needs. In addition, there are certain benefits to attending a voting centre, such as access to support from voting centre staff and participation in shared civic rituals.

32

**FINDING 8:** The VEC's planning is supported by a number of documents, including a *Disability education and engagement plan*, which set out how the VEC will support people with disability. The VEC also seeks input from an Electoral Access Advisory Group, which consists of representatives from multiple organisations that support people with disability.

39

## 4 Selecting venues for voting centres

**FINDING 9:** The VEC's strategy and strategic plan for election infrastructure do not recognise accessibility as an obligation. Accessibility is also framed narrowly as physical accessibility, referenced only in relation to early voting centres and not identified at all as a location need for election-day voting centres.

44

**FINDING 10:** As part of its assessment of venues for use as voting centres, the VEC relies on forms completed during site inspections. These forms include multiple criteria and are primarily completed with yes/no tick boxes, with some limited space for commentary. The accessibility criteria predominantly relate to wheelchair accessibility and leave out the needs of many people with disability. Some additional criteria are used to select low-sensory voting centres, but these criteria are not used to assess other venues.

49

**FINDING 11:** The VEC’s continued reliance on wheelchair accessibility as the primary measure of accessibility is a systemic limitation in the VEC’s approach to accessibility. It fails to reflect the full range of barriers experienced by voters and does not adequately support inclusive venue selection or accurately reflect the lived experience of people with disability. The VEC is considering ways to expand its assessment of accessibility.

49

**RECOMMENDATION 8:** That the VEC comprehensively review and redevelop its venue accessibility audit process. The new audit process should reflect the full range of barriers and access requirements and include both qualitative and quantitative measures. The process should be based on an accessibility-first approach to venue selection, assessing all potential voting centres against a comprehensive set of accessibility requirements. The VEC should aim to have the highest possible number of voting centres meet the broadest range of accessibility criteria.

49

**FINDING 12:** While the VEC applies several processes, tools and tasks when assessing venues, it does not have a formal, clearly articulated strategy for venue selection. The VEC’s reporting on the suitability of venue selection is restricted to the proportion of voting centres categorised as having independent or assisted wheelchair access.

51

**RECOMMENDATION 9:** That the VEC undertake a comprehensive review of its *Election infrastructure location strategy* and associated strategic plan and develop a new venue selection framework that recognises accessibility as an obligation, embeds the three guiding principles recommended by the Committee in Section 1.4 of this report and identifies accessibility as a need for both early voting centres and election-day voting centres. Key elements of the framework should include:

- the relevant legislative obligations and policy commitments
- clear and specific accessibility objectives that prioritise equal participation for all voters including acknowledging, identifying and addressing the barriers people with disability may encounter
- criteria for venue selection grounded in universal design principles that include more than just access for people with mobility impairments
- a uniform and justifiable process for venue selection, with criteria that enable the selection of venues that may not meet all aspects of universal accessibility, but are appropriate as a way to address a wider range of accessibility barriers and other operational considerations
- a decision-making process that requires evidence that any limitations to accessibility could not reasonably be avoided
- a process to continuously review and refine processes based on performance, feedback and accessibility outcomes.

51

**RECOMMENDATION 10:** That, following each election, the VEC report against a comprehensive set of performance measures that assess the overall suitability of early voting centres and election-day voting centres for a range of users.

51

**FINDING 13:** The VEC has previously struggled to find suitable accessible venues to use as early voting centres. Despite this, the VEC plans to increase the number of early voting centres at the 2026 election and to increase the proportion of early voting centres classified as ‘independent wheelchair access’.

52

**FINDING 14:** The VEC has recommended legislative change to require publicly funded venues to be made available for use as early voting centres. This would increase the number of accessible venues which could be considered. Research-based evidence identifying specific venues that would be suitable but are currently not available to the VEC would strengthen the VEC’s recommendation.

53

**RECOMMENDATION 11:** That the VEC undertake research to identify specific publicly funded venues that may be suitable for use as early voting centres but are not currently available. In determining the venues, the VEC should take into account the full breadth of accessibility and not just wheelchair access. The VEC should provide a list of these venues to the Government and this Committee, in support of the previously recommended legislative change, together with the reasons these venues cannot currently be accessed.

53

**FINDING 15:** The Government is currently planning infrastructure projects across the state which are required to follow universal design principles. Where practicable, accessible venues could be included within these projects which could be used as voting centres and community facilities.

54

**RECOMMENDATION 12:** That the Government develop and fund a strategic program to incorporate purpose-built, universally accessible spaces suitable for use as voting centres into government infrastructure projects where practicable, affordable and where there are no similar facilities in the vicinity. These facilities could be used as early voting centres and election-day voting centres during election periods and for broader community purposes at other times.

54

**FINDING 16:** The VEC will establish a low-sensory voting centre in each district at the 2026 election. These voting centres will benefit people with sensory sensitivities by providing a less overwhelming environment. However, the low-sensory voting centres will only be open on the day before early voting commences. As a result, people wanting low-sensory voting will be restricted in terms of when they can vote and would need to vote before all policies are available from parties and candidates.

57

**RECOMMENDATION 13:** That the VEC expand its trial of low-sensory voting at the 2026 election to include at least three different sessions across the voting period.

57

**FINDING 17:** Low-sensory voting was developed by the VEC to support neurodivergent people. However, the Committee was informed that it would benefit a broader range of people who have sensory sensitivities or would benefit from a quieter, calmer environment.

59

**RECOMMENDATION 14:** That the VEC explicitly expand low-sensory voting to a broader range of voters who may benefit, including people with psychosocial, cognitive and neurodegenerative conditions, older voters and voters with support people. The VEC should clearly advertise the service as open to any person who would benefit from a low-sensory environment and target communications to a wider range of groups. This should include renaming it ‘low-sensory and inclusive voting’.

59

**RECOMMENDATION 15:** That the VEC provide staff at low-sensory and inclusive voting centres with additional training in how to support voters with dementia, vision impairment, psychosocial disability and other relevant disabilities, as well as neurodivergence.

59

**FINDING 18:** The VEC does not currently assess all potential voting centre venues for barriers to people with sensory sensitivity. As a result, the VEC may be missing opportunities to reduce barriers when selecting voting centres. This approach may also be unnecessarily restricting some voters to using designated low-sensory voting centres on a specific day, rather than giving them more options.

60

**RECOMMENDATION 16:** That, as part of implementing an accessibility-first approach, the VEC assess all potential early and election-day voting centre venues against a comprehensive, multi-dimensional universal accessibility audit, including all low-sensory criteria. Information about which venues meet low-sensory criteria should be published, giving voters options to determine which voting centre will be most appropriate for them.

61

**RECOMMENDATION 17:** That the VEC look for ways to incorporate low-sensory features more generally into voting centres, including by looking at the approaches that other electoral bodies have undertaken, considering ideas presented as part of this Inquiry and considering input from the VEC’s stakeholders.

61

**FINDING 19:** Public transport proximity, frequency and accessibility (including paths between the nearest stops and the voting centre) do not always meet the needs of voters, campaigners and scrutineers.

62

**RECOMMENDATION 18:** That the VEC include proximity to high-frequency public transport, proximity to accessible public transport stops and unobstructed paths from public transport stops to a venue into its voting centre venue assessment criteria.

62

**RECOMMENDATION 19:** That the VEC, the Government and public transport service providers work together to ensure sufficient public transport services are available during the election period to meet the needs of voters, election staff, campaigners and scrutineers. This could include extra services and free public transport on voting days.

62

## 5 Operating voting centres

**FINDING 20:** A clear, safe approach to a voting centre is essential. This includes all paths of travel from public transport stops, parking and drop-off points to the entry/exit of the voting centre. Conditions associated with the approach, entry and exit of voting centres can compromise accessibility and pose barriers to participation.

66

**RECOMMENDATION 20:** That the VEC provide drop-off zones at voting centres wherever possible to assist voters who do not have accessible parking permits and for when allocated accessible car spaces are insufficient. Drop-off zones should be safe, have accessible paths to the entrance of voting centres and have sheltered seating where possible.

66

**FINDING 21:** The activity of candidates and campaigners at the entrance to voting centres can deter and prevent people from participating in elections, especially people with sensory sensitivities, psychosocial conditions, neurodegenerative conditions or cognitive impairments.

68

**FINDING 22:** Legislation currently provides the VEC with limited powers to exclude or control campaigners at voting centres. The Committee has previously recommended legislative change to allow the VEC to apply an extended campaigning exclusion zone at specified voting centres and for specified times to facilitate low-sensory voting.

68

**FINDING 23:** Waiting for long periods in queues can make voting centres inaccessible for some people with disability. The VEC currently manages this through designating people as queue controllers at busy voting centres, whom people can ask for assistance, training these people to look for voters who might have difficulty standing and providing signage indicating that people can ask for help.

73

**RECOMMENDATION 21:** That the VEC work with relevant stakeholders to formally review and evaluate its queue management approach for people with disability. This should include:

- ensuring that training recognises that people with hidden disability may have difficulty standing in queues
- training staff not to rely solely on spoken instructions for people in queues
- developing protocols for establishing fast-track queue lanes
- identifying alternative options for supporting people, including publishing real-time data about queue lengths at each voting centre
- ensuring that seats are available at voting centres for people who have difficulty standing in queues or who require rest before moving to the next stage of voting.

73

**FINDING 24:** The *Electoral Act* allows the VEC to bring ballot papers to people outside voting centres (for example, in their cars) where they are physically incapable of entering the voting centre. However, the VEC has chosen not to communicate this option to voters because access to the service depends heavily on local conditions and the discretion of individual voting centre managers. In other states, in-car voting is advertised and facilitated by electoral commissions.

76

**RECOMMENDATION 22:** That the VEC revise its approach to voting outside voting centres, including:

- informing voters about the option
- providing a way for voters to request the service without leaving their car, such as advertising a phone number in car parking areas or enabling voters to pre-book the service
- communicating which voting centres are able to offer the service and which ones are not.

76

**RECOMMENDATION 23:** That the Government introduce an amendment to the *Electoral Act* extending the eligibility for voting outside voting centres to any person with disability who may face barriers to entering a voting centre.

76

**FINDING 25:** Takeaway voting is offered in New Zealand, in which a voter or another person on their behalf can provide a form at a voting centre during the voting period and receive a ballot pack, which is taken away and returned to the voting centre later. This is similar to postal voting, but provides a faster turnaround and provides an option for people who missed the deadline for postal voting.

77

**RECOMMENDATION 24:** That the VEC review the benefits and practicability of providing takeaway voting in Victoria, as is provided in New Zealand. Following this review, the VEC should make any appropriate recommendations to the Parliament, including for legislative change if required.

77

**FINDING 26:** Voting centre managers are currently instructed to place voting compartments along one or two walls of a voting centre. They are instructed to set up low-level or table-top compartments in line with the other compartments, with two chairs, plus a magnifier and large pencil attached to table-top compartments. This may not allow sufficient space for voters using mobility aids, being guided or being accompanied by a support person. It also may not provide privacy for voters who need to talk with a support person. It is also important that accessibility tools are not restricted to table-top compartments.

80

**RECOMMENDATION 25:** That the VEC work with relevant stakeholders to formally review and evaluate its voting compartment protocols. This should include identifying layouts that:

- are adequate for people using mobility aids, people who are guided by a dog or human and people accompanied by a support person
- meet the privacy needs of people who need to talk with support people while voting.

80

**RECOMMENDATION 26:** That the VEC ensure that accessibility tools such as magnifiers and large-grip pencils are available at all issuing tables and/or at each voting compartment and are not restricted to table-top voting compartments. This could include providing large-grip pencils as the default pencil in all booths at all voting centres.

80

**FINDING 27:** Multiple stakeholders have raised concerns about a lack of wayfinding signage outside voting centres. In addition, key information is frequently only provided inside the voting centre, a practice that does not support preparedness and informed decision-making. In some cases, information appears to only be provided on one sign, which means that it may not be seen when it is needed.

83

**RECOMMENDATION 27:** That the VEC work with relevant stakeholders to formally review and evaluate what signage is provided to voting centres and the directions for how it should be placed. This should include:

- the number of each type of sign to be provided to voting centres
- the instructions for voting centre managers about where to locate signs
- what signs should be placed inside the voting centre and what should be placed outside the voting centre, taking a whole-of-journey approach
- what signs are necessary to provide clear messaging for people with disability about what support and accessibility tools are available
- the formatting of signs (including font, font size and colours) to ensure that they are as accessible as possible.

83

**FINDING 28:** Voting centre staff have to make a range of decisions about how a voting centre operates. These decisions affect how accessible the voting centre is for people with disability. In some cases, adjustments for people with disability are delivered on a discretionary, case-by-case basis. Barriers to accessibility can arise from reliance on ad hoc decisions rather than consistent procedures and guidelines.

84

**RECOMMENDATION 28:** That the VEC provide clear and consistent operational guidance across all training modules, manuals and guides regarding the importance of accessibility and how to operate voting centres in the most accessible way. Reliance on discretionary decision-making should be minimised. Where discretionary decision-making is needed, it should be supported by clear, consistent guidelines based on an understanding that providing services in an accessible way is a legal obligation.

84

## 6 Equipping voting centres

**FINDING 29:** In addition to its standard voting compartments, the VEC provides low-level voting compartments and table-top voting screens to enable voters to use a chair or wheelchair when filling out ballot papers. The Committee was told that some voters with disability had to wait to use these compartments as there was sometimes only one in a voting centre and they were not labelled to prioritise their use by people with disability. Stakeholders also raised concerns about voting compartments not being wide enough to include a support person.

89

**RECOMMENDATION 29:** That the VEC review its voting compartment designs to ensure that they align with universal design principles, benefit the widest possible range of voters and reduce reliance on voters self-identifying or requesting assistance. Among other matters, the VEC should ensure that voting compartments are accessible by people using a range of mobility devices, have sufficient space for a support person and are visually distinguishable.

90

**RECOMMENDATION 30:** That the VEC review the number of low-level voting compartments and table-top voting screens provided to voting centres to ensure that they are provided in sufficient numbers to reduce waiting times for people with disability.

90

**FINDING 30:** Although VEC manuals note the importance of seating for some voters, submitters have reported that seating has not been available in some voting centres. Guidance on the provision of seating within voting centres relies heavily on discretionary judgement by voting centre managers and staff and the VEC generally only provides one or two chairs to a voting centre for voters to use.

91

**RECOMMENDATION 31:** That the VEC review its processes to ensure sufficient seating is consistently available at all voting centres, including through the introduction of minimum standards for the provision of chairs. Processes and training should ensure that seating is available by default in queues, within some voting compartments and in clearly marked rest areas accessible to voters before and after voting.

92

**FINDING 31:** Accessibility tools are supplied to voting centres in limited numbers. While they are technically available, they are not automatically offered, visibly available or adequately signposted. They may be attached to one or more compartments or provided on request, rather than as standard-issue equipment at every compartment, visibly available at issuing tables or placed at convenient locations.

93

**RECOMMENDATION 32:** That the VEC review the number of accessibility tools that are supplied to each voting centre to ensure that they are supplied in sufficient quantities.

93

**RECOMMENDATION 33:** That the VEC review its processes for supplying accessibility tools to voters, including ensuring that staff know what tools are available, that available tools are advertised in voting centres so that people know to ask for them or look for them and that tools are available for voters to help themselves where practical. The VEC should also supply low-cost, easily used accessibility tools in every voting compartment.

94

**FINDING 32:** Assistive listening systems make it easier for people with hearing loss to hear. They are currently only offered by the VEC at early voting centres and low-sensory voting centres.

94

**RECOMMENDATION 34:** That the VEC make assistive listening systems available in as many voting centres as practicable, advertising those places that have these systems available. This may be as simple as keeping them in use at early voting centres when they are subsequently used as election-day voting centres, or redistributing equipment to nearby election-day voting centres.

94

**FINDING 33:** The VEC offered an Auslan interpreting service at the 2022 state election, though the usage was lower than the VEC expected. The VEC attributes this primarily to insufficient promotion and has committed to considering improved promotion in future elections. However, the VEC does not appear to have factored improved promotion into its planning. It is also not clear that a lack of promotion is the reason for the low usage.

97

**FINDING 34:** Although other commissions supply text-to-speech pens at selected voting centres, the VEC has not offered this technology. Instead, voters who have difficulty reading voting instructions and ballot papers must rely on magnifying sheets, assistance from another person or supplying their own devices.

97

**RECOMMENDATION 35:** That the VEC investigate and trial the introduction of assistive reading technology, including text-to-speech pens, accompanied by measures to avoid exposing votes through audio, as part of in-person voting.

97

**FINDING 35:** Pencils can be difficult for some voters to use and pencil writing can be difficult for some voters to read. This can increase the likelihood of errors or force people to seek assistance to complete their ballot papers. If voters want to use a pen or marker, they are expected to bring their own.

98

**RECOMMENDATION 36:** That the VEC supply a range of marking options (including pens and ergonomically adapted writing tools) at voting centres for voters who face difficulties when using pencils.

98

**FINDING 36:** The VEC developed the Voters Voice app for the 2018 election. The app included an electronic communication board that voters could download to their device and use at any voting centre. This facilitated people with communication difficulties communicating with voting centre staff by pressing buttons to select key phrases and responses and by allowing users to type information into the app. The app was developed in response to feedback from the VEC's Electoral Access Advisory Group and co-designed with external disability groups. Despite generally positive feedback from users, the VEC discontinued the Voters Voice app. Some features of the app are available on the VEC's website. However, the communication board is not.

102

**FINDING 37:** Communication boards, when co-designed, tested and maintained, are potentially a low-cost and low-risk way of supporting a wide range of communication needs. They are used in a variety of other sectors. They are consistent with universal design principles, as they do not require voters to self-identify or explain their disability and they reduce reliance on voters supplying their own supports.

103

**RECOMMENDATION 37:** That the VEC work with relevant stakeholders to develop communication boards for use in voting centres. Paper-based communication boards should be supplied to all voting centres, including early voting and election-day locations, in sufficient quantities to have them available at each point of contact between staff and voters.

103

**FINDING 38:** Electronic voting on kiosks in voting centres would potentially provide a way for some people with disability to vote independently, privately and on an equal basis with others. However, trials between 2006 and 2014 found that few people used the service and it was not offered by the VEC at the 2018 and 2022 elections. Electronic voting also involves a number of integrity, cost and technical issues that are beyond the scope of this Inquiry.

105

**RECOMMENDATION 38:** That the VEC and Government regularly review developments in electronic voting to assess whether it should be offered to people with disability. These reviews should examine technical developments, the potential benefits to people with disability, integrity concerns and costs.

105

## 7

## Communication about voting and voting centres

**FINDING 39:** Evidence indicates that some people with disability do not have access to information about their voting options, about how to vote and about their candidates. This makes it difficult for them to choose the method of voting best suited to them and to make informed and accurate votes.

109

**FINDING 40:** Stakeholders and the Committee's analysis identified a number of limitations in the information materials produced by the VEC for people with disability. To reduce or remove barriers for people with disability, the VEC should produce information in a variety of formats, including plain English, Easy English, large print, video, Auslan, braille, audio and digital products that are compatible with screen readers.

111

**RECOMMENDATION 39:** That the VEC review all of its information products for people with disability to ensure that they are available in an appropriate range of accessible formats and that they are complete, accurate and effectively support full participation. Going forward, the VEC should continually monitor the usage of its products to identify where changes are needed.

111

**FINDING 41:** People with disability may also face barriers to electoral participation related to other factors, such as age, cultural background and gender. Information products should be designed with these factors in mind, as well as needs relating to disability.

111

**RECOMMENDATION 40:** That, in developing information products and programs for people with disability, the VEC consult not only with disability advocacy groups but also with other groups (such as cultural and age-related groups) so that the needs of people with disability who also face other barriers to electoral participation can be taken into account.

111

**FINDING 42:** The VEC has stated that it will post a printed *EasyVote guide* to every household in Victoria with electors at the 2026 election. This guide will include information about the election, including different ways of voting and wheelchair accessibility ratings for voting centres. The Committee welcomes the VEC's return to mailing this guide. Adding some additional information about voting centres would help electors better understand their options.

113

**RECOMMENDATION 41:** That *EasyVote guides* at future elections include more details about accessibility at voting centres, including accessibility ratings for every voting centre in the district that cover more than just wheelchair access, details of the accessibility tools available at every voting centre and the fact that virtual Auslan interpreting is available.

113

**FINDING 43:** To inform voters about the accessibility of voting centres, the VEC currently groups all voting centres into one of three categories—'independent wheelchair access', 'assisted wheelchair access' or 'limited or no wheelchair access'. This categorisation is currently the only information published about the features of each voting centre.

119

**RECOMMENDATION 42:** That the VEC create a searchable online database of voting centres which allows users to select the accessibility criteria that matter to them and then returns a list of voting centres that meet those criteria. The database should be accessible via the VEC's website. The VEC should also make the information available through an app.

120

**RECOMMENDATION 43:** That the VEC record data about which accessibility criteria are selected by people using the searchable online database to help understand what criteria are most frequently required by voters.

120

**RECOMMENDATION 44:** That the VEC work with its Electoral Access Advisory Group to develop a new system for displaying information about the accessibility of voting centres in static lists on webpages, in *EasyVote guides* and in other printed material. This new system should provide more details than the current three categories of wheelchair access.

120

**FINDING 44:** Some stakeholders have indicated that more could be done to let voters know about support that is available from VEC staff at voting centres and about the accessibility tools provided. The Committee's analysis showed that what information is provided about assistance from staff, accessibility tools and virtual Auslan interpreting varies between products and is not always provided together in one place. At times, inaccurate information about options for people with disability has also been published on the VEC's website.

122

**RECOMMENDATION 45:** That the VEC examine its communication products to look for more opportunities to let people know about the availability of assistance from staff at voting centres, accessibility tools at voting centres and virtual Auslan interpreting. These should all be mentioned in the *EasyVote guide* and on the webpage that lists different voting options.

122

**RECOMMENDATION 46:** That the VEC review its processes for checking website content to prevent inaccurate information about accessibility options (and other matters) from appearing on its website in the future.

122

**FINDING 45:** Many voters would benefit from additional information about what happens at a voting centre. The VEC intends to produce a small number of access keys or social scripts for the 2026 election. It will be important to evaluate these documents and their effectiveness to understand whether this approach should be modified in the future.

124

**FINDING 46:** Information about where voting centres are and what features they have is essential for some people with disability to decide how to vote. As some people with disability may need time to organise support, transport or alternative arrangements, this information should be published as early as possible. **125**

**RECOMMENDATION 47:** That the VEC publish information about the locations of voting centres and details about their accessibility features as early as possible, so that people have time to organise support or alternative arrangements if needed. **125**

**FINDING 47:** Some voters are not getting the information they need about candidates and parties in accessible formats. This limits their ability to make informed decisions when voting. The Committee has previously recommended further work to identify the best way to make this information readily available. **127**

**FINDING 48:** Some voters would benefit from having information available in voting centres about how to vote in Easy English, Easy Read or a similar format. **129**

**RECOMMENDATION 48:** That the VEC make information about how to fill out ballot papers in Easy English, Easy Read or a similar format available to voters in voting centres. This may be with posters, information in voting compartments or brochures handed out by the staff giving people ballot papers. Printed versions of these resources should be available, not just online versions. **129**

**FINDING 49:** Some submitters suggested that being able to register their support needs online before voting would assist with communicating their needs to voting centre staff. It could also provide more privacy for voters who do not wish to explain their needs out loud. **129**

**RECOMMENDATION 49:** That the VEC explore whether it would be practical and beneficial to establish a system where voters with disability could register their needs online before voting, so that voting centre staff can be notified of the voters' needs when they get to a voting centre. **130**

**FINDING 50:** In the United Kingdom, 'voting passports' have been developed. These are documents that can be downloaded and printed, which voters can fill out to indicate any support they need and who they would like to provide the support. They typically include lists of available support to help voters know what is possible, along with a form for voters to indicate what supports they need. Some also include details about voters' rights. The filled-out passports can be shown to staff to communicate a voter's needs in the voting centre. **132**

**FINDING 51:** Voting passports may be helpful to voters with disability by illustrating the kinds of support they can ask for, giving them time to think about what help they want, making it easier for them to communicate their needs to voting centre staff and providing a more private way to communicate their needs.

132

**RECOMMENDATION 50:** That the VEC develop ‘voting passports’ using the examples developed in the United Kingdom as a model. They should include fields for the voter to add their name, address and any support that they need at a voting centre. They should also include lists of the accessibility tools and support available at voting centres that voters can select, so that there is more awareness of what is available and to facilitate it being provided. The voting passports should be published on the Commission’s website. Voters should be able to fill them in online or print them and fill them in by hand. Voters should then be able to save digital versions to a portable device or print them and bring printed or digital copies to show staff at voting centres. A supply of printed copies should also be kept in every voting centre for voters who may need them. Staff should be trained in how to respond when presented with a voting passport.

133

## 8 Staff training and the voter experience

**FINDING 52:** Voters with disability reported mixed experiences of staff at voting centres. Some had positive experiences of staff being helpful, patient and respectful, making voting centres more accessible. Others had negative experiences, including communication not being adapted to the voters’ needs, not knowing about the accessibility tools in the voting centres and questioning them having a support person. The negative experiences suggest problems with the VEC’s training materials or processes.

139

**FINDING 53:** While the VEC’s training materials include some information on supporting people with disability, much of this is presented through a segmented approach. Some accessibility guidance is organised around specific groups (First Nations people, people with disabilities and multicultural communities), with barriers and supports listed for each group. This risks reinforcing assumptions, rather than addressing common structural barriers that affect voters across multiple or overlapping identities, voters who do not fit into one of these groups or voters who may not appear to staff like they fit into one of these groups.

143

**RECOMMENDATION 51:** That the VEC revise its training materials to adopt a barrier-based framework, embedding universal accessibility principles across all training content. Guidance should focus on identifying and removing systemic barriers, with tools and services presented as universally applicable rather than linked to specific groups. This could be supplemented by intersectional and community-specific modules where appropriate.

143

**RECOMMENDATION 52:** That the VEC work with its Electoral Access Advisory Group and other stakeholders to review its training materials to identify any additional barriers that people with disability might face in voting centres and supports that should be discussed. The review should also identify other helpful information, such as the nature of hidden disability, the purpose of accessibility tools and the virtual Auslan interpreting service. The VEC should also ensure that voting centre managers are instructed to pass on all relevant information to staff about supports for people with disability, including the location of accessibility tools.

143

**FINDING 54:** There is a gap between how the VEC trains and expects voting centre staff to act and how some staff perform their roles in practice. This may be related to not all staff completing the required training and to the volume of guidance that staff are expected to know. Further investigation would be required to understand whether these and/or other factors are the main reasons.

146

**RECOMMENDATION 53:** That, as part of evaluating the 2026 election, the VEC undertake research to understand why guidance in training is not always followed in practice and what can be done to reduce this at future elections.

146

**FINDING 55:** Submitters suggested having designated ‘accessibility officers’ in voting centres. These staff members could have responsibility for ensuring services are being delivered in an accessible way and could assist people with disability. This could help to ensure that the VEC’s guidance is being followed and that people with disability get the support they need.

147

**RECOMMENDATION 54:** That the VEC conduct a pilot program involving specially trained and clearly identifiable ‘accessibility officers’ present at multiple selected voting centres across various locations. These people would be points of contact for staff and would have responsibility for ensuring that accessible practices were being implemented. They could also be approached by voters or their support people seeking assistance or advice. The appointment of accessibility officers should not replace the need for all voting centre staff to be trained in supporting people with disability. As part of the pilot program, the VEC should establish mechanisms to evaluate whether the accessibility officers provided benefits to voters and staff, so that the VEC can assess whether the program should be rolled out on a larger scale or in each voting centre in future elections.

147

**FINDING 56:** Decisions made at head office determine how services are delivered in voting centres and the resources available to voting centre staff. It is important that these decisions are informed by a good understanding of accessibility and inclusivity.

148

**RECOMMENDATION 55:** That the VEC provide role-specific training for all staff, including head office staff, on accessibility, including the guiding principles set out by the Committee in Section 1.4 of this report.

148

## 9 Measuring and reporting on accessibility and inclusivity

**FINDING 57:** The VEC's *Monitoring and evaluation plan for the 2025–2027 VEC education and engagement plans* contains 34 evaluation questions with associated performance measures. These are used to assess the effectiveness of the VEC's efforts to improve inclusivity in elections, including the *Disability education and engagement plan* and the Electoral Access Advisory Group. The measures look at a variety of aspects, including processes, effectiveness and outcomes. However, some measures are limited in their breadth or not quantified. There are also additional measures which should be added to more fully evaluate the VEC's efforts.

151

**FINDING 58:** It is important for both new initiatives and ongoing practices to be monitored and reported on. Monitoring should be sufficiently detailed to enable proper evaluation, identifying whether or not the VEC is meeting the needs of people with disability and, if not, what should be done differently in future elections.

156

**FINDING 59:** The *Disability education and engagement plan* sets out goals, objectives and actions for the VEC with respect to people with disability. However, many of its actions are defined at a high level, leading to a lack of clarity about what the VEC intends to do. In addition, measures and targets are not included in the plan, but in a separate document which is not published. There is also scope for additional measures and additional transparency about the VEC's progress.

159

**RECOMMENDATION 56:** That the VEC change the way that it produces plans like the *Disability education and engagement plan*, with future plans:

- being more specific about what actions are planned
- including performance measures and targets in the plan from the beginning
- using all the relevant data that it collects to measure and report on activity
- including all commitments related to the topic.

159

**RECOMMENDATION 57:** That the VEC report comprehensively on plans such as the *Disability education and engagement plan*, including:

- reporting on all performance measures as part of progress reports
- comparing results to targets when reporting and explaining discrepancies
- publishing final evaluation reports on the VEC's website at the end of a plan's timeframe.

159

**FINDING 60:** A dedicated accessibility performance report after each election would provide an opportunity for the VEC to report on the voting experience for people with disability from a whole-of-journey perspective and identify areas for future improvement.

161

**RECOMMENDATION 58:** That the VEC include a dedicated accessibility performance report in each report to Parliament on an election. The accessibility performance report should include:

- an analysis of voting for people with disability from a whole-of-journey perspective
- reporting on efforts to remove a variety of barriers, including physical, sensory and communication-based (not just barriers to wheelchair use)
- reporting on complaints related to accessibility for people with disability and any actions taken in response
- reporting on the suitability of voting centres and whether sufficient information was provided to voters
- evaluations of any new initiatives
- evaluations of ongoing practices
- details of what plans and initiatives were shaped by input from the Electoral Access Advisory Group and how the group contributed
- analyses from an intersectional approach to evaluate services for people with disability who also face other barriers (such as different cultural backgrounds, age, living in remote areas, limited English language skills, gender and imprisonment).

162

**FINDING 61:** After each election, the VEC commissions an independent evaluation of its election services through a survey of voters and candidates. This survey asks a number of questions about services for people with disability. Additional questions could be asked to understand more about how satisfied people with disability are with the VEC's new initiatives and ongoing practices.

163

**RECOMMENDATION 59:** That the VEC expand the number of questions asked in the post-election survey to evaluate new initiatives for people with disability and to understand the level of satisfaction of people with disability with ongoing practices. Particular focus should be given to the topics noted in Section 9.3 of this report.

163

**FINDING 62:** Although the 2022 post-election evaluation commissioned by the VEC included a question about whether respondents had any physical disability, the answers to the survey questions for this group were not separately analysed or reported. Respondents were not asked about mental or cognitive disability.

164

**RECOMMENDATION 60:** That the VEC have questions added to the post-election survey about respondents' disabilities and broaden the definition of disability to include mental, cognitive, psychosocial and neurodevelopmental disability (such as disability associated with anxiety disorders, neurodivergence or dementia) as well as physical disability.

164

**RECOMMENDATION 61:** That the VEC analyse the data from its post-election surveys to better understand the experience of people with disability and their satisfaction with election services. Additional analyses should be conducted to understand intersectional issues where the results are statistically meaningful.

164



# Chapter 1

## Introduction and guiding principles

### 1.1 Voting centre accessibility

In December 2025, the Victorian Parliament initiated this Inquiry into voting centre accessibility. The Electoral Matters Committee was asked to conduct the Inquiry and report back to the Parliament.

People with disability encounter multiple barriers to participation in electoral processes. To ensure that our democracy is healthy, it must be inclusive. It is important to understand what these barriers are, to eliminate them where possible and to mitigate them where they cannot be eliminated. As one submitter told the Committee:

Improving physical access is not just about ticking a box; it is a commitment to ensuring that people with disabilities feel welcomed, respected, and fully included in their communities. Strengthening accessibility at voting centres helps uphold the values we pride ourselves on as Australians and ensures that every eligible voter has a fair and equal opportunity to take part in shaping our shared future as one community.<sup>1</sup>

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) recognises the importance of accessibility at voting centres. The VEC explained:

We are committed to ensuring that all Victorians can participate fully in their electoral system. This commitment is driven by the principles of accessibility, equity, and inclusion, and reflects our role in delivering elections that are fair, transparent, and representative.

Accessible voting centres are a critical point of contact between voters and the electoral system. While disability access and inclusion also encompass education, information, and engagement, the accessibility of voting venues is central to a voter's ability to vote independently and with confidence.<sup>2</sup>

In conducting this Inquiry, the Committee heard from people with disability and organisations representing people with disability. They shared their experiences with voting and their ideas about how things could be improved. Based on this, the Committee believes that more could be done to reduce barriers to participation in elections.

The Committee would like to see changes to how voting centres are selected, how they are run and what furniture and equipment are supplied. Improvements should also

<sup>1</sup> Matilda Osborne, *Submission 1*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 4.

be made to the VEC's communications. Voters with disability need clear information about their voting options, what to expect at voting centres and how to complete their ballot papers. Underpinning all of this is a need for staff to be trained to understand the needs of people with disability and how to support them.

Specific recommendations are detailed throughout this report.

Overall, the Committee considers that the VEC needs to take a new approach to accessibility to thoroughly integrate it into planning and service delivery. Three guiding principles to support that new approach are set out in Section 1.4 of this chapter.

## 1.2 The Inquiry process

In conducting this Inquiry, the Committee invited stakeholders to contribute their views and share their experiences. The Committee wrote to multiple organisations associated with people with disability, inviting the organisations to make written submissions and to invite their members to make submissions. The Committee also posted information on its webpage and through the Parliament's social media. Information was provided in a variety of formats, including written material, videos and Auslan.

The Committee:

- received written submissions from 52 organisations and individuals
- conducted public hearings to speak with 14 groups and organisations
- requested and analysed a variety of documents from the VEC.

The Committee is grateful to everybody who contributed their experiences and expertise to this Inquiry. The information supplied through submissions and public hearings has been critical for the Committee to understand the issues and identify potential improvements. The Committee sincerely thanks everybody who participated.

Appendix A of this report provides more details about the Inquiry process and who contributed.

## 1.3 Lived experience is important for understanding

Hearing from people with lived experience was essential for this Inquiry. As Morgan O'Sullivan from the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service told the Committee:

Listening to people with lived experience is how we make sure that the systems are designed to meet the needs of those who are impacted, resulting in better outcomes for everyone.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Morgan O'Sullivan, Principal Policy Lead, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 43.

Numerous people with lived experience provided written submissions to the Committee directly. Several organisations conducted surveys or consulted with their members and shared the feedback with the Committee. Some people with disability attended public hearings to share their experiences and ideas with the Committee in person.

The Committee was also able to draw on a survey it conducted of people with disability as part of a previous inquiry.<sup>4</sup>

The details of people's lived experiences were extremely helpful for the Committee in understanding the barriers that people face at voting centres.

Throughout this report, the Committee has included quotes from people with lived experience. These quotes are not intended to capture the full experience of living with disability and do not include all the experiences that people shared with the Committee. The quotes have been selected to illustrate different aspects of the voting experience for people with disability.

Ultimately, it will be important for the voices of people with lived experience to be heard as part of any initiatives in this space. In considering the recommendations in this report and deciding whether to implement them, the VEC should consult with its Electoral Access Advisory Group and other relevant stakeholders. This is important to ensure that actions are implemented in a way that genuinely reduces barriers for people with disability.

**FINDING 1:** The lived experience of people with disability is critical for understanding the barriers they encounter and what should be done to provide more accessible services.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** That, in responding to and implementing the recommendations in this report, the VEC consult with its Electoral Access Advisory Group, Aboriginal Advisory Group and other stakeholders with lived experience.

## 1.4 A new approach is needed, incorporating three guiding principles

The Committee recognises that the VEC has established some systems to consider the needs of people with disability in its planning and election delivery (see Section 3.4 in Chapter 3 for more details). The Committee commends the VEC for this effort but believes that more could be done to reduce the barriers faced by people with disability.

<sup>4</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *The conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, vol. 2, July 2024, Appendix D.

Numerous specific changes have been recommended throughout this report. In addition, the VEC would benefit from an overall change to the way that it approaches accessibility. The Committee has identified three key principles to guide this new way of considering the topic:

- an accessibility-first approach
- a whole-of-journey approach
- recognising and understanding the diversity of disability.

These principles should be incorporated into planning, process development and service delivery. Incorporating these principles will highlight areas where more can be done, will assist the VEC to provide a more inclusive voting experience and will help the VEC meet its obligations under legislation and the standards in international agreements.

### 1.4.1 An accessibility-first approach

An accessibility-first approach involves designing processes and materials to be accessible from the beginning, rather than accessibility being an add-on or an afterthought. It involves trying to create a voting experience without barriers, rather than creating a system with barriers and then trying to find ways to help people who are affected by those barriers. It involves reconsidering existing systems to remove barriers.

Connected with this is the idea of ‘universal design’.<sup>5</sup> As with an accessibility-first approach, universal design aims to make things accessible from the beginning. The Victorian Government has a *Universal design policy* which focuses on incorporating universal design principles into infrastructure projects.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to ensuring that people have physical access to a space, universal design involves creating spaces that can be used *independently*.<sup>7</sup> This is a key part of what it means to make something accessible. While recognising that some people with disability will always need assistance, voting should be designed to allow as many people as possible to participate without assistance.

Several stakeholders argued that all voting centres should be accessible.<sup>8</sup> While the Committee agrees in principle, it may not be practicable to expect all voting centres to be universally accessible immediately. The VEC plans to operate approximately 1,750 voting centres at the 2026 election.<sup>9</sup> The VEC has struggled to find accessible

<sup>5</sup> Several submissions advocated for universal design—Nicole Karidis, *Submission 28*, p. 1; Council on the Ageing Victoria, *Submission 29*, p. 2; Name withheld, *Submission 39*, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Victorian Government, *Whole of Victorian Government universal design policy*, Melbourne, 2022. See also Victorian Government, *Inclusive Victoria: state disability plan 2022–2026*, Melbourne, 2022, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Victorian Government, *Inclusive Victoria: state disability plan 2022–2026*, Melbourne, 2022, p. 80.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Lo Schiavo, *Submission 3*, p. 1; Reinforce Self-Advocacy, *Submission 31*, p. 1; Endeavour Foundation, *Submission 37*, p. 2; Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 32.

venues previously, especially for early voting centres (see Section 4.3 in Chapter 4). The Committee therefore does not believe that it would be appropriate to mandate that all voting centres should be accessible. However, the VEC should adopt a long-term goal of universal access. There are legal duties to remove barriers to voting and offer reasonable adjustments for people with disability (see Section 2.3). Taking an accessibility-first approach would see the VEC selecting accessible venues to use as voting centres wherever possible, adopting minimum standards which increase over time and being transparent about exceptions where the VEC has been unable to avoid them.

Ultimately, accessibility-first and universal design approaches involve designing voting for all people—people with disability, people without disability, people new to voting, people whose first language is not English, people with low literacy and so on. They are about factoring the needs of all voters into decisions from the beginning, aiming for full accessibility everywhere and only compromising on this where necessary. These approaches involve aiming for as many voting centres as possible to be accessible, rather than just some voting centres. They involve using the most accessible entrance to the voting centre as the main entrance, rather than creating a main entrance that is not accessible and a separate entrance for people with disability. They involve providing accessibility tools at all voting centres and not just selected venues. Above all, they mean trying to design voting experiences for everybody wherever possible, rather than relegating people with disability to specific venues or processes.

### 1.4.2 A whole-of-journey approach

The VEC should also take a ‘whole-of-journey’ approach to supporting people with disability.<sup>10</sup> A whole-of-journey approach would consider the entire experience of a voter at an election, not just their experience in the voting centre.

A whole-of-journey approach would include:

- learning that an election is happening
- updating enrolment (if necessary)
- learning about the different options for voting
- learning about the candidates
- for those people voting at a voting centre:
  - travelling to the voting centre (either privately or by public transport)
  - arriving at the centre (including drop-off or parking where relevant)
  - navigating past campaigners
  - queuing

<sup>10</sup> Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 11. See also Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 27*, pp. 3–4.

- entering the voting centre
- being marked off the electoral roll and receiving ballot papers
- receiving instructions and having any questions answered
- casting a vote
- leaving the voting centre and returning home or going to another destination.

This approach requires considering factors which are not currently considered when selecting voting centres. For example, while the VEC's current selection criteria look at the distance to public transport stops,<sup>11</sup> they do not consider whether those are accessible stops (as opposed to, for example, tram stops with large steps) or whether the path from the closest stop is accessible (as opposed to, for example, including a gravel path). These were noted by multiple submitters as important considerations.

The voting journey for some people with disability also involves other people, and their needs must also be taken into account to create a fully accessible experience. Some people may be accompanied by an unpaid support person, who may only be available at certain times or who may be caring for children at the same time as supporting a voter.<sup>12</sup> Some people may need assistance in the voting compartment, requiring compartments to be wide enough to fit two people (see Section 6.2.1).<sup>13</sup> Some voters will have guide dogs and need facilities for the dogs to be toileted.<sup>14</sup> As Judith Abbott from Carers Victoria explained, it is important not to work on assumptions that a person with disability will be alone but to cater for the fact that sometimes the people around the people with disability 'are actually mission critical to getting where you need to go'.<sup>15</sup> Factoring in the needs of these people is part of considering all aspects of the journey for people with disability.

The Committee considers that a whole-of-journey approach can highlight aspects of the voting experience for people with disability that might not be considered with other approaches. It is therefore an important part of ensuring that elections are accessible and inclusive.

### 1.4.3 Understanding the diversity of disability

The Australian Bureau of Statistics found that 75.3% of people with disability reported a physical condition as their main long-term health condition (e.g. arthritis, back

<sup>11</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Inspection form Mar 2026—v13*, [Melbourne], 2026, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Judith Abbott, Chief Executive Officer, and Lorraine Langley, Acting General Manager, Communications, Policy and Partnerships, Carers Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> Stefan Slucki, Board Director and National Policy Committee Chair, Blind Citizens Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> Stefan Slucki, Board Director and National Policy Committee Chair, Blind Citizens Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> Judith Abbott, Chief Executive Officer, Carers Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 38. See also Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

problems, difficulty walking). The remaining 24.7% reported mental or behavioural disorders as their main condition (e.g. autism, anxiety disorders).<sup>16</sup>

Despite this, there is a tendency in electoral legislation and in the VEC's practice to focus on support for physical disability. For example, the only accessibility information published about voting centres relates to wheelchair accessibility (see Section 7.6.1). Potential barriers to people with sensory sensitivities are only assessed for dedicated low-sensory voting centres and not for voting centres in general (see Section 4.4.2). The post-election evaluation commissioned by the VEC asks about physical disability but not mental or cognitive disability (see Section 9.5.2).

As Endeavour Foundation explained, focusing on support for physical disabilities:

risks overlooking the considerable proportion of Australians whose disability is cognitive rather than physical. Intellectual disability relates to difficulty learning or understanding things, but it does not mean people can't learn or understand the voting process with the right supports or that their voting preferences do not matter.

For individuals with intellectual disability, the barriers to voting are not at the entrance—they are inside the voting centre. Clear instructions, easy-read materials, and patient, well-trained staff are as fundamental to their participation as a ramp is to a wheelchair user. Designing accessible voting centres means designing for the full spectrum of disability, not just its most visible forms.<sup>17</sup>

While reducing barriers to physical access is important for many people with disability, a variety of other barriers were identified through this Inquiry as well. For example, excessive noise and crowding can be a barrier to some neurodivergent people. Complex information can be a barrier to people with dementia. Relying on spoken instructions can be a barrier to Deaf people.

It is also important to understand that every person with disability is different, with a different combination of conditions and different needs. People with disability may also face other barriers (such as age or cultural background) that need to be taken into account (see further discussion in Section 2.2.1).

To make voting as accessible as possible, the diversity and complexity of disability must be recognised when planning, designing and managing voting processes.

**FINDING 2:** A contemporary approach to accessibility builds accessibility into plans from the beginning, considers the whole journey of people using a service and takes account of the diversity of disability.

<sup>16</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Disability, ageing and carers, Australia: summary of findings*, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release>> accessed 27 March 2026.

<sup>17</sup> Endeavour Foundation, *Submission 37*, p. 2 (with sources). See also Joshua Lucey, Senior Policy and Advocacy Adviser, Endeavour Foundation, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 29–30.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** That the VEC develop a new approach to accessibility, guided by three principles:

- an accessibility-first approach, which involves designing systems (including voting centres) to be accessible by default wherever possible, rather than trying to add accessibility into systems that have been designed without accessibility in mind
- a whole-of-journey approach, which takes into account the entire experience of the voter, from finding out that an election is happening through to returning home after casting their vote
- understanding the diversity of disability, which includes visible and invisible disabilities, physical conditions, mental/behavioural disorders, psychosocial, cognitive, intellectual and sensory disability, and recognising that voters with disability may also have other characteristics that result in barriers to electoral participation.

## 1.5 Structure of this report

This report sets out the Committee's findings from this Inquiry, along with recommendations to the VEC and the Parliament for changes to make voting more inclusive.

Chapter 1 provides background information about this Inquiry and sets out three guiding principles for the VEC's future efforts to make voting more accessible.

Chapter 2 provides background information about disability in Victoria and the international agreements and legislation that relate to accessibility.

Chapter 3 looks at how the VEC currently considers the needs of voters with disability in its planning and service delivery.

Chapters 4 to 6 explore how the VEC selects, manages and equips voting centres. These chapters analyse the VEC's current processes and identify changes that could make voting more accessible.

Chapter 7 considers the VEC's approach to communication and how this could be more accessible, both before voting and inside the voting centre.

Chapter 8 looks at staff training. Getting training right is essential to creating accessible experiences for people with disability.

Finally, Chapter 9 considers how the VEC measures and reports on accessibility. Establishing a robust performance measurement system is important for embedding accessibility into decisions and for holding the VEC to account.

# Chapter 2

## Background

### 2.1 Introduction

For many years, the Victorian Electoral Commission's (VEC's) vision has been 'to enable all Victorians to actively participate in their democracy'. It is estimated that 21.4% of Australians in 2022 had some sort of disability. The likelihood of experiencing disability increases over a person's life, with 52.3% of people aged 65 or older having some form of disability.<sup>1</sup> Addressing barriers faced by voters with disability is therefore a critical part of the VEC achieving its vision.

One of the things that can make this challenging is the varied nature of disability. As explained in Section 1.4.3 of this report, understanding the diversity of disability should be a guiding principle for the VEC. Section 2.2 of this chapter explores that diversity in more detail.

The importance of including people with disability within elections is recognised by international agreements, Victorian legislation and Commonwealth legislation. The obligations arising from legislation and the rights set out in the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* are explored in Section 2.3. These are relevant to many aspects of election delivery.

The Committee would like to see the VEC undertake an audit of its policies, decisions and processes with its legislative obligations and the United Nations' Convention in mind. This would help to identify areas where barriers faced by people with disability could be removed.

### 2.2 Understanding disability

Understanding the nature of disability is essential to addressing the barriers that people with disability face. The Committee considers it particularly relevant to note two important aspects of disability:

- disability is varied—there are many different types of disability, which are associated with many different barriers; it is important to cater to the full range of disabilities and not treat all people with disability as having the same needs
- some disability is hidden—not all disability can be seen and any system that relies on staff to identify people with disability will not meet some people's needs.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Disability, ageing and supports, Australia: summary of findings*, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release>> accessed 27 March 2026.

In addition, the Committee notes that there is a need for additional, specialised work to understand how best to support the participation of people with intellectual and cognitive disability.

### Box 2.1 A note on concepts and terminology

Many concepts and terms relating to disability are contested and understood in different ways.

The Committee's understanding of disability has been informed by the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. This states:

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Source: United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, art 1.

The Committee has found the 'social model of disability' to be helpful. This model has been adopted by the Victorian Government in its *Inclusive Victoria* disability plan. The social model sees *societal barriers* as the obstacles to a person's equal participation, not their impairment. For example, with this approach, a flight of stairs is what creates a barrier for a wheelchair user, rather than the fact that they are in a wheelchair. The focus is therefore on understanding the barriers that prevent people from equal participation.

This model is also reflected in the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, which explains:

disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Source: United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, Preamble (e).

Discrimination against people with disability can be referred to as 'ableism'. Ableism includes attitudes, practices and structures that privilege people with typical abilities and disadvantage people with disability. It can be associated with practices such as designing systems and services without acknowledging, detecting and dismantling the barriers that people with disability may encounter, excluding people with disability as a result.

In describing people with disability, the Committee recognises that people with disability describe themselves in a variety of ways. Different groups and different individuals vary in their preferred terms. In particular, people have different preferences about whether to use person-first language (such as 'a person with disability') or identity-first language (such as 'a disabled person').

(Continued)

### Box 2.1 Continued

Some groups prefer to use capitals to recognise their identity, especially the Autistic community and the Deaf community.

In this report, the Committee generally uses person-first language, with some exceptions where the Committee understands other practices to be generally preferred. The Committee recognises that the terms used in this report may not be everybody's preferred approach.

The Committee also recognises that there are a variety of other terms relating to disability where there are variations in people's preference (for example, 'support person' or 'carer'). Again, the Committee has attempted to use the terms most appropriate or most commonly preferred. However, the Committee recognises that these will not be everybody's preferred terms.

In quoting people who provided input to this Inquiry, the Committee has retained the terms and capitalisation conventions used by those people.

## 2.2.1 Disability is varied

There are many different forms of disability. The United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* notes that people with disability include people with physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments.<sup>2</sup> Associated with each of these categories is a variety of disabilities and many people live with more than one impairment and multiple disabilities.

People experience a range of barriers to participation depending on their individual circumstances. Nuray Kaya outlined the variety of barriers faced by people with disability:

- **Physical accessibility issues**, including uneven terrain, inadequate ramps, narrow entrances, inaccessible parking, or distance from public transport
- **Sensory and cognitive barriers**, such as noise, crowds, signage complexity, lighting, and time pressure
- **Reliance on assistance**, which may reduce privacy, independence, or confidence in casting a secret ballot
- **Health and fatigue impacts**, particularly for voters with mobility, chronic illness, or neurological conditions.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, opened for signature 30 March 2007, 2515 UNTS 3 (entered into force 3 May 2008), art 1.

<sup>3</sup> Nuray Kaya, *Submission 19*, p. 1.

It is important to recognise the diversity of disability, and the resulting different experiences and access considerations. The Committee has identified this as one of three new guiding principles that the VEC should adopt (see Section 1.4.3).

Recognising this means:

- identifying and minimising a wide range of barriers when selecting voting centres (see Chapter 4)
- organising and running voting centres in ways that reduce the barriers people may face when voting (see Chapter 5)
- providing multiple accessibility tools and services at voting centres that can be used in different combinations (see Chapter 6)
- communicating important information in a range of accessible formats (see Chapter 7)
- training staff to understand different needs and to offer a variety of supports (see Chapter 8).

Many people with disability also face barriers that are unrelated to disability or do not arise solely from disability. For example, people with disability from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may have difficulties understanding English in addition to the barriers that relate to their disability. People with disability from regional areas may have to travel further to access services and may have less access to public transport. People with disability who also have insecure housing may find it harder to access voting.

Some groups of people facing other barriers may be more likely to have disability. For example, older people are more likely to have disability and also to have lower digital skills and more social isolation.<sup>4</sup> People in prison are more likely to have disability, as well as face barriers resulting from their imprisonment.<sup>5</sup> Aboriginal people are more likely than non-Aboriginal people to have disability and can face barriers to participation from a lack of cultural safety.<sup>6</sup>

Other characteristics, such as age and gender, may also affect how people with disability are treated. The Committee was told that younger people with disability are more likely to report experiencing discrimination than older people with disability.<sup>7</sup> Women with disability are more likely to experience domestic and family violence than women without disability, which may make voting less safe for them.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Council on the Ageing Victoria, *Submission 29*, p. 3; Martin Turnbull, Senior Policy Adviser, Council on the Ageing Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 14, 16.

<sup>5</sup> Centre for Innovative Justice, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services, Human Rights Law Centre and Voices for Change, *Submission 49*, p. 10; Morgan O'Sullivan, Principal Policy Lead, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 43.

<sup>6</sup> Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 27*, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Youth Disability Advocacy Service & Youth Affairs Council Victoria, *Submission 48*, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, pp. 15–16.

These combinations of challenges, together with different aspects of people's identities, can expose people to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation. This is referred to as 'intersectionality' and needs to be considered when designing and evaluating support for people with disability. This is discussed in Sections 3.4.5, 7.3 and 9.4.3.

The varied nature of disability means that each person will have their own particular needs and may require direct engagement to identify their individual needs.<sup>9</sup>

## 2.2.2 Some disability is hidden

### Lived experience

“ I voted early because my disability makes it very painful to have to stand in line for prolonged periods. I use a cane for mobility assistance. Everyone, including election officials fall over themselves trying to look considerate to wheelchair users by ushering them to the front of the queue. These guys are already sitting down and comfortable. They would be sitting whether they are waiting or not. A walking stick user, who may well be in considerable pain after queueing up for a few minutes is expected to line up with everyone else and suffer in silence. I told an electoral official that I was in great pain from having to stand while waiting in the queue and she told me that I just had to put up with it. I was very disappointed with her lack of concern and compassion.

Source: Respondent to the Committee's survey of voters with disability (Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election).

A hidden disability is one that is not immediately obvious from looking at a person. Hidden disability can include neurodiversity, sensory or processing difficulties and chronic pain.

It may be harder for people with hidden disability to get help, especially where systems rely on staff to visually identify people with disability. It is important to have systems that provide ways for people with hidden disability to receive the assistance they need.

**FINDING 3:** It is important to recognise the diversity of people with disability, including the range of physical, psychosocial, intellectual, cognitive and sensory impairments, and the consequent barriers to participation. In addition, some disability is hidden and it may not be obvious from looking at a person that they are facing barriers.

<sup>9</sup> Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, *Submission 34*, p. 11.

### 2.2.3 More work is needed to support people with intellectual and cognitive disability

Electoral systems must enable eligible people with intellectual and cognitive disability to exercise their right to vote, with appropriate support. Multiple submitters to this Inquiry raised issues related to people with intellectual and cognitive disability and the sorts of support they need.

The Committee explored this matter previously in its Inquiry into the 2022 state election.<sup>10</sup> In that inquiry, the Committee recommended that a framework be developed for the inclusion of people with intellectual and cognitive disability.<sup>11</sup> In February 2025, the Government indicated that further consideration was required on whether to implement the recommendation.<sup>12</sup> The Committee looks forward to further action being taken on this matter.

A key issue was the ‘unsound mind’ provision in the Victorian Constitution. This provision means that a person cannot be enrolled to vote if they are ‘incapable of understanding the nature and significance of enrolment and voting’ due to ‘being of unsound mind’.<sup>13</sup> Concerns were raised about this provision again during this Inquiry.<sup>14</sup>

The unsound mind provision is beyond the scope of this Inquiry, but the Committee reiterates its support for further work being done on this issue. The VEC has also indicated that it plans to produce a research report on the impacts of the unsound mind provision as part of implementing its *Disability education and engagement plan*.<sup>15</sup> That report may contribute to future work on this matter.

## 2.3 Victorian legislation, Commonwealth legislation and the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Victorian and Commonwealth legislation places obligations on the VEC to provide accessible voting options. The *Electoral Act*<sup>16</sup> is the main piece of legislation regarding state elections. It includes some provisions relating to accessibility. More generally,

<sup>10</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *The conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, vol. 2, July 2024, pp. 102–11.

<sup>11</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *The conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, vol. 2, July 2024, p. 111, Recommendation 25.

<sup>12</sup> Government of Victoria, *Response to the Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, 6 February 2025, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Constitution Act 1975* (Vic) s 48(2)(d).

<sup>14</sup> Endeavour Foundation, *Submission 37*, p. 6; Centre for Innovative Justice, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services, Human Rights Law Centre and Voices for Change, *Submission 49*, pp. 24–5; Joshua Lucey, Senior Policy and Advocacy Adviser, Endeavour Foundation, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 30, 32.

<sup>15</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Disability education and engagement plan logic 2025–2027*, [Melbourne], (n.d.), p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Electoral Act 2002* (Vic).

the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities*,<sup>17</sup> the *Equal Opportunity Act*<sup>18</sup> and the *Disability Discrimination Act*<sup>19</sup> include various obligations related to people with disability.

Australia has also ratified the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. This includes multiple obligations for Australia which are relevant to elections.<sup>20</sup> These obligations do not form part of law in Australia except where they have been specifically incorporated into legislation.<sup>21</sup> However, the Victorian Government has explained that, 'In agreeing to the Convention, all levels of government agreed to work towards all people with disability enjoying equal human rights and freedoms.'<sup>22</sup>

### 2.3.1 Voting centres must be accessible

The *Electoral Act*, when discussing voting centres, requires the VEC to 'ensure that electors are provided with an accessible service that facilitates the opportunity to vote'.<sup>23</sup>

The Victorian *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities* states that every person has the right to vote without discrimination,<sup>24</sup> as well as more generally to enjoy human rights without discrimination.<sup>25</sup> Discrimination involves treatment based on attributes protected under the *Equal Opportunity Act*, including disability.<sup>26</sup> This covers both 'direct discrimination' (treating a person unfavourably because of a protected attribute) and 'indirect discrimination' (imposing unreasonable requirements, conditions or practices that will disadvantage a person with a protected attribute).<sup>27</sup> As explained by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission:

Direct discrimination could occur, for example, if a person with a disability is denied access to a polling station because they have a particular disability, or if electoral staff say something detrimental about a person because they have a disability.

Indirect discrimination could occur, for example, if there are physical barriers like steps to get into a polling centre that mean some people with disability cannot enter, or if there are requirements to mark a ballot paper without appropriate adjustments for people whose disability means they cannot write with a pencil.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic).

<sup>18</sup> *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic).

<sup>19</sup> *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth).

<sup>20</sup> United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, opened for signature 30 March 2007, 2515 UNTS 3 (entered into force 3 May 2008), particularly art 29.

<sup>21</sup> Victorian Law Reform Commission, *Inclusive juries—access for people who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind or have low vision: report*, Melbourne, 2022, p. 43.

<sup>22</sup> Victorian Government, *Inclusive Victoria: state disability plan 2022–2026*, Melbourne, 2022, p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> *Electoral Act 2002* (Vic) s 65(3). This was also noted by the Electoral Commissioner in Determination 013/2026: *Campaigning at voting centres*, 25 May 2026, especially 1.1–1.2.

<sup>24</sup> *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) s 18(2).

<sup>25</sup> *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) s 8(2).

<sup>26</sup> *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) s 3(1) s.v. 'discrimination'.

<sup>27</sup> *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) s 3(1) s.v. 'discrimination'; *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic) ss 8–9.

<sup>28</sup> Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, *Submission 34*, p. 10.

More broadly, Victorian and Commonwealth legislation prohibits discrimination in the provision of services and in accessing premises open to the public.<sup>29</sup> The *Equal Opportunity Act* places several obligations on people providing services (including public authorities). It requires ‘reasonable adjustments’ to be made by service providers to meet the needs of people with disability.<sup>30</sup> It also places a positive duty on people providing services to ‘take reasonable and proportionate measures’ to eliminate discrimination ‘as far as possible.’<sup>31</sup> As noted by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, there has yet to be any Australian case law on whether the VEC is considered to be providing a service to voters for the purposes of the *Equal Opportunity Act*, but the definition of a ‘service’ has been interpreted broadly.<sup>32</sup>

The *Electoral Act* explicitly identifies some adjustments for people with disability (such as telephone-assisted voting, electronic voting, voting outside voting centres and being a general postal voter). These are limited to particular disabilities or circumstances. The *Electoral Act* also allows people, if they need it, to receive assistance when voting by a person of their choice, including an election official.<sup>33</sup>

The Committee notes that there are limitations to what the VEC is required to do under Victorian and Commonwealth law. For example, requirements, conditions and practices which disadvantage people with disability do not constitute indirect discrimination if they are ‘reasonable’. Similarly only ‘reasonable’ adjustments are mandated.<sup>34</sup> While there is room for debate in terms of what is reasonable, legislation provides some criteria to be considered in making a decision, including cost, the consequences of not making an adjustment and the consequences for the service provider.<sup>35</sup> The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission noted that the integrity of the voting process would also be a relevant consideration.<sup>36</sup>

These obligations are relevant to many aspects of the voting experience, including venue selection, internal and external layouts, signage, queue management, assistive technologies and accessible voting equipment.

Overall, these obligations would best be met through the accessibility-first principle that the Committee has recommended (see Section 1.4.1). With this approach, voting centres would be accessible by default. Inaccessible facilities and practices would only be used where they cannot reasonably be avoided and where not addressing the issues is reasonably justified.

The United Nations’ *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* reinforces these obligations. It requires states to guarantee the right to vote for people with

<sup>29</sup> *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic) s 44; *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) s 23.

<sup>30</sup> *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic) s 45.

<sup>31</sup> *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic) s 15(2).

<sup>32</sup> Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, *Submission 34*, p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> *Electoral Act 2002* (Vic) ss 24, 94, 110D; *Electoral Regulations 2022* (Vic) reg 50.

<sup>34</sup> *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic) ss 9, 45; *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) s 6.

<sup>35</sup> *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic) ss 9(3), 45(3); *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) s 11.

<sup>36</sup> Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, *Submission 34*, p. 11.

disability on an equal basis with others. This includes ensuring that voting procedures and facilities are accessible.<sup>37</sup> More generally, the Convention requires states to develop minimum standards for the accessibility of facilities and services for the public.<sup>38</sup>

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has argued that the Convention establishes a duty on states to take *proactive* steps to ensure people with disability can vote on an equal basis with others. That is, states have a duty to provide accessibility ‘*ex ante*’—they must identify and remove barriers before they cause exclusion, rather than waiting for a request from an individual.<sup>39</sup>

It is also important to note that the general principles underlying the Convention go beyond accessibility and non-discrimination. They include ‘Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one’s own choices, and independence of persons’.<sup>40</sup> This would mean taking account of the dignity and independence of people with disability when designing voting processes and making voting centres accessible.

In line with this, the Convention requires states to protect the right of people with disability to vote by secret ballot.<sup>41</sup> In contrast, Victoria’s *Electoral Act* has provisions protecting the secrecy of the vote but no general right and some permitted forms of voting involve disclosing a voter’s preferences to a support person or election official.<sup>42</sup> In a case brought against the Australian Government (*Given v Australia*), the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities formed the view that Australia is obliged to provide a way for people to vote without revealing their choices to anyone (including a support person) and that failing to do so means that Australia is not meeting its obligations under the Convention.<sup>43</sup> The Convention explicitly requires the use of assistive technologies ‘where appropriate’.<sup>44</sup>

The Committee notes that the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* outlines different expectations of accessibility and reasonably justified accommodations than Victorian and Commonwealth legislation.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>37</sup> United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, opened for signature 30 March 2007, 2515 UNTS 3 (entered into force 3 May 2008), art 29. See also: CRPD/C/GC/2, United Nations Committee on the Rights of People with Disabilities, *General Comment No.2 (2014) Article 9: Accessibility*, May 2014, para 23.

<sup>38</sup> United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, opened for signature 30 March 2007, 2515 UNTS 3 (entered into force 3 May 2008), art 9(2)(a).

<sup>39</sup> *Given v Australia*, CRPD/C/19/D/2014, (16 February 2018), p. 10. Based on United Nations Committee on the Rights of People with Disabilities, *General Comment No.2 (2014) Article 9: Accessibility*, CRPD/C/GC/2, para 25.

<sup>40</sup> United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, opened for signature 30 March 2007, 2515 UNTS 3 (entered into force 3 May 2008) art 3(a).

<sup>41</sup> United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, opened for signature 30 March 2007, 2515 UNTS 3 (entered into force 3 May 2008) art 29(a)(ii).

<sup>42</sup> *Electoral Act 2002* (Vic) s 154.

<sup>43</sup> *Given v Australia*, UN Doc CRPD/C/19/D/2014 (16 February 2018), p. 11.

<sup>44</sup> United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, opened for signature 30 March 2007, 2515 UNTS 3 (entered into force 3 May 2008) art 29(a)(ii).

<sup>45</sup> United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, opened for signature 30 March 2007, 2515 UNTS 3 (entered into force 3 May 2008); *Given v Australia*, CRPD/C/19/D/2014 (16 February 2018), para 8.5; *Sherlock v Australia*, CRPD/C/24/D/20/2014, 30 April 2021, para 8.7; Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General comment No. 20 (2009)*, para 13.

### 2.3.2 People need accessible information

Effective participation in elections also depends on access to clear and accessible information. Electoral participation cannot be genuinely equal where some voters are unable to obtain, understand or use information necessary to vote. Ensuring electoral information is accessible is therefore not merely a matter of convenience, it is necessary for equal participation.

Failing to provide information in accessible formats may constitute discrimination under Victorian or Commonwealth legislation.<sup>46</sup> The *Victorian Government accessible communication policy* also places a number of accessibility requirements on communication products from public sector bodies, including the VEC.<sup>47</sup> The policy is based on principles including ‘Flexibility: Provide content in multiple formats to suit diverse needs, for example Easy Read, audio, video, braille.’<sup>48</sup>

These obligations are relevant to the communication of information about elections and voting options. This information is important both before a person goes to vote, as well as at a voting centre.

The *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* similarly requires states to make public information available in accessible formats.<sup>49</sup> It also requires states to accept and facilitate the use of sign language, braille and augmentative and alternative communication, along with other accessible formats.<sup>50</sup> The Convention explicitly indicates that materials used in voting should be accessible and easy to understand.<sup>51</sup>

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has also argued that this applies to information from candidates and parties:

It is also important that political meetings and materials used and produced by political parties or individual candidates participating in public elections are accessible. If not, persons with disabilities are deprived of their right to participate in the political process in an equal manner.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Victorian Government accessible communication policy*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> The policy notes that it applies to ‘Special bodies as defined by the *Public Administration Act 2004* (Vic)’ (Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Victorian Government accessible communication policy*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 1), which includes the VEC—*Public Administration Act 2004* (Vic) s 6(1)(j).

<sup>48</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Victorian Government accessible communication policy*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* opened for signature 30 March 2007, 2515 UNTS 3 (entered into force 3 May 2008), Preamble (v), arts 9(1)(b), 21(a)–(b).

<sup>50</sup> United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, opened for signature 30 March 2007, 2515 UNTS 3 (entered into force 3 May 2008), art 21(a)–(b).

<sup>51</sup> United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, opened for signature 30 March 2007, 2515 UNTS 3 (entered into force 3 May 2008), art 29(a)(i); United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, *General Comment No. 2 (2014), Article 9: Accessibility*, CRPD/C/GC/2, May 2014, paras 23, 43, 44.

<sup>52</sup> United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, *General Comment No. 2 (2014), Article 9: Accessibility*, CRPD/C/GC/2, May 2014, para 43.

### 2.3.3 Staff should be trained to support people with disability

The effective implementation of accessibility measures depends on the knowledge, capability and conduct of electoral staff. The *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* recognises the importance of training in achieving substantive equality. It requires states to promote training for professionals and staff working with people with disability. Training should cover the rights in the Convention and accessibility issues.<sup>53</sup>

Staff training is also essential to achieving the obligations in legislation and the other standards set in the Convention. If staff do not understand the relevant obligations and standards, they may make inappropriate decisions that negatively impact on people with disability.

### 2.3.4 The VEC should ensure that it complies with legislation and meets the standards of international agreements

The VEC has recognised the rights set out in the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and the obligations in legislation. The Electoral Commissioner told the Committee:

the right and opportunity to vote is protected at every level of our legal system. Australia signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007, and accessible voting centres are fundamental for ensuring every eligible voter can vote without discrimination under federal and state law, including the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act* and the *Disability Act*. It is a crucial factor we always take into account when appointing voting locations under the *Electoral Act*.<sup>54</sup>

Table 2.1 breaks down how some of the issues discussed in this report relate to the obligations and standards outlined above. It would be prudent for the VEC to audit its compliance with the obligations set out in legislation regarding people with disability. The VEC should also identify any areas where it does not meet the expectations set out in the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. These represent agreed standards and the VEC should reconsider any areas where it does not meet these standards. The VEC should pay particular attention to the issues in Table 2.1.

This work would help the VEC to identify areas where people with disability face barriers. The Committee encourages the VEC to make every effort to ensure that barriers to accessibility will be gradually removed. Progress should be made steadily in a systematic and continuously monitored manner, with the aim of achieving full accessibility. To support this, the VEC should conduct an analysis to identify the barriers that need to be removed and develop plans to address them.

<sup>53</sup> United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, opened for signature 30 March 2007, 2515 UNTS 3 (entered into force 3 May 2008), art 4(1)(i), 9(2)(c).

<sup>54</sup> Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49. See also Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 4.

Table 2.1 How the obligations in legislation and standards in international agreements apply to voting centres

| Expectation                                                                                                                                          | Risk if expectation not met                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Issue discussed in the report (with relevant section)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| All people can vote without discrimination and on an equal basis                                                                                     | Where accessible voting options, information and services are unavailable, inconsistent or insufficiently accessible, people with disability may be unable to participate in elections on an equal basis with others.                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applies to all issues</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Facilities are accessible                                                                                                                            | Voting venues and infrastructure that do not provide universal accessibility may create physical, sensory and environmental barriers. These can prevent some people with disability from participating in elections comfortably, independently and on an equal basis with others. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Venue selection focused primarily on wheelchair access (4.2.2)</li> <li>• Low-sensory features currently only considered for some voting centres (4.4.2)</li> <li>• Inadequate public transport access (4.5)</li> <li>• Approaches to voting centres must be accessible, with lighting, signage, parking and drop-off points (5.2, 5.7)</li> <li>• Campaign workers create sensory and psychosocial barriers (5.3)</li> <li>• Queues need to be managed to reduce barriers (5.4)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Reasonable adjustments are made for people with disability<br>Assistive technologies are used where appropriate<br>People can vote via secret ballot | Insufficient reasonable adjustments to remove barriers throughout the voting journey may prevent people with disability from accessing electoral services independently, safely and effectively.                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of mobile voting venues (3.2.1)</li> <li>• Ad hoc, inconsistent institutional arrangements for mobile voting (3.2.1)</li> <li>• Some voting options only permitted for people with certain disabilities, not everybody who would benefit (3.2.2, 3.2.3, 5.5.2)</li> <li>• Braille ballot papers only available by post and not in voting centres (3.2.2)</li> <li>• Large-print ballot papers not provided (3.2.2)</li> <li>• Communications about low-sensory voting may exclude some people who would benefit (4.4.1)</li> <li>• Lack of seating before, during and after voting (5.4, 6.2.2)</li> <li>• Accessibility tools need to be readily available (5.6.2)</li> <li>• Insufficient low-level voting compartments (6.2.1)</li> <li>• Limited reading and writing tools (6.3, 6.6)</li> <li>• Personal hearing amplifiers not available on election day (6.4)</li> <li>• Communication boards not provided (6.7.1)</li> <li>• Electronic voting kiosks not provided (6.8)</li> </ul> |

| Expectation                                             | Risk if expectation not met                                                                                                                                                                                  | Issue discussed in the report (with relevant section)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| People can vote with dignity, autonomy and independence | Voting arrangements that require disclosure of disability, segregate voters or create stigma may undermine the dignity, autonomy and equal treatment of people with disability.                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alternative entrances not providing a dignified experience (4.2.3)</li> <li>Inadequate spacing between voting compartments reduces privacy (5.6.1)</li> <li>Some processes rely on people to disclose their disability to obtain assistance (5.4.1, 6.2.2, 6.3)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Communication and information are accessible            | Barriers to accessible information, communication and digital services may prevent voters with disability from obtaining, understanding and using information necessary to exercise their democratic rights. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Queue announcements only verbal (5.4.1)</li> <li>Not informing people about the option to vote outside voting centres (5.5.1)</li> <li>Need to understand low usage of Auslan translation service (6.5)</li> <li>Not providing communication boards (6.7.1)</li> <li>Insufficient information for some voters with disability (7.2)</li> <li>Lack of Easy English or Easy Read information (7.3, 7.8.1)</li> <li>Website difficult to navigate with screen readers (7.3)</li> <li>Insufficient information about accessibility services and tools (7.3, 7.4, 7.6.2)</li> <li>Limited published information about the accessibility of voting centres (7.6.1)</li> <li>Lack of accessible candidate and party information (7.7)</li> <li>Staff not knowing how to communicate with some people with disability (8.2)</li> </ul> |
| People can receive assistance                           | Preventing people from having a support person help them, making it difficult to have a support person or not providing assistance may limit the ability of some people to participate effectively.          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Voting compartments not suited for support people (6.2.1)</li> <li>Voting centre staff questioning support people (8.2)</li> <li>Inadequate personalised support for some voters (8.2)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Staff are trained on accessibility issues               | Gaps in disability awareness, accessibility knowledge and staff training may result in inconsistent implementation of accessibility obligations and unequal experiences for voters with disability.          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff unaware of accessibility tools or their location (6.3, 8.2)</li> <li>Staff not knowing how to communicate with people with disabilities (8.2)</li> <li>Training materials could be improved (8.3)</li> <li>Not all staff complete training (8.4)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

Source: Electoral Matters Committee.

**FINDING 4:** Victorian and Commonwealth legislation contains a number of obligations regarding people with disability that are relevant to the VEC's delivery of elections. These include ensuring that voting centres are accessible, that venues and processes do not discriminate and that reasonable adjustments are made for people with disability. Additional standards are set in the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* which it would be appropriate for the VEC to take into account.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** That the VEC conduct an audit of its policies, decisions and processes in relation to the obligations in legislation and the standards set in international agreements with respect to voters with disability. As part of this, the VEC should identify the barriers to accessibility that need to be removed and develop a short-, mid- and long-term implementation framework of actions to address them. This should be supported by relevant data to justify accessibility-related decision-making, and recommendations for legislative change if required.

# Chapter 3

## How the VEC considers the needs of voters with disability

### 3.1 Introduction

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) provides several ways that people can vote without going to a voting centre. These include mobile voting (where VEC staff set up temporary voting facilities at different locations), postal voting and telephone-assisted voting. These are explored in Section 3.2 of this chapter, along with some improvements that were suggested as part of this Inquiry.

Despite these options, it is still important for voting centres to be accessible. Mobile, postal and telephone-assisted voting have limitations. In addition, some important features of voting centres, such as help from VEC staff and a feeling of civic inclusion, are not present with some alternative ways of voting (see Section 3.3).

The VEC's plans for the 2026 state election and future elections are examined in Section 3.4 of this chapter. While the VEC's plans provide some information about its intentions, many of the proposed actions are defined at a high level and without clear targets. These limitations and potential improvements are discussed further in Chapter 9.

The VEC also relies for advice on an Electoral Access Advisory Group, which is made up of representatives from organisations that support people with disability. Section 3.5 looks at this group. The VEC's systems for monitoring the effectiveness of the group and how well the VEC incorporates the group's feedback are considered in Chapter 9.

### 3.2 Alternatives to voting centres suit some people with disability

The VEC provides three main alternatives to voting at voting centres: mobile voting, postal voting and telephone-assisted voting. Many people with disability prefer these options. However, as discussed in Section 3.3, these options do not suit everybody and do not meet the accessibility obligations discussed in Section 2.3. In addition, some people prefer using voting centres for a variety of reasons.

#### 3.2.1 Mobile voting

Mobile voting involves the VEC establishing temporary voting centres at locations such as aged care facilities, hospitals, prisons, homelessness services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community locations. With mobile voting, VEC staff travel to the

venue for a limited time on one day and people can cast their votes while the staff are there. It is intended to help people who may find it difficult to travel to a voting centre.

Low-sensory voting is also delivered through mobile voting. This is discussed separately in Section 4.4 of this report.

The VEC intends to provide mobile voting at approximately 900 venues in 2026. This is an increased number compared to the 2022 election (322), when mobile voting was reduced due to COVID-19. However, this is fewer venues than were serviced at the 2018 election (1,131).<sup>1</sup>

Some stakeholders called for an increase in mobile voting. In particular, they called for more mobile voting at inpatient psychiatric units and prisons. The VEC's current *Strategic service plan* includes a commitment to review mobile voting, including 'exploring options to re-introduce mobile voting in hospitals and some prisons.'<sup>2</sup>

The Committee notes the VEC's obligations under Victorian legislation to ensure that people have access to voting without discrimination (see Section 2.3). This includes ensuring that people in inpatient psychiatric units and eligible people in prisons have practical mechanisms to vote.

In addition to increasing mobile voting, other options may also be helpful for some people in these locations, such as takeaway voting (see Section 5.5.3).

### More mobile voting was called for in inpatient psychiatric units

The Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council (VMIAC) called for mobile voting teams to visit all inpatient mental health units.<sup>3</sup> The organisation noted that people admitted to mental health units do not lose their voting rights and that civic participation has been linked to 'enhanced agency, social inclusion and recovery-oriented outcomes.'<sup>4</sup>

VMIAC indicated that current arrangements for electors in inpatient psychiatric units are not satisfactory:

Across multiple election cycles, VMIAC has heard from consumers who were admitted to inpatient units during election periods and were unable to vote. In many cases, no mobile polling team attended the unit. Consumers were advised to use postal voting without being provided with practical support to do so or were given no clear information about their options at all.

While hospital voting programs and postal voting mechanisms technically exist, their operation in psychiatric settings is inconsistent. Admission is often unplanned and frequently involuntary. Consumers may be acutely unwell, medicated against their

<sup>1</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Strategic service plan*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> VMIAC, *Submission 46*, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> VMIAC, *Submission 46*, p. 3.

will, or deprived of access to personal devices, identification documents, or mailing processes. Without structured facilitation, postal voting is not a reliable pathway.<sup>5</sup>

Currently, access can depend on ad hoc arrangements between the VEC and institutions. VMIAC therefore called for mobile voting at public inpatient mental health units to be mandatory, with a formalised coordination framework and public reporting to provide transparency.<sup>6</sup>

VMIAC noted the importance of clear, accessible information for people in inpatient psychiatric units about their voting rights and options, along with information for staff outlining their obligations. VMIAC also called for training for electoral staff on supporting people with psychosocial disability and structured mechanisms to assist with enrolment, mobile voting and postal vote applications.<sup>7</sup>

### More mobile voting was called for in prisons

A consortium of submitters called for mobile voting at every prison in Victoria. The consortium noted that whether or not mobile voting takes place in a prison currently depends on the prison manager. The consortium argued that the current arrangements often fail to meet the needs of prisoners. In particular, prisoners may not have the information they need to make informed votes.<sup>8</sup>

One witness explained, based on his experience in prison:

the way it currently works is the people from the electoral commission come on the day, nothing is organised, there are no rooms and nobody knows what is going on. Generally, I used to take it upon myself to go and book a room, set up the tables and make it happen.<sup>9</sup>

The witness suggested establishing peer listener groups to emphasise the importance of voting, to prepare people for voting and to make voting an event.<sup>10</sup> Another witness who had lived experience of voting in prisons proposed candidates going to prisons to speak with prisoners and called for facilitated ways for prisoners to raise issues.<sup>11</sup>

The consortium of submitters raised multiple other significant issues related to voting in prisons. A number of these issues are beyond the scope of this Inquiry, but the Committee would like to see them explored further in the future.

<sup>5</sup> VMIAC, *Submission 46*, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> VMIAC, *Submission 46*, pp. 5–7.

<sup>7</sup> VMIAC, *Submission 46*, pp. 5–7.

<sup>8</sup> Centre for Innovative Justice, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services, Human Rights Law Centre and Voices for Change, *Submission 49*, pp. 15–16.

<sup>9</sup> Ricky M, lived experience contributor, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 44.

<sup>10</sup> Ricky M, lived experience contributor, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> Fran, member, Voices for Change, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 45–6.

**FINDING 5:** Mobile voting involves VEC staff travelling to certain locations to allow people to vote in person at that location on a specific day. This can be valuable for some people with disability who find it difficult to travel to voting centres. Some stakeholders have called for mobile voting in more locations at future elections, including inpatient psychiatric units and prisons.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** That the VEC identify opportunities to provide mobile voting at more prisons and inpatient psychiatric units in future elections.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** That the Parliament refer an inquiry into prisoners' access to voting and their access to the information needed for voting to the Electoral Matters Committee.

### 3.2.2 Postal voting

#### Lived experience

“ Voting via postal vote means I can complete my ballot in a space where I feel comfortable and calm. Since I have difficulties with concentration, voting ahead of time also removes the worry that I will forget to vote on the day of the election.

Source: Name withheld, *Submission 16*, p. 2.

“ I am neurodivergent so I just postal vote as the long lines and being hassled by volunteers with flyers is overwhelming.

Source: Respondent to consultation by the Australian Institute of Architects, *Submission 44*, p. 3.

“ I now do mail votes as it is too hard to try to find accessible places to vote. You also can't get someone to help you in person but at home you can and with reading issues I need to. If I ever missed the mail in voting, it would be easier to pay the fine than to go in person.

Source: Name withheld, *Submission 2*, p. 1.

With postal voting, ballot papers are mailed to the voter, who can then return them by mail (or hand deliver them to an early voting or election-day voting centre). Several people with disability told the Committee that postal voting is the best solution for them because voting centres can present barriers. These barriers can include difficulties physically accessing a voting centre, an inability to stand in lines for a long time, sensory overload and a feeling of being rushed in voting centres.

## Eligibility for general postal voting should be extended

To vote by post, people can either apply to vote by post for one particular election or they can apply to become general postal voters (in which case ballot papers are automatically posted to them at every election). Any person can become a one-time postal voter but people must meet certain criteria to become general postal voters.<sup>12</sup>

The criteria for being a general postal voter in state elections include being unable to travel to an election-day voting centre ‘by reason of being seriously ill or infirm’. This is also a valid reason for becoming a general postal voter for Commonwealth elections. However, people can also become general postal voters for Commonwealth elections if they cannot travel from their home to a voting centre because of disability or because they care for a person with disability.<sup>13</sup>

As a result, some people are eligible to register as general postal voters for Commonwealth elections but not state elections, which may cause confusion. The VEC therefore recommended that the criteria in the Victorian *Electoral Act* be expanded to match the *Commonwealth Electoral Act*.<sup>14</sup> The Committee agrees that this is appropriate.

However, the Committee would also like to see the criteria for both Commonwealth and state elections expanded. The criteria currently only focus on disability that prevents people travelling from their home to a voting centre. This reflects the tendency to focus primarily on physical disability rather than the full range of disability, as discussed in Section 1.4.3. The Committee would like to see eligibility explicitly extended more broadly to any disabilities that are associated with barriers when voting at a voting centre, including psychosocial disability.

Overall, the Committee believes that harmonising the eligibility criteria for being a general postal voter is the most important thing. This will prevent people missing out because of confusion about whether or not ballot papers will be sent to them at a particular election. However, there would be benefits to the Victorian and Commonwealth governments working together to expand the eligibility criteria to include people who may experience barriers to voting at a voting centre due to any disability.

**FINDING 6:** While any elector can apply to vote by post at a specific election, only people meeting certain criteria can become general postal voters (who are automatically sent postal votes at every election). Both the Victorian and Commonwealth electoral acts allow people who are seriously ill or infirm to become general postal voters. However, the Commonwealth act also allows people who cannot travel from their home to a voting centre because of disability or because they care for a person with disability. The difference between eligibility at the state and Commonwealth levels may cause confusion.

<sup>12</sup> *Electoral Act 2002* (Vic) s 24(1).

<sup>13</sup> *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (Cth) s 184A(2)(caa)–(cab).

<sup>14</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 25.

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** That the Victorian Government introduce legislation amending the Victorian *Electoral Act* so that the eligibility criteria for general postal voting match the criteria in the *Commonwealth Electoral Act*.

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** That the Victorian Government work with the Commonwealth Government to expand the eligibility for general postal voting at both the state and Commonwealth levels to include:

- any people with disability who may face barriers at a voting centre (including people with psychosocial disability)
- people who care for a person with disability who may face barriers at a voting centre.

### Braille and large-print ballot papers

The VEC posts braille ballot papers to people on request. While this is a valuable service to some voters, only a small proportion of people with vision impairment can read braille. At the 2022 state election, 26 people requested braille ballot papers across the whole of Victoria.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to braille ballot papers, the VEC offers large-print ballot papers for local council elections. Large-print is significantly more requested than braille, with 208 requests for large-print compared to 37 for braille at the 2024 local council elections.<sup>16</sup> However, the VEC has stated that it will not provide large-print ballot material at state elections ‘due to production timeline constraints’.<sup>17</sup>

Regardless of timeline constraints, the Committee recognises that there would be practical difficulties with producing large-print versions of the Upper House ballot papers. The regular ballot papers were 50 by 41 centimetres at the 2022 election and large-print versions would have to be much larger.

Nonetheless, the data from local council elections suggest that there may be a demand for large-print ballot papers at state elections. The Committee encourages the VEC to investigate whether there are any ways to provide large-print ballot papers at future state elections.

In addition, braille ballot papers are only available by post. Some stakeholders suggested having a supply of braille ballot papers at voting centres.<sup>18</sup> The VEC may wish to consider the practicality of that.

<sup>15</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 26.

<sup>16</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 26.

<sup>17</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 47.

<sup>18</sup> Blind Citizens Australia, *Submission 32*, p. 7; Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 22.

### 3.2.3 Telephone-assisted voting

Telephone-assisted voting allows people to vote using an ordinary telephone. Voters tell election officials how they would like their ballot papers to be filled out. The election official completes a physical ballot paper, which is then included in the count with the other ballot papers. At the 2022 election, 5,476 people used telephone-assisted voting.<sup>19</sup>

Telephone-assisted voting is only available to electors who:

- cannot vote without assistance because of blindness or low vision
- cannot vote without assistance because of a motor impairment
- are unable to travel to a voting centre because of a declared emergency.<sup>20</sup>

As part of this Inquiry, the VEC has advocated for change to allow more people to access telephone-assisted voting. The VEC recommended adding several extra categories, including electors who are neurodivergent, unwell, infirm and carers.<sup>21</sup> Another stakeholder also called for extending access to telephone-assisted voting to more people with disability.<sup>22</sup>

The VEC made the same recommendation during the Committee's inquiry into the 2022 election. The Committee at that time noted that adding all the categories that the VEC proposed (which also included interstate and overseas electors) would expand eligibility by hundreds of thousands. The Committee therefore recommended that the VEC undertake further work to understand the implications of such a large expansion of eligibility, including the risks, costs, challenges and impacts on campaigning.<sup>23</sup>

The VEC supported this recommendation and committed to publishing the results of that research.<sup>24</sup> At the time of this Inquiry, the VEC told the Committee that research had been conducted and was expected to be published later in 2026.<sup>25</sup>

Subject to the results of that research, the Committee believes that there may be benefits to extending the eligibility for telephone-assisted voting to other people who face barriers at voting centres because of disability, including neurodivergent people and people with psychosocial disorders. People who fear for their safety if voting in person may also benefit from telephone-assisted voting.

<sup>19</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 63.

<sup>20</sup> *Electoral Regulations 2022* (Vic) reg 50.

<sup>21</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 8*, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *The conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, vol. 2, July 2024, p. 98, Recommendation 23.

<sup>24</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Response to the Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, 18 November 2024, p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, correspondence, 29 May 2026, p. 3.

### 3.3 Voting centres are still important for people with disability

The Committee fully supports the VEC offering mobile voting, postal voting and telephone-assisted voting for people with disability. Multiple people told the Committee that these were helpful. However, even with these options, it is important to ensure that voting centres are inclusive and accessible. For some people, mobile, postal or telephone-assisted voting are not suitable or not available. For others, there are particular aspects of voting centres that are important to them. Relying on alternative voting methods to provide voting for people with disability risks ‘othering’ them by excluding them from the mainstream voting experience and undermining equal participation.

#### 3.3.1 Mobile, postal and telephone-assisted voting have limitations

##### Lived experience

“ The phone voting is torture. I was just suppose to have everything worked out, who I wanted in what order and all those things. [I had to] remember everything that’s read out to me and be able to put them in the order and know who is running and everything. So it feels like I need to have everything worked out beforehand.

Source: Respondent to consultation by Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 18.

“ The issue with doing a postal vote is that it generally works well for my disability which is an Acquired Brain Injury but the major issue is that I live alone and needing to get a witness for postal voting makes completing a postal vote quite difficult.

Source: Respondent to the Committee’s survey of voters with disability (Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election).

Mobile, postal and telephone-assisted voting do not suit some people with disability.

After the 2022 election, voters were surveyed about their experience by an independent organisation as part of the VEC’s evaluation efforts (see Section 9.5). Of the respondents who used telephone-assisted voting, 6% were dissatisfied, with 14% indicating that it was a worse experience than voting had been for them at previous elections.<sup>26</sup>

Some participants in this Inquiry also expressed concerns about telephone-assisted voting, including:

- difficulties being able to take the information in and work out preferences over the phone<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Kantar Public, *Victorian Electoral Commission: evaluation of services at the 26 November 2022 Victorian State election*, report for the Victorian Electoral Commission, 2023, pp. 67, 69. Dissatisfaction is measured by people scoring it as 1–4 out of 10.

<sup>27</sup> Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 18.

- the fact that telephone-assisted voting includes staff involvement and is therefore not fully independent, secret and verifiable.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, 7% of people who voted by post (which included both people with disability and people without) were dissatisfied.<sup>29</sup> Several of the people consulted by the Australian Institute of Architects voted by post because they felt that that was their only practical choice rather than because they preferred it.<sup>30</sup>

Postal voting can provide a number of barriers for some people with disability. Some people require assistance filling out ballot papers and may not be comfortable getting help from their support people or family members, as they would prefer to keep their voting preferences private. For these people, getting assistance from an official at a voting centre may be preferable. Postal voting also requires having someone available to witness the voter signing the declaration envelope and some people with disability may not have someone readily available at home to do this.<sup>31</sup> In addition, applications for postal voting close three days before election day. It may therefore not be accessible to people who become unable to travel to a voting centre unexpectedly in the last days of the voting period.

Mobile voting also has limitations. It is only available at limited locations and at limited times. This means that it is not an option for many people with disability. In addition, the setups for mobile voting are not always ideal. The Committee was told that private voting was not always possible with mobile voting.<sup>32</sup> The Committee also heard that some voters needed more information in advance of mobile voting.<sup>33</sup>

Another concern about postal and telephone-assisted voting is that they may not allow for a free vote for people experiencing family or domestic violence. Women with Disabilities Victoria noted that women and gender-diverse people with disability are much more likely to experience family or domestic violence than the population as a whole.<sup>34</sup>

These limitations mean that, for some people with disability, voting at a voting centre may be the best or only option.

<sup>28</sup> Blind Citizens Australia, *Submission 32*, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> Kantar Public, *Victorian Electoral Commission: evaluation of services at the 26 November 2022 Victorian State election*, report for the Victorian Electoral Commission, 2023, p. 99. Dissatisfaction is measured by people scoring it as 1–4 out of 10.

<sup>30</sup> Australian Institute of Architects, *Submission 44*, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Reinforce Self-Advocacy, *Submission 31*, p. 1. This was also raised by multiple respondents to the Committee's survey of voters with disability (Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election).

<sup>32</sup> Dementia Australia, *Submission 50*, p. 8; Dr Rose Capp, Policy Adviser, Dementia Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 22.

<sup>33</sup> Dementia Australia, *Submission 50*, p. 8; Dr Rose Capp, Policy Adviser, Dementia Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 21–3.

<sup>34</sup> Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, pp. 15–16; Saumya Kaushik, Policy Research Lead, Women with Disabilities Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 27 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

### 3.3.2 Voting centres have advantages for some people with disability

#### Lived experience

“ There is no real other option that postal voting which is unfair. I should have the choice to be part of the process and vote on the day, get my democracy sausage like everyone else.

Source: Respondent to consultation by the Australian Institute of Architects, *Submission 44*, p. 3.

There are certain benefits of voting centres which are not available through mobile, postal and telephone-assisted voting which may be important for some people with disability.

Voting centres provide the opportunity to get advice from election officials on how to complete ballot papers. Election officials can also help voters to complete ballot papers, which may be preferable for some people than having a support person or family member assist. Attending a voting centre also provides an opportunity to get how-to-vote cards<sup>35</sup> and speak with candidates or campaigners. For some people, voting on election day rather than the early-voting period is important, as some parties release policies very close to election day and events may occur in the last days of the election period which affect a person's vote.

Attending a voting centre and participating in shared civic rituals such as the 'democracy sausage' can also be an expression of belonging and feeling included in civic life. In addition, voting in person can be a way for people with disability to be seen and can be 'a powerful expression of equal citizenship'.<sup>36</sup>

Given these factors, it is important for voting centres to be accessible for people with disability.

Australia's obligations under the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and the VEC's obligations under Victorian legislation also require voting centres to be accessible and require voting processes to allow people with disability to participate in political life on an equal basis with others (see Section 2.3.1).

**FINDING 7:** Attending a voting centre can be the best option for some people with disability. This is because there are limitations to mobile, postal and telephone-assisted voting that result in them not meeting some people's needs. In addition, there are certain benefits to attending a voting centre, such as access to support from voting centre staff and participation in shared civic rituals.

<sup>35</sup> How-to-vote cards that have been registered before the mobile voting visit are brought to mobile voting.

<sup>36</sup> Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 9; Saumya Kaushik, Policy Research Lead, Women with Disabilities Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 27 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

## 3.4 The VEC's plans for future elections

The VEC uses several plans to direct its work. These include a plan specifically focused on people with disability (the *Disability education and engagement plan*) as well as more general strategic and election-focused plans. The Victorian Government also has a state disability plan which includes some actions related to elections.

By examining these plans, we can better understand the VEC's future goals and how it plans to achieve them.

The Committee has found that there is scope for improvement in how these plans are prepared and reported on. These potential changes are explored in Chapter 9 of this report.

### 3.4.1 The Disability education and engagement plan

The VEC launched a *Disability education and engagement plan* (DEEP) in 2025. The VEC has explained that:

The purpose of the DEEP is to reduce barriers experienced by people with disability when engaging with the electoral system and to increase participation across all stages of the electoral cycle. This includes access to information, enrolment, voting services, employment opportunities, and consultation processes. The plan is underpinned by a principle of continuous improvement, recognising that accessibility is not static and must evolve in response to lived experience, technological change, and community expectations.<sup>37</sup>

The Electoral Commissioner explained that the plan was developed in collaboration with the disability community, support agencies and the VEC's Electoral Access Advisory Group (see Section 3.5).<sup>38</sup>

The plan sets out 15 goals to be achieved between 2025 and 2027. These goals focus on:

- improving access for people with disability
- increasing their knowledge and confidence in electoral processes
- building relationships with people with disability and increasing their visibility and representation.<sup>39</sup>

A number of actions are associated with each goal. These are generally defined at a high level, such as 'address barriers for parents, carers, and workers who help people vote' or 'deliver partnership programs with disability service providers'.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

<sup>39</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Disability education and engagement plan*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 13.

<sup>40</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Disability education and engagement plan*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 13.

The plan also identifies eight outcomes that it intends to achieve:

- more accessible and inclusive voting options available to more people (including low-sensory voting, telephone-assisted voting, large-print ballot papers, braille ballot papers and postal voting)
- reduced reports of accessibility issues during and after elections
- more people with disability knowing how to enrol and vote and feeling confident enrolling and voting
- more people with disability enrolling and voting
- organisations that support people with disability promoting electoral education and supporting their clients to vote
- having stronger engagement, visibility and representation from disability stakeholders at the VEC
- disability stakeholders having greater awareness and understanding of the VEC's work and the importance of electoral participation
- improving the VEC's understanding of the 'unsound mind' provisions and the impacts of direct enrolment on voters with disability.<sup>41</sup>

Quantified targets for these outcomes are not set in the plan, but more details are included in a *Monitoring and evaluation plan for the 2025–2027 VEC education and engagement plans* (see further discussion in Section 9.2).

The VEC told the Committee:

To date, the DEEP has informed the preparation of detailed training content and delivery resources for disability sector staff, an inclusive suite of accessible election materials to support diverse learning and communication needs, professional learning for VEC staff to strengthen their knowledge of neurodiversity in the workplace, and the development of site inspections and planning for low sensory voting.<sup>42</sup>

### 3.4.2 The Strategic service plan

The VEC has also produced a *Strategic service plan* which more broadly sets out the VEC's 3-year and 5-year plans. One of the aims in the plan is 'accessibility for our communities' diverse needs'.<sup>43</sup>

For the 2026 election, the plan's commitments include:

- reviewing its mobile voting policy
- appointing Democracy Ambassadors as permanent roles to deliver education and engagement sessions

<sup>41</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Disability education and engagement plan*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 14.

<sup>42</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Strategic service plan*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 9.

- conducting research on the barriers preventing voter participation
- implementing ‘new activities based on research findings to reduce the barriers to entry’ (such as low-sensory voting).<sup>44</sup>

The plan also contains commitments for the 2030 election, including:

- reviewing the provision of telephone-assisted voting and advocating for legislative change to expand access (see Section 3.2.3)
- undertaking ‘research into technology enabled voting options’, developing a plan for implementation and advocating for legislative change where needed.<sup>45</sup>

### 3.4.3 The 2026 state election service plan

The VEC’s state election service plan sets out some specific commitments for supporting voters with disability at the 2026 election. At the time of writing this report, a draft version of the plan had been published, but the final version had not yet been released. All discussion in this report relates to the draft plan.

The VEC will offer mobile, postal and telephone-assisted voting, as in previous elections (see Section 3.2).<sup>46</sup>

The VEC also plans to provide at least one low-sensory voting site in every district from 10 am to 4 pm on Tuesday 17 November.<sup>47</sup> Low-sensory voting has been trialled at previous by-elections, but this is the first time it has been made available at a general election. Low-sensory voting is discussed further in Section 4.4.

In terms of regular voting centres, the VEC has committed to having at least one ‘fully accessible’ voting centre or early voting centre in each district.<sup>48</sup> The VEC has also changed some of its targets for the proportion of venues that are rated as ‘independent wheelchair access’ and ‘assisted wheelchair access’ (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2).

In addition, the plan states that the VEC will provide ‘numerous tools and aids’ to help voters, including magnifying sheets, maxi pencils, assisted hearing devices at early voting centres and wheelchair or desktop voting compartments.<sup>49</sup> The VEC will also send braille ballot papers to voters who request them.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Strategic service plan*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 15.

<sup>45</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Strategic service plan*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 17.

<sup>46</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, pp. 48–9.

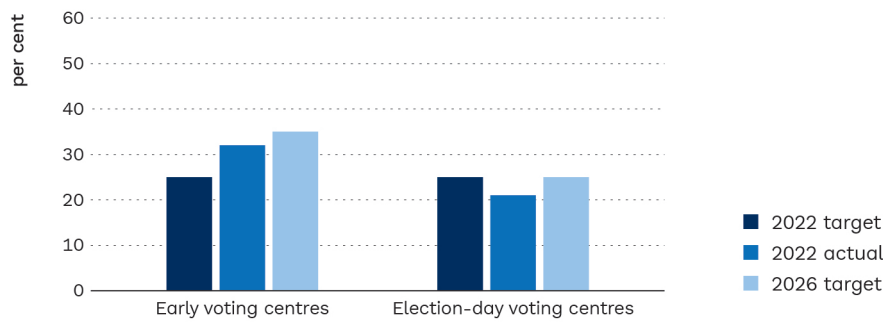
<sup>47</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 49.

<sup>48</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 32.

<sup>49</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 48.

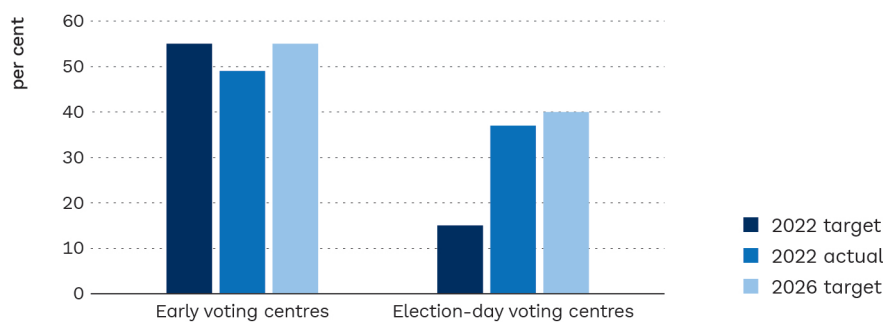
<sup>50</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 47.

Figure 3.1 Targets for independent wheelchair access, 2022 and 2026



Sources: Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, pp. 133–4; Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 10.

Figure 3.2 Targets for assisted wheelchair access, 2022 and 2026



Sources: Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, pp. 133–4; Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 10.

In terms of communication and engagement, the plan states that:

Our services for people living with disability will include braille ballot papers and peer-to-peer electoral education sessions. With these activities we aim to further enhance the support provided to people with disabilities to enrol and vote. We will work with peak bodies and community partners to provide targeted resources and ensure that appropriate information is distributed across their networks.

We will deliver education sessions to sector staff in strategic organisations to facilitate the distribution of information and support to clients and participants.

We will create video and print resources to support community members to enrol and vote. This will include:

- supporting resources such as access guides and social stories
- video resources targeted at carers/support workers
- Auslan video resources
- promotional material.<sup>51</sup>

The VEC has also committed to providing election information in accessible formats for people with vision impairments.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 31.

<sup>52</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 46.

### 3.4.4 The state disability plan

The Victorian Government has produced a disability plan for the public sector as a whole. The current plan covers the period from 2022 to 2026. It includes several commitments relating to elections:

We will work with community to improve the engagement of people with disability in Victoria's democracy. We will do this by:

- 4.3.7 Forming a partnership with a training organisation to provide a leadership program for people with disability. The aim will be to support new and emerging leaders to promote active citizenship and participation in elections.
- 4.3.8 Supporting leadership graduates (from action 4.3.7) to apply for paid roles as Victorian Electoral Commission Democracy Ambassadors. The roles will provide education and share their knowledge about democracy, how to vote, understanding the value of voting and how democratic processes affect service delivery requirements for people with disability.
- 4.3.9 Delivering peer-led electoral education sessions across Victorian NDIS-approved services, specialist accommodation services and Australian disability enterprises.
- 4.3.10 Co-designing an electoral education resource with people with disability to inform people with disability about active citizenship, democracy and the support available when enrolling and voting.<sup>53</sup>

The Government stated that these were all 'on track' in its midway report in 2024.<sup>54</sup> The VEC told the Committee that it engaged 15 people with disability or lived experience of disability as Democracy Ambassadors at the 2022 election and will follow a similar process for the 2026 election. These Democracy Ambassadors deliver sessions to disability services and specialist schools. The VEC also indicated that the development of electoral education resources for people with disability was 'in progress' for the 2026 election.<sup>55</sup>

### 3.4.5 Plans to support other groups that face barriers

The VEC also has a variety of other plans to address barriers faced by certain groups. These include plans for the education and engagement of:

- Aboriginal people
- people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- prisoners and people without a home
- young people.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Victorian Government, *Inclusive Victoria: state disability plan 2022–2026*, [2022], p. 69.

<sup>54</sup> Victorian Government, *Inclusive Victoria: state disability plan midway report*, Melbourne, 2024, p. 89.

<sup>55</sup> Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, correspondence, 29 May 2026, p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *How our new engagement plans support all Victorians*, <<https://vec.vic.gov.au/about-us/vec-news/how-our-new-engagement-plans-support-all-victorians>> accessed 8 May 2026.

As noted in Section 2.2.1, some people with disability will also fit into one or more of these other categories. For some of these categories (such as Aboriginal people and prisoners), people are more likely to have disability than the general population.<sup>57</sup> For other categories, people with disability may need a different approach. For example, young people with disability may not participate in traditional schooling<sup>58</sup> and may therefore need a different approach to education and engagement to other young people.

It is therefore important that these plans interact and that people working on delivering one plan are aware of the others. Similarly, it is important in designing each of these plans that the VEC consult with all its stakeholders, including all its advisory groups, to ensure that those perspectives have been included.

This will help to support those people who fit into more than one of these categories.<sup>59</sup>

### 3.5 An Electoral Access Advisory Group provides advice to the VEC

The VEC has established an advisory group to provide ‘independent advice, feedback, and community perspectives to support accessible and inclusive electoral participation for people with disability.’<sup>60</sup>

The group currently includes representatives of:

- Scope
- Vision Australia
- Blind Citizens Australia
- Amaze
- Yooralla
- Carers Victoria
- VALID (Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability)
- the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
- Action on Disability within Ethnic Communities
- the Brotherhood of St. Laurence.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 27*, p. 2; Centre for Innovative Justice, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services, Human Rights Law Centre and Voices for Change, *Submission 49*, pp. 9–11; Morgan O’Sullivan, Principal Policy Lead, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 43.

<sup>58</sup> ACD (the Association for Children with a Disability), *Submission 30*, pp. 2–3; Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, pp. 14–15. See also Youth Disability Advocacy Service & Youth Affairs Council Victoria, *Submission 48*, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> See related discussion from Lisa Briggs, Chief Executive Officer, and Reuben Leigh, Policy Officer, Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 7–8.

<sup>60</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 6.

<sup>61</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 6.

The VEC has stated that feedback from the group has informed how venues are assessed, how accessibility information is communicated and how staff interact with voters. Low-sensory voting (see Section 4.4 of this report) and the Voters Voice app (see Section 6.7.1) emerged from suggestions of the group.<sup>62</sup> The *Disability education and engagement plan* was also developed in close collaboration with the group.<sup>63</sup>

In addition, the VEC has established a 'carers and supporters electoral participation working group'. The VEC plans to 'work with this group to co-design electoral education, information, and promotional resources for carers, supporters, and family members of people with disabilities in the lead up to the 2026 state election.'<sup>64</sup>

The Committee considers that working with these groups can be valuable. Providing opportunities for input from people with lived experience is essential to delivering effective support. However, there also need to be effective systems to ensure that this input is properly considered as part of the VEC's planning, training and service delivery.

Robust performance measures can demonstrate the effectiveness of groups like these or highlight problems. Publicly reporting on these measures provides transparency and accountability to the community. The VEC has established some performance measures relating to these groups and their impact, but there is potential for more reporting on the groups (see Section 9.4.2).

**FINDING 8:** The VEC's planning is supported by a number of documents, including a *Disability education and engagement plan*, which set out how the VEC will support people with disability. The VEC also seeks input from an Electoral Access Advisory Group, which consists of representatives from multiple organisations that support people with disability.

<sup>62</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 7; Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 50; Victorian Electoral Commission, Electoral Access Advisory Group, *Meeting minutes*, 1 June 2021, p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Annual report 2024–25*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 75.



# Chapter 4

## Selecting venues for voting centres

### 4.1 Introduction

#### Lived experience

“ The atmosphere was welcoming and the staff were friendly, even though there was a long queue. However, the path through the heritage pavilion and courtyard to the voting area was not accessible. There was signage directing people to an alternative accessible route, but this meant using a separate entrance and queue. As someone with lived experience of disability, I chose not to use this option because I did not want to feel “othered” or singled out. I have bilateral leg amputations and wear prosthetic legs, but my disability is not always obvious. I did not want to have to explain or justify why I was using the accessible queue, in case staff questioned me. As a result, I used the main route, which was physically challenging and not inclusive.

Source: Nicole Karidis, *Submission 28*, p. 2.

In selecting venues to be voting centres, accessibility and inclusion must be fundamental requirements. As discussed in Section 3.3, voting centres are an essential means of participation for some people with disability. Legislation also places multiple requirements on the VEC in relation to accessibility and non-discrimination (see Section 2.3).

At the 2026 election, the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) plans to operate three types of voting centre:

- approximately 220 early voting centres, which will operate for the 10 days before election day<sup>1</sup> and on election day (28 November)
- approximately 1,530 additional election-day voting centres, which will only open on election day
- at least 88 low-sensory voting centres, which will only open for six hours on Tuesday 17 November.<sup>2</sup>

Section 4.2 of this chapter examines the VEC’s venue selection framework. The VEC has done considerable work in recent years to introduce new arrangements for people

<sup>1</sup> Excluding Sunday 22 November.

<sup>2</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, pp. 32, 46, 49.

with disability. However, the Committee would like to see a broader set of criteria used to assess potential voting centre venues. The Committee would also like to see a more transparent approach. This would include publishing details of the VEC's process and establishing measures to demonstrate the effectiveness of the VEC's efforts in procuring appropriate venues.

Section 4.3 looks at some of the difficulties that the VEC has experienced finding suitable early voting centres. It also explores possible solutions to make it easier in the future. The VEC has called for legislation to require publicly funded venues to be available for use as early voting centres. There is also potential for additional accessible venues to be constructed as part of other infrastructure projects.

Low-sensory voting venues are explored in Section 4.4. The VEC is planning to provide low-sensory voting throughout Victoria at the 2026 election. The Committee would like to see access to low-sensory voting expanded to more groups and to see low-sensory characteristics considered as part of the selection process for all voting centres.

Section 4.5 notes the need to consider public transport in venue selection and to advertise which venues are close to accessible public transport stops. Providing additional public transport services on election day would also help people to get to voting centres to vote, campaign or work for the VEC.

## 4.2 How voting centre venues are selected

When planning elections, the VEC develops an *Election infrastructure location strategy*, which establishes the election infrastructure model in the context of a particular election. This guides and informs strategic and operational plans.<sup>3</sup> Supporting these plans is a multi-step process involving the identification of possible venues, site inspections and an evaluation of the shortlisted venues.<sup>4</sup>

To establish more inclusive elections, the VEC needs a robust selection framework that has an accessibility-first approach (see Section 1.4.1) embedded at every stage, aligned with universal design principles. This should include a strategy which identifies accessibility as a priority, a comprehensive and publicly articulated set of selection criteria, transparent weighting and prioritisation, and performance reporting after each election.

### 4.2.1 Accessibility must be prioritised at a strategic level

The *Election infrastructure location strategy* sets out four 'core strategic principles'. These are intended to provide 'a framework to assess election infrastructure solutions ... [and] will assure that the VEC is able to deliver the desired outcomes in a rapidly changing environment with evolving voter and governmental expectations.'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Election infrastructure location strategy*, [Melbourne], 2020, pp. 3–4.

<sup>4</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Election infrastructure location strategy*, [Melbourne], 2020, p. 1.

Of the four principles, ‘Deliver voter-centric services’ is most relevant to this Inquiry. The related ‘elements’ are listed as

- Enable all Victorians with an eligibility to vote to do so
- Deliver electoral services on time and in line with public expectations
- Create a positive elector experience when engaging with our electoral services, products and processes
- Incorporate elector behaviour and trends into evidence-based solutions
- Capture elector feedback and implement continual improvements where possible.<sup>6</sup>

While accessibility for people with disability is implied by some of these elements, the Committee would like to see accessibility explicitly included at this strategic level in future versions.

In describing the election context, the strategy does note that ‘Both voter and government behaviours and expectations are rapidly evolving, including ... A strong desire for more convenient and accessible voting’.<sup>7</sup> While it is good to see a reference to accessibility, the Committee is concerned that the VEC describes accessibility as a ‘strong desire’ of voters and government, rather than a legal obligation. As discussed in Section 2.3.1, legislation requires accessibility (except where accommodations cannot be reasonably justified). Embedding accessibility as an obligation into the strategy could help to ensure that it is prioritised through the venue selection process.

A strategic plan sits underneath the *Election infrastructure location strategy*. In describing learnings from the previous election, the strategic plan notes:

There is a lack of physically accessible spaces for use as both early and election day voting centres. While securing more venues will be a challenge, the focus could be on ensuring that as many leased venues as possible meet the accessibility requirements for voters who may have mobility issues.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, in relation to ‘location needs’ for early voting centres, the strategic plan states:

All EVCs [early voting centres] should be fully accessible to the public (aim for 100% compliance with disability accessibility targets)<sup>9</sup>

However, accessibility is not listed as a location need for election-day voting centres.

The Committee is disappointed to see accessibility only listed as a need for early voting centres. The Committee is also disappointed that the discussion of accessibility is restricted to voters with mobility issues (the Committee presumes that the ‘disability accessibility targets’ referred to are the wheelchair access targets).

<sup>6</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Election infrastructure location strategy*, [Melbourne], 2020, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Election infrastructure location strategy*, [Melbourne], 2020, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *2022 election infrastructure locations strategic plan*, [Melbourne], 2020, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *2022 election infrastructure locations strategic plan*, [Melbourne], 2020, p. 7.

In addition, in 2022, there appears to have been a mismatch between the goal of all early voting centres being fully accessible in the strategic plan and the final *2022 state election service plan*, which only aimed for 25% of voting centres to be classified as ‘independent wheelchair access’.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, in the 2026 election service plan, the VEC states:

We are committed to ensuring that each district has at least one fully accessible VC [voting centre] or EVC [early voting centre] to provide maximum access for voters.<sup>11</sup>

This is a much less ambitious goal than what was set out in the strategic plan. The Committee also considers that the VEC is overstating by claiming that providing ‘at least one fully [wheelchair] accessible venue’ for around 50,000 voters constitutes ‘maximum access for voters’. It suggests that accessibility has not been prioritised or treated as an obligation.

The Committee considers that accessibility for people with disability should be more thoroughly integrated into planning at the strategic level. The three guiding principles outlined in Section 1.4 should also be incorporated into the plan—an accessibility-first approach, a whole-of-journey approach and understanding the diversity of disability. The VEC may find it difficult to remove barriers to accessibility when the issue is framed as a desire rather than an obligation, defined narrowly as physical accessibility and not identified as a need for election-day voting centres.

**FINDING 9:** The VEC’s strategy and strategic plan for election infrastructure do not recognise accessibility as an obligation. Accessibility is also framed narrowly as physical accessibility, referenced only in relation to early voting centres and not identified at all as a location need for election-day voting centres.

### 4.2.2 The current accessibility criteria are limited

After identifying potential sites, the VEC assesses the venues using a set of criteria relating to:

- operational factors (such as cost, logistics, security, telecommunications and size)
- basic amenity considerations (including entries, pathways, internal movement, toilets, lighting)
- political neutrality.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *2022 state election service plan*, Melbourne, 2022, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, pp. 8–9.

The VEC notes in its submission that:

Accessibility requirements feature across some of these factors [that are used to assess venues], for example:

- proximity to public transport services
- accessible parking, pathways, entrances, doors, ramps, handrails, toilets and, if needed, lifts
- availability of audible and Braille features
- adequate internal and external lighting
- reasonably free from hazards and risks.<sup>13</sup>

Key to the VEC's venue selection process are two forms used in inspecting a site: an 'inspection form/selection checklist' and an 'accessibility audit form'. The Committee reviewed the latest versions of these as part of this Inquiry. The VEC has indicated that these forms will be merged into one document for the 2026 election.<sup>14</sup>

### 4.2.3 The inspection form/selection checklist provides some information about accessibility

The VEC's inspection form<sup>15</sup> includes a checklist of features related to the needs of the VEC and voters. The form is completed using a combination of yes/no/NA responses, check boxes, measurements and subjective responses with some opportunities for commentary.

The form includes multiple criteria related to physical accessibility. However, some complex issues are reduced to yes/no answers, even when the reality may be nuanced. For example, a yes/no response is required for accessible parking, but no quantity is specified. One field asks whether there are accessible toilets, but it does not specify whether they are in spaces that the public has access to or only staff. No option is available for identifying ambulant toilets.

Twelve criteria relating to low-sensory considerations are listed but are only used if the venue has been pre-designated as a low-sensory voting centre.

The form does not clearly define or distinguish between the needs of voters, carers, staff and campaigners. The inspection form also relies in part on subjective and undefined judgements such as 'risky-neighbours free', 'easy to open' doors or 'enough' fixed toilets.

<sup>13</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, pp. 8–9.

<sup>14</sup> Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, correspondence, 20 March 2026, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Inspection form Mar 2026—v13*, [Melbourne], 2026.

#### 4.2.4 The VEC's accessibility audit form is focused on wheelchairs

The VEC introduced a wheelchair accessibility audit for the 2002 Victorian state election. This is used to classify a voting centre into one of three categories:

- independent wheelchair access
- assisted wheelchair access
- limited or no wheelchair access.

This is currently the only publicly advertised measure of accessibility (see further discussion in Section 7.6.1).

In 2002, the introduction of a formal audit and categorised ratings represented a significant improvement in transparency and accessibility. However, more than two decades later, the framework has not evolved in line with contemporary understandings of accessibility, human rights obligations or the diverse needs of voters (see Section 1.4.3).

The accessibility audit form,<sup>16</sup> while technically detailed, focuses predominantly on wheelchair accessibility and does not account for broader accessibility considerations, including sensory, cognitive, communication and whole-of-journey factors. As with the inspection form, it primarily consists of yes/no questions, plus a few questions with other multiple choices. Depending on which criteria are met, a venue is categorised as one of the three wheelchair access categories listed above.

The current accessibility audit form collects some information that would also be useful to people who do not use wheelchairs, such as the presence of automatic doors, audible and braille information in elevators and slip-resistant floors. However, this information is not communicated to voters, despite its importance for many voters (see Section 7.6.1). Further, the absence of key details, such as the availability of accessible or ambulant toilets or the number of accessible car parks, limits the usefulness of the tool, even for wheelchair users.

#### 4.2.5 Accessibility assessments must consider more than wheelchairs

Submitters consistently highlighted that accessibility extends well beyond physical accessibility. In addition, physical accessibility cannot be understood solely in terms of wheelchair use. They emphasised that accessibility barriers affect not only wheelchair users but also people with other mobility limitations, fatigue, cognitive impairment, neurodiversity, deafness, vision impairment and other disabilities.<sup>17</sup> Submitters emphasised the need for a broader, more inclusive approach:

<sup>16</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Accessibility audit form—Attachment 3*, [Melbourne], 2024.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Deaf Victoria, *Submission 9*, p. 3; Nicole Karidis, *Submission 28*, p. 1; Blind Citizens Australia, *Submission 32*, pp. 6–8; Endeavour Foundation, *Submission 37*, p. 2; Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 11; Dementia Australia, *Submission 50*, p. 4.

Feedback [from Endeavour Foundation members] included looking beyond wheelchair accessibility and considering other factors such as environment and noise, queue management, and priority access for people with disability. Excessive noise or crowded spaces can cause distress, physical pain and anxiety for some people with disabilities such as Autism making it very difficult to absorb information and concentrate on the task at hand, while long wait times without seating can be physically exhausting for those with fatigue or pain-related conditions.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, Women with Disabilities Victoria noted that:

Voting centre accessibility should not be limited to a wheelchair accessibility rating and limited to access aids and tools. Voting centre accessibility should take a **whole-of-journey approach**. This means considering the voter's experience from travelling to the centre, to casting their vote, and returning home. The goal should be to ensure the process is safe, easy and empowers voters with disabilities.

The Committee should develop best practice accessibility and inclusion guidelines for voting centres. These guidelines should be co-designed with people with disabilities. This will help ensure that accessibility measures are meaningful, not tokenistic, and allow every voter to confidently choose in-person voting if they wish.<sup>19</sup>

Other specific criteria are discussed in other parts of this report, including clear approaches, entries and exits (Section 5.2), the provision of accessibility tools and services (Chapter 6) and sensory accessibility (Section 4.4.2).

Of note, the VEC's accessibility audit form does not include fields to identify whether either 'ambulant' or 'accessible' toilets are available for voters. This information is also not published for voters. However, this is a fundamental requirement for many people with disability with or without wheelchairs, or those who have children with disability who must accompany them.

The Committee also heard evidence that current practices may fail to consider voter dignity. A voting centre cannot be listed as 'independent wheelchair access' unless the main entrance is accessible, but a venue can be classed as 'assisted wheelchair access' if there is an alternative accessible entrance.<sup>20</sup> However, the Committee heard that alternative entrances sometimes fail to provide voters with a dignified experience.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Endeavour Foundation, *Submission 37*, p. 2; See also Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Accessibility audit form—Attachment 3*, [Melbourne], 2024, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 2*, p. 1; Mary Lo Schiavo, *Submission 3*, p. 1; Nicole Karidis, *Submission 28*, p. 2.

### Lived experience

“ I couldn’t get through the door at the church, so I travelled to the next one ... I had to go through the garbage entrance.

Source: Name withheld, *Submission 2*, p. 1.

“ Why are disabled people always told to go around the back or through a different entrance?

Source: Mary Lo Schiavo, *Submission 3*, p. 1.

The Committee notes that contemporary policy approaches, including the Victorian Government’s *Inclusive Victoria: state disability plan 2022–2026*, emphasise the application of universal design and co-design principles across infrastructure and service delivery. Universal design is the design and development of products, environments, programs and services in such a way that they are ‘usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design’.<sup>22</sup> It goes beyond accessibility, which often focuses on meeting legal standards for people with disabilities, by creating solutions that are naturally easier and more intuitive for all users.

A simple example of this approach would be to consider the low-sensory voting features as part of every audit and not just audits of low-sensory voting centres (see further discussion in Section 4.4.2).

Considering a broader range of criteria would also be in line with the new guiding principles recommended by the Committee in Section 1.4.

#### 4.2.6 The VEC recognises the need for change

In its submission to this Inquiry, the VEC acknowledged that its current approach to accessibility audits has potential for improvement:

We are continuing to evolve our consideration of accessibility at voting centres to encompass a wider range of access challenges, acknowledging that mobility-related disabilities are not representative of the full scope of disability challenges faced by Victorians that may present barriers to voting in person. Feedback from the community and our disability sector partners has indicated that we should identify opportunities to expand our selection checklist to encompass a broader scope of disability access considerations. We are looking to incorporate this into the selection checklist, noting that the limited available venue options in turn limit our capacity to meet additional criteria when sourcing voting centres.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> The Universal Design Project, *What is universal design?*, <<https://universaldesign.org/definition>> accessed 7 July 2026.

<sup>23</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 10.

The *Disability education and engagement plan* also includes a commitment to ‘review our building access checklist for reasonable adjustments to voting centres and election offices’.<sup>24</sup>

The Committee is pleased to see that the VEC recognises the need to revise its criteria and to consider a broader range of barriers. The Committee further notes the VEC’s consideration of feedback from the disability community and sector partners as a constructive step towards improved access. Incorporating that feedback, along with the guiding principles outlined in Section 1.4 of this report and the recommendations made throughout this report, would provide a more robust set of criteria that would present fewer barriers to voters.

**FINDING 10:** As part of its assessment of venues for use as voting centres, the VEC relies on forms completed during site inspections. These forms include multiple criteria and are primarily completed with yes/no tick boxes, with some limited space for commentary. The accessibility criteria predominantly relate to wheelchair accessibility and leave out the needs of many people with disability. Some additional criteria are used to select low-sensory voting centres, but these criteria are not used to assess other venues.

**FINDING 11:** The VEC’s continued reliance on wheelchair accessibility as the primary measure of accessibility is a systemic limitation in the VEC’s approach to accessibility. It fails to reflect the full range of barriers experienced by voters and does not adequately support inclusive venue selection or accurately reflect the lived experience of people with disability. The VEC is considering ways to expand its assessment of accessibility.

**RECOMMENDATION 8:** That the VEC comprehensively review and redevelop its venue accessibility audit process. The new audit process should reflect the full range of barriers and access requirements and include both qualitative and quantitative measures. The process should be based on an accessibility-first approach to venue selection, assessing all potential voting centres against a comprehensive set of accessibility requirements. The VEC should aim to have the highest possible number of voting centres meet the broadest range of accessibility criteria.

#### 4.2.7 The VEC should adopt a more transparent process

As noted in Section 4.2.4, the VEC is expanding its concept of accessibility and trying to reduce barriers for a wider range of people with disability. However, without clear commitments, defined standards and accountability mechanisms, the VEC’s intention may remain aspirational and may not result in meaningful improvements in practice. The Committee would therefore like to see more transparency around the VEC’s selection of voting centres, including the development of a publicly available venue selection strategy, along with post-election evaluation and reporting.

<sup>24</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Disability education and engagement plan*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 13.

The VEC produces several infrastructure location documents (see Section 4.2.1) and provides some details about its strategy for voting centres in the election service plan (see Section 3.4.3).<sup>25</sup> These materials provide some visibility of the process by which venues are identified and assessed, as well as the strategic configuration of the broader network. However, they do not constitute a clearly articulated strategy for venue selection. Many of the VEC's commitments are described at a high level in the state election service plan, through aspirational statements such as 'ensure every Victorian can take part in a fair, accessible and trusted election'<sup>26</sup> and an 'intent to provide an accessible experience.'<sup>27</sup>

In addition, much of the VEC's documentation is not publicly available. The *Election infrastructure location strategy* and the strategic plan that sits underneath it are not published. Nor are the criteria in the inspection and accessibility audit forms (see Section 4.2.2).

The Committee would like to see a clear evidence-based 'venue selection framework' published at future elections. This would include a defined strategy, processes and comprehensive accessibility criteria. This would incorporate the Committee's suggested guiding principles (see Section 1.4) and universal design principles to ensure that both early and election-day voting centres meet diverse needs, including mobility, sensory and communication requirements. This should also be accompanied by clear performance measures to assess and report on the effectiveness of the VEC's efforts.

In its inquiry on the 2018 election, the Committee recommended that the VEC introduce performance indicators assessing the suitability of early and election-day voting centres, beyond operational considerations.<sup>28</sup> The VEC responded by citing its targets for assisted and independent wheelchair access ratings.<sup>29</sup> In 2022, the Committee reiterated and broadened its recommendation, seeking assessments of venue suitability against multiple criteria, including transport access, shelter, disability access and campaigning space.<sup>30</sup> The VEC did not support this recommendation, asserting that wheelchair access ratings were sufficient.<sup>31</sup>

The Committee continues to believe that this is an area of the VEC's performance which needs to be tracked and reported on. Performance measures would be an important part of a robust venue selection framework. They would help to embed the VEC's intentions into the organisation's systems, reporting practices and organisational ethos. The framework as a whole, including performance measures, would also provide transparency and accountability to the community.

<sup>25</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 32.

<sup>26</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, Foreword.

<sup>27</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 48.

<sup>28</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *Inquiry into the conduct of the 2018 Victorian state election*, August 2020, p. 138, Recommendation 33.

<sup>29</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 59*, submission to the Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election, 2023, p. 112.

<sup>30</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *The conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, vol. 2, Melbourne, July 2024, p. 72, Recommendation 13.

<sup>31</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Response to the Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, 18 November 2024, p. 30.

**FINDING 12:** While the VEC applies several processes, tools and tasks when assessing venues, it does not have a formal, clearly articulated strategy for venue selection. The VEC's reporting on the suitability of venue selection is restricted to the proportion of voting centres categorised as having independent or assisted wheelchair access.

**RECOMMENDATION 9:** That the VEC undertake a comprehensive review of its *Election infrastructure location strategy* and associated strategic plan and develop a new venue selection framework that recognises accessibility as an obligation, embeds the three guiding principles recommended by the Committee in Section 1.4 of this report and identifies accessibility as a need for both early voting centres and election-day voting centres. Key elements of the framework should include:

- the relevant legislative obligations and policy commitments
- clear and specific accessibility objectives that prioritise equal participation for all voters including acknowledging, identifying and addressing the barriers people with disability may encounter
- criteria for venue selection grounded in universal design principles that include more than just access for people with mobility impairments
- a uniform and justifiable process for venue selection, with criteria that enable the selection of venues that may not meet all aspects of universal accessibility, but are appropriate as a way to address a wider range of accessibility barriers and other operational considerations
- a decision-making process that requires evidence that any limitations to accessibility could not reasonably be avoided
- a process to continuously review and refine processes based on performance, feedback and accessibility outcomes.

**RECOMMENDATION 10:** That, following each election, the VEC report against a comprehensive set of performance measures that assess the overall suitability of early voting centres and election-day voting centres for a range of users.

### 4.3 The VEC has struggled to find accessible early voting centres

Submissions to this Inquiry indicated that many voters with disability choose early voting to avoid queues and for a calmer, less crowded experience.<sup>32</sup> Voters wanting to use assisted hearing devices also need to use early voting, as these devices will only

<sup>32</sup> Different Journeys, *Submission 11*, p. 2; Alexandra Reimers, *Submission 13*, p. 1; Joanna Middleton, *Submission 20*, p. 1; Endeavour Foundation, *Submission 37*, p. 5; Rights Information and Advocacy Centre, *Submission 38*, p. 4; Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 23; Dementia Australia, *Submission 50*, p. 8.

be offered at early voting centres (and low-sensory voting centres).<sup>33</sup> It is therefore important that early voting centres are accessible to people with disability.

Early voting has grown substantially over recent elections, rising from 16.3% of votes in 2010 to almost 50% at the 2022 state election.<sup>34</sup> All Victorians have the option to vote at an early voting centre before election day. No particular reason is required. Anticipating that this trend will continue, the VEC plans to increase the number of early voting centres by over 40% at the 2026 state election.<sup>35</sup>

However, the VEC has reported ongoing challenges in sourcing appropriate, accessible venues:

In the lead up to the [2022] State election, the VEC was faced with extremely low vacancy rates (<0.5%) for commercial property in some districts, significantly impacting venue searches and acquisition. This was amplified by a reluctance by owners/landlords to enter into short-term leases ... For early voting centres, this left no option other than to lease a number of sub-optimal sites in terms of accessibility, which required investment in significant works by the VEC to render the venues compliant.<sup>36</sup>

As noted in Section 3.4.3 of this report, the VEC has increased its target for the proportion of early voting centres classified as ‘independent wheelchair access’ at the 2026 election. It is not clear how the VEC intends to achieve this at the same time as increasing the number of early voting centres by approximately 40%, especially given that the VEC has previously struggled to find suitable accessible venues.

The VEC has recommended legislative change to make more accessible venues available. Action from the Government to create more venues would also be beneficial.

**FINDING 13:** The VEC has previously struggled to find suitable accessible venues to use as early voting centres. Despite this, the VEC plans to increase the number of early voting centres at the 2026 election and to increase the proportion of early voting centres classified as ‘independent wheelchair access’.

### 4.3.1 Compulsory access to publicly funded venues may remove barriers

To increase the number of accessible venues, the VEC previously recommended legislative change to require suitable publicly funded venues to be made available

<sup>33</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 14; Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 48.

<sup>34</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Based on the VEC’s plan for approximately 220 early voting centres in 2026 (Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 32) compared to 155 in 2022 (Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 22).

<sup>36</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 3.

for use as early voting centres.<sup>37</sup> Legislation currently requires publicly funded venues to be available for use as election-day voting centres but not as early voting centres. The Committee supported the VEC's recommendation and similarly recommended legislative change.<sup>38</sup> The VEC reiterated its recommendation as part of this Inquiry.<sup>39</sup>

In February 2025, the Government indicated that it supported the change 'in principle' and that it needed to consult with the VEC and local councils.<sup>40</sup> No legislative change has been introduced to date.

The Committee continues to believe that this legislative change would be beneficial. In particular, the VEC has argued that 'community facilities owned and operated by local councils are ideal for the placement of early voting centres and in many cases already meet high standards of accessibility'.<sup>41</sup>

The Committee believes that the VEC could make a stronger case by identifying specific publicly funded venues which would be suitable but which the VEC cannot currently access. This would demonstrate that the recommended legislative amendment would increase capacity, improve accessibility and enhance compliance with Victoria's legal and human rights obligations. This would support the Government in proposing legislative change and assist the Parliament in considering it.

**FINDING 14:** The VEC has recommended legislative change to require publicly funded venues to be made available for use as early voting centres. This would increase the number of accessible venues which could be considered. Research-based evidence identifying specific venues that would be suitable but are currently not available to the VEC would strengthen the VEC's recommendation.

**RECOMMENDATION 11:** That the VEC undertake research to identify specific publicly funded venues that may be suitable for use as early voting centres but are not currently available. In determining the venues, the VEC should take into account the full breadth of accessibility and not just wheelchair access. The VEC should provide a list of these venues to the Government and this Committee, in support of the previously recommended legislative change, together with the reasons these venues cannot currently be accessed.

<sup>37</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *The conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, vol. 2, July 2024, p. 71, Recommendation 12.

<sup>39</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 12.

<sup>40</sup> Government of Victoria, *Response to the Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, 6 February 2025, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 12.

### 4.3.2 Creating universally accessible venues

Another way to increase the number of accessible venues would be to build new ones. There are currently many infrastructure projects being constructed by the Government across the state. Accessible community facilities could be incorporated into some of these projects, which would provide a useful venue at all times and a voting centre during elections.

When constructing new buildings or renovating existing buildings, government bodies are already required to make them accessible. The Victorian Government has committed to this responsibility with universal design, co-design and user engagement statements in its *Whole of Victorian government universal design policy*:

All new Victorian Government infrastructure projects should demonstrate how their design and construction will align with the universal design principles. Projects should be assessed on their alignment with the universal principles in procurement processes or against building design standards.<sup>42</sup>

The Committee therefore recommends that all future infrastructure projects be required to consider whether it would be feasible to include an accessible venue for use by the VEC as an early voting centre during elections and as a community facility at other times. This could include projects such as train stations, bus interchanges, state government buildings and local government facilities. Where it is practicable and affordable to incorporate such a facility, and where there is no similar venue in the vicinity, an accessible venue should be included as part of the project. Integrating purpose-built, fully accessible spaces into suitable government infrastructure projects would expand the availability of suitable voting venues while also providing benefits to communities.

**FINDING 15:** The Government is currently planning infrastructure projects across the state which are required to follow universal design principles. Where practicable, accessible venues could be included within these projects which could be used as voting centres and community facilities.

**RECOMMENDATION 12:** That the Government develop and fund a strategic program to incorporate purpose-built, universally accessible spaces suitable for use as voting centres into government infrastructure projects where practicable, affordable and where there are no similar facilities in the vicinity. These facilities could be used as early voting centres and election-day voting centres during election periods and for broader community purposes at other times.

<sup>42</sup> Victorian Government, *Whole of Victorian Government universal design policy*, Melbourne, 2022, p. 7.

## 4.4 Low-sensory voting venues

### Lived experience

“ Imagine that you are an autistic individual voting for the first time. You do not normally have the ability to leave the house much but recognise this importance of going out to vote. You go to an early polling booth knowing that on election day it will be too overwhelming. You need support, so you take a support worker with you.

Upon arrival at the pre-poll station there are lots [of] people representing political parties all trying to talk to you, touch you, and thrust their brochures at you. They are strangers that you do not know, or trust and their anxiety provoking actions overwhelm you. Before even entering the polling centre you have been talked at, touched, and impacted by the smells of others. As an autistic you suffer complete sensory overload.

Exhausted you go into the centre with your support worker, only to experience another major barrier when your support worker is questioned about why they are there if they are not voting. The whole episode is overwhelming and ultimately you are unable to vote. This experience shapes how you consider voting for the rest of your life.

This is the reality for many of our community. It stops people being able to vote.

Source: Different Journeys, *Submission 11*, p. 2.

Voting centres can involve noise, crowding, bright lighting and high levels of social interaction. These factors can make voting overwhelming or inaccessible, even where physical access is adequate. Low-sensory voting tries to remove these barriers to make voting more accessible for people with sensory sensitivities.

Low-sensory voting involves choosing venues with low-sensory features and/or removing barriers that can make voting overwhelming or inaccessible. The VEC and other members of the Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand described features that support low-sensory or quiet voting, including:

- reduced noise levels
- moderated lighting
- subdued visual stimuli (e.g. signage clutter, bright colours)
- step-free entries and exits
- controlled crowd levels and more space
- reduced or managed interaction with campaigners
- increased space between voting compartments
- the provision of designated quiet spaces.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand, *Submission 42*, pp. 3, 7, 15, 19, 24; Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 17; Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 3*, submission to the Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, Inquiry into the 2025 Prahran and Werribee by-elections, 2025, p. 9.

The Committee commends the VEC for pioneering low-sensory voting for neurodivergent voters during the 2023 Warrandyte District by-election, which was a direct response to requests and feedback from reference groups.<sup>44</sup>

At the Warrandyte by-election, the trial was conducted at an early voting centre during certain hours on one day during the early voting period. An evaluation conducted by the VEC found that 100% of surveyed participants would choose to vote at a low-sensory centre again if available.<sup>45</sup> However, the VEC also found that there were problems. In particular, the VEC reported that the behaviour of campaigners at the voting centre during the low-sensory voting period ‘led to many voters turning away and not casting their votes.’<sup>46</sup> This is explored further in Section 5.3 of this report.

The VEC offered low-sensory voting with different arrangements at the Prahran, Werribee and Nepean District by-elections in 2025 and 2026. At these by-elections, low-sensory voting was offered at a dedicated voting centre (technically classified as a mobile voting centre) on the day before early voting centres opened.

Since the VEC’s introduction of this initiative, other electoral commissions across Australia and New Zealand have trialled or will trial low-sensory voting in various forms:

- Tasmania designated a quiet voting hour at early voting centres every day of the early voting period<sup>47</sup>
- Western Australia offered low-sensory voting at one polling place on four days of early voting<sup>48</sup>
- the Australian Capital Territory appointed one designated low-sensory voting centre, co-designed with disability and mental health organisations, to operate for early and election-day voting, with appropriately qualified staff recruited for that venue<sup>49</sup>
- South Australia designated three voting centres as ‘inclusive’, offering reduced barriers for people with hidden disabilities, as well as parents with children who need lower-stimulus environments; it was planned for the selected venues to have staffed set-down or decompression-style internal foyers and party campaigners would not be permitted in these spaces<sup>50</sup>
- New Zealand plans to trial ‘quiet voting’ at specific voting centres across the country for the 2026 general election.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 50.

<sup>45</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2023 Warrandyte District by-election*, Melbourne, 2024, p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2023 Warrandyte District by-election*, Melbourne, 2024, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> Tasmanian Electoral Commission, *Annual report 2024–25*, Hobart, 2025, p. 15.

<sup>48</sup> Western Australian Electoral Commission, *2025 WA state election–post election report*, Perth, 2025, p. 13.

<sup>49</sup> Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand, *Submission 42*, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand, *Submission 42*, p. 19; Electoral Commission South Australia, *Early voting centres open March 14 until March 20 at 6pm*, <<https://www.ecsa.sa.gov.au/early-voting-centres>> accessed 7 July 2026.

<sup>51</sup> Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand, *Submission 42*, p. 15.

At the 2026 general election, the VEC will expand its offering of low-sensory voting. It plans to establish one low-sensory voting centre in each district, to operate for one day on the day prior to early voting (that is, on Tuesday 17 November).<sup>52</sup> This trial will see low-sensory voting offered at a much larger scale than previously. The fixed date of the general election will also give the VEC more opportunity to communicate about the service than has been available in the compressed timeframes of by-elections.<sup>53</sup>

However, the Committee is concerned about the approach of restricting low-sensory voting to one day before the early-voting period. This timing may not suit all voters who would benefit from this service. It also means that people using the service would have to vote before all policies from candidates and parties have been released. The Committee would therefore like to see the service extended to at least three sessions during the 2026 election. By expanding the trial in this way, the VEC will be able to reach a broader range of stakeholders. In addition, it will be able to compare the numbers of voters at the different sessions, which will assist with evaluating the initiative and planning in future elections.

The Committee understands that the VEC is still trialling low-sensory voting. If a formal evaluation of the program following the election, with effective performance measures and relevant targets, demonstrates its success, the Committee would like to see low-sensory voting offered to a broader range of people. The Committee would also like to see sensory considerations included in the audit of all voting centres at future elections, with an intention to remove and reduce barriers to sensory sensitivities wherever possible.

**FINDING 16:** The VEC will establish a low-sensory voting centre in each district at the 2026 election. These voting centres will benefit people with sensory sensitivities by providing a less overwhelming environment. However, the low-sensory voting centres will only be open on the day before early voting commences. As a result, people wanting low-sensory voting will be restricted in terms of when they can vote and would need to vote before all policies are available from parties and candidates.

**RECOMMENDATION 13:** That the VEC expand its trial of low-sensory voting at the 2026 election to include at least three different sessions across the voting period.

<sup>52</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 49.

<sup>53</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament 2025 Prahran District and Werribee District by-elections*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 93.

### 4.4.1 Expanding who can access low-sensory voting centres

#### Lived experience

“ I find polling places overwhelming and stressful—the queuing, managing way-finding, sensory overload and overwhelm from people handing out political flyers. Even the pre-polling centres are overwhelming for me ... I might attend a polling place if there was a dedicated accessible/inclusive venue in my electorate, or if there were sensory friendly or disability friendly sessions, but I generally prefer postal voting.

Source: Name withheld, *Submission 16*, pp. 1–2.

The VEC developed low-sensory voting to reduce barriers for neurodivergent voters. While the Committee believes that this program is helpful for some neurodivergent voters, it may also benefit other people who have sensory sensitivities and face the associated barriers.

The Committee was told that people with mental health issues, cognitive disability and psychosocial disability, including dementia, could benefit from low-sensory voting.<sup>54</sup> Other people such as survivors of abuse, people with post-traumatic stress disorder and people who need to take time to work with a support person could also benefit from low-sensory voting environments.<sup>55</sup>

In its submission, the VEC noted that low-sensory voting centres offer benefits for a range of voters who require low-sensory environments.<sup>56</sup> However, when questioned about low-sensory voting for a broader range of voters, the Electoral Commissioner said:

it has sort of been quite broadly very well received, including by people who may not specifically identify as a sort of targeted cohort for whom we are running this service ... We have not deliberately phrased this offering as being that broader offering, because we want to make sure that we are primarily meeting the needs of people who are neurodiverse and have a very strong preference for a low-sensory voting environment. We do not want to dilute that. We are not going to be turning away people who may wish to use it, but we will be encouraging those to be very much targeted to people with neurodiverse needs ...

<sup>54</sup> Council on the Ageing Victoria, *Submission 29*, pp. 4–5; Martin Turnbull, Senior Policy Adviser, Council on the Ageing Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14; Dr Rose Capp, Policy Adviser, Dementia Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 21–2; Dr Trishima Mitra-Kahn, Chief Executive Officer, Women with Disabilities Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 27 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4. See also Dementia Australia, *Submission 50*, p. 8.

<sup>55</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 16; Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 10; Dr Trishima Mitra-Kahn, Chief Executive Officer, and Saumya Kaushik, Policy Research Lead, Women with Disabilities Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 27 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>56</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 16.

What we will do though to ensure that the low-sensory option is available to those who most need it is we are going to be targeting our communications at those cohorts, their peak bodies and so on, so that we make a really deliberate effort on that.<sup>57</sup>

In the *EasyVote guide* for the 2026 Nepean District by-election, the service was described as ‘for neurodivergent voters and their support people’.<sup>58</sup> This is problematic, as it could easily mislead people who have sensory sensitivities but are not neurodivergent into thinking they are not eligible to use this service.

The Committee would like to see eligibility for this service explicitly extended and promoted to a broader range of voters.

The VEC’s *Voting options* webpage for the 2026 election is more inclusive, describing the service as ‘for neurodivergent voters and voters with sensory needs’.<sup>59</sup> The Committee encourages the VEC to adopt similar, more inclusive descriptions in its other communication products for the 2026 election. The VEC should also ensure that its staff have the relevant training to support a wider range of people.

**FINDING 17:** Low-sensory voting was developed by the VEC to support neurodivergent people. However, the Committee was informed that it would benefit a broader range of people who have sensory sensitivities or would benefit from a quieter, calmer environment.

**RECOMMENDATION 14:** That the VEC explicitly expand low-sensory voting to a broader range of voters who may benefit, including people with psychosocial, cognitive and neurodegenerative conditions, older voters and voters with support people. The VEC should clearly advertise the service as open to any person who would benefit from a low-sensory environment and target communications to a wider range of groups. This should include renaming it ‘low-sensory and inclusive voting’.

**RECOMMENDATION 15:** That the VEC provide staff at low-sensory and inclusive voting centres with additional training in how to support voters with dementia, vision impairment, psychosocial disability and other relevant disabilities, as well as neurodivergence.

<sup>57</sup> Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 53.

<sup>58</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *EasyVote guide: 2026 Nepean District by-election*, Melbourne, 2026.

<sup>59</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Voting options*, <<https://vec.vic.gov.au/voting/2026-state-election/voting-options>> accessed 30 July 2026.

## 4.4.2 Incorporating low-sensory considerations into other voting centres

### Lived experience

“ At my local voting centre, the loud, echoing noise from people in the queue made communication really difficult. Choosing quieter, more suitable venues would reduce stress and help me participate fully.

Source: Dominique Loulie (voter with hearing loss), *Submission 18*, p. 2.

The VEC’s venue inspection form includes 12 criteria for low-sensory voting.<sup>60</sup> However, these are only applied to pre-designated low-sensory voting centres. This limits the VEC’s ability to assess and compare all potential venues for barriers affecting people with sensory sensitivity, or to identify low-cost adjustments (e.g. lighting, noise, queue management) that could be made to reduce barriers.

The Committee would like to see low-sensory criteria applied to all venue assessments in the future. The current arrangements restrict access to low-sensory voting to one venue per district on one day before the early voting period. This may introduce new barriers, such as the need to vote earlier or travel further. Embedding sensory considerations into all venue assessments would support selecting more sites with low-sensory features, benefiting a wide range of voters, including older people, those with anxiety, fatigue, dementia or hearing loss, parents and first-time voters.

In addition, a number of stakeholders suggested other ways to incorporate low-sensory features into voting centres. Their suggestions included a quiet waiting area for people who feel overwhelmed or need breaks,<sup>61</sup> quiet periods,<sup>62</sup> for each voting centre to have a separate quiet and low-sensory zone<sup>63</sup> and the provision of an alternate entrance to access quiet and low-sensory zones.<sup>64</sup> Some of these would be feasible in many voting centres and should be considered by the VEC going forward.

**FINDING 18:** The VEC does not currently assess all potential voting centre venues for barriers to people with sensory sensitivity. As a result, the VEC may be missing opportunities to reduce barriers when selecting voting centres. This approach may also be unnecessarily restricting some voters to using designated low-sensory voting centres on a specific day, rather than giving them more options.

<sup>60</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Inspection form Mar 2026—v13*, [Melbourne], 2026, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> Reinforce Self-Advocacy, *Submission 31*, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> Reinforce Self-Advocacy, *Submission 31*, p. 1. See also Dementia Australia, *Submission 50*, p. 8.

<sup>63</sup> Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, pp. 10–11.

<sup>64</sup> Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 11.

**RECOMMENDATION 16:** That, as part of implementing an accessibility-first approach, the VEC assess all potential early and election-day voting centre venues against a comprehensive, multi-dimensional universal accessibility audit, including all low-sensory criteria. Information about which venues meet low-sensory criteria should be published, giving voters options to determine which voting centre will be most appropriate for them.

**RECOMMENDATION 17:** That the VEC look for ways to incorporate low-sensory features more generally into voting centres, including by looking at the approaches that other electoral bodies have undertaken, considering ideas presented as part of this Inquiry and considering input from the VEC’s stakeholders.

## 4.5 The proximity and availability of public transport is important for accessibility

### Lived experience

“ you have to work with the bus times and that’s assuming that the bus isn’t late and often there’s not much information available about timetables and stuff for buses specifically. You can’t just hop into the car and vote whenever works for you, you have to work with the times of the public transport.

Source: Respondent to consultation by Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 19.

A venue’s physical accessibility is only one component of the broader ‘whole-of-journey’ experience required for an inclusive election (see Section 1.4.2). At an inclusive election, any elector should be able to arrive at a voting centre by any means, make their way to the main entrance and cast their vote. As well as arriving via private vehicle or on foot, voters also rely on public transport.

The VEC’s inspection form records the proximity of public transport and walking distance to the nearest stop.<sup>65</sup> However, public transport availability and distance are not treated as qualifying factors, but as one of several considerations in venue selection.<sup>66</sup> The assessment does not capture the accessibility of the transport services or stops themselves, barriers along the route to the venue or timetable constraints that may affect voter access.

In its submission, the Public Transport Users Association noted that deficiencies with public transport may be especially pronounced on Saturdays when state elections are held. Many public transport services run less frequently on weekends, and some routes

<sup>65</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Inspection form Mar 2026—v13*, [Melbourne], 2026, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, pp. 8–9.

do not operate at all or only within restricted hours (with some ceasing before the close of voting).<sup>67</sup>

In addition to affecting voters, the restricted hours of operation on weekends may also limit people wishing to work or campaign at voting centres. In particular, counting may extend beyond the hours of operation of some bus services, and evening frequencies may be poor on many routes.<sup>68</sup>

The Public Transport Users Association made several recommendations that it believed would help remove barriers. These included selecting voting centres that are near frequent public transport (such as trains, trams or high-frequency buses like Smartbuses) and near accessible tram stops served by low-floor trams. The Association also suggested that ‘the VEC should liaise with Transport Victoria to minimise the impact of service disruptions on voting centre access’.<sup>69</sup>

Infrastructure Victoria also noted the importance of accessible public transport stops and called on the Government to prioritise upgrading stops near voting centres.<sup>70</sup>

**FINDING 19:** Public transport proximity, frequency and accessibility (including paths between the nearest stops and the voting centre) do not always meet the needs of voters, campaigners and scrutineers.

**RECOMMENDATION 18:** That the VEC include proximity to high-frequency public transport, proximity to accessible public transport stops and unobstructed paths from public transport stops to a venue into its voting centre venue assessment criteria.

**RECOMMENDATION 19:** That the VEC, the Government and public transport service providers work together to ensure sufficient public transport services are available during the election period to meet the needs of voters, election staff, campaigners and scrutineers. This could include extra services and free public transport on voting days.

<sup>67</sup> Public Transport Users Association, *Submission 43*, p. 3.

<sup>68</sup> Public Transport Users Association, *Submission 43*, p. 4.

<sup>69</sup> Public Transport Users Association, *Submission 43*, p. 5. See also Council on the Ageing Victoria, *Submission 29*, p. 5.

<sup>70</sup> Infrastructure Victoria, *Submission 35*, p. 2.

# Chapter 5

## Operating voting centres

### 5.1 Introduction

#### Lived experience

“ The expectation that I will need to stand in a line for a long period waiting to vote is a barrier. Somewhere to sit after voting would be appreciated. Often voting centres do not offer enough accessible parking at peak times. Parking spaces close to the centres are often taken up by those working for candidates. These barriers require me to carefully plan when and how I will attend a voting centre with my family, causing unnecessary anxiety. Where possible I have resorted to early postal voting.

Source: Nancye Harrison, *Submission 17*, p. 1.

In addition to selecting accessible venues, voting centres also need to be operated in an accessible way. The systems, processes and practices at a voting centre should be designed using an accessibility-first approach to ensure all voters can participate effectively, independently and with dignity. As Ngaweeyan Maar-oo explained:

Operational accessibility needs to be treated with the same seriousness as physical access. This means standardised requirements for signage, lighting and safety controls (including wet weather and crowding contingencies), fatigue-friendly queue arrangements (including seating options), and a clearly signposted priority assistance pathway. Each centre should have a designated escalation lead responsible for resolving accessibility issues on the day.<sup>1</sup>

People will arrive at a voting centre by various means, and should be able to enter and exit the building safely, no matter how they arrive. Section 5.2 looks at what is needed to provide an accessible route into the voting centre. Section 5.3 discusses the significant limitations on the VEC's ability to manage campaigners outside voting centres and how they interact with voters and each other.

Queues should be managed effectively to reduce wait times, with clearly available options that remove or reduce barriers for people with disability. Section 5.4 discusses the Victorian Electoral Commission's (VEC's) current queue management processes. It also looks at strategies to decrease wait times, including fast-track and priority queues, real-time queue tracking and performance measurement for future planning.

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<sup>1</sup> Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 27*, p. 4.

Section 5.5 discusses two additional forms of voting based out of voting centres: voting outside the voting centre (for example, in a car) and takeaway voting. Both have the potential to benefit some people with disability.

The voting centre layout also impacts accessibility. The availability and placement of suitable furniture and equipment, queueing equipment and the organisation of voter flow is the subject of Section 5.6. The Committee examines the guidance provided to voting centre managers by the VEC and evidence provided by submitters to identify improvements.

Independent, confident and dignified navigation to, around and out of a voting centre depends on clear, consistent and accessible signage. Section 5.7 looks at the quantity and location of signage outside and inside voting centres.

Ultimately, the actions of voting centre staff will play an important role in determining how accessible a voting centre is. To help staff make consistent and appropriate decisions, accessibility needs to be embedded into processes determined by head office. Section 5.8 examines the need for a stronger focus on accessibility in processes and manuals developed by head office.

Ensuring that voting centres have the right equipment and that staff have the right training are also integral to operating voting centres. These matters are covered in Chapters 6 and 8 of this report.

## 5.2 Voting centres need clear, safe, accessible approaches

### Lived experience

“ Mostly I have found staff to be friendly, take their time with me, and happy to show me and whoever I’m with the best way to get in and out for the centre.

Source: Respondent to consultation by Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 23.

“ My husband has MS and is a wheelchair user now. When he was able to ambulate using a wheeled walker we would attend voting centres but it became too difficult. Car parking being a long way from the entrance was the most difficult.

Source: Alison Reece, *Submission 45*, p. 1.

A clear, safe approach to a voting centre is essential. This includes all paths of travel from public transport stops, parking and drop-off points to the entry/exit of the voting centre.<sup>2</sup> Submitters identified barriers including physically challenging or uneven paths,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Endeavour Foundation, *Submission 37*, p. 3; Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Nicole Karidis, *Submission 28*, p. 2.

inappropriate lighting,<sup>4</sup> inadequate signage,<sup>5</sup> a lack of accessible parking<sup>6</sup> and a need for drop-off zones.<sup>7</sup>

Blind Citizens Australia provided the following recommendations relating to physical access and wayfinding:

- Step-free access from the street, car parks, and public transport.
- Tactile ground surface indicators where appropriate.
- Logical, predictable placement of entrances, exits, and voting desks.
- Accessible toilets and designated areas for toileting of dog guides.
- Clear path of travel to the entrance, devoid of obstacles including party campaigners.<sup>8</sup>

The Committee acknowledges that much of the physical approach to the voting centre is beyond the VEC's control. However, several submitters noted the importance of clear, accessible signage,<sup>9</sup> which is discussed in Section 5.7 of this chapter.

The VEC currently looks at accessible parking spaces and the route from them to the entrance as part of its assessment of potential venues.<sup>10</sup> Staff are also instructed to consider establishing an accessible parking space if needed.<sup>11</sup> However, not all voting centres will have accessible parking or will have enough accessible spots. In addition, not everyone who has difficulty walking is entitled to an accessible parking permit. Therefore, it is important for there to be an alternative accessible way for people to enter voting centres who cannot use an accessible parking space.

Several stakeholders suggested drop-off areas, where cars could drop off passengers in a safe space with an accessible path to the entrance.<sup>12</sup> For example, one stakeholder suggested:

When the car park is full you need to be able to drop oldies or people you are supporting at the front so they don't have to walk as far. But there is no seating and no shelter if it's raining or very hot. Accessible parking is one option but chairs and even umbrellas would be an easy fix. Doesn't have to be everywhere but a centre with designated drop off area would be good to know.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 39*, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 39*, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Nancye Harrison, *Submission 17*, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Jennie Trigg, *Submission 7*, p. 1. See also Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 27*, p. 3; Nicole Karidis, *Submission 28*, p. 1; Council on the Ageing Victoria, *Submission 29*, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Blind Citizens Australia, *Submission 32*, pp. 6–7.

<sup>9</sup> Council on the Ageing Victoria, *Submission 29*, p. 6; Reinforce Self-Advocacy, *Submission 31*, p. 1; Name withheld, *Submission 39*, p. 3; Dementia Australia, *Submission 50*, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Inspection form Mar 2026—v13*, [Melbourne], 2026, p. 3; Victorian Electoral Commission, *Accessibility audit form—Attachment 3*, [Melbourne], 2024, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State district by-election voting centre manager guide*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Council on the Ageing Victoria, *Submission 29*, p. 5; Australian Institute of Architects, *Submission 44*, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Australian Institute of Architects, *Submission 44*, p. 3.

The Committee considers that this would be a valuable addition where practicable.

**FINDING 20:** A clear, safe approach to a voting centre is essential. This includes all paths of travel from public transport stops, parking and drop-off points to the entry/exit of the voting centre. Conditions associated with the approach, entry and exit of voting centres can compromise accessibility and pose barriers to participation.

**RECOMMENDATION 20:** That the VEC provide drop-off zones at voting centres wherever possible to assist voters who do not have accessible parking permits and for when allocated accessible car spaces are insufficient. Drop-off zones should be safe, have accessible paths to the entrance of voting centres and have sheltered seating where possible.

### 5.3 Campaigning needs to be restricted for low-sensory voting

#### Lived experience

“ I find polling places overwhelming and stressful—the queuing, managing way-finding, sensory overload and overwhelm from people handing out political flyers. Even the pre-polling centres are overwhelming for me.

Source: Name withheld, *Submission 16*, p. 1.

“ I find it overwhelming that people outside the voting centre have all different parties who are constantly trying to hand you bits and pieces. You have to kind of say no and sometimes they get up in your space. It’s just very overwhelming.

Source: Respondent to consultation by Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 19.

Entering a voting centre can present sensory barriers to some people. Voters are confronted with lighting, noise, queuing equipment and signage, along with the conglomeration of campaigners, election officials and voters who may be exiting as well as entering.

The presence and behaviour of campaign workers at voting centres was identified as a significant barrier to accessibility by a number of stakeholders to this Inquiry. They reported crowding, unsolicited interaction, sensory impacts and psychosocial impacts that deterred or prevented them from attending voting centres.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Different Journeys, *Submission 11*, p. 2; Reinforce Self-Advocacy, *Submission 31*, p. 1; Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, pp. 13, 19; Australian Institute of Architects, *Submission 44*, p. 3; Martin Turnbull, Senior Policy Adviser, Council on the Ageing Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 15.

It is important to note that these submitters are not referring to the generally unacceptable behaviour discussed by this Committee previously.<sup>15</sup> In this context, it is the normal campaign behaviour that creates a barrier for voters. This is particularly relevant for voters with sensory sensitivities, psychosocial conditions, neurodegenerative conditions or cognitive impairments. However, the VEC has found that a significant portion of the general population have also reported problems with campaigners.<sup>16</sup>

Moderating the behaviour of campaigners was considered particularly important by the VEC as part of low-sensory voting (see Section 4.4). The VEC stated that the behaviour of campaigners at the initial trial of low-sensory voting 'led to many voters turning away and not casting their votes.'<sup>17</sup> The VEC noted the inadequacy of the current limitations in place on campaigners, the lack of tools available to the VEC to manage campaigners and the need for legislative change to address these issues.<sup>18</sup>

The Committee previously recommended:

That the Government introduce legislation amending the Electoral Act to provide the VEC with the ability to apply an extended campaigning exclusion zone at specified voting centres and for specified times, so that the VEC can provide dedicated periods of low-sensory voting. This should include an obligation for the VEC to adequately inform election stakeholders, with a defined notice period, when an extended exclusion zone will apply.<sup>19</sup>

The Government supported this recommendation in principle, noting the need for consultation.<sup>20</sup> The Electoral Commissioner has issued determinations regarding the powers of voting centres staff outside voting centres,<sup>21</sup> but no legislative changes have been made to address this issue. The Committee continues to believe that this legislative change would be helpful.

While this would assist with low-sensory voting, campaigners can also be a barrier at regular voting centres. Priority queues may be one way to assist people (see Section 5.4.1).

<sup>15</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee *The conduct of the 2022 state election*, vol. 2, July 2024, pp. 263–5.

<sup>16</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report on the 2023 Warrandyte District by-election*, Melbourne, 2024, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2023 Warrandyte District by-election*, Melbourne, 2024, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 17; Victorian Electoral Commission, *Response to the Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, 18 November 2024, p. 41.

<sup>19</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *The conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, vol. 2, July 2024, p. 118, Recommendation 27.

<sup>20</sup> Government of Victoria, *Response to the Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, 6 February 2025, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, *Determination 013/2026: Campaigning at voting centres*, 25 May 2026.

**FINDING 21:** The activity of candidates and campaigners at the entrance to voting centres can deter and prevent people from participating in elections, especially people with sensory sensitivities, psychosocial conditions, neurodegenerative conditions or cognitive impairments.

**FINDING 22:** Legislation currently provides the VEC with limited powers to exclude or control campaigners at voting centres. The Committee has previously recommended legislative change to allow the VEC to apply an extended campaigning exclusion zone at specified voting centres and for specified times to facilitate low-sensory voting.

## 5.4 Queues should be managed in ways that maximise accessibility for all voters

### Lived experience

“ The staff at the early voting centre prioritised people with a disability and we were ushered through the lengthy waiting line. It expediated my voting, and made it a very easy process.

Source: Respondent to the Committee’s survey of voters with disability (Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election).

“ I was able to sit on steps etc last time I voted and much of the queue was in a breezeway—but the early part was in full sun, which was also difficult for me.

Source: Name withheld, *Submission 5*, p. 1.

Queueing and queue management were consistently identified as an operational barrier for voters. Long wait times,<sup>22</sup> a lack of seating,<sup>23</sup> unclear paths,<sup>24</sup> uncertainty or anxiety about skipping the queue<sup>25</sup> and chronic pain exacerbated by standing<sup>26</sup> make voting centres difficult or impossible for many people with disability. Long, crowded or noisy queues can also be a barrier for people with sensory sensitivities.<sup>27</sup>

Clear queue processes, proactive staff support, accessible signage and appropriate attention to voters’ needs can reduce wait times. Where significant wait times cannot be prevented, helping voters with disability to avoid queues can make voting centres more accessible.

<sup>22</sup> Endeavour Foundation, *Submission 37*, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Melbourne East Disability Advocacy, *Submission 21*, p. 2; Name withheld, *Submission 5*, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 5*, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Nicole Karidis, *Submission 28*, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 10*, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Cheri O’Connell, *Submission 25*, p. 1; Reinforce Self-Advocacy, *Submission 31*, p. 2.

### 5.4.1 The VEC's queue management strategies

#### Lived experience

“ I once asked a staff member if we could have priority entrance, as queueing was causing my son distress. The gentleman escorted us in, and helped us in the booth. In the next election, I went to a different place and we were not able to have priority entrance, there were no staff available to help, and there was only a wheelchair-level booth, no other provision for other types of disability.

Source: Respondent to consultation by Carers Victoria, *Submission 41*, p. 6.

In its 2026 election service plan, the VEC states:

We will manage queues inside and outside EVCs [early voting centres] and election day VCs [voting centres] to ensure voters can move quickly through the process and that voters who require assistance receive appropriate support.

At busy venues, we will assign staff as queue controllers with the primary responsibility of managing queues during peak periods. Queue controllers will also act as a point of contact for questions and assistance and will direct voters to the correct district issuing point or to the declaration issuing point if they are voting outside their district.<sup>28</sup>

In the VEC's manual for voting centre staff, staff are instructed to assist electors in confirming that they are in the correct district, to actively manage queuing by directing small groups to issuing points, to monitor voter flow, to provide wait-time estimates, to apologise for delays where necessary, to group electors with the same family name for processing and to organise orderly queues under shelter where possible—potentially using structured layouts such as ‘snake-style’ lines.<sup>29</sup>

This guidance reflects a strong operational focus on efficiency, crowd management and voter flow within the voting centre. However, it is primarily aimed at optimising in-centre processes rather than addressing broader accessibility challenges for voters who may struggle to enter or navigate the voting environment.

Staff are advised to look for people who may need assistance while in the queue and give them priority access or seating:

Ask anyone using a mobility aid, such as a walking frame or crutches, or who appears to be having difficulty standing if they would like to come to the front of a queue or offer them a seat.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 State election*, Melbourne, 2025, pp. 47–8.

<sup>29</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State by-election early voting officer manual*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State by-election election official manual*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 14.

However, many people who struggle to stand in queues have hidden disabilities. It is important that instructions relating to queue management include attention to other conditions that can make queueing difficult.

As a bare minimum, the election officials' instructions should be updated to encourage staff to ask any person wearing a Hidden Disabilities Sunflower lanyard how they can help. It should also be recognised that not all people with a hidden disability choose to wear a Sunflower lanyard. To further promote accessibility and inclusion, appropriate staff could wear a Sunflower Supporter lanyard, which may help individuals with a hidden disability (or their support person) feel more comfortable approaching staff for assistance when needed.

The VEC provides a 'priority poster advising voters in queues to come to the front of the line and notify staff if they require any assistance with wheelchair use, difficulty standing or other needs.'<sup>31</sup>

A priority poster requires voters first to see it, and secondly to self-identify and self-advocate. Self-identifying and self-advocacy can be difficult, embarrassing and can cause real or perceived resentment in other voters. Submitters explained:

It's always super frustrating and people kind of give you looks if you jump the line as well, especially because I have a hidden disability. I get all the nasty looks and things like that.<sup>32</sup>

I kind of have to build up the courage to self-advocate and to go up to whoever the staff member is and be like I can't wait in this long line, I've got a disability, I need you to escort me to the front of the line.<sup>33</sup>

The Committee considers the poster to be a good idea. It helps to establish that it is acceptable to ask for support and that support will be provided. It will be helpful for some people. However, it should not be relied on as the only way for people to get support.

Barriers also arise when information and announcements about queueing are not provided in accessible formats. Deaf Victoria explained:

When times are busy, voting centre staff often make voice announcements walking up and down the queue, and this practice needs to be accompanied by visual and written information. Deaf and hard of hearing people have reported that they were standing in the wrong queue and could have voted quicker when they realised there was a separate and shorter queue for voters who are voting from out of their area.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 22.

<sup>33</sup> Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 21.

<sup>34</sup> Deaf Victoria, *Submission 9*, pp. 3–4.

This barrier could be addressed through operational changes to ensure instructions are provided in accessible formats and staff are trained so important information does not rely solely on spoken communication.

It is important that queue management strategies are planned with an accessibility-first approach so that accessible options are clear and available, and the need to request or be offered assistance should be an exception.

Several other strategies were suggested as part of this Inquiry.

### Priority or express queues

As an alternative approach, several submitters proposed separate priority lines that voters may join if they are unable to wait in a long queue.<sup>35</sup> One submitter also suggested an alternative ‘quiet line’ with seating and a low-sensory environment.<sup>36</sup>

Other submitters disliked the idea of separate queues, feeling that it ‘othered’ them or singled them out.<sup>37</sup> This difference of opinion highlights the view that one size does not fit all, and that it is better to identify and eliminate barriers wherever possible, rather than create work-arounds. This is in line with the accessibility-first approach recommended by the Committee (see Section 1.4.1).

### Real-time tracking tools

One way to help people avoid queues and the associated barriers would be to provide real-time information about waiting times. This was recommended by the Council on the Ageing Victoria as a tool that could help people to choose a voting centre where queuing is not an issue.<sup>38</sup> This could be provided on the VEC’s website or via an app.

The Committee has not investigated the feasibility of this idea, but would like to see the VEC explore it. This may be something made possible through data from the use of electronic roll mark-off or from performance monitoring as discussed in Section 5.4.2.

<sup>35</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 39*, p. 2; Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, pp. 10, 21. See also Reinforce Self-Advocacy, *Submission 31*, p. 2; Dementia Australia, *Submission 50*, p. 9; Saumya Kaushik, Policy Research Lead, Women with Disabilities Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 27 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>36</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 8*, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Nicole Karidis, *Submission 28*, p. 2. See also Mary Lo Schiavo, *Submission 3*, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Council on the Ageing Victoria, *Submission 29*, p. 5.

## Seating

### Lived experience

“ I don’t mind waiting, especially for another person with disability, but I really need a chair to wait any length of time, and if I have been standing for a while I need a chair to rest in before I can walk back to the car.

Source: Name withheld, *Submission 39a*, p. 2.

The need for seating was repeatedly mentioned.<sup>39</sup> The *Election official manual* suggests that staff offer seats to people who appear to be having difficulty standing in a queue (or take them to the front of the queue).<sup>40</sup> However, it is not clear how many voting centres are sufficiently equipped with seats to make providing seats possible in practice.

Ensuring that sufficient seating is provided before, during and after voting would significantly assist voters (see further discussion in Section 6.2.2 of this report).

### 5.4.2 Evaluation to inform queue management planning could help reduce barriers

Queuing and queue management have been the subject of previous Committee recommendations. These recommendations have focussed on the development of measures and targets to assist with planning.<sup>41</sup>

The VEC has not agreed with the recommendations. Instead, the VEC has focussed on demand management strategies such as increasing the number of early voting centres and extending hours.<sup>42</sup> The Committee notes that the absence of queue measurement will make it very difficult to evaluate whether these strategies improve accessibility in practice.

The VEC has argued that queue measurement requires intrusive technologies that involve high costs and privacy risks.<sup>43</sup> The Committee does not believe that this is necessary. For example, the VEC could acquire useful data through manual logging by staff at regular intervals.

<sup>39</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 5*, p. 1; Name withheld, *Submission 8*, p. 2; Melbourne East Disability Advocacy, *Submission 21*, p. 2; Name withheld, *Submission 39a*, p. 2; Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 10; Dementia Australia, *Submission 50*, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State by-election election official manual*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 14.

<sup>41</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *Inquiry into the conduct of the 2014 Victorian state election*, May 2016, p. 45, Recommendation 6; Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *Inquiry into the conduct of the 2018 Victorian state election*, August 2020, p. 138, Recommendation 34; Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, vol. 2, July 2024, p. 75, Recommendation 14.

<sup>42</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Response to the Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, Melbourne, 18 November 2024, p. 31.

<sup>43</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Response to the Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, Melbourne, 18 November 2024, p. 31.

**FINDING 23:** Waiting for long periods in queues can make voting centres inaccessible for some people with disability. The VEC currently manages this through designating people as queue controllers at busy voting centres, whom people can ask for assistance, training these people to look for voters who might have difficulty standing and providing signage indicating that people can ask for help.

**RECOMMENDATION 21:** That the VEC work with relevant stakeholders to formally review and evaluate its queue management approach for people with disability. This should include:

- ensuring that training recognises that people with hidden disability may have difficulty standing in queues
- training staff not to rely solely on spoken instructions for people in queues
- developing protocols for establishing fast-track queue lanes
- identifying alternative options for supporting people, including publishing real-time data about queue lengths at each voting centre
- ensuring that seats are available at voting centres for people who have difficulty standing in queues or who require rest before moving to the next stage of voting.

## 5.5 Voting outside the voting centre could be of assistance

To avoid barriers associated with queuing and entering voting centres, voting outside the voting centre (for example, from a car) is allowed in Victoria, but not advertised. A second method—takeaway voting—is available in New Zealand. The Committee considers these could provide a helpful alternative for people facing barriers when entering and voting inside a voting centre.

These options have generally been considered for people facing barriers associated with mobility. However, these options would also help address barriers faced by people who cannot enter a voting centre due to sensory sensitivities, including barriers presented by campaigners outside a voting centre (see Section 5.3).

### 5.5.1 Victorian legislation allows voting outside the voting centre as an accessibility measure

#### Lived experience

“ I was voting at Croydon North Primary School, first we had trouble finding a Disable Parking space Oh! There wasn't any..... After parking the car we had trouble with getting to the Room/Hall. Second, the driveway/path was all gravel and uneven, next the steps??? There were two at different levels and each level was uneven and a tripping hazard.. Then the entry to the room/hall, the door frame was part of the problem as it went across the bottom making it hard to step over while using a walking stick... Now if I was using a walker, a bigger problem again??? In the end one of the Officials went and got a table, a cardboard shield, pencil, the roll book for me and the voting forms. This was appreciated by me as I couldn't have got into the room/hall to vote which is why I was there.....

Source: Name withheld, *Submission 12*, p. 1.

Victorian electoral laws currently allow voting outside the voting centre:

If an elector satisfies an election official that the elector is physically incapable of entering the voting centre, the election official may allow the elector to vote outside the voting centre, in close proximity to the voting centre.<sup>44</sup>

The legislation does not provide further details about where the voter would complete the ballot papers, but this could include on a table outside the voting centre<sup>45</sup> or in a car.<sup>46</sup> In-car voting is known by various names and is available in other Australian jurisdictions as well.<sup>47</sup> Endeavour Foundation recommended improving access to in-car voting as part of this Inquiry.<sup>48</sup>

Voting outside voting centres provides some of the advantages of going to a voting centre (see Section 3.3.2) for people who face barriers entering a centre.

The VEC's staff manuals recognise that voters can vote outside the voting centre. The *Election official manual* explains that 'An elector (or someone acting on their behalf) may ask to vote outside the voting centre.' This is followed by further instructions about how to issue the ballot paper if the voting centre manager approves.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>44</sup> *Electoral Act 2002* (Vic) s 94(3).

<sup>45</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 12*, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> Noted as a possibility in Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 16.

<sup>47</sup> Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand, *Submission 42*, pp. 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 19.

<sup>48</sup> Endeavour Foundation, *Submission 37*, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State by-election election official manual*, Melbourne, 2025, pp. 16–17.

However, the Committee was unable to find any information on the VEC's website that informed voters that an option to vote outside the voting centre is available. The VEC explained to the Committee:

The environmental layout may also impact the available adjustments. For example, the distance of car parking from the voting centre itself or any traffic management in place may limit the ability for voting centre staff to assist voters with mobility impairment to cast their vote from their car.

As adjustments are not always available, are context-specific and are generally at the discretion of the voting centre manager, we cannot advertise these as available services more broadly as has been previously suggested by the Committee. This risks misleading voters with accessibility needs about the voting experience and impacts their ability to plan ahead.<sup>50</sup>

The VEC adds a footnote that voting outside voting centres, 'is permitted, but not required, under section 94(3) of the Electoral Act'.<sup>51</sup> While this may be a correct interpretation of the *Electoral Act*, the VEC should obtain legal advice regarding whether this service is part of the reasonable adjustments required under other legislation (see Section 2.3). Regardless of the legal requirements, the VEC should set a higher service standard by offering this service more readily.

### 5.5.2 The ability to vote outside voting centres needs to be communicated

The Committee considers the VEC's approach to voting outside voting centres to be impractical. It is only offered to people who ask for it. However, it is not communicated to voters, so people do not know that they can ask for it. Asking for it requires voters to make contact with a member of the voting centre staff, which may be complicated for some people who have difficulty entering voting centres. It is also not offered consistently, but left at the discretion of the voting centre manager, meaning that a voter will not know whether or not it is available at a voting centre without going there and asking.

The VEC's approach contrasts with more explicit and operationalised practices in several other Australian jurisdictions. The Committee notes that the Queensland and Western Australian electoral commissions provide upfront information about the service on the relevant pages on their websites, with Queensland also providing information about the process.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 16 (with sources).

<sup>51</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 16.

<sup>52</sup> Electoral Commission of Queensland, *I need help voting*, <<https://www.ecq.qld.gov.au/how-to-vote/voter-help>> accessed 21 June 2026; Western Australian Electoral Commission, *Assisted voting guide*, as at 14 November 2025, accessed via Internet Archive, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20251114140319/https://www.elections.wa.gov.au/vote/elector-assistance/assisted-voting-guide>> accessed 21 June 2026.

The Queensland electoral commission provides a phone number outside the voting centre that voters can call to request in-car/car-side voting assistance.<sup>53</sup> This allows voters to independently request assistance without relying on a support person and without the contradiction of having to enter the voting centre in order to ask for help outside the voting centre.

The Committee would like to see the VEC adopt a more helpful approach to voting outside voting centres. This would include communicating about it, establishing a practical process for requesting it (such as signs with phone numbers in parking lots) and providing clear information to voters about which voting centres can offer it and which cannot, so that voters can plan where to go.

**FINDING 24:** The *Electoral Act* allows the VEC to bring ballot papers to people outside voting centres (for example, in their cars) where they are physically incapable of entering the voting centre. However, the VEC has chosen not to communicate this option to voters because access to the service depends heavily on local conditions and the discretion of individual voting centre managers. In other states, in-car voting is advertised and facilitated by electoral commissions.

**RECOMMENDATION 22:** That the VEC revise its approach to voting outside voting centres, including:

- informing voters about the option
- providing a way for voters to request the service without leaving their car, such as advertising a phone number in car parking areas or enabling voters to pre-book the service
- communicating which voting centres are able to offer the service and which ones are not.

**RECOMMENDATION 23:** That the Government introduce an amendment to the *Electoral Act* extending the eligibility for voting outside voting centres to any person with disability who may face barriers to entering a voting centre.

### 5.5.3 Takeaway voting may also help some voters

Takeaway voting is provided by the New Zealand Electoral Commission.<sup>54</sup> It involves the voter completing an application (similar to a postal voting application) that the voter, or another person on behalf of the voter, submits at a voting centre. The person

<sup>53</sup> Electoral Commission of Queensland, *I need help voting*, <<https://www.ecq.qld.gov.au/how-to-vote/voter-help>> accessed 21 June 2026; Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand, *Submission 42*, p. 6.

<sup>54</sup> Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand, *Submission 42*, p. 15.

submitting the application is given a declaration or postal-style ballot pack to take away and the completed ballot papers are returned to the voting centre by the close of voting.

This service is similar to postal voting and provides the same advantage of allowing a voter to complete their ballot papers in an environment that suits them and with the support that they need. However, it has the advantage that the application can be made, the ballot papers received by the voter and the completed ballot papers received by the VEC in a short period of time (including all steps happening on election day).

This could benefit people who did not apply for postal voting in time or who are concerned about ballot papers not arriving or not being received in time. Many people with disability have fluctuating conditions which make their capacity to attend a voting centre unpredictable. Takeaway voting could also be very useful to people who are unexpectedly hospitalised, unwell or debilitated. This could include people in inpatient psychiatric units (see Section 3.2.1).

Where the VEC is unable to offer in-car voting, takeaway voting would enable a family member or support person to offer a similar experience to a voter.

When asked about takeaway voting, the Electoral Commissioner told the Committee:

it is not something we have particularly turned our minds to, because it is currently not allowed really under the legislation. We are not aware of a particular drive towards that, so it is not something we have particularly studied.<sup>55</sup>

The Committee therefore encourages the VEC to consult with the New Zealand Electoral Commission regarding its takeaway voting model and to investigate its potential application in Victoria. This should include assessing the benefits and the operational feasibility, integrity safeguards and communication requirements needed to support such a service as an accessibility option.

**FINDING 25:** Takeaway voting is offered in New Zealand, in which a voter or another person on their behalf can provide a form at a voting centre during the voting period and receive a ballot pack, which is taken away and returned to the voting centre later. This is similar to postal voting, but provides a faster turnaround and provides an option for people who missed the deadline for postal voting.

**RECOMMENDATION 24:** That the VEC review the benefits and practicability of providing takeaway voting in Victoria, as is provided in New Zealand. Following this review, the VEC should make any appropriate recommendations to the Parliament, including for legislative change if required.

<sup>55</sup> Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58.

## 5.6 Internal layouts should be designed for universal accessibility

### Lived experience

“ Where centres were physically accessible and clearly laid out, the voting process was straightforward and dignified. However, accessibility was inconsistent between locations.

Source: Respondent to consultation by Carers Victoria, *Submission 41*, p. 5.

Multiple submitters reported features in the layout of voting centres that acted as barriers to accessibility, privacy and dignity. They noted the importance of sufficient space for mobility aids and guided assistance, an absence of clutter from temporary equipment, good lighting, sufficient voting compartments and seating inside and outside the voting centre.<sup>56</sup>

The VEC has recognised the importance of accessible internal layouts. Voting centre managers are advised that ‘Furniture and equipment placement must maximise access for all electors.’<sup>57</sup> Early voting centre managers are additionally advised that there are four key principles for laying out a voting centre, of which the first is ‘Accessibility: Is the EVC [early voting centre] as accessible as possible for all staff and electors?’<sup>58</sup>

Submitters and witnesses to this Inquiry noted two major areas where there could be improvements: how voting compartments are placed and how accessibility tools are made available.

### 5.6.1 Voting compartments could be placed better to meet the needs of voters with disability

### Lived experience

“ I do wish there was a quiet space where I did have my support worker. She was looking stuff up for parties and what they were wanting to advertise. It was great that I was able to take the time with her to do that. But on flip side it was at a spot where everyone else was around and I felt like everyone knew that I was taking forever and I don’t want to talk too loudly or anything. Then whispering in the corner and it was just a bit weird.

Source: Respondent to consultation by Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 18.

<sup>56</sup> Jennie Trigg, *Submission 7*, p. 1; Blind Citizens Australia, *Submission 32*, p. 7; Rights Information and Advocacy Centre, *Submission 38*, p. 2; Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 20; Carers Victoria, *Submission 41*, p. 5; Dementia Australia, *Submission 50*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>57</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State district by-election voting centre manager guide*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 7; Victorian Electoral Commission, *State by-election early voting manager manual*, 2024, Melbourne, p. 31.

<sup>58</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State by-election early voting manager manual*, 2024, Melbourne, p. 27.

The VEC provides several types of voting compartments (also referred to as ‘voting booths’) in voting centres, including standard compartments, low-level compartments and table-top screens (see Section 6.2.1). The last two types are designed to accommodate a chair or a wheelchair. Voting centre managers are instructed to place two chairs in front of the low-level compartment or table-top screen and to attach a magnifier and maxi pencil to the table-top screen.<sup>59</sup>

The placement of voting compartments is determined by the voting centre manager with guidance from the VEC.<sup>60</sup> Voting centre managers are instructed to place voting compartments in a line along one or two sides of the room and to:

Place low-level compartment or table-top screens in the same line as other compartments, with a chair for the elector and a second chair in case the elector needs assistance. These screens are designed so those who use mobility aids, or who need to sit down, can vote in private.<sup>61</sup>

While this configuration may support easier management, it is not necessarily the most practical in terms of accessibility. A wider space between compartments may assist people using wheelchairs, mobility aids, guided assistance (whether human or animal) or support people. Voters who are being assisted by support people or election officials may also need a larger space between them and other voters so that they can talk without losing the secrecy of their vote. People with sensory sensitivities may benefit from a space that is less crowded.<sup>62</sup>

This has been recognised by the VEC and staff are instructed to provide additional space around voting compartments at low-sensory voting venues.<sup>63</sup> However, this has not been integrated into instructions viewed by the Committee for other voting centres.

Some submitters also raised concerns about the width and design of voting compartments. This is discussed in Section 6.2.1 of this report.

## 5.6.2 Accessibility tools need to be readily available

### Lived experience

“ I advised her [an election official] I needed a magnifier as I also have very limited vision. She said there’s one on the accessible booth, but that someone was using that booth at the moment ... I asked if there was another magnifier I could use. She said she thought there might be, but after looking for a while she could not find one ...

Source: Name withheld, *Submission 39a*, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State district by-election voting centre manager guide*, Melbourne, 2023, pp. 8, 11.

<sup>60</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State district by-election voting centre manager guide*, Melbourne, 2023, pp. 8, 46–7.

<sup>61</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State district by-election voting centre manager guide*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 8.

<sup>62</sup> Australian Institute of Architects, *Submission 44*, p. 2. Similar points were made by Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, pp. 10–11, 18.

<sup>63</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Low-sensory voting session* (online module), [Melbourne], 2025, lesson 1.

It is also important that accessibility tools (such as magnifiers and maxi pencils) are readily available for people who need them. Voting centre managers are instructed to attach a magnifier and large grip pencil to the table-top voting compartment, and a magnifier in one or more compartments.<sup>64</sup>

It is important that accessibility tools are not only available in low-level or table-top compartments. Not all people who need these tools use wheelchairs and it would be helpful to have these devices readily available for use in other compartments where appropriate. In addition, if these devices are only available in the table-top compartment, that may push people to use the table-top compartment who do not need to use it, making it unavailable to people who do need it.

Regarding pencils, a solution may be to provide maxi pencils as the default pencil used in all voting compartments, rather than making them only available on request. This could be phased in by all future orders of pencils being maxi pencils, replacing the existing pencil stock as it is used up.

**FINDING 26:** Voting centre managers are currently instructed to place voting compartments along one or two walls of a voting centre. They are instructed to set up low-level or table-top compartments in line with the other compartments, with two chairs, plus a magnifier and large pencil attached to table-top compartments. This may not allow sufficient space for voters using mobility aids, being guided or being accompanied by a support person. It also may not provide privacy for voters who need to talk with a support person. It is also important that accessibility tools are not restricted to table-top compartments.

**RECOMMENDATION 25:** That the VEC work with relevant stakeholders to formally review and evaluate its voting compartment protocols. This should include identifying layouts that:

- are adequate for people using mobility aids, people who are guided by a dog or human and people accompanied by a support person
- meet the privacy needs of people who need to talk with support people while voting.

**RECOMMENDATION 26:** That the VEC ensure that accessibility tools such as magnifiers and large-grip pencils are available at all issuing tables and/or at each voting compartment and are not restricted to table-top voting compartments. This could include providing large-grip pencils as the default pencil in all booths at all voting centres.

<sup>64</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State district by-election voting centre manager guide*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 11.

## 5.7 Signage must be clear, unambiguous and placed for optimal coverage

### Lived experience

“ In some [Commonwealth] centres, QR posters [for Auslan interpreting services] were placed only after the roll desk or inside the venue, which meant voters could not connect to interpreters when they first needed support.

Source: Deaf Victoria, *Submission 9*, p. 3.

Well placed signage that provides clear wayfinding and information in a variety of formats is key to ensuring that voters have the information they need.

Submitters see signage as a critical accessibility tool, with some noting that it can be inadequate, inconsistent or poorly placed.<sup>65</sup> Improving it would significantly help people navigate voting centres independently and confidently. Submitters called for clear, consistent and standardised signage protocols across all voting centres.<sup>66</sup>

Some submitters noted a lack of directional and wayfinding support outside and within the voting centre. Some called for better signage to assist with navigating queues, layouts and knowing where to go next.

### 5.7.1 Wayfinding and informative signs outside voting centres would assist navigation and help voters be prepared

### Lived experience

“ On request I was shown an accessible entry to the voting place. It would be helpful to have signage to direct those who need disabled access. The school is on a sloping site and is well served by ramps, but could do with extra signage for those unfamiliar with their property.

Source: Jennifer Pretty, *Submission 22*, p. 1.

The VEC provides very limited instructions to voting centre managers about signs outside the voting centre, focusing only on the voting centre banner, an accessible parking sign and designated entrance signs.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Jennie Trigg, *Submission 7*, pp. 1–2; Jennifer Pretty, *Submission 22*, p. 1; ACD (the Association for Children with a Disability), *Submission 30*, p. 2; Reinforce Self-Advocacy, *Submission 31*, p. 1; Blind Citizens Australia, *Submission 32*, p. 7; Endeavour Foundation, *Submission 37*, p. 3; Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 9; Alison Reece, *Submission 45*, p. 1; Dementia Australia, *Submission 50*, pp. 4–5; Dr Rose Capp, Policy Adviser, Dementia Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21. See also Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 54–5.

<sup>66</sup> Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 27*, pp. 3–4.

<sup>67</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State district by-election voting centre manager guide*, 2023, Melbourne, pp. 11, 15.

Concerns about a lack of directional signage outside voting centres have been raised at meetings of the Electoral Access Advisory Group in 2022 and 2023, with the VEC committing to look at having directional signage on the outside of buildings, including signs relating to accessible entries.<sup>68</sup> Similar concerns were raised in submissions to this Inquiry.<sup>69</sup>

The Committee particularly notes the importance of taking a ‘whole of journey’ approach to signage (see Section 1.4.2). This may include wayfinding signage from public transport stops to the voting centre, as well as the full path from arrival points through to exit, with multiple, strategically placed signs.

A lack of outside signage reduces accessibility, as voters may become frustrated, disoriented, fatigued or require assistance to locate the correct entry points. In addition to wayfinding signage, it is important to include other key information outside voting centres. When key information is provided only once voters are inside the venue, it may not be available in a timely manner to support informed decision-making.

### 5.7.2 Signs inside voting centres would support preparedness and informed decision-making

The VEC provides a range of signs and posters for display inside the voting centre. The *Voting centre manager guide* includes general instructions to ‘display’, ‘use’ or ‘place’ the signs in locations such as ‘near the head of the queue’ or ‘near where electors exit’ and to position critical signs ‘where they can be clearly seen’.<sup>70</sup>

The Committee notes numerous references in the guide to a singular poster or sign being provided. However, it is important for recurring signs and posters to be displayed in numerous places along the queue and in the voting centre. Signs should also be in a range of formats, be placed at accessible heights<sup>71</sup> and be located at clear decision points. This will make it easier for voters to understand what is expected, will reduce anxiety and will reduce reliance on spoken instructions.

Deaf Victoria noted that, at the Commonwealth election, posters with QR codes for Auslan interpreters were sometimes not visible before reaching staff desks, although voters may need access to this service when first arriving at a voting centre.<sup>72</sup>

In terms of content, in addition to signs relating to processes and how to vote, it is also important for there to be clear information about what support and accessibility tools are available. Providing this information through signs means that voters do not have to rely on prior research or having to disclose their disability to staff and ask about options.

<sup>68</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, Electoral Access Advisory Group, *Meeting minutes*, 23 May 2022, p. 5; Victorian Electoral Commission, Electoral Access Advisory Group, *Meeting minutes*, 27 June 2023, p. 2.

<sup>69</sup> Dominique Loulie, *Submission 18*, p. 2; Jennifer Pretty, *Submission 22*, p. 1; Endeavour Foundation, *Submission 37*, p. 3; Dementia Australia, *Submission 50*, p. 5.

<sup>70</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State district by-election voting centre manager guide*, 2023, Melbourne, pp. 11, 46.

<sup>71</sup> Jennie Trigg, *Submission 7*, p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> Deaf Victoria, *Submission 9*, p. 3.

**FINDING 27:** Multiple stakeholders have raised concerns about a lack of wayfinding signage outside voting centres. In addition, key information is frequently only provided inside the voting centre, a practice that does not support preparedness and informed decision-making. In some cases, information appears to only be provided on one sign, which means that it may not be seen when it is needed.

**RECOMMENDATION 27:** That the VEC work with relevant stakeholders to formally review and evaluate what signage is provided to voting centres and the directions for how it should be placed. This should include:

- the number of each type of sign to be provided to voting centres
- the instructions for voting centre managers about where to locate signs
- what signs should be placed inside the voting centre and what should be placed outside the voting centre, taking a whole-of-journey approach
- what signs are necessary to provide clear messaging for people with disability about what support and accessibility tools are available
- the formatting of signs (including font, font size and colours) to ensure that they are as accessible as possible.

## 5.8 Accessibility needs to be built into processes and manuals

It is ultimately the actions of voting centre staff that will determine whether a voting centre is operated in an accessible way. To support the staff, head office must provide clear policy direction, appropriate standards and consistent guidelines. Voting centre managers must be supported by reducing the reliance on discretionary decisions. Head office should also promote and support the consistent use of available adjustments and accessibility tools. Election managers and voting centre managers must implement these adjustments and accessibility tools effectively on-site, ensuring staff are informed, supported and responsive to voters' needs.

As noted throughout this chapter, voting centre staff are required to make many decisions which affect accessibility, such as:

- whether to have a staff member managing queues and what supports they offer to people who may struggle to stand in queues (see Section 5.4)
- whether to provide voting outside the voting centre (see Section 5.5)
- the layout of voting centres (see Section 5.6)
- where to place signage (see Section 5.7).

The Committee understands the need for flexibility in the way that voting centres are operated. However, the Committee would like to see more direction to voting centre staff to help them consider accessibility in making these decisions. The manuals examined by the Committee often do not provide much detail about how to take into account accessibility and the needs of people with disability. For example, they do not provide criteria for deciding whether or not to provide voting outside the voting centre or suggestions about logistics (such as going to a voter's car or taking a table out of the voting centre). While the manuals identify accessibility as important in determining layouts,<sup>73</sup> detailed guidance about what is required in practice is lacking.

The Committee would also like to see manuals and training materials treat adjustments for people with disability as an obligation which should be provided unless there are compelling reasons not to. This is in line with the recommended accessibility-first approach (see Section 1.4.1) and the legal obligations on the VEC (see Section 2.3). It would also help to provide voters with a more predictable experience, making it easier for voters with disability to select the most appropriate way of voting for their circumstances.

**FINDING 28:** Voting centre staff have to make a range of decisions about how a voting centre operates. These decisions affect how accessible the voting centre is for people with disability. In some cases, adjustments for people with disability are delivered on a discretionary, case-by-case basis. Barriers to accessibility can arise from reliance on ad hoc decisions rather than consistent procedures and guidelines.

**RECOMMENDATION 28:** That the VEC provide clear and consistent operational guidance across all training modules, manuals and guides regarding the importance of accessibility and how to operate voting centres in the most accessible way. Reliance on discretionary decision-making should be minimised. Where discretionary decision-making is needed, it should be supported by clear, consistent guidelines based on an understanding that providing services in an accessible way is a legal obligation.

<sup>73</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State district by-election voting centre manager guide*, Melbourne, 2023, pp. 7, 46.

# Chapter 6

## Equipping voting centres

### 6.1 Introduction

Even where voting centres meet entry and circulation requirements, barriers can still arise if voting centres do not have the right equipment. This chapter examines what it means to properly equip voting centres with inclusive resources. It considers the Victorian Electoral Commission's (VEC's) current practices with voting centre furniture (Section 6.2), reading and writing tools (Section 6.3), assistive listening systems (Section 6.4) and a virtual Auslan interpreting service (Section 6.5). The Committee finds that there is scope for improvement in the way that all of these things are provided.

This chapter also considers other technology that could reduce barriers for voters, including:

- reading support technology and pens (Section 6.6)
- communication boards (Section 6.7)
- electronic voting (Section 6.8).

The Committee notes the importance of providing voters with the opportunity to vote independently, confidentially and with dignity. While the VEC provides some accessibility tools to support this, there is more that could be done. The Committee encourages the VEC to provide whatever supports it can to reduce the burden on the voter to bring their own solutions or be compelled to use postal or telephone-assisted voting.

It is also essential that people know what equipment is available before they get to a voting centre. This helps people to know whether or not voting at a voting centre will be a practical option for them. By informing people in advance what is available, people can also feel more confident asking for the supports they need. This is discussed further in Section 7.6.2.

### 6.2 Furniture supplied by the VEC

The VEC supplies a range of furniture to voting centres, including voting compartments, tables, privacy screens, ballot boxes, queuing barriers, signage stands and seating. This furniture needs to meet the needs of all users of the voting centre, as well as the logistics needs of the VEC.

Through this Inquiry, two major areas of improvement to voting centre furniture were identified: making voting compartments more accessible and providing seating for voters to rest before, during and after voting.

### 6.2.1 Voting compartments and voting screens should support safe, accessible and confidential voting

#### Lived experience

“ When sites happen to include a proper table and chair, it significantly improves voting autonomy, particularly for large ballot papers.

Source: Rights Information and Advocacy Centre, *Submission 38*, p. 3.

A voting compartment (also referred to as a ‘voting booth’) is a designated, enclosed space provided at a voting centre, where a voter can mark their ballot papers privately and without interference. A voting screen is the section of the voting compartment, or a portable table-top item, that provides vertical barriers to protect the secrecy and integrity of the vote.

The VEC generally provides three types of voting compartment in voting centres:

- standard voting compartments, which are self-supporting cardboard structures that include a flat surface for filling out ballot papers, with vertical screening around three sides to provide privacy
- low-level voting compartments, which are wider and lower and have space for a chair or a wheelchair user to be positioned at the compartment
- table-top voting screens, which consist of just the flat surface and vertical screens, which are placed on tables.

For mobile voting, the VEC also uses ‘pizza box’ compartments (which can be folded down for transport) and ‘mobile screens’ (for use at a bedside or in an armchair).<sup>1</sup>

At the 2026 Nepean District by-election, voting centres were supplied with 8, 12 or 16 standard compartments, and 1 or 2 low-level voting compartments. No other compartments were supplied to voting centres at that by-election. Table-top and ‘pizza box’ compartments were supplied in small numbers to election offices.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 6.1 illustrates the three different compartments listed above.

<sup>1</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Mobile voting team training*, [Melbourne], 2025, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Distribution checklist—voting locations: Nepean District by-election 2026*, Melbourne, 2026.

**Figure 6.1** Standard compartments, a low-level voting compartment and a table-top voting screen



Source: Victorian Electoral Commission.

## Voting compartments could be better designed

### Lived experience

“ I take my elderly parents voting and assist them in the booth. They are not disabled but need help in filling out the forms. The booths are not wide enough to stand next to them to support them.

Source: Respondent to consultation by the Australian Institute of Architects, *Submission 44*, p. 3.

“ The booths themselves are quite compact. There isn't generally a lot of space to really have somebody else supporting you with it.

Source: Respondent to consultation by Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 20.

The Rights Information and Advocacy Centre told the Committee that:

Many issues stem from the standard cardboard polling booths used in most elections. These generally fail to meet the needs of people with mobility limitations, vision impairment, or those using Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, neither low-level nor standard options appear well suited to people who require a support person to assist them.<sup>4</sup> The Australian Institute of Architects recommended that every voting centre have at least one 'Double width (1350 mm wide) accessible polling booths—located away from other booths to provide acoustic privacy—preferred/recommended especially for neurodivergent voters, and those with a support person'.<sup>5</sup>

There may also be other design changes which could reduce barriers for voters with disability. The Electoral Commission of South Australia advised that it provides: 'A black outline around the desktop and edges of polling stations to help voters with low vision identify where to complete their ballot papers.'<sup>6</sup> This can potentially help voters with low vision by improving visual definition and navigability and may also help others with a reduced capacity to distinguish items or surfaces of similar tone or colour (such as people with dementia).<sup>7</sup>

Although the Committee has not reviewed any evaluation of South Australia's approach, it considers that this represents an opportunity to improve accessibility. The Committee encourages the VEC to consult with stakeholders in South Australia on the

<sup>3</sup> Rights Information and Advocacy Centre, *Submission 38*, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 21; Australian Institute of Architects, *Submission 44*, p. 3; Dementia Australia, *Submission 50*, p. 4. See also Rights Information and Advocacy Centre, *Submission 38*, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Institute of Architects, *Submission 44*, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand, *Submission 42*, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 39*, p. 2; Dementia Australia, *Submission 50*, p. 5.

success or otherwise of this initiative and to consult with relevant stakeholders about implementation in Victoria.

### There needs to be enough low-level voting compartments or table-top screens and they need to be available for voters who need them

#### Lived experience

“ I advised her [an election official] I needed a magnifier as I also have very limited vision. She said there’s one on the accessible booth, but that someone was using that booth at the moment. I said that I couldn’t stand for much longer to wait for the accessible booth, but there were no chairs available inside (or outside) the centre for me to wait for the single accessible booth available ...

The accessible booth was being used as a regular booth so anyone like me who needed it had to wait until it was vacant. I don’t think that’s the right way to do it.

Source: Name withheld, *Submission 39a*, p. 2.

6

The number of compartments, low-level voting compartments or table-top screens was considered inadequate by some submitters.<sup>8</sup> Some submitters believed that this problem was exacerbated by low-level or table-top compartments being used by people who did not need to use them, resulting in increased wait times.<sup>9</sup>

If there are insufficient low-level or table-top compartments, or if voters are using these compartments, then voters who require this option may have to wait in throughway areas or relocate until the compartment becomes available. If they require seating as they wait, it may not be available.<sup>10</sup> There is no indication in VEC operational guidance documents that voters with accessibility needs should be given priority use of these compartments. Nor do the compartments have any signage to indicate this to voters.

**FINDING 29:** In addition to its standard voting compartments, the VEC provides low-level voting compartments and table-top voting screens to enable voters to use a chair or wheelchair when filling out ballot papers. The Committee was told that some voters with disability had to wait to use these compartments as there was sometimes only one in a voting centre and they were not labelled to prioritise their use by people with disability. Stakeholders also raised concerns about voting compartments not being wide enough to include a support person.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Lo Schiavo, *Submission 3*, p. 1; Rights Information and Advocacy Centre, *Submission 38*, p. 2; Name withheld, *Submission 39*, p. 2; Dementia Australia, *Submission 50*, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Lo Schiavo, *Submission 3*, p. 1; Name withheld, *Submission 39a*, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 39a*, p. 2.

**RECOMMENDATION 29:** That the VEC review its voting compartment designs to ensure that they align with universal design principles, benefit the widest possible range of voters and reduce reliance on voters self-identifying or requesting assistance. Among other matters, the VEC should ensure that voting compartments are accessible by people using a range of mobility devices, have sufficient space for a support person and are visually distinguishable.

**RECOMMENDATION 30:** That the VEC review the number of low-level voting compartments and table-top voting screens provided to voting centres to ensure that they are provided in sufficient numbers to reduce waiting times for people with disability.

## 6.2.2 Seating is needed before, during and after the voting process

### 6

#### Lived experience

“ I have chronic fatigue so standing in lines is a challenge for me. I was able to sit on steps etc last time I voted ... Priority seating would also be really helpful for people with a range of disability and mobility needs.

Source: Name withheld, *Submission 5*, p. 1.

“ The expectation that I will need to stand in a line for a long period waiting to vote is a barrier. Somewhere to sit after voting would be appreciated.

Source: Nancye Harrison, *Submission 17*, p. 1.

Multiple organisations and individuals with lived experience highlighted the need for seating at all stages of the voting process—before, during and after voting.<sup>11</sup>

Submitters linked waiting without seating to fatigue, physical exhaustion and pain.<sup>12</sup> They described sitting on steps while queueing<sup>13</sup> or having nowhere to sit while waiting for a free voting compartment.<sup>14</sup> Self-identifying to access assistance can create additional barriers (see Section 5.4.1). Others felt that they had to rely on postal voting to avoid problems,<sup>15</sup> resulting in inequitable voting options.

<sup>11</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 5*, p. 1; Jennie Trigg, *Submission 7*, p. 1; Name withheld, *Submission 16*, p. 1; Rights Information and Advocacy Centre, *Submission 38*, p. 2; Name withheld, *Submission 39a*, p. 2; Carers Victoria, *Submission 41*, p. 5; Australian Institute of Architects, *Submission 44*, p. 3; Dementia Australia, *Submission 50*, pp. 4, 5, 9.

<sup>12</sup> Endeavour Foundation, *Submission 37*, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 5*, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 39a*, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Nancye Harrison, *Submission 17*, p. 1; Carers Victoria, *Submission 41*, p. 5.

The Rights Information and Advocacy Centre specifically called for ‘chairs with backs and armrests for people who need to sit while voting.’<sup>16</sup> Evidence also indicates that some voters require seating after voting to rest or recover, as the process can be physically and psychologically demanding.<sup>17</sup>

The importance of seating is noted in the VEC’s training materials. Voting centre managers are instructed to set up ‘seating for electors unable to stand while they wait,’ advised that chairs may need to be set up if access from the car park to the building is ‘a long distance’ and to place two seats at a low-level voting compartment or table-top screen.<sup>18</sup> They are also instructed to check if there is an ‘adequate number of adult-sized tables and chairs’ before election day.<sup>19</sup>

Voting centre staff are also advised to ‘Ask anyone using a mobility aid, such as a walking frame or crutches, or who appears to be having difficulty standing if they would like to come to the front of a queue or offer them a seat,’ and to ‘identify electors with special needs, and provide assistance where necessary, for example, bringing an elderly elector forward in the queue or providing a seat.’<sup>20</sup>

However, the VEC only supplies one or two chairs to voting centres for voters’ use (though more may be available with the venue).<sup>21</sup> The experiences shared with the Committee suggest that there are not always enough. Much of the VEC’s instructions also rely on the voting centre manager’s discretion or judgement as to when seating is required, and what constitutes ‘a long distance’ and ‘adequate’ provision. This is compounded by staff having to ‘identify electors with special needs’ to offer seating. The combination of vague guidance and reliance on staff to recognise individuals who may require assistance creates a risk that barriers will remain unaddressed, resulting in inequitable experiences.

It was argued that seating should be treated as a requirement, not an optional extra.<sup>22</sup> Whether or not seating is available should not depend on staff discretion. Minimum seating standards should be applied state-wide to ensure consistent access and dignity for all voters.

**FINDING 30:** Although VEC manuals note the importance of seating for some voters, submitters have reported that seating has not been available in some voting centres. Guidance on the provision of seating within voting centres relies heavily on discretionary judgement by voting centre managers and staff and the VEC generally only provides one or two chairs to a voting centre for voters to use.

<sup>16</sup> Rights Information and Advocacy Centre, *Submission 38*, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Nancye Harrison, *Submission 17*, p. 1; Name withheld, *Submission 39a*, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State district by-election voting centre manager guide*, Melbourne, 2023, pp. 6, 8, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State district by-election voting centre manager guide*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State by-election election official manual*, Melbourne, 2025, pp. 14, 52.

<sup>21</sup> Keegan Bartlett, Assistant Commissioner, Electoral Integrity and Regulation, Victorian Electoral Commission, correspondence, 16 July 2026.

<sup>22</sup> Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 27*, p. 4.

**RECOMMENDATION 31:** That the VEC review its processes to ensure sufficient seating is consistently available at all voting centres, including through the introduction of minimum standards for the provision of chairs. Processes and training should ensure that seating is available by default in queues, within some voting compartments and in clearly marked rest areas accessible to voters before and after voting.

## 6.3 Reading and writing devices

### Lived experience

“ I asked about a large grip pencil because of dexterity limitations caused by arthritis. She looked very worried and said she didn’t think so. She said I could use her pen. I advised her I needed a magnifier as I also have very limited vision. She said there’s one on the accessible booth, but that someone was using that booth at the moment. I said that I couldn’t stand for much longer to wait for the accessible booth, but there were no chairs available inside (or outside) the centre for me to wait for the single accessible booth available. She asked me to go to a regular booth so I did, so that I could vote sooner and get back to my son. I asked if there was another magnifier I could use. She said she thought there might be, but after looking for a while she could not find one. While I was at the regular booth, the original staff member leaned across the voter at accessible voting booth, took the magnifier without even speaking to the man who was voting there and gave it to me. I was embarrassed.

Source: Name withheld, *Submission 39a*, p. 2.

The VEC equips voting centres with a range of accessibility tools to assist with reading and writing. On its website, the VEC states:

Voting centres will have:

- at least one accessible voting screen or a table-top voting screen
- magnifying sheets
- maxi pencils.<sup>23</sup>

However, the Committee was told about staff not knowing what accessibility tools are available or where they are located.<sup>24</sup> Rather than being built into the default voting experience, accessibility depends heavily on staff awareness, voter confidence to request assistance and how equipment is set up on the day.

In addition, the VEC’s Distribution checklist (which lists the items sent to a voting centre) does not explicitly reference magnifying sheets and large-grip pencils.

<sup>23</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *What happens at a voting centre*, <<https://www.vec.vic.gov.au/voting/how-voting-works/what-happens-at-a-voting-centre>> accessed 22 June 2026.

<sup>24</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 39a*, p. 2.

Including these as separate items to be checked off may help ensure that they are consistently considered, supplied and available when needed.

Voting centre managers are instructed to set up a magnifier in one or more voting compartments, attach magnifiers to the voting compartment(s) with string and attach a label indicating each magnifier. No specific number is indicated. They are also instructed to set up a table-top voting compartment with magnifier and large pencil attached.<sup>25</sup>

It could be inferred from these instructions that more than one magnifier and large pencil are available. Even so, at the recent Nepean District by-election, one submitter found it difficult to access either of these items.<sup>26</sup> The instruction to tie these items to a voting compartment limits their usefulness unless they are attached to every compartment and may cause unnecessary delays for voters who require a magnifier, a maxi pencil or both, but do not require a low-level voting compartment or table-top screen.

Current processes also partly rely on voters knowing what is available and requesting the tools that they need. There are no general signs about what tools are available or where to find them. Staff are instructed to attach a label to voting compartments with magnifiers. However, this may not be useful for some people with vision impairment. Compartments with maxi pencils are not labelled.

As discussed in Section 7.6.2, there is scope for improving the communication about what is available before voters arrive at a voting centre. There is also scope to make it easier for voters to get the appropriate tools at the voting centre. Signs in the voting centre indicating what is available would help some voters. Making some equipment (such as maxi pencils) freely available for voters to take (rather than having to request them) would also provide a more discreet and dignified way for voters to get what they need.

**FINDING 31:** Accessibility tools are supplied to voting centres in limited numbers. While they are technically available, they are not automatically offered, visibly available or adequately signposted. They may be attached to one or more compartments or provided on request, rather than as standard-issue equipment at every compartment, visibly available at issuing tables or placed at convenient locations.

**RECOMMENDATION 32:** That the VEC review the number of accessibility tools that are supplied to each voting centre to ensure that they are supplied in sufficient quantities.

<sup>25</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State district by-election voting centre manager guide*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 11. See also Victorian Electoral Commission, *State by-election early voting manager manual*, Melbourne, 2024, p. 29.

<sup>26</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 39a*, p. 2.

**RECOMMENDATION 33:** That the VEC review its processes for supplying accessibility tools to voters, including ensuring that staff know what tools are available, that available tools are advertised in voting centres so that people know to ask for them or look for them and that tools are available for voters to help themselves where practical. The VEC should also supply low-cost, easily used accessibility tools in every voting compartment.

## 6.4 Assistive listening systems

Hearing loops (also called induction loops) and similar technology (such as Auracast) transmit sound directly to hearing aids or cochlear implants, improving hearing clarity for people with hearing loss. Personal hearing amplifiers are devices used by individuals, who can listen through headphones or similar devices, or the device can connect to hearing aids or implants. The use of hearing support devices at voting centres was suggested by some submitters.<sup>27</sup>

The VEC told the Committee that it supplies personal hearing amplifiers at early voting centres and low-sensory voting centres but not election-day voting centres. The VEC advised that it does not supply the devices at election-day voting centres 'due to a limited number of devices.'<sup>28</sup> The Committee assumes this is a budgetary constraint rather than a lack of supply. The Committee would like to see the VEC make the most effective use of the devices that it is able to access.

As with other accessibility tools, it is important to ensure that voters are aware in advance of which voting centres have assistive listening systems (see further discussion in Section 7.6.2).

**FINDING 32:** Assistive listening systems make it easier for people with hearing loss to hear. They are currently only offered by the VEC at early voting centres and low-sensory voting centres.

**RECOMMENDATION 34:** That the VEC make assistive listening systems available in as many voting centres as practicable, advertising those places that have these systems available. This may be as simple as keeping them in use at early voting centres when they are subsequently used as election-day voting centres, or redistributing equipment to nearby election-day voting centres.

<sup>27</sup> Nicole Karidis, *Submission 28*, p. 1; Council on the Ageing Victoria, *Submission 29*, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 14.

## 6.5 Auslan interpreting service

At the 2022 election, the VEC engaged Convo Communications Australia to provide virtual Auslan interpreting services before the election and during the voting period.<sup>29</sup> Voters could scan a QR code in the voting centre to connect with an interpreter via video. The service was offered on demand, with no need to book in advance.<sup>30</sup> This allowed Deaf voters to communicate with staff at voting centres.

Todd Wright from Convo Communications Australia, the organisation that provided the service, explained:

We have received feedback from deaf voters. For some of them it was their first opportunity to ask questions directly to the electoral commission. By asking those questions, they have actually realised they have been voting unintentionally the wrong way their entire lives. It is not about what they cannot do, it is just a simple lack of access in the moment when they need it the most. This obviously really shifts what we are talking about here: when access is available at that moment of intent, at the point when you need it most, it does not only help but really empowers people—giving people confidence to ask questions, to understand the process and to be able to participate fully in the process. Importantly, it really gives people something fundamental: it gives people dignity, confidentiality and ownership of their own vote.<sup>31</sup>

Regarding the use of the service at the 2022 state election, the VEC reported that ‘Overall connection numbers for the election were lower than expected with 25 interactions totalling 1.7 hours of interpreting time taking place.’<sup>32</sup>

The Australian Electoral Commission also engaged this service, with a similar rate of use at the 2025 Australian Commonwealth election (adjusting for the larger number of voters at a Commonwealth election).<sup>33</sup>

The VEC sought feedback on the service through its post-election evaluation. The evaluation found that only 30% of the voters who were Deaf or hard of hearing were aware of the Auslan interpreting service. Of the voters who were aware of the service, only 9% actually used it. However, the Committee notes that this sample size was relatively small, with only 23 people being aware of the service.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, pp. 54–5.

<sup>30</sup> Todd Wright, Chief Executive Officer, Convo Communications Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Todd Wright, Chief Executive Officer, Convo Communications Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 55.

<sup>33</sup> Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, correspondence, 29 May 2026, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Kantar Public, *Victorian Electoral Commission: evaluation of services at the 26 November 2022 Victorian State election*, report for the Victorian Electoral Commission, 2023, p. 89.

The VEC concluded that better promotion may be appropriate at future elections:

The VEC will consider better promotion opportunities for Auslan interpreting services with the aim to boost access and usage.<sup>35</sup>

The Committee notes that the service has not featured clearly in communication at previous elections (see Section 7.6.2).

In its submission to this Inquiry, the VEC reported that its commitment to consider better promotion opportunities is not yet actioned. The VEC stated that it 'will be progressed in future elections.'<sup>36</sup> When asked what changes to the promotion plan for this service have been made for the 2026 election, the VEC told the Committee:

The VEC will again offer these services utilising Convo, a global private company offering interpretation services. The service will again be available at all early voting centres and election day voting centres. Signage will be at all voting centres alerting voters to the service, and public communications will highlight the service's availability.<sup>37</sup>

It is not clear from this response whether this will involve better promotion than in 2022.

The VEC has listed an Auslan interpreting service as an available support at voting centres in its submission to this Inquiry.<sup>38</sup> However, there is no mention of this service in the 2026 state election service plan. Nor does it appear in the *Disability education and engagement plan* and associated documents (see Section 9.4.1).

The Committee also notes that there has been a lack of evaluation of this service (see Section 9.3.1). As a result, the VEC does not know why the service has had a lower level of usage than expected. It is therefore not clear whether increased promotion is the best response.

Deaf Victoria provided the Committee with details of its experience at the 2025 Commonwealth election. The organisation noted that QR posters were often placed in locations that were not seen until later in the voting process, limiting early access to interpreters. Staff were unaware of the Auslan service or failed to display posters, assuming no Deaf voters, and one voter felt dismissed when requesting better signage. In contrast, where QR posters were clearly displayed at entry points, voters reported improved access and visibility of Auslan services.<sup>39</sup>

This suggests that factors other than promotion may have contributed to the low uptake of the service. The Committee encourages the VEC to expand its consideration of why the Auslan service had a lower level of usage than expected.

<sup>35</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 55.

<sup>36</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 30.

<sup>37</sup> Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, correspondence, 29 May 2026, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, p. 14.

<sup>39</sup> Deaf Victoria, *Submission 9*, pp. 2–4.

**FINDING 33:** The VEC offered an Auslan interpreting service at the 2022 state election, though the usage was lower than the VEC expected. The VEC attributes this primarily to insufficient promotion and has committed to considering improved promotion in future elections. However, the VEC does not appear to have factored improved promotion into its planning. It is also not clear that a lack of promotion is the reason for the low usage.

## 6.6 Some additional reading and writing tools would be helpful

Accessibility tools that support reading, writing and marking are essential to ensuring that voting is inclusive, independent and dignified for all voters. Many people experience barriers when completing written materials due to vision impairment, cognitive conditions, physical limitations or fatigue. Providing appropriate tools helps reduce these barriers by enabling voters to engage with information more easily and to accurately complete their ballot papers.

Importantly, these tools reduce the need for voters to seek assistance or disclose their vote to other people. While some tools are supplied by the VEC (see Section 6.3), additional tools may also be helpful.

### 6.6.1 Reading support or text access technology

A text-to-speech pen is a type of assistive reading technology—a portable device that scans printed text and reads it aloud to help people read and understand written material.

Text-to-speech pens would support access to voting information, including what is on ballot papers, and reduce dependence on assistance. They would enable some people who currently rely on support to complete ballot papers independently. The Australian Electoral Commission and the Western Australian Electoral Commission provide text-to-speech or reader pens at selected locations.<sup>40</sup> However, these have not been offered by the VEC.

**FINDING 34:** Although other commissions supply text-to-speech pens at selected voting centres, the VEC has not offered this technology. Instead, voters who have difficulty reading voting instructions and ballot papers must rely on magnifying sheets, assistance from another person or supplying their own devices.

**RECOMMENDATION 35:** That the VEC investigate and trial the introduction of assistive reading technology, including text-to-speech pens, accompanied by measures to avoid exposing votes through audio, as part of in-person voting.

<sup>40</sup> Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand, *Submission 42*, pp. 10, 23.

## 6.6.2 Pens are better than pencils for some people

### Lived experience

“ We don’t get a pen and I am told to supply my own.

Source: Name withheld, *Submission 2*, p. 2.

Standard 2B half-size pencils<sup>41</sup> are provided for voter use in each voting compartment. These can be difficult to handle, particularly for individuals with dexterity impairments. For voters with vision impairment, both the pencil and numbers written with a pencil can be difficult to see.<sup>42</sup> This increases the risk of errors or informal ballot papers.

Directly or indirectly requiring voters to bring their own writing instruments undermines equity and creates immediate barriers. It assumes prior awareness that assistive tools are needed and the ability to prepare accordingly. It also places an additional burden on voters and their support networks, who may not anticipate or remember this requirement.

One submitter suggested supplying pens for people to use when voting.<sup>43</sup> Providing a choice of writing implements would allow voters to select what works best for them, rather than putting the burden onto the voter.

**FINDING 35:** Pencils can be difficult for some voters to use and pencil writing can be difficult for some voters to read. This can increase the likelihood of errors or force people to seek assistance to complete their ballot papers. If voters want to use a pen or marker, they are expected to bring their own.

**RECOMMENDATION 36:** That the VEC supply a range of marking options (including pens and ergonomically adapted writing tools) at voting centres for voters who face difficulties when using pencils.

<sup>41</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Distribution checklist—voting locations: Nepean District by-election 2026*, pp. 3, 5, 8, 10, 13, 18, 20, 23, 25, 28, 30, 33.

<sup>42</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 39*, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 39*, p. 2. See also Name withheld, *Submission 2*, p. 1.

## 6.7 Accessible communication enables dignified, independent participation

### Lived experience

“ It can be tricky for me to communicate in loud or busy environments.

Source: Respondent to consultation by Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 23.

Some voters have functional communication difficulties which can make interacting with staff in voting centres difficult. These can include aphasia after a stroke, traumatic brain injury, intellectual disability, autism, degenerative neurological conditions, hearing loss and low English literacy.

A variety of accessibility tools and services can assist with communication. ‘Augmentative and alternative communication’ is when a person uses something other than speech to communicate. Tools such as assistance cards, communication boards and symbol-based expressive communication tools can facilitate communication for people with communication difficulties. However, the use of these accessibility tools at voting centres is not widely reported.

This represents an unaddressed accessibility gap for voters who experience difficulty communicating verbally.

### 6.7.1 Communication boards can support clearer and more inclusive interactions

A communication board is a device designed to support people who have difficulty speaking or are nonverbal. It displays text and/or images that a user can point to or gesture at to communicate, including asking or responding to questions. Communication boards can also assist staff to communicate with people who have difficulty hearing. They are a well established, low-cost support, often provided in public-facing service environments.

In addition to reducing barriers for people with disability, communication boards can also facilitate communication for people with low English language skills.

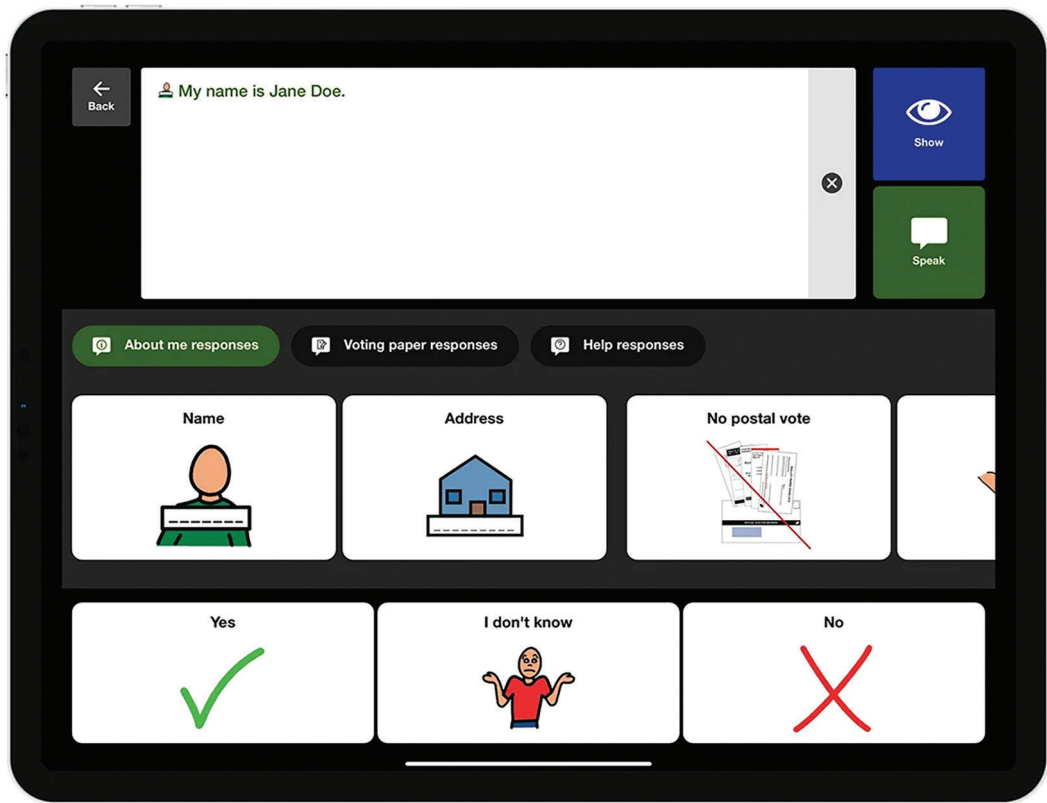
#### The VEC’s Voters Voice app used to provide an electronic communication board

The VEC introduced the Voters Voice app for the 2018 state election. It was developed from feedback from the Electoral Access Advisory Group and included an electronic communication board to replace paper-based talking boards that had been supplied to all voting centres in the past.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, Electoral Access Advisory Group, *Meeting minutes*, 1 June 2021, p. 3.

The Voters Voice communication board contained prepared voting phrases and common responses. It allowed voters to type in additional information. The app also included information about enrolling and voting in a variety of formats, including plain English, Easy English, audio and visual formats.<sup>45</sup> A screenshot of the communication board can be seen in Figure 6.2.

Figure 6.2 Communication board from the Voters Voice app



Source: Conduct, *Victorian Electoral Commission: enabling equality at the ballot box*, <<https://www.conducthq.com/work/vec-voters-voice-accessible-election-app>> accessed 21 June 2026.

The VEC stated:

The Voters Voice app was designed to help people with complex communication needs including people with low literacy, English language difficulties and people who use Auslan, to vote in person at Victorian elections. The Commission worked closely with disability support agencies, primarily Scope, in the development and testing of this application as part of a co-design project.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament on the 2018 Victorian state election*, Melbourne, 2019, p. 35.

<sup>46</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament on the 2018 Victorian state election*, Melbourne, 2019, p. 35. See also Conduct, *Voters Voice accessible iPad app*, video, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hmlvVEnvQ8>> accessed 2 July 2026.

A representative of the VEC at the time explained:

We identified a potential segment of voters who were either avoiding going to a voting centre or avoiding voting at all due to the difficulty they had communicating with election staff.<sup>47</sup>

The app was developed together with disability support agencies and was downloaded 2,280 times.<sup>48</sup> The communication board feature was viewed 807 times, accounting for 10.9% of the screen views on the app.<sup>49</sup>

### The Voters Voice app was well received but has been discontinued

In-app reviews gave the product an average rating of 2.2 out of 3.<sup>50</sup> Comments from users indicate that several of the 1 out of 3 ratings were because people expected the app to have different functions, such as allowing people to vote through the app or providing information about candidates or their policies.<sup>51</sup> Some positive reviews specifically mention the communication board:

‘Love the functionality and how it’s user friendly especially with the communication board and speak function’

‘Thanks for the good application so we communicate with VEC’

‘This app is the best app that I have seen in ages and will better assist everyone with communication problems thank you The Victorian electoral commission for making it happen.’<sup>52</sup>

Voters Voice was discontinued after the 2018 election. The VEC explained to the Committee:

Feedback received was generally positive. However, the key features used in the app ... indicated that improvements to the VEC website would be a more effective solution than maintaining a separate product, therefore making the website the only VEC source of truth.<sup>53</sup>

The Committee notes that a communication board is not available on the VEC’s website. While the VEC views its website as a ‘more effective solution’ serving as the ‘only VEC source of truth’, this represents a shift from the original purpose of the Voters Voice app. It was originally designed as an accessibility tool to support people with complex communication needs, with the communication board described as its ‘central

<sup>47</sup> Sue Lang, Director of Communication and Engagement, Victorian Electoral Commission, quoted in Conduct, *Victorian Electoral Commission: enabling equality at the ballot box*, <<https://www.conducthq.com/work/vec-voters-voice-accessible-election-app>> accessed 2 July 2026.

<sup>48</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament on the 2018 Victorian state election*, Melbourne, 2019, p. 35.

<sup>49</sup> Conduct, *VEC Voters Voice 2 App Nov17*, report for the Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2018, p. 10.

<sup>50</sup> Conduct, *VEC Voters Voice 2 App Nov17*, report for the Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2018, p. 15.

<sup>51</sup> Conduct, *VEC Voters Voice 2 App Nov17*, report for the Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2018, pp. 15–16.

<sup>52</sup> Conduct, *VEC Voters Voice 2 App Nov17*, report for the Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2018, p. 16.

<sup>53</sup> Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, correspondence, 29 May 2026, p. 5.

feature' at the time of release.<sup>54</sup> The app now appears to be viewed primarily as a platform for providing information. The decision to discontinue the app appears to be based on this function rather than an assessment of its value to users facing barriers to communication.

**FINDING 36:** The VEC developed the Voters Voice app for the 2018 election. The app included an electronic communication board that voters could download to their device and use at any voting centre. This facilitated people with communication difficulties communicating with voting centre staff by pressing buttons to select key phrases and responses and by allowing users to type information into the app. The app was developed in response to feedback from the VEC's Electoral Access Advisory Group and co-designed with external disability groups. Despite generally positive feedback from users, the VEC discontinued the Voters Voice app. Some features of the app are available on the VEC's website. However, the communication board is not.

### Paper-based communication boards may be a cost-effective solution

Paper-based communication boards were available in voting centres before the development of the app.<sup>55</sup> Printed communication boards have been used at the VEC's reception since 2013 and were updated in 2023.<sup>56</sup> However, no communication boards are produced for voting centres. When asked about printed communication boards in voting centres, the VEC stated, 'we are currently unable to provide communication boards due to cost'.<sup>57</sup>

The Committee notes the routine use of communication boards or books across health,<sup>58</sup> local government<sup>59</sup> and justice,<sup>60</sup> where frontline services regularly support people who have limited or no verbal communication. In these sectors, communication boards are treated as a standard accessibility measure rather than a specialist or exceptional adjustment. This widespread use reflects an established understanding that accessibility must address expressive communication needs.

The VEC has primarily focused on receptive communication (Easy Read guides, videos, signage), staff assistance and physical access adjustments. This leaves a gap for voters who may understand information but cannot easily communicate their needs or questions within a voting centre environment.

<sup>54</sup> Conduct, *Voters Voice accessible iPad app*, video, 0:45, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hmlvVEnvQ8>> accessed 2 July 2026.

<sup>55</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, Electoral Access Advisory Group, *Meeting minutes*, 1 June 2021, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, Electoral Access Advisory Group, *Meeting minutes*, 20 November 2023, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, correspondence, 29 May 2026, p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> AlfredHealth, *Highlights*, <<https://www.alfredhealth.org.au/about/patients-come-first/speak/publications/speak-resources>> accessed 22 June 2026.

<sup>59</sup> Glenelg Vic, *Communication boards*, <<https://www.glenelg.vic.gov.au/Our-Community/Access-and-Inclusion/Communication-Boards>> accessed 2 June 2026.

<sup>60</sup> Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner, *Languages and Accessibility*, <<https://lsbc.vic.gov.au/languages-and-accessibility#communication-support>> accessed 22 June 2026.

The VEC has claimed that the costs of producing communication boards are prohibitive.<sup>61</sup> However, it may be possible to produce effective paper-based communication boards at a reasonable cost and distribute multiple copies to voting centres along with other material. This was possible prior to 2018.

The Committee notes the importance of providing reasonable adjustments for people with disability (see Section 2.3.1). Communication boards would enable this for some people.

**FINDING 37:** Communication boards, when co-designed, tested and maintained, are potentially a low-cost and low-risk way of supporting a wide range of communication needs. They are used in a variety of other sectors. They are consistent with universal design principles, as they do not require voters to self-identify or explain their disability and they reduce reliance on voters supplying their own supports.

**RECOMMENDATION 37:** That the VEC work with relevant stakeholders to develop communication boards for use in voting centres. Paper-based communication boards should be supplied to all voting centres, including early voting and election-day locations, in sufficient quantities to have them available at each point of contact between staff and voters.

## 6.8 Electronic voting

### Lived experience

“ She suggested that a way to make voting more accessible for individuals like her is to use devices such as iPads with the accessibility functions applied to it and voting digitally similarly to how the ACT has digital voting. This would be far more accessible to her compared to the traditional pencil and paper method and she would feel empowered to vote independently then.

Source: Sarah in Endeavour Foundation, *Submission 37*, p. 5.

A number of stakeholders called for some form of electronic voting for people with disability.<sup>62</sup> One way to do this is through electronic terminals with headphones that voters could use in a voting centre to cast a vote unassisted. This could benefit people with vision impairments and people with motor impairments.

<sup>61</sup> Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, correspondence, 29 May 2026, p. 5.

<sup>62</sup> Alexandra Reimers, *Submission 13*, p. 1; Blind Citizens Australia, *Submission 32*, pp. 10–13; Endeavour Foundation, *Submission 37*, pp. 4–5; Rights Information and Advocacy Centre, *Submission 38*, p. 4; Stefan Slucki, Board Director and National Policy Committee Chair, Blind Citizens Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 26; Joshua Lucey, Senior Policy and Advocacy Adviser, Endeavour Foundation, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30.

Victorian legislation currently allows for electronic voting in voting centres for people with vision impairment, motor impairment or low literacy skills in English.<sup>63</sup> The VEC trialled electronic voting kiosks at selected early voting centres in the 2006, 2010 and 2014 state elections. However, there was very limited use of the service, with only 605 voters using it in Victoria across the three elections.<sup>64</sup> The VEC concluded that:

Irrespective of the VEC's efforts over the three State elections, the number of target voters using electronically assisted voting remains very low. There has been no interest among voters who are not fluent in English, and only a small minority of blind and low-vision voters used the system despite increased promotion. The only group of voters showing interest in greater numbers are those voting overseas, who are not part of the target cohort.

Evidence suggests that for the target cohort, many of whom find travel difficult, getting to the early voting centre is a significant inhibitor to using the products on offer. Indeed, feedback from the VEC's disability advocates is that, though appreciative of the VEC's efforts in providing an electronically assisted voting service, they believe that true uptake of electronic voting for this group of eligible electors will only be realised if they can vote from home or another familiar environment.<sup>65</sup>

The Australian Government, in responding to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, noted the large cost per vote of its trial of electronic voting.<sup>66</sup> A variety of other concerns have also been raised about electronic voting in general, particularly in relation to voters' ability to verify that what they entered into the system is what is counted.<sup>67</sup>

Electronic voting on kiosks in voting centres involves multiple complex matters that are beyond the scope of this Inquiry. The Committee has not been able to explore the necessary integrity, cost and technical evidence in this Inquiry to make recommendations about electronic voting. However, particularly in light of the decision in *Given v Australia* (see Section 2.3),<sup>68</sup> the Committee encourages the VEC and the Government to regularly review developments in electronic voting and assess whether it is an appropriate way to enable people with disability to vote independently, privately and on an equal basis with other voters.

<sup>63</sup> *Electoral Act 2002* (Vic) s 110D(2).

<sup>64</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 21, Part B*, submission to the Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, Inquiry into electronic voting, 2016, p. 7. Legislation restricted the use of electronic voting in Victoria to people with vision impairment in 2006. People with motor impairment and people with insufficient literacy skills were also permitted from 2010—*Electoral Act 2002* (Vic) s 110D. Electronic voting was also offered to any voter at some overseas locations, where usage rates were higher.

<sup>65</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 21, Part B*, submission to the Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, Inquiry into electronic voting, 2016, p. 7.

<sup>66</sup> Australian Government, *Response of Australia to the views of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in communication no. 19/2014 (Given v Australia)*, [2019], p. 4.

<sup>67</sup> Blind Citizens Australia, *Submission 32*, p. 11. See also Vanessa Teague, Damjan Vukcevic, Peter J Stuckey and Chris Culnane, *Submission 51*, submission to the Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election, 2023, p. 6.

<sup>68</sup> *Given v Australia*, CRPD/C/19/D/19/2014 (16 February 2018), paras. 8–9.

**FINDING 38:** Electronic voting on kiosks in voting centres would potentially provide a way for some people with disability to vote independently, privately and on an equal basis with others. However, trials between 2006 and 2014 found that few people used the service and it was not offered by the VEC at the 2018 and 2022 elections. Electronic voting also involves a number of integrity, cost and technical issues that are beyond the scope of this Inquiry.

**RECOMMENDATION 38:** That the VEC and Government regularly review developments in electronic voting to assess whether it should be offered to people with disability. These reviews should examine technical developments, the potential benefits to people with disability, integrity concerns and costs.



# Chapter 7

## Communication about voting and voting centres

### 7.1 Introduction

People need clear information about the different ways they can vote, barriers they may encounter, the policies of candidates and parties, and how to correctly fill out ballot papers. All this information needs to be provided in accessible formats to ensure that everyone has equal access to it.

Some people with disability need more information regarding voting than they currently get. The data indicate a need for more information about candidates and parties, as well as information about the logistics of voting (see Section 7.2). This information needs to be provided in a variety of accessible formats, as set out in Section 7.3.

At the 2026 election, the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) plans to send an *EasyVote guide* to every household with an elector. The VEC used to post guides to electors, but discontinued the practice after the 2018 election. The Committee is pleased to see the *EasyVote guide* being posted again, as this is an important way to reach people. A trial *EasyVote guide* was sent out for the Nepean District by-election in 2026. However, this did not include some key information for people with disability and the Committee would like to see more information at future elections (see Section 7.4).

To make an informed decision about what form of voting will best suit a person, they need information about what options are available to them (see Section 7.5) and what they will experience with each option (see Section 7.6).

The Committee finds that there is a particular need for more information about the accessibility of voting centres. Currently the only published information is which of three categories of wheelchair accessibility best describes a centre. While this is important, it is not sufficient. A better system would provide information about features related to a variety of disabilities and would provide more detailed information, enabling a voter to determine the suitability of a centre based on their particular needs.

There is also a need for better communication from the VEC about what support is available at voting centres and what will happen at a voting centre. In addition, information about voting centres must be provided early enough for people with disability to determine the best approach for them and to organise any support that they need.

Several stakeholders discussed the importance of candidates and parties providing information in accessible formats for voters with disability (see Section 7.7). This has been raised in earlier inquiries too. Further work is required to find the best way to make this information more readily available.

Finally, it is important that voters do not encounter communication and information barriers when they are at a voting centre. Several potential improvements to how election officials and voters communicate in voting centres are suggested in Section 7.8.

Some stakeholders discussed helping younger people with disability know about the voting process before they reach voting age. They noted that some people with disability may not participate in traditional schooling and therefore may not receive civics education through schools, requiring a different approach to other young people.<sup>1</sup>

Electoral education for younger people is an important topic that requires more investigation than has been possible in this Inquiry. The VEC has some work planned in this space.<sup>2</sup> The Committee encourages the VEC to continue this and to expand its efforts where possible. Expanding education efforts would support more informed and confident participation and indirectly contribute to improved accessibility of voting centres by reducing informational and psychological barriers for many voters.

## 7.2 Some voters need more information

Multiple stakeholders told the Committee that some people with disability need more information to make informed votes. Previous work by the Committee reached similar conclusions.

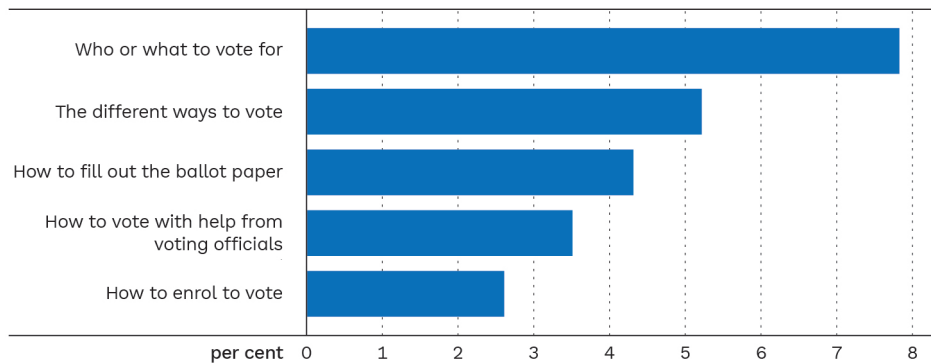
As part of its Inquiry into the 2022 state election, the Committee conducted a survey of Victorians with disability about their experiences and needs. While most respondents indicated that they had the information they needed to vote, 17.4% said that they did not.<sup>3</sup> Figure 7.1 sets out the sort of information that these people said they needed.

<sup>1</sup> ACD (the Association for Children with a Disability), *Submission 30*, pp. 2–3; Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, pp. 14–15. See also Youth Disability Advocacy Service & Youth Affairs Council Victoria, *Submission 48*, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Disability education and engagement plan*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *The conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, vol. 2, July 2024, p. 350.

**Figure 7.1 Unmet information needs at the 2022 election, based on respondents to the Committee’s survey**



Notes: Respondents could select multiple options. Figures for each type of information are measured as a percentage of all respondents with disability.

Source: Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *The conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, vol. 2, July 2024, p. 351.

As part of its contribution to this Inquiry, the Council on the Ageing Victoria conducted an online survey of its members. The results of this survey were similar to the results of the Committee’s survey:

- 21% found accessing useful information on candidates to be poor
- 15% considered finding out about voting locations to be poor
- 10% of respondents said that finding out about options for voting was poor.<sup>4</sup>

While the methodologies of both surveys mean that they may not reflect people with disability as a whole,<sup>5</sup> they both indicate that some people with disability need more information about both the logistics of voting and who to vote for.

These topics are explored in more detail below.

**FINDING 39:** Evidence indicates that some people with disability do not have access to information about their voting options, about how to vote and about their candidates. This makes it difficult for them to choose the method of voting best suited to them and to make informed and accurate votes.

### 7.3 Information needs to be provided in accessible formats

Providing material in accessible formats is a critical step in reducing barriers to participation for many voters. There are a variety of different formats that will suit different people with disability. These include plain English, Easy English, large print,

<sup>4</sup> Council on the Ageing Victoria, *Submission 29*, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *The conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, vol. 2, July 2024, p. 339; Council on the Ageing Victoria, *Submission 29*, p. 3.

video, Auslan, braille, audio and digital products that are compatible with screen readers. Both printed and digital versions of information are important.

Some stakeholders indicated that the VEC's current offerings are not sufficient. Joanna Middleton noted a lack of accessible Easy English information for voters with intellectual disability.<sup>6</sup> Another submitter stated that the VEC's current website is difficult to navigate, especially using a screen reader, and that much of the information from the VEC is not currently in accessible formats.<sup>7</sup>

The VEC did produce an Easy English guide to voting in the 2022 election.<sup>8</sup> However, this did not mention anything about how to find a wheelchair-accessible voting centre, what accessibility tools people could ask for (e.g. magnifying sheets, maxi pencils), the availability of personal hearing amplifiers at early voting centres or the Auslan interpreting service. Nor did it include detailed instructions for how to fill out the ballot papers.<sup>9</sup> It also included potentially confusing information, stating, 'If you **cannot** get to a voting centre you can vote by post,'<sup>10</sup> although people were eligible to vote by post regardless of whether or not they were able to get to a voting centre. It did not mention that there is a cut-off date to apply for postal voting.

The VEC also produced a video—*Voting with a disability at the 2022 state election*.<sup>11</sup> This video provided information about the Auslan interpreting service, equipment at voting centres and how to find out about the wheelchair accessibility ratings of voting centres.<sup>12</sup> However, it was not in Easy English. In addition, it was only viewed 52 times,<sup>13</sup> suggesting that there was a major problem with the VEC's approach, such as the video not being promoted effectively or the medium not being appropriate to the relevant communities.

The VEC plans to produce materials in a range of video and print formats for the 2026 election.<sup>14</sup> The Committee encourages the VEC to review its existing materials and promotion strategies to find ways to make them more complete, accurate and accessible. The Committee also encourages the VEC to explore new formats and new ways to deliver information to ensure that as many people as possible are informed about how to vote.

6 Joanna Middleton, *Submission 20*, p. 1.

7 Name withheld, *Submission 39*, pp. 2–3.

8 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Vote in the 2022 Victorian state election*, Melbourne, 2022.

9 The guide simply states: 'Follow the instructions on your ballot papers. Fill in each ballot paper using numbers only.'—Victorian Electoral Commission, *Vote in the 2022 Victorian state election*, Melbourne, 2022, p. 13 (emphasis in the original).

10 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Vote in the 2022 Victorian state election*, Melbourne, 2022, p. 7 (emphasis in the original).

11 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Voting with a disability at the 2022 state election*, video, 24 November 2022, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyulZdBtGP8>> accessed 5 May 2026.

12 A separate video provided instructions on how to fill out ballot papers—Victorian Electoral Commission, *Completing ballot papers correctly*, video, 16 November 2022, <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Xc\\_kn9kvKA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Xc_kn9kvKA)> accessed 5 May 2026.

13 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 50.

14 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 31.

In designing information for voters with disability, it is also important to consider that people with disability may also have other characteristics that affect their participation. These could include cultural background, age, gender or location (see Section 2.2.1). These factors need to be considered when developing materials.

For example, Ngaweeyan Maar-oo recommended that:

accessible communication and assistance be co-designed and delivered in ways that recognise the intersection of disability and cultural safety. This recommendation embeds shared decision-making and invests in community-controlled capability to support culturally safe accessibility through the provision of information and assistance to voters with accessibility needs.<sup>15</sup>

The Committee agrees that it is important for a variety of groups to be consulted about material produced for voters with disability and not just disability advocacy groups.

**FINDING 40:** Stakeholders and the Committee’s analysis identified a number of limitations in the information materials produced by the VEC for people with disability. To reduce or remove barriers for people with disability, the VEC should produce information in a variety of formats, including plain English, Easy English, large print, video, Auslan, braille, audio and digital products that are compatible with screen readers.

**RECOMMENDATION 39:** That the VEC review all of its information products for people with disability to ensure that they are available in an appropriate range of accessible formats and that they are complete, accurate and effectively support full participation. Going forward, the VEC should continually monitor the usage of its products to identify where changes are needed.

**FINDING 41:** People with disability may also face barriers to electoral participation related to other factors, such as age, cultural background and gender. Information products should be designed with these factors in mind, as well as needs relating to disability.

**RECOMMENDATION 40:** That, in developing information products and programs for people with disability, the VEC consult not only with disability advocacy groups but also with other groups (such as cultural and age-related groups) so that the needs of people with disability who also face other barriers to electoral participation can be taken into account.

<sup>15</sup> Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 27*, p. 2. See also Reuben Leigh, Policy Officer, Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 8.

## 7.4 The EasyVote guide

For the 2026 state election, the VEC plans to mail a printed *EasyVote guide* to every household with an elector.<sup>16</sup> The *EasyVote guide* will contain ‘details about when, where and how to vote, along with accessibility information and voting options’.<sup>17</sup> The VEC has stated that it will include ‘accessibility ratings’ for all venues,<sup>18</sup> by which the Committee presumes the VEC means wheelchair access ratings (see further discussion in Section 7.6 of this chapter).

The VEC mailed *EasyVote guides* or *Election guides* to electors in the 2018 election and earlier elections. However, this was discontinued for the 2022 election. An electronic *EasyVote guide* was available online in 2022, but it was not mailed to voters. In addition, earlier guides included personalised information (such as the voting locations for the elector’s district and their wheelchair accessibility ratings) but the 2022 guide was generic for the whole state and did not include this information.

As a trial of its plan for the 2026 state election,<sup>19</sup> an *EasyVote guide* was sent to households at the 2026 Nepean District by-election. This included plain English information about:

- what different ways of voting were available
- how to fill out the ballot paper
- where to find a list of candidates and how-to-vote cards
- details of who needed to vote and how to check whether or not you needed to vote
- why the by-election was occurring
- who could help you to vote
- how to get more information, including in different languages.<sup>20</sup>

The Nepean District *EasyVote guide* did not include a list of the voting centres and their wheelchair accessibility ratings, though it did include a QR code and web address to a page that links to that information. The VEC has indicated that the *EasyVote guide* at the state election will include information about voting centres and their accessibility ratings.<sup>21</sup>

The Committee was pleased that the *EasyVote guide* included clear statements about eligibility for different voting options, such as ‘Anyone can apply to vote by post in this by-election’ and a plain-English list of the criteria for telephone-assisted voting.

<sup>16</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 32.

<sup>19</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Service plan: 2026 Nepean District by-election*, Melbourne, 2026, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *EasyVote guide: 2026 Nepean District by-election*, Melbourne, 2026.

<sup>21</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 32.

The *EasyVote guide* also included a section on low-sensory voting. As noted in Section 4.4.1, the text around low-sensory voting focuses on it being for neurodivergent voters, and the Committee would like to see this expanded to other groups.

The guide noted the option of getting braille ballot papers. However, it did not mention the accessibility tools offered at voting centres, such as magnifying sheets, maxi pencils (see Section 6.3) and personal hearing amplifiers (see Section 6.4).

As discussed in Section 7.6, people with disability need more information about the accessibility of venues, the accessibility tools available at venues and the support offered by VEC staff. This information should be included in future *EasyVote guides*. The virtual Auslan interpreting service (see Section 6.5) was not offered at the Nepean District by-election, but the Committee would expect to see that mentioned in *EasyVote guides* when the service is offered.

Endeavour Foundation also suggested mailing voters a card with their enrolment details as well as other electoral information.<sup>22</sup> Voters could bring this with them to communicate their details at a voting centre more easily. The VEC used to do this as part of *EasyVote guides*. The Committee notes that this would not be possible with the VEC's current plan to send the guide to households rather than individuals. However, voters who would find this helpful could use the voting passport proposed in Section 7.8.3 of this chapter to communicate their personal details.

The Committee is pleased to see the VEC return to mailing the *EasyVote guide* to households, which the Committee has previously recommended.<sup>23</sup> This will benefit many voters, including voters with disability. Adding some additional information about support for people with disability will make it even more helpful.

**FINDING 42:** The VEC has stated that it will post a printed *EasyVote guide* to every household in Victoria with electors at the 2026 election. This guide will include information about the election, including different ways of voting and wheelchair accessibility ratings for voting centres. The Committee welcomes the VEC's return to mailing this guide. Adding some additional information about voting centres would help electors better understand their options.

**RECOMMENDATION 41:** That *EasyVote guides* at future elections include more details about accessibility at voting centres, including accessibility ratings for every voting centre in the district that cover more than just wheelchair access, details of the accessibility tools available at every voting centre and the fact that virtual Auslan interpreting is available.

<sup>22</sup> Endeavour Foundation, *Submission 37*, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *The conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, vol. 2, July 2024, p. 141, Recommendation 30.

## 7.5 Voters need to know what voting options are available

### Lived experience

“ Getting braille is so unpredictable and it may happen, it may not happen. It may be available this election but not the next one. We might send it out to you, but actually we won't. You were suppose to register but nobody told you. It's all over the place.

Source: Respondent to consultation by Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 18.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the VEC provides multiple ways for people to vote. In addition to early and election-day voting centres, the VEC provides postal voting, telephone-assisted voting, low-sensory voting and mobile voting. However, not all people with disability are aware of these options or their eligibility.

The need for more information about different ways of voting was raised in both the Committee's survey and the Council on the Ageing Victoria's survey (see Section 7.2). It was also raised by several stakeholders in this Inquiry.<sup>24</sup> The importance of producing this information in plain language and a variety of accessible formats was also emphasised (see Section 7.3).<sup>25</sup>

At the last state election, the VEC provided information for voters with disability through:

- a webpage with information about voting options<sup>26</sup>
- an *EasyVote guide* which was published online as a PDF<sup>27</sup>
- training 15 people with lived experience of disability to be Democracy Ambassadors, who delivered 52 sessions to 795 people with disability
- an Easy English election guide
- resources sent to disability services and education settings
- a video on voting with disability.<sup>28</sup>

24 Michelle Raymond, *Submission 14*, p. 1; Blind Citizens Australia, *Submission 32*, pp. 13–14; Dementia Australia, *Submission 50*, p. 8; Dr Rose Capp, Policy Adviser, Dementia Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19.

25 See, for example, Blind Citizens Australia, *Submission 32*, pp. 13–14; Dr Rose Capp, Policy Adviser, Dementia Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

26 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Voting options*, as at 14 November 2022, accessed via Internet Archive, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20221114001022/https://www.vec.vic.gov.au/voting/2022-state-election/voting-options-during-an-election>> accessed 20 April 2026.

27 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Your EasyVote Guide to the 2022 Victorian State election*, [Melbourne], (n.d.), accessed via Internet Archive, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20221118064115/https://www.vec.vic.gov.au/-/media/c721315c7c0748e7adb7ed1e74b744fb.ashx>> accessed 20 April 2026.

28 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, pp. 50, 54.

The VEC plans to do similar things at the 2026 state election, including:

- ‘work[ing] with peak bodies and community partners to provide targeted resources and ensure that appropriate information is distributed across their networks’
- delivering education sessions to staff in certain organisations
- having Democracy Ambassadors talk to community members about different voting options (and other matters)
- creating material in various formats, including Auslan and other videos.<sup>29</sup>

The VEC will also mail a printed *EasyVote guide* to every household with electors at the 2026 election (see Section 7.4).

While these are positive plans, the Committee notes the evidence showing that some voters at previous elections needed more information about different ways of voting. The Committee encourages the VEC to monitor the reach of its information about voting options to identify any gaps.

## 7.6 Voters need to know about voting centres

### Lived experience

“ At the bare minimum, I find it super helpful that they have a website that you can just look up and find the voting centers and see where they are, and how close they are to you.

Source: Respondent to consultation by Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 22.

In deciding how to vote, people with disability need clear information about voting centres so that they can make informed decisions. This information includes the accessibility limitations of individual voting centres, what support is available if they go to a voting centre and what will happen at a voting centre. It is also important that this information is provided sufficiently early that voters have time to decide where they want to go and to organise any support that they need.

<sup>29</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 31; Ben Sutherland, Assistant Commissioner, Event Strategy and Delivery, Victorian Electoral Commission, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 54.

### 7.6.1 Voters need more information about the accessibility of voting centres

#### Lived experience

What stops you from going to an early voting centre?

“ Uncertainty about how long it may take and what the access and parking is like.

“ Fear that they will not be as accessible and supported as main voting days.

Source: Respondents to consultation by Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 23.

When selecting a venue to use as a voting centre, the VEC has checklists of criteria to identify potential barriers to people with disability (see Section 4.2 of this report). As discussed in Section 4.2, however, these criteria are limited and largely focused on physical disability, especially wheelchair access. This is despite the fact that fewer than 14% of people with disability use mobility aids (including wheelchairs and other devices) for moving around places away from their homes or establishments.<sup>30</sup>

The Committee would like to see these criteria extended to reflect the requirements of universal accessibility (see Section 4.2.3). The Committee understands that, in practice, not every voting centre will meet all the criteria. It is therefore essential that voters with disability have information that allows them to identify which voting centres will be suitable for them and which will present barriers.

Currently, the VEC publishes very limited information about the accessibility of voting centres. Each voting centre is classified into one of three categories based on its features:

- independent wheelchair access (IWA)
- assisted wheelchair access (AWA)
- limited or no wheelchair access (LNWA).

The only information published about the accessibility of a voting centre is which of these categories it fits into (see Figure 7.2). No details are provided about what barriers are present at an assisted or limited/no wheelchair access voting centre that prevented it being classified as independent wheelchair access.

<sup>30</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Disability, ageing and carers, Australia: summary of findings*, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release>> accessed 2 July 2026.

**Figure 7.2 Information about the accessibility of voting centres on the VEC's website at the 2022 state election**

| <b>Voting centres</b>                                 |                                         |                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Election day voting centres are open 8 am until 6 pm. |                                         |                      |
| <b>Venue</b>                                          | <b>Address</b>                          | <b>Accessibility</b> |
| Rangeview Primary School                              | Gate 1, 27 Churinga Avenue Mitcham 3132 | AWA                  |
| Mt Pleasant Road Primary School                       | 105 Mount Pleasant Road Nunawading 3131 | AWA                  |
| 1st Vermont Scout Group                               | 483–485 Canterbury Road Vermont 3133    | LNWA                 |

Note: This is only part of the relevant webpage.

Source: Victorian Electoral Commission, *Ringwood District*, as at 25 November 2022, accessed via Internet Archive, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20221125222417/https://www.vec.vic.gov.au/electoral-boundaries/state-districts/ringwood-district>> accessed 9 April 2026.

Multiple submitters told the Committee that more detailed information would be helpful.<sup>31</sup> For example, one submission suggested:

clearly noting ... which accessibility features are available at each location—ie, accessible entrances and paths, including ramps and bathrooms, clearly marked places to for people to sit down while queueing, marked as priority, shaded areas while queueing or indoor queues, a quiet room/sensory room, a map/social script of what to expect—entrance, queues, expected wait time etc.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 5*, p. 1; Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 27*, p. 4; Council on the Ageing Victoria, *Submission 29*, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 5*, p. 1.

Another argued that:

VEC should publish centre-by-centre accessibility profiles in a consistent, searchable format well before voting. Each profile should include a plain English summary of key access features and limitations and be available in accessible formats. This recommendation ensures that communities can plan, choose and monitor outcomes over time.<sup>33</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 4, the VEC records much more information about voting centres than what is published on its website and in other materials. This includes specifics such as the gradient of ramps, whether there is a narrow doorway and whether there is an accessible toilet. Publishing these details would be helpful for some voters to understand whether the venue presents barriers to them.

Publishing these details would mean that a broader range of voting centres would be available for some people. For example, if the entrance to a voting centre is less than 85 centimetres wide, it is not classified as ‘independent wheelchair access’.<sup>34</sup> However, a narrower entrance may not be a barrier to some people with disability, including some with mobility issues. Knowing that a voting centre is accessible in other ways may mean that it suits some people with disability who do not need a wide entrance.

The Committee would also like to see information provided that would be useful to a broader range of people with disability (see Section 1.4.3). The current categorisation focuses on wheelchair access, although most people with disability do not use wheelchairs. They may require different information to understand whether there are barriers to them using a particular voting centre. For example, people with vision impairments may benefit from knowing whether there are tactile ground surface indicators or difficult access paths. People who are hard of hearing may need to know whether there are personal hearing amplifiers or similar systems. People with neurodiversity may benefit from knowing whether the voting centre is located in a busy or quieter environment.

In terms of how the additional information is presented, the Committee recommends two approaches.

Firstly, the VEC should set up a searchable online database, where all the accessibility criteria for each voting centre are stored. Users could then select the criteria that matter to them through an interface and a list of voting centres meeting those criteria could be returned to the user. Popular websites selling houses and cars use this sort of interface to help users identify the houses or cars meeting their needs.

Some submitters also suggested that it would be helpful to have real-time information about waiting times or accessibility issues at voting centres (see Section 5.4.1).<sup>35</sup> If this sort of information could be added to the interface, this would be a valuable addition.

<sup>33</sup> Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 27*, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Accessibility audit form—Attachment 3*, [Melbourne], 2024, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> Council on the Ageing Victoria, *Submission 29*, p. 5; Infrastructure Victoria, *Submission 35*, p. 3.

Subject to appropriate privacy considerations, the VEC could also anonymously record information from users' queries. That information could be useful in understanding which criteria are most commonly needed by voters with disability and could be used as an input in the VEC's future planning processes. The Committee notes that the data would need to be interpreted carefully, accounting for any biases from the fact that some people with disability are more likely to use a website than others.

A second way of presenting more information would be a more nuanced rating system that could be used in print publications and static webpages like the one shown in Figure 7.2. Rather than grouping voting centres into three categories, a series of letters or symbols could be used to identify key characteristics of each voting centre. For example, there might be a letter/symbol for accessible parking, another for accessible toilets, one for proximity to an accessible public transport stop, one for quieter voting centres. The VEC could work with its Electoral Access Advisory Group (see Section 3.5) to identify the five or six most important characteristics to display. These combinations could then be used in advertising, in the *EasyVote guide* and in other print formats.

The Brisbane Festival publishes a program with a combination of symbols for each event. These symbols indicate the event's accessibility regarding a variety of disabilities. This includes whether there is wheelchair access, an assistive listening system, Auslan interpreting and/or a reduced sensory environment.<sup>36</sup> In the United Kingdom, AccessAble provides information about a variety of venues, such as restaurants, shops and hotels. The website uses 33 symbols to provide information about different aspects of accessibility.<sup>37</sup> In terms of displaying symbols with voting centre information, the Electoral Commission of South Australia has integrated the use of several accessibility symbols in its listing of voting centres.<sup>38</sup> These could serve as models for the VEC.

This second approach is essential, as non-digital formats are important for some voters.<sup>39</sup> The Committee therefore encourages the VEC to include as much information as practicable in printed formats like the *EasyVote guide* or print advertising.

**FINDING 43:** To inform voters about the accessibility of voting centres, the VEC currently groups all voting centres into one of three categories—'independent wheelchair access', 'assisted wheelchair access' or 'limited or no wheelchair access'. This categorisation is currently the only information published about the features of each voting centre.

36 Brisbane Festival, *Accessibility guide 2025*, Fortitude Valley, [2025]. See also Brisbane Festival, *Access*, <<https://www.brisbanefestival.com.au/festival-info/access>> accessed 7 July 2026.

37 AccessAble, *A guide to our accessibility symbols*, <<https://www.accessable.co.uk/access-symbols>> accessed 7 July 2026.

38 See, for example, Electoral Commission of South Australia, *Early voting centres open March 14 until March 20 at 6pm*, <<https://www.ecsa.sa.gov.au/early-voting-centres>> accessed 7 July 2026.

39 Martin Turnbull, Senior Policy Adviser, Council on the Ageing Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 14, 17.

**RECOMMENDATION 42:** That the VEC create a searchable online database of voting centres which allows users to select the accessibility criteria that matter to them and then returns a list of voting centres that meet those criteria. The database should be accessible via the VEC’s website. The VEC should also make the information available through an app.

**RECOMMENDATION 43:** That the VEC record data about which accessibility criteria are selected by people using the searchable online database to help understand what criteria are most frequently required by voters.

**RECOMMENDATION 44:** That the VEC work with its Electoral Access Advisory Group to develop a new system for displaying information about the accessibility of voting centres in static lists on webpages, in *EasyVote guides* and in other printed material. This new system should provide more details than the current three categories of wheelchair access.

## 7.6.2 Voters need to know more about what support is available

### Lived experience

“ There’s just not a lot of good guidance without having to talk to a staff member about figuring out how you can get the right support that you need as such to be able to vote on the day.

Source: Respondent to consultation by Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 21.

“ Having a disability requires constant planning above and beyond that of people without disability, and being provided false or misleading information from the VEC’s website about what accommodations are provided at voting centres is unacceptable and could easily have meant I would have been unable to vote.’

Source: Name withheld, *Submission 39a*, p. 18.

In addition to the physical aspects of voting centres, it is also important for people with disability to know what support is available in voting centres. This includes details of the assistance that can be provided by staff and the accessibility tools that are available. What information is published and where it is published varies from one election to another. In addition, some inaccurate information has been published in the past. It is important for the VEC to ensure that that does not continue to happen.

At the 2022 election, the VEC informed voters on its *Voting options* webpage that, ‘You can ask a friend, carer, trusted person or one of our staff for help’.<sup>40</sup> Similar wording

<sup>40</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Voting options*, as at 25 November 2022, accessed via Internet Archive, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20221125033356/https://www.vec.vic.gov.au/voting/2022-state-election/voting-options-during-an-election>> accessed 15 May 2026.

was included in the *EasyVote guide* for the 2026 Nepean District by-election.<sup>41</sup> For the 2026 election, this information was not included on the *Voting options* page but on a page one level down titled *What happens at a voting centre*.<sup>42</sup>

The Nepean District by-election *EasyVote guide* did not mention what accessibility tools were available, nor did it mention the personal hearing amplifiers offered (see Section 6.4). At the 2022 election, the accessibility tools and virtual Auslan interpreting service were not discussed on the *Voting options* webpage, but were on a different page titled *What happens at a voting centre?*<sup>43</sup> For the 2026 election, information about accessibility tools and personal hearing amplifiers has been included on the *Voting options* page.<sup>44</sup> The Committee is pleased to see this improvement, as the voting options page is the one where voters would most naturally go to understand their different options and select the option most suited to their needs. However, the page contained no information about the Auslan interpreting service when the Committee examined it in July 2026.

As discussed in Section 5.5, the option to vote outside a voting centre (for example, in your car) is not communicated at all and relies on voters somehow knowing about it and asking.

Several stakeholders noted a lack of awareness about what help people could ask for and what services were available at voting centres.<sup>45</sup> The Committee believes that there is scope for the VEC to do more to let people know what support is available from staff and what accessibility tools are available at voting centres.

There have also been several instances where the VEC's webpages have provided inaccurate information about options for people with disability. The initial version of the 2026 *Voting options* webpage incorrectly stated that all election-day voting centres would have assistive hearing devices.<sup>46</sup> At the 2026 Nepean District by-election, the VEC's website incorrectly indicated that people could receive large-print ballot papers on request.<sup>47</sup> In 2022, the VEC advised people that all early voting centres would have hearing loops, though, in fact, personal hearing amplifiers

41 Victorian Electoral Commission, *EasyVote guide: 2026 Nepean District by-election*, Melbourne, 2026.

42 Victorian Electoral Commission, *What happens at a voting centre*, <<https://vec.vic.gov.au/voting/how-voting-works/what-happens-at-a-voting-centre>> accessed 28 July 2026.

43 Victorian Electoral Commission, *What happens at a voting centre?*, as at 25 November 2022, accessed via Internet Archive, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20221125131621/https://www.vec.vic.gov.au/voting/2022-state-election/what-happens-at-a-voting-centre>> accessed 15 May 2026.

44 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Voting options*, <<https://vec.vic.gov.au/voting/2026-state-election/voting-options>> accessed 28 July 2026.

45 Blind Citizens Australia, *Submission 32*, p. 10; Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, pp. 20–1; Martin Turnbull, Senior Policy Adviser, Council on the Ageing Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16.

46 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Voting options*, as at 27 July 2026, accessed via Internet Archive, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20260727055259/https://vec.vic.gov.au/voting/2026-state-election/voting-options>> accessed 31 July 2026; Keegan Bartlett, Assistant Commissioner, Electoral Integrity and Regulation, Victorian Electoral Commission, correspondence, 31 July 2026.

47 Victorian Electoral Commission, *Voting options*, as at 8 April 2026, accessed via Internet Archive, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20260408024052/https://www.vec.vic.gov.au/voting/current-elections/nepean-by-election/nepean-voting-options>> accessed 31 July 2026; Dana Fleming, Deputy Electoral Commission, Victorian Electoral Commission, correspondence, 3 June 2026.

were offered.<sup>48</sup> The VEC needs to review its processes to ensure that precise, accurate information is provided on its website. If people make decisions based on inaccurate information about accessibility, they risk missing out on the most appropriate option for their needs.

**FINDING 44:** Some stakeholders have indicated that more could be done to let voters know about support that is available from VEC staff at voting centres and about the accessibility tools provided. The Committee's analysis showed that what information is provided about assistance from staff, accessibility tools and virtual Auslan interpreting varies between products and is not always provided together in one place. At times, inaccurate information about options for people with disability has also been published on the VEC's website.

**RECOMMENDATION 45:** That the VEC examine its communication products to look for more opportunities to let people know about the availability of assistance from staff at voting centres, accessibility tools at voting centres and virtual Auslan interpreting. These should all be mentioned in the *EasyVote guide* and on the webpage that lists different voting options.

**RECOMMENDATION 46:** That the VEC review its processes for checking website content to prevent inaccurate information about accessibility options (and other matters) from appearing on its website in the future.

### 7.6.3 Voters need to know what will happen at a voting centre

#### Lived experience

“ I don't think there's a really great explanation out there for young [neurodivergent] people who have recently turned 18 that now have ability to vote, to understand what the voting centre really can look or feel like.

Source: Respondent to consultation by Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 14.

“ As I wasn't familiar with that school, I would have liked to know the layout as I wasn't sure what was around the next corner and how long the queue went for (it had a few twists and turns, so I couldn't see what was next).

Source: Name withheld, *Submission 5*, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *What happens at a voting centre?*, as at 25 November 2022, accessed via Internet Archive, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20221125131621/https://www.vec.vic.gov.au/voting/2022-state-election/what-happens-at-a-voting-centre>> accessed 31 July 2026; Keegan Bartlett, Assistant Commissioner, Electoral Integrity and Regulation, Victorian Electoral Commission, correspondence, 31 July 2026.

For some people with disability, it can be important to know in advance what a venue is like and what will happen there. A number of submissions called for this sort of information to be published for voting centres.<sup>49</sup> As Ngaweeyan Maar-oo explained:

VEC should provide plain English and Easy English voter information, along with other accessible formats, that clearly explain what to expect at a voting centre, how to request support, and what assistance is available, including privacy safeguards. A simple 'what to expect' guide can significantly reduce anxiety and cognitive load, particularly for people with psychosocial disability, cognitive disability, or prior negative experiences with mainstream institutions.<sup>50</sup>

Infrastructure Victoria similarly suggested better information about accessibility to help voters navigate voting centres.<sup>51</sup> Infrastructure Victoria noted some work done by Parks Victoria on the accessibility of parks, which could serve as a model.<sup>52</sup> Several submitters suggested the development of 'access keys' and 'social stories'.

'Access keys' are illustrated guides that outline how people enter a venue, how they move around it and what the venue will be like. The Youth Disability Advocacy Service explains:

Access keys are particularly helpful for some Autistic people or people with certain types of mental illness because it helps alleviate the anxiety associated with going somewhere new. They are useful for people who use wheelchairs, or other forms of mobility or sensory impairments, because it describes the best way to get to and move around the venue.

They can also support CALD communities to understand Australian conventions, or let LGBTQIA people know about gender neutral bathrooms. They can also support people with prams or people with temporary injuries know where ramps and elevators might be.<sup>53</sup>

The organisation suggests considering the following issues when developing an access key:

- How people will get to the venue
- How people will get into the venue
- How people will get around the venue
- What is in the space?
- What is the environment like?

49 Name withheld, *Submission 5*, p. 1; Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 27*, p. 3; Infrastructure Victoria, *Submission 35*, p. 2; Name withheld, *Submission 39*, p. 2; The Australian Institute of Architects, *Submission 44*, p. 4.

50 Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 27*, p. 3.

51 Infrastructure Victoria, *Submission 35*, p. 2.

52 Parks Victoria, *Parks with accessibility information*, <<https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/get-into-nature/all-abilities-access/park-accessibility-information>> accessed 13 April 2026.

53 Youth Disability Advocacy Service, *Access keys*, <<https://ydas.org.au/workers/resources/together-building-an-inclusive-youth-sector/access-keys>> accessed 9 April 2026.

- What barriers are there?
- Is there a quiet space?
- Is there going to be high-stimulation/scents/flashing lights?
- What about the bathrooms?<sup>54</sup>

Access keys can help people to understand whether a particular venue is accessible to them and to prepare for the experience.

‘Social stories’ or ‘social scripts’ are another sort of document to help people prepare for an event like voting. Social stories use storytelling to explain what to expect when visiting a place, including details of social interactions.

The Australian Electoral Commission has developed social stories for voting at voting centres and voting by mail at Commonwealth elections.<sup>55</sup>

The VEC’s Easy English guide to voting at the 2022 election included a two-page description of what to do at a voting centre.<sup>56</sup> The VEC plans to expand its offerings in 2026 with access keys for its head office and at least two voting centres.<sup>57</sup> The VEC has also committed to producing ‘electoral educational resources for people with disability e.g. social scripts/video modelling’ as part of delivering its *Disability education and engagement plan*.<sup>58</sup>

The Committee supports the VEC’s efforts to develop resources to help people know what will happen at a voting centre, including access keys and social stories. The Committee understands that these are new initiatives for the 2026 election and are therefore being rolled out on a small scale. As a next step, it will be important for the VEC to carefully evaluate these projects after the 2026 election to learn how successful they have been at preparing people for the voting centre experience and whether there are improvements that could be made (see Section 9.3). The Committee encourages the VEC to undertake this evaluation, with a view to expanding the materials produced for future elections.

**FINDING 45:** Many voters would benefit from additional information about what happens at a voting centre. The VEC intends to produce a small number of access keys or social scripts for the 2026 election. It will be important to evaluate these documents and their effectiveness to understand whether this approach should be modified in the future.

<sup>54</sup> Youth Disability Advocacy Service, *Access keys*, <<https://ydas.org.au/workers/resources/together-building-an-inclusive-youth-sector/access-keys>> accessed 9 April 2026.

<sup>55</sup> Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand, *Submission 42*, p. 10; Australian Electoral Commission, *Information for people with disability*, <<https://www.aec.gov.au/assistance>> accessed 9 April 2026.

<sup>56</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Vote in the 2022 Victorian state election*, Melbourne, 2022, pp. 12–13.

<sup>57</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Disability education and engagement plan*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 13; Victorian Electoral Commission, *Disability education and engagement plan logic 2025–2027*, [Melbourne], (n.d.), p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Disability education and engagement plan logic 2025–2027*, [Melbourne], (n.d.), p. 2.

### 7.6.4 Voters need this information well in advance

Several people noted that this information should be provided in advance so that people can plan ahead.<sup>59</sup> This information needs to be published as far in advance as possible. Some people may require information to identify the best voting centre for their needs with enough time to organise support with transportation. For some people, it may be that there are no voting centres close to them that are accessible. In that case, they need to know this information with enough time to organise alternative ways of voting, such as postal voting or telephone-assisted voting.

As Saumya Kaushik from Women with Disabilities Victoria explained:

there is a lot of advanced planning, preparation: how will you get there—by bus, car, friends, whether your support worker is going to be accompanying you or not, because they have to vote themselves as well.<sup>60</sup>

The VEC stated that the details of the election-day voting centres were published on VEC's website 17 days before election day in 2022.<sup>61</sup> The Committee would like to see this information available earlier.

**FINDING 46:** Information about where voting centres are and what features they have is essential for some people with disability to decide how to vote. As some people with disability may need time to organise support, transport or alternative arrangements, this information should be published as early as possible.

**RECOMMENDATION 47:** That the VEC publish information about the locations of voting centres and details about their accessibility features as early as possible, so that people have time to organise support or alternative arrangements if needed.

## 7.7 Voters need accessible information about candidates and parties

As noted in Section 2.3.2 of this report, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has recognised the importance of providing information about parties and candidates in accessible formats. In the Committee's survey of voters with disability, 'who or what to vote for' was the most common sort of information that respondents needed but did not receive (see Figure 7.1). Similar results were found by the Council on the Ageing Victoria in its survey.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 27*, p. 4; Nicole Karidis, *Submission 28*, p. 1; Saumya Kaushik, Policy Research Lead, Women with Disabilities Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 27 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

<sup>60</sup> Saumya Kaushik, Policy Research Lead, Women with Disabilities Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 27 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> Keegan Bartlett, Assistant Commissioner, Electoral Integrity and Regulation, Victorian Electoral Commission, correspondence, 16 July 2026.

<sup>62</sup> Council on the Ageing Victoria, *Submission 29*, p. 3.

Stakeholders in this Inquiry also raised this issue. Joanna Middleton told the Committee:

I also ask every candidate in our electorate for easy English information about their policies but they never have any information for him [my son] to read. This should be compulsory in my opinion. How can my son exercise his democratic right to vote if no information is provided in a form accessible to him?<sup>63</sup>

Blind Citizens Australia noted the importance of material from candidates and parties being produced in formats that are accessible to people with vision impairment, including candidate statements, how-to-vote cards and policy summaries.<sup>64</sup> The organisation noted that:

Without access to information, voters who are blind or vision impaired cannot make informed choices, undermining the principle of equal participation in democratic processes. Delayed or inaccessible information on candidates or how to vote creates inequity and restricts the ability of blind and vision-impaired voters to independently assess candidates and policies.<sup>65</sup>

Nicholas Brealey, who is a supported employee of Endeavour Foundation, told the Committee:

Another idea is for candidates to make short videos explaining who they are and what they want to achieve if they are elected. The videos should include an Auslan interpreter, captions, and be in plain language with no jargon. They should be kept short, around two to three minutes.

These videos could be made available to anyone who needs them by putting a QR code on advertisements, posters, and in newspapers. Voters could then watch in their own time, pause and rewatch, and share with family members who are helping them.<sup>66</sup>

There is clearly a need for more information about candidates and parties in accessible formats. This is something that candidates and parties could do themselves and the Committee strongly encourages this. The Committee notes the I Can Vote project, which has worked with candidates and parties to produce easy language videos at previous elections.<sup>67</sup> The Committee encourages parties and candidates to work with groups like I Can Vote to produce accessible information.

However, there would be benefits to a government body facilitating this and providing a single place where voters could go to find information about candidates and parties. This body could also encourage the production of materials in accessible formats and guide candidates and parties on how to do this.

<sup>63</sup> Joanna Middleton, *Submission 20*, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Blind Citizens Australia, *Submission 32*, pp. 12–13; Stefan Slucki, Board Director and National Policy Committee Chair, Blind Citizens Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 26.

<sup>65</sup> Blind Citizens Australia, *Submission 32*, p. 12.

<sup>66</sup> Nicholas Brealey, supported employee, Endeavour Foundation, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Additional information*, p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *The conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, vol. 2, July 2024, p. 107.

The Committee has previously discussed the problem of who should take responsibility for this, noting the VEC's concerns about it taking on this role.<sup>68</sup> The Committee recommended additional work on this issue.<sup>69</sup> The Committee also recommended further work to support people with intellectual and cognitive disability to vote, including providing them with the information they need.<sup>70</sup> The Committee continues to believe that further work is necessary on these topics.

**FINDING 47:** Some voters are not getting the information they need about candidates and parties in accessible formats. This limits their ability to make informed decisions when voting. The Committee has previously recommended further work to identify the best way to make this information readily available.

## 7.8 Communicating at the voting centre

### Lived experience

“ The hard thing is if it is your first time voting it can be a little confusing, especially if you do not have support. There are lots of instructions given in a short space of time. If you have not watched any videos or seen any of the advertising, there is no guidance at the polling booth that is easy to understand.

Source: Nicholas Brealey, supported employee, Endeavour Foundation, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

“ Supports may be available, but they are not well advertised at centres. There should be signs [to] encourage people to ask for Easy Read, large print etc.

Source: Respondent to consultation by Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 23.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, it is important for people to get information before they get to a voting centre. It is also critical that people can easily get the information they need to vote at a voting centre and can easily communicate what they need to voting centre staff.

Multiple submissions also called for staff to be trained in communicating with people with disability. This is discussed in Chapter 8 of this report. Assistive listening systems and virtual Auslan interpreting services can also help communication between voters and staff. These are explored in Sections 6.4 and 6.5 of this report.

<sup>68</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *Inquiry into the impact of social media on Victorian elections and Victoria's electoral administration*, September 2021, pp. 136–7; Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *The conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, vol. 1, July 2024, p. 32 and vol. 2, July 2024, pp. 256–7.

<sup>69</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *The conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, vol. 1, July 2024, p. 33, Recommendation 9.

<sup>70</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *The conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, vol. 2, July 2024, p. 111, Recommendation 25.

### 7.8.1 The VEC should provide Easy English or Easy Read information at voting centres

Several submitters recommended having printed Easy English or Easy Read information available in voting centres.<sup>71</sup> Endeavour Foundation explained:

We also heard that the environment of voting centres and the delivery of complicated voting instructions can be very overwhelming for people with intellectual disability creating confusion especially between elections where the process to vote differs (Federal vs State), this is made worse when there's a feeling of time pressure in a busy voting location.

The people we support raised that the commission should adopt written Easy Read/ Easy English instructions for all voters and have them available inside voting booths. Easy Read is a communication format specifically designed to enhance the accessibility of information for individuals with diverse literacy levels and cognitive abilities. It employs a set of strategies that simplify language, utilise clear design principles, and incorporate visual aids to improve overall readability.<sup>72</sup>

Joshua Lucey from Endeavour Foundation further suggested that these instructions should be proactively offered to voters and not just available on request.<sup>73</sup>

The Committee supports the idea of having Easy English or Easy Read voting instructions readily available in voting centres. This could be done with posters, laminated sheets in every voting compartment or by providing the staff handing out ballot papers with materials that they can offer people.

The Committee also notes that this information was previously provided through an app called Voters Voice. However, this app was discontinued in favour of providing information through the VEC's website (see Section 6.7.1).

In terms of directing people in voting centres to information online, the VEC trialled directing people to information in multiple languages through a QR code printed in voting booths in 2022. However, this got very limited use.<sup>74</sup> The VEC did not evaluate the initiative to understand why the use was so limited (see further discussion in Section 9.3.1). Nonetheless, given the low use of the QR codes, the Committee considers that printed material should be available in addition to any digital versions.

In Section 5.7.2, the Committee notes the importance of placing signs and information at the appropriate locations.

<sup>71</sup> Dominique Loulie, *Submission 18*, p. 3; ACD (the Association for Children with a Disability), *Submission 30*, p. 2; Reinforce Self-Advocacy, *Submission 31*, p. 2; Endeavour Foundation, *Submission 37*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>72</sup> Endeavour Foundation, *Submission 37*, p. 4 (with sources).

<sup>73</sup> Joshua Lucey, Senior Policy and Advocacy Adviser, Endeavour Foundation, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30.

<sup>74</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 53.

**FINDING 48:** Some voters would benefit from having information available in voting centres about how to vote in Easy English, Easy Read or a similar format.

**RECOMMENDATION 48:** That the VEC make information about how to fill out ballot papers in Easy English, Easy Read or a similar format available to voters in voting centres. This may be with posters, information in voting compartments or brochures handed out by the staff giving people ballot papers. Printed versions of these resources should be available, not just online versions.

### 7.8.2 Pre-registration could help voters communicate their needs to staff

Some people with disability must communicate their needs to voting centre staff to access the support and specific arrangements that they need. Currently, this relies on voters or their carers talking with staff at the voting centre on the day. Submissions to this Inquiry suggested some ways to make this communication easier.

Several submissions suggested voters registering their needs online before they vote.<sup>75</sup> It may be possible for this to be integrated where the VEC uses electronic roll mark-off. When a voter is marked off the roll, the system could create an alert identifying any needs that the voter has registered. This could assist people who have difficulties communicating or people who prefer not to have to announce their needs in a voting centre. There may also be other systems that would enable the VEC to do this.

Pre-registration could also provide opportunities to direct voters to the most appropriate voting centre for their needs. If combined with a booking system, voters could even book a specific time for help, which may assist with managing a voting centre.

The Committee has not investigated the practicality of this concept, but believes that the VEC should explore this idea further. In exploring the idea, the VEC should take into account privacy and security implications as well as the potential benefits to voters.

**FINDING 49:** Some submitters suggested that being able to register their support needs online before voting would assist with communicating their needs to voting centre staff. It could also provide more privacy for voters who do not wish to explain their needs out loud.

<sup>75</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 8*, p. 3; Dominique Loulie, *Submission 18*, p. 3; Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, pp. 14, 22.

**RECOMMENDATION 49:** That the VEC explore whether it would be practical and beneficial to establish a system where voters with disability could register their needs online before voting, so that voting centre staff can be notified of the voters' needs when they get to a voting centre.

### 7.8.3 Voting passports could help voters understand what is available and communicate their needs to staff

An alternative approach is for voters to have a card or document that they can show to election staff. This document would then indicate their needs.<sup>76</sup> In the UK, a project called 'Promote the Vote' has been undertaken which includes a 'voting passport', identifying voters' rights.<sup>77</sup> A number of voting passports have been created in the UK which also provide forms giving voters with a chance to indicate any help that they will need at a voting centre.

These are PDF documents that can be downloaded and printed, which include lists of the supports available. Voters can tick the supports that they need, identify any other help that they might need and indicate whether they would like help from an election official or somebody else. These passports can then be shown to voting centre staff so that they can organise the appropriate support.

As an example, Figure 7.3 shows a voting passport developed for the City of Bradford in the United Kingdom.

In Australia, a similar product was developed as part of the I Can Vote project. *Plan to vote* helps someone develop a plan for the entire voting experience, including learning about politics and elections, travelling to and from voting centres and completing the ballot papers.<sup>78</sup> This is a valuable document but does not have the same level of detail about support needed in the voting centre as seen in the examples from the United Kingdom.

<sup>76</sup> Dominique Loulie, *Submission 18*, p. 3.

<sup>77</sup> Elaine James, Rob Mitchell, Clare Reeves and Amani Ali, 'Social work practitioner research into participation of people with learning disabilities in elections in the UK—a local case study', *The British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 53, no. 7, 2023, pp. 3382–98.

<sup>78</sup> I Can Vote, *Plan to vote*, <<https://icanvote.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Plan-to-Vote-V2-digital-form.pdf>> accessed 9 June 2026.

Figure 7.3 Voting passport from the City of Bradford, United Kingdom



In partnership with




☐

Someone to mark the ballot paper with my decision.


☐

Someone to show me where to put my ballot paper.


☐

I need things explained in a slow, clear way.

List any other support you need to help you vote:

**I would like the above support from:**

☐ A member of the polling station staff.
 ☐ My companion, whose name is:
 ☐ My companion is eligible to vote in the UK.
 ☐ My companion is not eligible to vote in the UK and will need to work with the Presiding Officer to support me.



In partnership with





Insert Photo Here.  
Optional.



## This is my Voting Passport

For people with learning disabilities

My name is:

I have a learning disability.

I need reasonable adjustments to support me to vote in this election.

**The support I need is:**


☐ To stay with my support worker.
 
☐ Someone to show me a large print ballot paper.
 
☐ Someone to go into the polling booth with me.
 
☐ Someone to read out the candidates on the ballot paper.

Source: Bradford People First and City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, *This is my voting passport*, <<https://www.bradford.gov.uk/media/5586/votingpassport.pdf>> accessed 2 July 2026.

While the Committee is not aware of any evaluation of the effectiveness of voting passports, the Committee considers that these are likely to be helpful for some voters with disability. They provide a number of potential benefits:

- by including a list of the types of support that a voter can ask for, they communicate what is available and acceptable and may reduce anxiety about whether it is appropriate to ask for a particular type of support
- because voters can fill the forms out in advance (with help from a support person if needed), voters have time to consider what they would like to request
- they allow voters to ask for help in a non-verbal way, which may be more comfortable or easier than speaking with voting centre staff
- handing a piece of paper to a staff member with a voter's needs may be more private than having a conversation in front of other people standing in a line.

If the voting passport also included fields for a person to write their name and address, this could be shown to voting centre staff when marking the voter off the electoral roll. This may facilitate communication at this point of the process as well.

Given the low cost involved with this program, the Committee considers that this would be worth trying in Victoria. Having the VEC produce an official voting passport which is published on its website would legitimise the document and ensure that it includes correct and helpful information. The VEC may wish to work with I Can Vote to incorporate this into their *Plan to vote* document or to link the two documents. While the idea of the voting passport was initially designed for people with a learning disability, the Committee considers that this could be helpful for people with other disabilities too, especially anything that makes communication difficult.

**FINDING 50:** In the United Kingdom, 'voting passports' have been developed. These are documents that can be downloaded and printed, which voters can fill out to indicate any support they need and who they would like to provide the support. They typically include lists of available support to help voters know what is possible, along with a form for voters to indicate what supports they need. Some also include details about voters' rights. The filled-out passports can be shown to staff to communicate a voter's needs in the voting centre.

**FINDING 51:** Voting passports may be helpful to voters with disability by illustrating the kinds of support they can ask for, giving them time to think about what help they want, making it easier for them to communicate their needs to voting centre staff and providing a more private way to communicate their needs.

**RECOMMENDATION 50:** That the VEC develop ‘voting passports’ using the examples developed in the United Kingdom as a model. They should include fields for the voter to add their name, address and any support that they need at a voting centre. They should also include lists of the accessibility tools and support available at voting centres that voters can select, so that there is more awareness of what is available and to facilitate it being provided. The voting passports should be published on the Commission’s website. Voters should be able to fill them in online or print them and fill them in by hand. Voters should then be able to save digital versions to a portable device or print them and bring printed or digital copies to show staff at voting centres. A supply of printed copies should also be kept in every voting centre for voters who may need them. Staff should be trained in how to respond when presented with a voting passport.



# Chapter 8

## Staff training and the voter experience

### 8.1 Introduction

#### Lived experience

“ Staff should be trained to offer assistance in a respectful, proactive and inclusive way. This includes providing clear information about accessible routes, quiet spaces, alternative voting options, and waiting time. Support should be offered without making assumptions or requiring people to justify their disability.

Staff should also be trained in disability awareness and communication, including how to support people with hidden disabilities. For example, they should understand that not all disabilities are visible and avoid questioning or gatekeeping access to priority queues or entrances.

The focus should be on enabling people to vote independently and with dignity, rather than singling people out or making them feel different.

Source: Nicole Karidis, *Submission 28*, p. 1.

The accessibility, inclusivity and dignity of the voting process are closely linked to the quality of interactions between voters and staff. Where staff are well trained, voters may experience fewer barriers, greater confidence, reduced stress and an increased willingness to vote in person. Conversely, gaps in staff awareness or capability can be a significant barrier to participation.

As Blind Citizens Australia stated, ‘Staff play a critical role in ensuring voting centres are accessible in practice, not just in theory.’<sup>1</sup>

This chapter examines the structure and delivery of the Victorian Electoral Commission’s (VEC’s) training strategy and framework, and the extent to which it results in consistent learning and application. The chapter considers whether the training enables staff to develop the knowledge and skills required to deliver accessible and inclusive services. It looks at limitations in design, timing and delivery that may contribute to inconsistency in staff capability and practice.

<sup>1</sup> Blind Citizens Australia, *Submission 32*, p. 8.

The Committee recognises the large and complex challenge associated with training election officials. At the 2022 election, the VEC employed more than 20,000 people in temporary roles and operated 1,765 voting centres on election day.<sup>2</sup> All these staff needed training, with many performing a variety of tasks in a complex, high-pressure environment with many rules.<sup>3</sup> It is therefore critical that the VEC's training products and processes are effective.

Voters' experiences with voting centre staff are discussed in Section 8.2 of this chapter. The evidence suggests that people have had mixed experiences. Some people have encountered helpful and responsive staff who have reduced barriers and made voting accessible. Others have had negative experiences where staff have been unsure how to communicate with people with disability, unaware of accessibility tools in the voting centre or have questioned the legitimacy of support people. The remaining sections of this chapter explore why people have had these mixed experiences.

Section 8.3 outlines the training model used by the VEC. While the VEC's training does include information for supporting people with disability and making elections inclusive, there are additional topics which should be added to the training. A change to the overall approach to disability would also make the training more effective.

Some of the negative experiences noted by stakeholders have occurred despite the VEC explicitly providing guidance that should have prevented these experiences. This is explored in Section 8.4. Further work is required to understand why there is a gap between training and implementation. However, the fact that not all staff do the required training and the large volume of material that voting centre staff need to know may be contributing factors. To improve things in the future, the Committee recommends having a designated 'accessibility officer' at each voting centre to oversee compliance with the VEC's processes and to act as a liaison for people with disability needing support. The Committee also recommends ensuring that head office staff have accessibility training as well as voting centre staff. This will help to embed accessibility considerations into decisions about process design, training and service delivery.

<sup>2</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, pp. 22–4.

<sup>3</sup> Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 54.

## 8.2 Voters' experiences with staff have been mixed

### Lived experience

“ Our local voting booths have been fantastic, supportive welcoming, inclusive ... [my son] enjoys fronting up and having his say ...

Source: Joanna Middleton, *Submission 20*, p. 1.

“ As a carer, previous voting centre experiences in Victoria have been mixed. In many cases, staff were polite, patient and willing to assist when asked, and support people were generally welcomed. [But] not all staff appeared confident in supporting people with sensory, cognitive or communication needs.

Source: Respondent to consultation by Carers Victoria, *Submission 41*, p. 6.

“ I'm deaf and blind. I couldn't vote on my own and couldn't follow verbal instructions due to being deaf. No one there was helpful and staff kept talking to me verbally despite me saying I'm non verbal please write it down.

Source: Respondent to the Committee's survey of voters with disability (Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election).

Multiple submitters to this Inquiry shared their experiences with voting centre staff. These experiences were a mixture of positive and negative interactions.

Positive experiences included staff allowing people to skip queues, being patient, being respectful, taking people to a quiet area and providing assistance when asked.<sup>4</sup> These experiences helped to make voting centres accessible for the voters.

A recurrent negative experience was voting centre staff not meeting the communication needs of voters with disability. This included staff:

- relying on physical gestures to point things out to people with vision impairments or not knowing how to guide them<sup>5</sup>
- relying exclusively on verbal communication<sup>6</sup>
- talking to support people rather than the voter<sup>7</sup>
- 'talking down' to voters with disability<sup>8</sup>
- being impatient or making voters feel rushed.<sup>9</sup>

4 Reinforce Self-Advocacy, *Submission 31*, p. 1; Blind Citizens Australia, *Submission 32*, p. 9; Carers Victoria, *Submission 41*, p. 6; Matthew Potocnik, *Submission 47*, p. 5; Dementia Australia, *Submission 50*, p. 6.

5 Name withheld, *Submission 39a*, pp. 1–2; Blind Citizens Australia, *Submission 32*, p. 10.

6 Deaf Victoria, *Submission 9*, pp. 3–4.

7 Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 23.

8 Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 23.

9 Blind Citizens Australia, *Submission 32*, p. 10.

Staff not knowing how to communicate through the virtual Auslan interpreting service (see Section 6.5) was also reported at Commonwealth elections. This included actions like talking to the interpreter rather than the voter, blocking the voter's view of the screen or taking the device out of the voter's hand.<sup>10</sup>

Several submitters felt that staff simply did not know what to do:

When I told staff I had hearing loss, they weren't sure how to communicate with me ...<sup>11</sup>

He said there's an accessible booth over there and moved his arm. I said I have impaired vision so a statement like 'over there' is not useful because I can't see 'over there' nor can I see where 'over there' is. I'm not sure he quite understood that message. He just kind of laughed/grunted.<sup>12</sup>

Nick wears his Hidden Disability Sunflower Lanyard when voting, but feels staff are not trained to understand its meaning or how to adjust their instructions to better support his disability.<sup>13</sup>

Another negative experience that was reported was staff not knowing about accessibility tools in the voting centre.<sup>14</sup>

Several submitters also reported staff questioning them having a support person or making them feel like they should not be there:

People with disabilities may need help from their carers. This shouldn't be questioned by electoral staff as it can make the person with the disability embarrassed to be publicly outed as needing help.<sup>15</sup>

These experiences indicate a lack of appropriate training or problems with the training process.

Overall, it is difficult to know what proportion of voting centre staff have been effectively trained. The 2022 post-election evaluation commissioned by the VEC found that 14% of voters with physical disabilities who required assistance when voting were dissatisfied with the assistance they received.<sup>16</sup> The Council on the Ageing Victoria found much higher rates of dissatisfaction with its survey of voters with disability. More than a third of respondents to that survey reported inadequate personalised support at voting centres.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Deaf Victoria, *Submission 9*, p. 3; Todd Wright, Chief Executive Officer, Convo Communications Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Dominique Loulie, *Submission 18*, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 39a*, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Endeavour Foundation, *Submission 37*, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 39a*, p. 2. See also Deaf Victoria, *Submission 9*, pp. 2–3 (in relation to the last Commonwealth election).

<sup>15</sup> Carers Victoria, *Submission 41*, p. 6. See also Different Journeys, *Submission 11*, p. 2; Cheri O'Connell, *Submission 25*, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Based on rating it between 1 and 4 out of 10—Kantar Public, *Victorian Electoral Commission: evaluation of services at the 26 November 2022 Victorian State election*, report for the Victorian Electoral Commission, 2023, p. 87.

<sup>17</sup> Council on the Ageing Victoria, *Submission 29*, p. 5.

While there is a large discrepancy between these surveys, they both indicate variability in staff performance. This can result in inconsistent voter experiences, unequal access across voting centres and stress for voters with disability who cannot feel confident about getting the support they need.

**FINDING 52:** Voters with disability reported mixed experiences of staff at voting centres. Some had positive experiences of staff being helpful, patient and respectful, making voting centres more accessible. Others had negative experiences, including communication not being adapted to the voters' needs, not knowing about the accessibility tools in the voting centres and questioning them having a support person. The negative experiences suggest problems with the VEC's training materials or processes.

## 8.3 The VEC's training products and processes could be improved

To understand why not all staff have the knowledge needed to effectively support people with disability, the Committee examined the VEC's training materials and processes. This included the manuals provided to staff outlining what they should do and the online training provided.

The Committee found that these materials do contain content discussing how to support people with disability. However, there is scope for this to be improved in a number of ways.

There also appear to be cases where the instructions in the training materials are not being followed in practice. This is discussed in Section 8.4.

### 8.3.1 There are dedicated training pathways for different election roles

The VEC delivers election training through a combination of online modules, home study, in-person training and verbal briefings. In the voting centre, staff are expected to keep various role-specific manuals handy to consult throughout the voting period.

Online training for election officials is delivered in a short, click-through format that focuses on information rather than practical skill-building. Assessment is via multiple choice or true/false questions.

For the 2026 state election, the VEC explained:

Election managers and assistant election managers will complete a blended learning program that combines online and face-to-face training, supported by just-in-time reminder materials and detailed work instructions ...

Online training will provide foundational knowledge of the election processes relevant to each role. This will form the basis for role-specific face-to-face sessions, which will give

participants hands-on experience in completing processes through real-life scenarios in a partial election office or hub set-up.

Written work instructions provided to each role will include manuals, guides and task sheets tailored to specific responsibilities.

...

We will develop dedicated training pathways for different election roles. Roles with short duration or low complexity will receive a briefing at the start of the first shift. Supervisory roles such as early voting centre managers, mobile voting team leaders and voting centre managers will complete a blended program of online and face-to-face training.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, the VEC has indicated that its training program will include scenario-based role playing:

our training program for the 2026 state election will focus on fostering a culture of customer service and responsive accessibility by incorporating scenario-based role-playing to strengthen staff capability and understanding in managing a range of accessibility needs.<sup>19</sup>

Training is supplemented by role-specific manuals or guides for senior election officials, plus an *Election official manual* which all staff are expected to read and study independently and bring on election day.<sup>20</sup> There does not appear to be any verification of completion or learning assessment linked to the manual, although some sections are included in the online training with a knowledge check.

The VEC appears to consider a verbal briefing by the voting centre manager to be a failsafe for training. As noted above, the VEC states that, 'Roles with short duration or low complexity will receive a briefing at the start of the first shift.'<sup>21</sup> It has similarly indicated that:

all staff will receive compliance training, delivered through our online learning portal *or verbally at the start of their first shift* if there is insufficient time to complete training online.<sup>22</sup>

The *Voting centre manager guide* outlines what managers are expected to cover in their briefing at the start of election day. It lists a broad range of topics, including location-specific information, customer service, queue management, roles, procedures, safety and a general direction to:

Remind staff to refer to 'Providing accessible and inclusive services' in Part 2 in the *Election official manual* for key points to help all electors have a positive experience.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 39.

<sup>19</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 36*, pp. 15–16.

<sup>20</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State by-election election official manual*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 39.

<sup>22</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 39 (emphasis added).

<sup>23</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State district by-election voting centre manager guide*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 18.

The briefing is delivered within a very tight timeframe in the 20 minutes prior to the commencement of voting.<sup>24</sup> A briefing within the 20 minutes prior to the opening of voting centres should not be a substitute for mandatory accessibility and compliance training. It relies heavily on the individual knowledge, confidence and priorities of the voting centre manager, and assumes the absence of pre-opening issues that could affect the amount of time available.

The Committee is concerned that given the timing, it would be extremely difficult for the briefing to be delivered in full and to cover the breadth of required information. Reliance on briefings by the voting centre manager in this context seems unlikely to ensure the consistent provision of accessible and inclusive services.

### 8.3.2 Training materials discuss several issues relating to voters with disability

The Committee examined the VEC's training manuals, guides and online modules with a focus on accessibility and inclusive elections. It has not examined the content of the face-to-face training.

The *Election official manual* is mandated reading for all election officials. It contains five pages of instructions on providing accessible and inclusive services under the following headings:

- 'Helping electors have a positive experience'
- 'Electors with disabilities'
- 'Electors needing help to fill out their ballot paper'
- 'Electors from First Nations communities'
- 'Electors from multicultural communities'.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to general guidance on communicating with and supporting people with disability, it includes:

- specific guidance on assisting people with vision impairment
- a list of tasks that people with disability may need assistance with
- a list of resources for people with disability available at voting centres
- guidance regarding people who need help filling out ballot papers, including instructions for voting outside a voting centre (see Section 5.5 of this report).

The VEC's online training program *Working inclusively 2025* is comprised of five click-through modules, including modules on 'An inclusive customer environment and experience' and 'An inclusive team environment and experience'. The importance of

<sup>24</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State district by-election voting centre manager guide*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 17.

<sup>25</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State by-election election official manual*, Melbourne, 2025, pp. 14–19.

ensuring inclusive outcomes for all voters is acknowledged in introductory notes. The program provides general advice about inclusive service and respectful behaviour. It includes a list of things that people with disability may need assistance with (the same list that is provided in the *Election official manual*). The online module also includes some information about the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower program, which is not included in the manual. The version of the online program for election supervisors also includes a link to a video on the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower program. The Committee encourages the VEC to also include information about the program in the manual.

### 8.3.3 A universal access, barrier-based approach may be more appropriate

The Committee is pleased to see that much of the advice about communicating inclusively is framed in the training as ‘services for all electors’.<sup>26</sup> This helps to embed universal accessibility into interactions rather than conceptualising certain approaches as relevant only to certain voters. However, this is weakened by some information being presented as related to specific groups.

The training materials focus on three groups of voters: First Nations people, people with disabilities and multicultural communities. Each group is treated separately, suggesting that each group has discrete needs. The training materials then provide guidance on tools, services and communication strategies aligned with the perceived attributes or needs of each group. Some of these are repeated across groups, while others are framed as though they are unique to a particular cohort.

While categorisation may assist in identifying barriers and inform operational planning, it risks reinforcing stereotypes, encouraging assumptions and limiting support to certain voters. The Committee is concerned that framing accessibility in this way can inadvertently reinforce narrow assumptions and oversimplifications, leading to misunderstandings. This approach does not reflect intersectionality (see Section 2.2.1), the fact that voters may present with multiple or overlapping attributes and face various barriers that relate to one or more of these attributes. It may also lead to staff not considering adjustments needed by people who do not fit into one of those three categories.

The problems with this approach may be reinforced by expectations that voters will be comfortable asking for accessibility tools and services<sup>27</sup> or that staff should visually identify voters who may need assistance:

Ask anyone using a mobility aid, such as a walking frame or crutches, or who appears to be having difficulty standing if they would like to come to the front of a queue or offer them a seat.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State by-election election official manual*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State by-election election official manual*, Melbourne, 2025, pp. 22–5, 81.

<sup>28</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State by-election election official manual*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 14.

The Committee considers that a universal access approach based on barriers may be more effective. With this approach, training would focus on identifying barriers to participation and describing the accessibility tools and services available to remove or reduce those barriers. This would help to better account for intersectionality, hidden disability and needs which may not be related to disability. It would encourage staff to focus on reducing barriers for all voters and not just the ones who look like they need it. This could be supplemented by intersectional and community-specific modules, where appropriate.

When the VEC reviews its material to follow this approach, the Committee recommends considering whether there are additional barriers that should be discussed in the training. As noted above, the Hidden Disability Sunflower program is currently discussed in the online training, but not the *Election official manual*. It would be worth including information about the program in both. Although the manual includes information about the accessibility tools provided,<sup>29</sup> it does not provide information about their purpose or how they are to be used. The checklist of topics for voting centre managers to include when briefing staff does not include explaining where these tools are located.

**FINDING 53:** While the VEC's training materials include some information on supporting people with disability, much of this is presented through a segmented approach. Some accessibility guidance is organised around specific groups (First Nations people, people with disabilities and multicultural communities), with barriers and supports listed for each group. This risks reinforcing assumptions, rather than addressing common structural barriers that affect voters across multiple or overlapping identities, voters who do not fit into one of these groups or voters who may not appear to staff like they fit into one of these groups.

**RECOMMENDATION 51:** That the VEC revise its training materials to adopt a barrier-based framework, embedding universal accessibility principles across all training content. Guidance should focus on identifying and removing systemic barriers, with tools and services presented as universally applicable rather than linked to specific groups. This could be supplemented by intersectional and community-specific modules where appropriate.

**RECOMMENDATION 52:** That the VEC work with its Electoral Access Advisory Group and other stakeholders to review its training materials to identify any additional barriers that people with disability might face in voting centres and supports that should be discussed. The review should also identify other helpful information, such as the nature of hidden disability, the purpose of accessibility tools and the virtual Auslan interpreting service. The VEC should also ensure that voting centre managers are instructed to pass on all relevant information to staff about supports for people with disability, including the location of accessibility tools.

<sup>29</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State by-election election official manual*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 15.

## 8.4 Current training arrangements are not sufficient to ensure consistent and effective support for all voters at voting centres

### Lived experience

“ While some carers described positive experiences where staff provided priority access and appropriate assistance, others reported limited support, refusal of priority access, or accessibility provisions focused only on wheelchair use. Carers noted that inconsistent practices between voting centres and elections created stress and uncertainty and called for more uniform implementation of accessibility measures statewide.

Source: Carers Victoria, *Submission 41*, p. 6.

“ i had to fight for a chair it be able to sit down to vote, and once again i had to fight for my right to privacy whilst i voted. It was stressful and humiliating ... it is not appropriate to offer a chair at a table where there is an official person very close by, able to see how you vote. You need to provide a low voting booth that is private. I find it so hard to understand why this can't be possible, and why it isn't a given. Disabled people need privacy like everyone else.

Source: Respondent to the Committee's survey of voters with disability (Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election).

As discussed in Section 8.3, there is certainly scope for improving the VEC's training materials. However, a number of voters' negative experiences (as described in Section 8.2 of this chapter) do not seem to be the result of the quality and content of the training materials. Rather, they appear to reflect a gap between that guidance and its consistent application in practice.

For example, the *Election official manual* advises staff when dealing with voters that, 'You can offer a person a pen and paper as an alternative method of communication'<sup>30</sup> and a pen and note paper are supposed to be supplied at issuing points.<sup>31</sup> However, one submitter with hearing loss reported: 'When I told staff I had hearing loss, they weren't sure how to communicate with me and didn't have the right resources ... There was no pen and paper'.<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, although training materials state that a voter may be accompanied by a support person in the voting compartment if needed, multiple submissions described instances where support people were questioned or made to feel that they were not permitted to assist.<sup>33</sup> As another example, Blind Citizens Australia reported staff not

<sup>30</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State by-election election official manual*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State by-election election official manual*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 21.

<sup>32</sup> Dominique Loulie, *Submission 18*, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> Different Journeys, *Submission 11*, p. 2; Cheri O'Connell, *Submission 25*, p. 1; Carers Victoria, *Submission 41*, p. 6.

knowing how to guide blind people,<sup>34</sup> despite the *Election official manual* having specific instructions on how to do that.<sup>35</sup>

These experiences indicate that training is not always translated into practice. There may be several reasons for this.

Firstly, not all staff complete the training. The VEC reported that only 88% of election officials completed its general online training and only 90% of relevant staff completed the core values training for the 2022 state election.<sup>36</sup> As discussed in Section 8.3.1, an unspecified number of staff may also rely solely on a briefing provided at the start of their first shift.

Secondly, voting centre staff are required to understand a large volume of complex information on many different topics. The *Election official manual* is 81 pages long and only some of the information in it is covered by the online training. Voting centre staff are temporary employees, with many only working for one day. The unavoidably fast-paced and short-term nature of election employment and training limits opportunities for in-depth learning and reinforcement.

There may also be other factors that lead to this gap between training and practice. The Committee has not been able to investigate this issue in depth as part of this Inquiry.

Concerns about the VEC's training have been raised previously by the Committee and by the independent evaluator of the VEC's election delivery.<sup>37</sup> Surveys of election management teams have also identified improving the clarity of instructional products as one of the actions that would have been of the greatest help. Some also believed that additional targeted training would have helped.<sup>38</sup>

In 2024, the Committee recommended a review of the VEC's training products and procedures by an independent expert, including the observation of staff in voting centres to identify areas where improvements are needed.<sup>39</sup> The VEC indicated that

<sup>34</sup> Blind Citizens Australia, *Submission 32*, p. 10.

<sup>35</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *State by-election election official manual*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 133.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *The 2025 Prahran and Werribee by-elections*, December 2025, pp. 4–5; Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *The conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, vol. 1, July 2024, pp. 25–7; Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *Inquiry into the conduct of the 2018 Victorian state election*, August 2020, pp. 169–72; Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *Inquiry into the conduct of the 2010 Victorian state election and matters related thereto*, May 2012, p. 82; Colmar Brunton, *Victorian Electoral Commission: evaluation of services at the 24 November 2018 Victorian State election: parties and candidates report*, report for the Victorian Electoral Commission, 2019, pp. 4, 8, 16, 42; Colmar Brunton, *Victorian Electoral Commission: evaluation of services at the 29 November 2014 Victorian State election*, report for the Victorian Electoral Commission, 2015, p. 192.

<sup>38</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 100; Victorian Electoral Commission, *State election 2022 election management team feedback*, [Melbourne], 2023, p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *The conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, vol. 1, July 2024, p. 27, Recommendation 7.

it supported this recommendation, though the VEC did not commit to including the observation of voting centre staff, stating only that it would ‘explore the possibility’.<sup>40</sup>

The VEC has indicated that improving training and upskilling staff are priorities for the 2026 state election,<sup>41</sup> with independent auditing of some material already having taken place.<sup>42</sup> The VEC has also taken steps to strengthen oversight, including the proposed development of new performance indicators for staff training and support.<sup>43</sup> However, the Committee believes that additional work is required to understand why the guidance is not always followed, whether through observation of voting centre staff or by other means.

The Committee considers that there are two other changes that would also help to ensure that services are delivered in an accessible way: designating some voting centre staff as ‘accessibility officers’ and ensuring that appropriate accessibility-first training is delivered to head office staff, as well as voting centre staff.

**FINDING 54:** There is a gap between how the VEC trains and expects voting centre staff to act and how some staff perform their roles in practice. This may be related to not all staff completing the required training and to the volume of guidance that staff are expected to know. Further investigation would be required to understand whether these and/or other factors are the main reasons.

**RECOMMENDATION 53:** That, as part of evaluating the 2026 election, the VEC undertake research to understand why guidance in training is not always followed in practice and what can be done to reduce this at future elections.

#### 8.4.1 Designated accessibility officers may help ensure that guidance is implemented

Given the large casual workforce and the complexity of their roles, training will always be a challenge for the VEC. The Committee considers that there may be value in designating at least one staff member at each voting centre as an ‘accessibility officer’. This role would involve targeted recruitment and/or additional training in how to identify and address barriers, support an inclusive environment and assist other staff in providing accessible services. The accessibility officer should be clearly identifiable so that staff and voters can seek assistance or raise accessibility needs.

<sup>40</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Response to the Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, 18 November 2024, p. 10.

<sup>41</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Strategic service plan*, Melbourne, 2025, pp. 23–4.

<sup>42</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Submission 3*, submission to the Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, Inquiry into the 2025 Prahran and Werribee by-elections, 2025, p. 26.

<sup>43</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 62.

This approach was suggested in a number of submissions to this Inquiry.<sup>44</sup> For example, one member of Women with Disabilities Victoria told the organisation:

It would be great if there was one or two clearly designated accessibility officers who can assist people with navigation, any questions they may have about the process, being able to reduce stress around what is happening, information on how to make the process more accessible etc. Adapting their style to work with the individual that is in front of them for example allowing processing time for those with communication needs, respecting when someone says that they don't need help, asking how they can help rather than making assumptions or forcing help upon people.<sup>45</sup>

This role would complement, not replace, the need for all staff to be trained in universal access principles and how to support people with disability. It would recognise the importance of accessibility and the need for dedicated oversight. This officer would be a point of contact for staff and would ensure that accessible practices were taking place in the voting centre. All election officials should be sufficiently trained to assist in the first instance, but could call on the support of the accessibility officer for complex or exceptional requests.

The accessibility officer could also be a point of contact for people with disability or their support people, who may prefer to approach a designated person rather than other members of staff.

**FINDING 55:** Submitters suggested having designated 'accessibility officers' in voting centres. These staff members could have responsibility for ensuring services are being delivered in an accessible way and could assist people with disability. This could help to ensure that the VEC's guidance is being followed and that people with disability get the support they need.

**RECOMMENDATION 54:** That the VEC conduct a pilot program involving specially trained and clearly identifiable 'accessibility officers' present at multiple selected voting centres across various locations. These people would be points of contact for staff and would have responsibility for ensuring that accessible practices were being implemented. They could also be approached by voters or their support people seeking assistance or advice. The appointment of accessibility officers should not replace the need for all voting centre staff to be trained in supporting people with disability. As part of the pilot program, the VEC should establish mechanisms to evaluate whether the accessibility officers provided benefits to voters and staff, so that the VEC can assess whether the program should be rolled out on a larger scale or in each voting centre in future elections.

<sup>44</sup> Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 27*, p. 4; ACD (the Association for Children with a Disability), *Submission 30*, p. 2; Reinforce Self-Advocacy, *Submission 31*, p. 2; Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 13; Dementia Australia, *Submission 50*, p. 7; Saumya Kaushik, Policy Research Lead, Women with Disabilities Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 27 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, p. 13. See also Saumya Kaushik, Policy Research Lead, Women with Disabilities Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 27 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

### 8.4.2 Head office staff need a good understanding of accessibility to ensure that it underpins all decision-making, process design, training and service delivery

Women with Disabilities Victoria noted the importance of training head office staff in disability inclusion.<sup>46</sup> The policies, systems and resources determined by head office will ultimately shape what voting centre staff do and the overall voter experience. Head office makes many decisions relating to accessibility, such as:

- the criteria used to select voting centres
- the number and type of accessibility tools provided to voting centres
- staffing levels
- systems and processes at voting centres
- training content.

Accessibility-first and universal design principles should underpin the decisions about these matters.

The Committee has not reviewed the VEC's general staff training. However, the Committee encourages the VEC to ensure that all staff receive role-specific training on accessibility, including the three guiding principles set out by the Committee in Section 1.4. Embedding accessibility across the organisation would help staff proactively prevent, identify and remove barriers so that services are planned and delivered more inclusively.

**FINDING 56:** Decisions made at head office determine how services are delivered in voting centres and the resources available to voting centre staff. It is important that these decisions are informed by a good understanding of accessibility and inclusivity.

**RECOMMENDATION 55:** That the VEC provide role-specific training for all staff, including head office staff, on accessibility, including the guiding principles set out by the Committee in Section 1.4 of this report.

<sup>46</sup> Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 40*, pp. 12–13; Saumya Kaushik, Policy Research Lead, Women with Disabilities Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 27 March 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

# Chapter 9

## Measuring and reporting on accessibility and inclusivity

### 9.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 3, the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) has several plans and policy frameworks that relate to accessibility and inclusivity. However, much of this is defined at a high level and many aspects of election delivery for people with disability are not measured. This makes it difficult to thoroughly assess the VEC's efforts and to hold the VEC to account. Similarly, although there is some reporting, this could be much more complete and informative.

Section 9.2 of this chapter looks at how the VEC currently measures its education and engagement activities, including activities intended to support people with disability.

Section 9.3 discusses why the VEC should thoroughly evaluate both new initiatives and ongoing practices. The VEC has not evaluated some new initiatives at past elections well. Improvements in evaluation would enable the VEC to learn from unsuccessful trials and provide better services in the future.

Section 9.4 provides suggestions on how the VEC could improve performance measurement and reporting. Section 9.5 identifies some data sources that the VEC could use. Overall, the Committee would like to see the VEC strengthen its existing performance measurement and reporting practices. This should include producing a specific accessibility performance report after each election.

Better performance measurement will help the VEC understand whether its plans are having the intended effects and, if not, why. This is essential for identifying future improvements. The VEC's *Election infrastructure location strategy* recognises this, identifying a need to 'Capture elector feedback and implement continual improvements where possible' and to 'Ensure electoral process and service delivery decisions are data-led and evidence-based.'<sup>1</sup> Detailed measures will be essential for these goals to be achieved.

In addition, increasing the transparency about what the VEC intends to do and how successful its efforts are will create opportunities for external input and for holding the VEC to account. Transparency is also critical for ensuring that trust in the electoral system is maintained and public money is well spent.

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<sup>1</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Election infrastructure location strategy*, [Melbourne], 2020, pp. 2-3.

## 9.2 How the VEC currently measures its education and engagement activities

The VEC's current framework for reducing barriers for people with disability is its *Disability education and engagement plan*. As discussed in Section 3.4.1, this plan sets out intended outcomes, goals and actions defined at a high level. For example, actions in the plan include:

- 'review and evaluate our accessible enrolment and voting options'
- 'address barriers for parents, carers, and workers who help people vote'
- 'build the skills of carers and support workers to help people vote'.<sup>2</sup>

No further details about these actions are included in the plan. However, the plan notes that a monitoring and evaluation plan is available on request, which supplies more detail.<sup>3</sup>

The *Monitoring and evaluation plan for the 2025–2027 VEC education and engagement plans* contains a program logic that provides some additional details about the outputs associated with the planned actions. It also contains 34 evaluation questions, with at least 56 associated measures, to measure the implementation of the *Disability education and engagement plan* and other plans. Of these 34 questions, 23 have at least one quantified target.<sup>4</sup> The remaining 11 questions have measures but no quantified targets, either because the VEC is still waiting on baseline data or the targets are to be assessed through qualitative data.<sup>5</sup>

The majority of the measures relate to processes, such as the proportion of planned activities implemented, attendance rates for advisory groups, ensuring that the advisory group members are appropriate and the number of participants in particular programs.

There are also some measures which relate to the effectiveness of the VEC's advisory groups (such as the Electoral Access Advisory Group—see Section 9.4.2). Measures of the advisory groups include:

- members' satisfaction
- whether members see themselves as contributing to VEC planning or implementation
- the proportion of recommendations from group members that are adopted by the VEC in planning or implementation.

<sup>2</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Disability education and engagement plan*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Disability education and engagement plan*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Including two which are yes/no measures.

<sup>5</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Monitoring and evaluation plan for the 2025–2027 VEC education and engagement plans*, [Melbourne], (n.d.), pp. 8–11.

More broadly, there are several quantified outcomes measures (for the *Disability education and engagement plan* and other plans). These may give some indication of whether the VEC's efforts are actually assisting people with disability:

- the number of enrolments for priority groups
- the election participation rates for priority groups
- the proportion of participants in the Democracy Ambassador program who know how to vote and complete a ballot paper correctly.

The Committee is pleased to see a focus on outcomes with these measures. However, the VEC notes that its ability to collect enrolment and voting data for people with disability is limited to what can be gathered through a coded enrolment process associated with its community education and engagement activities.<sup>6</sup> This is a serious limitation, especially as there are no other outcomes measures in the monitoring and evaluation plan that relate to some of the key objectives of the *Disability education and engagement plan*.

The VEC is also planning stakeholder consultation to assess the impact of programs on priority group stakeholders. This includes whether they have greater awareness and understanding of the VEC and electoral participation; and whether they are more likely to facilitate the electoral participation of priority communities. However, it is not clear exactly what is being measured with these indicators, as the targets are simply listed as 'qualitative'.

Overall, the Committee considers that the monitoring and evaluation plan is a valuable part of the VEC's performance measuring system. However, the system as a whole could be improved with a number of changes, especially including some additional measures. These are discussed in Sections 9.4 and 9.5 of this chapter.

**FINDING 57:** The VEC's *Monitoring and evaluation plan for the 2025–2027 VEC education and engagement plans* contains 34 evaluation questions with associated performance measures. These are used to assess the effectiveness of the VEC's efforts to improve inclusivity in elections, including the *Disability education and engagement plan* and the Electoral Access Advisory Group. The measures look at a variety of aspects, including processes, effectiveness and outcomes. However, some measures are limited in their breadth or not quantified. There are also additional measures which should be added to more fully evaluate the VEC's efforts.

<sup>6</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Monitoring and evaluation plan for the 2025–2027 VEC education and engagement plans*, [Melbourne], (n.d.), p. 7.

## 9.3 To make progress, the VEC must evaluate its efforts to make elections more accessible and inclusive

Evaluation of both new initiatives and ongoing practices is critical for understanding whether the VEC is meeting the needs of all voters. Evaluation is also essential to learn how to improve services in the future.

### 9.3.1 New initiatives must be properly evaluated

In recent elections, the VEC has trialled multiple initiatives to support people with disability. The VEC is planning further initiatives with the 2026 election. Robust evaluations of these initiatives will help the VEC and stakeholders to understand whether the initiatives are effective and if they are the best use of the VEC's resources.

Evaluation can be particularly important when an initiative is unsuccessful or where few voters use it. Robust evaluation can help to identify whether the limited use is because there was relatively little demand for that sort of service or because the way it was implemented could be improved (for example, better placement of signs or more advertising about the service before the election).

#### The VEC has not evaluated some previous trials in depth

In previous years, the VEC has not thoroughly evaluated some initiatives. The Committee asked the VEC about its evaluation of two previous trials of services for people with disability: the Voters Voice app (see Section 6.7.1) and the virtual Auslan interpreting service (see Section 6.5). In both cases, the project had less usage than the VEC had hoped for.<sup>7</sup>

With the app, the VEC was able to evaluate its effectiveness with usage statistics and 100 in-app reviews, 40 of which included comments.<sup>8</sup> Despite generally favourable reviews, the VEC discontinued the project, deciding to deliver most of the functions through the website instead (see Section 6.7.1).

With the interpreting service, there was much less data to evaluate the program. As part of the post-election evaluation commissioned by the VEC (see Section 9.5), voters who had used the service were asked how satisfied they were and how the service might be improved.<sup>9</sup> However, only two people who had used the service were included in the survey sample.<sup>10</sup> As a result, there would have been limited value to the data.

<sup>7</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, Electoral Access Advisory Group, *Meeting minutes*, 1 June 2021, p. 3; Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 55; Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, correspondence, 29 May 2026, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Conduct, *VEC Voters Voice 2 App Nov17*, report for the Victorian Electoral Commission, Melbourne, 2018, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Kantar Public, *Victorian Electoral Commission: evaluation of services at the 26 November 2022 Victorian State election*, report for the Victorian Electoral Commission, 2023, p. 194.

<sup>10</sup> Kantar Public, *Victorian Electoral Commission: evaluation of services at the 26 November 2022 Victorian State election*, report for the Victorian Electoral Commission, 2023, p. 89.

When asked about evaluation to understand why usage of the interpreting service was less than the VEC expected, the VEC stated:

While lower than hoped, the number of interactions at the 2022 state election was consistent with previous state elections as well as federal elections (according to Deaf Victoria's submission to this inquiry, there were 107 interactions nationwide at the 2025 federal election). Therefore, no evaluation was warranted into usage levels.<sup>11</sup>

The Committee also asked about the evaluation of another trial that the VEC had conducted. At the 2022 election, the VEC trialled printing QR codes on voting compartments and queue signage linking to information in multiple languages. The project was trialled in one district during the early voting period. As with Voters Voice and the Auslan interpreting service, usage was low, with only nine scans of the QR code in total.<sup>12</sup>

The VEC did not conduct any further evaluation to understand why the usage of the QR codes was so low or whether there were any changes that might have increased usage. The VEC explained:

Given that it [the trial] was not responding to a specific identified need or voter demand, and rather testing whether there would be any significant level of uptake from the initiative, the very low interaction rate did not warrant further evaluation for the initiative.<sup>13</sup>

The Committee does not share the view that further evaluation was unnecessary in either of these cases.

The fact that the low usage of the Auslan interpreting service was consistent with previous efforts does not mean that usage could not be improved or that there was nothing to learn. It is particularly hard to understand the VEC's reasoning given that the VEC was subsequently considering actions to boost usage.<sup>14</sup>

It is also hard to understand the VEC's reasoning for not evaluating the trial of QR codes. Because the trial was testing whether there would be significant usage, it provided an opportunity to understand why the usage was low and use this information to better design future projects. The fact that it was a trial of whether or not there would be significant usage is not, as the VEC argues, a reason to not investigate the low usage.

The Committee is disappointed by the VEC's explanations for why it did not evaluate these initiatives more thoroughly. Failing to evaluate them means that the VEC is unable to learn what was problematic. Evaluation could help identify whether the concept was

<sup>11</sup> Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, correspondence, 29 May 2026, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 53.

<sup>13</sup> Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, correspondence, 29 May 2026, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 55.

inappropriate, the way that it was implemented was flawed, more communication was needed or whether there was some other reason for the low usage. By not investigating these matters, the VEC deprives itself of an opportunity to learn from these trials and to use those learnings to better meet voters' needs in the future.

### **New initiatives and changes to service delivery at the 2026 election should be more thoroughly evaluated**

For the 2026 election, the VEC anticipates trialling several new initiatives for people with disability. These include:

- low-sensory voting throughout the state (see Section 4.4)
- access keys and social scripts (see Section 7.6.3).

The VEC has also made changes to:

- mobile voting (see Section 3.2.1)
- the targets for the proportion of voting centres that are classified as 'assisted wheelchair access' or 'independent wheelchair access' (see Section 3.4.3)
- the content of the *EasyVote guide* and how it is distributed (see Section 7.4)
- training for election officials (see Section 8.4).

It is important for the VEC to establish ways of evaluating all of these initiatives and changes to identify potential problems, to ensure that they are actually reducing barriers for people with disability and to check that the programs have not inadvertently created new barriers. At the same time, as noted by one submitter, the VEC must ensure that the new approaches do not compromise the integrity of the election and public confidence.<sup>15</sup> Transparency in the VEC's evaluation processes is critical for this.

Regarding low-sensory voting, the Committee notes that other jurisdictions in Australia and New Zealand are trialling different approaches (see Section 4.4). Robust evaluations of each approach, with the evaluations shared between commissions, would facilitate the most effective approach being taken across Australia and New Zealand. As discussed in Section 4.4, the VEC's trial at the 2026 election will see low-sensory voting offered at one voting centre per district on the day before the early voting period and (if previous practice is followed) promoted for neurodivergent voters rather than the full range of people who may benefit. If usage is less than anticipated, it will be important to understand whether it was the locations, the timing, the targeted communications or other factors. Understanding Victorian voters' experiences and comparing them to other states' approaches will help to better understand this.

The Committee has also recommended a number of changes throughout this report and would expect to see these carefully evaluated when implemented.

<sup>15</sup> Nuray Kaya, *Submission 19*, pp. 2–3; Nuray Kaya, *Submission 19a*, p. 2.

### 9.3.2 Ongoing practices must be properly evaluated

In addition to evaluating new initiatives, the VEC also needs to evaluate its ongoing practices. Evaluation can help the VEC understand whether these practices are achieving the VEC's goals, meeting people's needs or creating barriers.

The VEC currently conducts its own evaluation after elections and also commissions an independent evaluation after state elections (see Section 9.5). At the time of writing this report, the performance measures used by the VEC in its own evaluation were being reviewed.<sup>16</sup> The Committee has therefore not been able to examine these.

The performance measures used at the 2022 election provided little information about people with disability. The VEC counted the proportion of voting centres that met its criteria for 'independent wheelchair access' and 'assisted wheelchair access', noted compliance with website accessibility guidelines and had several measures of the Democracy Ambassador program and its workshops.<sup>17</sup>

The Committee would like to see more reporting about ongoing practices. Throughout this report, several problem areas have been noted which should be monitored, including:

- queuing (see Section 5.4)
- voting centre layout (see Section 5.6)
- information materials in accessible formats (see Section 7.3)
- training (see Section 8.4).

In addition, it would be helpful to understand the usage, effectiveness and satisfaction with ongoing services intended to support people with disability, such as:

- the wheelchair accessibility ratings of voting centres, including the accuracy of the VEC's assessment processes and whether sufficient information is provided to voters to determine the best way to vote for them (see Sections 4.2 and 7.6)
- the provision of information about voting (see Chapter 7)
- accessibility tools (see Section 6.3)
- assistive listening systems (see Section 6.4)
- the online Auslan interpreting service (see Section 6.5).

The Committee has identified some ways that ongoing practices could be measured and reported on. These are discussed in Sections 9.4 and 9.5 of this chapter.

<sup>16</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 62.

<sup>17</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, pp. 133–4.

**FINDING 58:** It is important for both new initiatives and ongoing practices to be monitored and reported on. Monitoring should be sufficiently detailed to enable proper evaluation, identifying whether or not the VEC is meeting the needs of people with disability and, if not, what should be done differently in future elections.

## 9.4 How measurement and reporting could be improved

The Committee would like to see two changes to the VEC's reporting on the election experience for people with disability. Firstly, there is scope for improved reporting on the *Disability education and engagement plan*. Secondly, the Committee would like to see the VEC produce a dedicated accessibility performance report after each election.

### 9.4.1 Improving reporting on the Disability education and engagement plan

The Committee has previously raised concerns about the performance measurement and reporting associated with the VEC's strategies and plans. In 2024, the Committee analysed several strategies and plans and found that the plans generally featured 'lists of actions, many of which are not clearly defined and often lack clear and quantifiable measures and targets.'<sup>18</sup>

The Committee recommended:

That, in developing future plans and strategies, the VEC include concrete actions, measures and quantified targets in the original plan at the time of release, so that stakeholders have a better understanding of what the VEC intends to do and the VEC can more transparently report against those plans and strategies.<sup>19</sup>

The VEC supported this recommendation in principle.<sup>20</sup> However, the *Disability education and engagement plan*, which was published after the Committee's recommendation, still listed actions at a very high level and did not include measures or targets.

While additional details were subsequently included in a monitoring and evaluation plan, specific actions and targets should have been included in the plan when it was first released. The Committee considers that additional useful measures could have been included as well. There is also scope for improved reporting on the progress of this and other plans.

<sup>18</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *The conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, vol. 2, July 2024, p. 194.

<sup>19</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *The conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, vol. 2, July 2024, p. 194, Recommendation 50.

<sup>20</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Response to the Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, 18 November 2024, p. 57.

## Including specific actions and targets in the plan from the beginning

As noted above, the planned actions in the *Disability education and engagement plan* are generally described at a high level. For example, one of the VEC's actions is 'support people impacted by the "cognitive impairment" provision in legislation'.<sup>21</sup> A wide range of actions could be covered by this description. This could mean publishing a paragraph of information on its website. Or it may cover more ambitious plans, such as advocating for legislative change or conducting an awareness and education campaign. Any of these and many other actions would be covered by the description in the *Disability education and engagement plan*. The community therefore has no idea whether the VEC is planning to do a lot or a little on this topic and no chance to provide informed feedback.

The monitoring and evaluation plan provides more detail. In that document, we learn that the VEC intends to produce a 'research report on impacts of unsound mind provisions'.<sup>22</sup> However, the monitoring and evaluation plan is a separate document which is not published on the VEC's website. The community therefore does not have access to that information about the VEC's plans. It would be much better practice to have included this level of detail in the *Disability education and engagement plan* from the beginning.

Quantified targets should also have been established and published from the beginning. It is a weakness of the current plan that it was published without quantified targets. Although some targets were included in the monitoring and evaluation plan, many targets were not quantified. Even half-way through the plan's 2025–27 timeframe, a significant number of targets are still listed as 'TBC'. In addition, there are multiple measures where the target is simply listed as 'qualitative' with no further details.

The VEC has also made at least one commitment relating to disability that is not reflected in the *Disability education and engagement plan*. In 2023, the VEC declared that it would, 'consider better promotion opportunities for Auslan interpreting services with the aim to boost access and usage'.<sup>23</sup> This and any other commitments should have been included in the *Disability education and engagement plan* so that the document could bring together all of the VEC's planned actions in one place.

The Committee would like to see more specific actions set out in future disability plans. Elections ACT's plan could be used as a model.<sup>24</sup> The Committee would also like to see measures and targets included in the *Disability education and engagement plan* at the time of publication. This would more clearly communicate the VEC's intentions to the community. It would also provide for more accountability.

<sup>21</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Disability education and engagement plan*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Monitoring and evaluation plan for the 2025–2027 VEC education and engagement plans*, [Melbourne], (n.d.), p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 55.

<sup>24</sup> Elections ACT, *Accessibility and inclusion plan 2024–2026*, Canberra, 2024.

## Measuring what can be measured

There is also scope for additional quantified performance measures related to the *Disability education and engagement plan*. For example, one of the plan's intended outcomes is 'reduced reports of accessibility issues during and after elections',<sup>25</sup> which could be easily measured as part of the VEC's regular analysis of complaints and feedback after elections.<sup>26</sup> Planned activities like delivering electoral education in specialist schools<sup>27</sup> could also be easily quantified.

Similarly, the VEC plans to develop and promote 'electoral education resources' for people with disability and produce resources for support people, including videos.<sup>28</sup> The number of views of online videos could be measured to get some understanding of the reach of these resources. In fact, reporting on previous videos has indicated that a low number of views has been a problem,<sup>29</sup> which would make including it as a performance measure particularly informative.

The Committee notes that the data would need to be interpreted and analysed carefully. For example, a decrease in the number of complaints can reflect less accessible complaint channels rather than improving services. An increase in complaints can reflect greater awareness or trust in the organisation rather than worse service. However, appropriate measures could be derived from the data that the VEC has or could collect. Looking at complaints about accessibility issues as rates (rather than raw numbers), examining complaints to identify repeated themes and supplementing data with qualitative evidence could provide useful measures. Establishing targets and reporting on these measures would provide more transparency and accountability.

In addition, more use could be made of the data collected as part of the post-election evaluations to understand the overall effectiveness of the plan and to identify problem areas (see Section 9.5).

## Increasing transparency and reporting

For transparency purposes, the monitoring and evaluation plan should be published on the VEC's website. The final evaluation report should also be published on the VEC's website when the plan is complete.

<sup>25</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Disability education and engagement plan*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, Chapter 9.

<sup>27</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Disability education and engagement plan*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Disability education and engagement plan*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 13; Victorian Electoral Commission, *Monitoring and evaluation plan for the 2025–2027 VEC education and engagement plans*, [Melbourne], (n.d.), p. 18; Victorian Electoral Commission, *Draft service plan: 2026 state election*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 31.

<sup>29</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Report to Parliament: 2022 Victorian state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 50.

The plan states that the VEC will ‘publish a yearly progress summary in our VEC annual reports.’<sup>30</sup> However, the quality and details of information in annual reports has varied. The Committee raised concerns about how the VEC reported on its advisory groups in its 2022–23 annual report.<sup>31</sup> Some additional measures were added to the VEC’s reporting in 2023–24, but these measures were rolled back in the 2024–25 report.<sup>32</sup> Although the VEC’s monitoring and evaluation plan has at least 56 measures, the 2024–25 report only discussed five of them and did not compare the results to targets. The Committee would like to see much more thorough progress reporting in future annual reports, including all measures and comparisons to targets.

**FINDING 59:** The *Disability education and engagement plan* sets out goals, objectives and actions for the VEC with respect to people with disability. However, many of its actions are defined at a high level, leading to a lack of clarity about what the VEC intends to do. In addition, measures and targets are not included in the plan, but in a separate document which is not published. There is also scope for additional measures and additional transparency about the VEC’s progress.

**RECOMMENDATION 56:** That the VEC change the way that it produces plans like the *Disability education and engagement plan*, with future plans:

- being more specific about what actions are planned
- including performance measures and targets in the plan from the beginning
- using all the relevant data that it collects to measure and report on activity
- including all commitments related to the topic.

**RECOMMENDATION 57:** That the VEC report comprehensively on plans such as the *Disability education and engagement plan*, including:

- reporting on all performance measures as part of progress reports
- comparing results to targets when reporting and explaining discrepancies
- publishing final evaluation reports on the VEC’s website at the end of a plan’s timeframe.

<sup>30</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Disability education and engagement plan*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee, *The conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election*, vol. 2, July 2024, p. 311.

<sup>32</sup> Compare Victorian Electoral Commission, *Annual report 2022–23*, Melbourne, 2023, p. 35; Victorian Electoral Commission, *Annual report 2023–24*, Melbourne, 2024, p. 32; Victorian Electoral Commission, *Annual report 2024–25*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 34.

### 9.4.2 Improving reporting on the Electoral Access Advisory Group

The Electoral Access Advisory Group (see Section 3.5) consists of representatives from stakeholder groups related to people with disability. The advice from this group is important in providing the VEC with expertise and the lived experience of people with disability.

As discussed in Section 9.2, the VEC has some measures relating to this group in its monitoring and evaluation plan. One of the key metrics, which is reported in the VEC's annual report, is the proportion of recommendations from the VEC's advisory groups that are adopted (in full or part).<sup>33</sup> In the annual report, one figure is reported aggregating all recommendations from all advisory groups. In correspondence, the VEC informed the Committee that there was one recommendation from the Electoral Access Advisory Group in 2024–25 and it was implemented.<sup>34</sup>

With only one recommendation coming out of the group in a year, tracking the implementation of recommendations provides relatively little information about the effectiveness of the group. The Committee understands that the advisory group does more than make recommendations, such as providing input to plans and advice on implementing initiatives. Detailing how feedback from the group has influenced decisions would therefore be one way to improve reporting. This could be part of accessibility performance reports (see Section 9.4.3).

### 9.4.3 Introducing accessibility performance reports

Ngaweeyan Maar-oo suggested that the VEC publish an accessibility performance report after each election:

VEC should publish an accessibility performance report that includes compliance with the minimum standard, incident and complaint themes, the actions taken to rectify issues, both immediately and long-term, and a time-bound improvement plan. Reporting should include trends across election cycles and a regional equity lens, so Parliament and communities can assess whether accessibility is improving in practice.

Transparent and continuous reporting is an essential tool that supports voter, caregiver, and community decision-making, highlights ongoing needs and areas for improvement, and supports long-term accountability.<sup>35</sup>

The Committee considers that this would be worthwhile. The VEC does include some reporting on accessibility as part of its post-election reports. However, this tends to be split and discussed under various different themes (e.g. community engagement, voting, evaluation) rather than looking at the whole experience of voters with disability. Preparing a section with a dedicated accessibility performance report would enable a whole-of-journey perspective (see Section 1.4.2) to be taken and would

<sup>33</sup> Victorian Electoral Commission, *Annual report 2024–25*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 34.

<sup>34</sup> Sven Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, correspondence, 29 May 2026, p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 27*, p. 4.

provide a clearer understanding of how successfully the VEC has reduced barriers to participation for people with disability. It would also provide an opportunity for the VEC to report on its work identifying and reducing barriers, including physical, sensory and communication-based barriers.

As discussed in Section 4.2.5, the Committee would also like to see the VEC develop and publish a venue selection framework at future elections. This would transparently set out the VEC's intentions for selecting early and election-day voting centres. This should also include performance measures that assess the suitability of venues, including a broad range of accessibility features. This should be reported on as part of the accessibility performance report.

When reporting on the VEC's efforts to support people with disability, it is important for the VEC to take account of the fact that people with disability may also face other barriers. As noted in Section 2.2.1, factors such as age, cultural background, location, socio-economic status and gender may add to the barriers experienced by people with disability.

These intersectional factors need to be considered by the VEC when developing materials and programs (see Section 2.2.1). They also need to be considered when the VEC is evaluating its performance. For example, the Council on the Ageing Victoria recommended:

We encourage the VEC to collect, study and report on longitudinal data on voting method and patterns of voting centre attendance among older people and those with a disability. This data should be cross tabulated with other potential indicators of disenfranchisement such as migrant and First Nations status, rural and regional location and socio-economic disadvantage, especially those living in insecure housing. This data should inform an intersectional approach, ensuring, for example, that older people from non-English speaking backgrounds are supported by disability-accessible signage in community languages.<sup>36</sup>

The Committee agrees and would like to see intersectional aspects monitored and discussed by the VEC in the future when reporting on accessibility performance.

**FINDING 60:** A dedicated accessibility performance report after each election would provide an opportunity for the VEC to report on the voting experience for people with disability from a whole-of-journey perspective and identify areas for future improvement.

<sup>36</sup> Council on the Ageing Victoria, *Submission 29*, p. 6.

**RECOMMENDATION 58:** That the VEC include a dedicated accessibility performance report in each report to Parliament on an election. The accessibility performance report should include:

- an analysis of voting for people with disability from a whole-of-journey perspective
- reporting on efforts to remove a variety of barriers, including physical, sensory and communication-based (not just barriers to wheelchair use)
- reporting on complaints related to accessibility for people with disability and any actions taken in response
- reporting on the suitability of voting centres and whether sufficient information was provided to voters
- evaluations of any new initiatives
- evaluations of ongoing practices
- details of what plans and initiatives were shaped by input from the Electoral Access Advisory Group and how the group contributed
- analyses from an intersectional approach to evaluate services for people with disability who also face other barriers (such as different cultural backgrounds, age, living in remote areas, limited English language skills, gender and imprisonment).

## 9.5 Gathering more information

The additional performance measurement and reporting recommended in this chapter will require the VEC to gather and analyse more data than it currently tracks and reports on. This may require the VEC to introduce new ways of gathering data, such as additional surveys or recording more data in voting centres.

However, there is also scope for additional useful data to be gathered from the independent evaluation commissioned by the VEC after each election. This evaluation is conducted by an independent organisation using a detailed survey of voters and candidates. These surveys allow the evaluator to investigate a wide range of issues and to ask multiple questions about topics to better understand voters' and candidates' experiences.

### 9.5.1 Adding more questions to the post-election survey

The surveys used in the post-election evaluation typically include a small number of questions specifically relating to services for people with disability. In the 2022 evaluation, the questions included:

- multiple questions about telephone-assisted voting from voters who used it
- voters' satisfaction with the assistance provided to them if they needed assistance related to disability

- the awareness and use of the Auslan interpreting service for voters who are Deaf or hard of hearing
- candidates' perception of whether there is a need to improve services for voters with disability.<sup>37</sup>

The Committee would like to see additional questions about support for people with disability. Additional questions could also be added to better understand people's experience with both the new initiatives trialled by the VEC and ongoing practices. Particular attention could be paid to the topics set out in Section 9.3 of this chapter.

**FINDING 61:** After each election, the VEC commissions an independent evaluation of its election services through a survey of voters and candidates. This survey asks a number of questions about services for people with disability. Additional questions could be asked to understand more about how satisfied people with disability are with the VEC's new initiatives and ongoing practices.

**RECOMMENDATION 59:** That the VEC expand the number of questions asked in the post-election survey to evaluate new initiatives for people with disability and to understand the level of satisfaction of people with disability with ongoing practices. Particular focus should be given to the topics noted in Section 9.3 of this report.

### 9.5.2 Analysing the data differently

In addition, the survey asked all respondents whether they had any physical disability.<sup>38</sup> Approximately 14% of respondents (434 people) identified as having physical disability. As these respondents were asked numerous questions about their experience during the election, it would be possible to analyse the responses from this group separately to the other respondents. This would provide a holistic understanding of the experience of people with disability at an election and would help to identify particular problem areas.

For example, the data collected in 2022 could be used to assess the following about voters with physical disability without needing to add any additional questions:

- how satisfied they were with various aspects of their experience at voting centres
- how satisfied they were with postal voting
- whether they would have liked more information
- how easy it was for them to use the VEC's website

<sup>37</sup> Kantar Public, *Victorian Electoral Commission: evaluation of services at the 26 November 2022 Victorian State election*, report for the Victorian Electoral Commission, 2023, pp. 65–71, 87–9, 126.

<sup>38</sup> Specifically whether they are 'blind or low-vision, in a wheelchair, having arthritis or impaired motor function or some other mobility restriction'—Kantar Public, *Victorian Electoral Commission: evaluation of services at the 26 November 2022 Victorian State election*, report for the Victorian Electoral Commission, 2023, p. 87.

- whether the VEC's communication products provided relevant information for them
- for people who did not vote, their reasons for not voting.

The data could be even more useful if additional questions were added to get some specific details of respondents' disabilities. Validated functional disability measures should be used (following, for example, the measures adopted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics), with respondents able to select multiple options, self-identify or 'prefer not to say'. The measures should also extend beyond physical disability (as is currently asked about) to also include sensory, communication, intellectual, cognitive and psychosocial disability.

There are also other demographic questions in the survey, such as age, gender, main language spoken, location and economic status. It may thus be possible to analyse these categories together with the information about disability to get some understanding of intersectionality (where the sample size is large enough).

**FINDING 62:** Although the 2022 post-election evaluation commissioned by the VEC included a question about whether respondents had any physical disability, the answers to the survey questions for this group were not separately analysed or reported. Respondents were not asked about mental or cognitive disability.

**RECOMMENDATION 60:** That the VEC have questions added to the post-election survey about respondents' disabilities and broaden the definition of disability to include mental, cognitive, psychosocial and neurodevelopmental disability (such as disability associated with anxiety disorders, neurodivergence or dementia) as well as physical disability.

**RECOMMENDATION 61:** That the VEC analyse the data from its post-election surveys to better understand the experience of people with disability and their satisfaction with election services. Additional analyses should be conducted to understand intersectional issues where the results are statistically meaningful.

**Adopted by the Electoral Matters Committee  
Parliament of Victoria, East Melbourne  
10 August 2026**

# Appendix A

## About the Inquiry

### A.1 Inquiry process

On 3 December 2025, the Victorian Parliament's Legislative Assembly referred an inquiry into voting centre accessibility to the Committee. The Committee was required to table a final report by 30 September 2026.

#### Submissions

The Committee called for written submissions through its website, media releases and the Parliament's social media accounts, starting in December 2025. The Committee published videos inviting people with lived experience to make a submission, including a video in Auslan. The Committee wrote to key stakeholders inviting them to make submissions. The Committee also wrote to multiple organisations connected with people with disability, inviting them to make submissions and asking them to invite people associated with their organisations to make submissions.

In total, the Committee received 52 submissions from individuals, organisations and electoral commissions.

A full list of submitters can be found in Section A.2 of this appendix.

#### Public hearings

The Committee conducted two days of public hearings on 23 March 2026 and 27 March 2026. Ten sessions were conducted with 25 witnesses.

The public hearings were held in Melbourne, with some witnesses appearing by videoconference.

A list of the witnesses who attended the public hearings is included in Section A.3 below.

## A.2 Submissions

| No. | Author                                   |
|-----|------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Matilda Osborne                          |
| 2   | Name withheld                            |
| 3   | Mary Lo Schiavo                          |
| 4   | Jordan Crane                             |
| 5   | Name withheld                            |
| 6   | Mark Stewart                             |
| 7   | Jennie Trigg                             |
| 8   | Name withheld                            |
| 9   | Deaf Victoria                            |
| 10  | Name withheld                            |
| 11  | Different Journeys                       |
| 12  | Name withheld                            |
| 13  | Alexandra Reimers                        |
| 14  | Michelle Raymond                         |
| 15  | People with Multiple Sclerosis, Victoria |
| 16  | Name withheld                            |
| 17  | Nancye Harrison                          |
| 18  | Dominique Louie                          |
| 19  | Nuray Kaya                               |
| 20  | Joanna Middleton                         |
| 21  | Melbourne East Disability Advocacy       |
| 22  | Jennifer Pretty                          |
| 23  | Behnam Amirpanahi                        |
| 24  | Convo Communications Australia Pty Ltd   |
| 25  | Cheri O'Connell                          |
| 26  | Polio Network Victoria                   |
| 27  | Ngaweeyan Maar-oo                        |
| 28  | Nicole Karidis                           |
| 29  | Council on the Ageing Victoria           |

| No. | Author                                                               |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 30  | Association for Children with a Disability                           |
| 31  | Reinforce Self-Advocacy                                              |
| 32  | Blind Citizens Australia                                             |
| 33  | Confidential                                                         |
| 34  | Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission              |
| 35  | Infrastructure Victoria                                              |
| 36  | Victorian Electoral Commission                                       |
| 37  | Endeavour Foundation                                                 |
| 38  | Rights Information and Advocacy Centre                               |
| 39  | Name withheld                                                        |
| 40  | Women with Disabilities Victoria                                     |
| 41  | Carers Victoria                                                      |
| 42  | Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand                       |
| 43  | Public Transport Users Association                                   |
| 44  | The Australian Institute of Architects                               |
| 45  | Alison Reece                                                         |
| 46  | VMIAC                                                                |
| 47  | Matthew Potocnik                                                     |
| 48  | Youth Disability Advocacy Service and Youth Affairs Council Victoria |
| 49  | Centre for Innovative Justice                                        |
|     | Human Rights Law Centre                                              |
|     | Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services                                  |
|     | Voices for Change                                                    |
| 50  | Dementia Australia                                                   |
| 51  | Marie Jones                                                          |
| 52  | Eve Kinnear                                                          |

## A.3 Public hearings

### 23 March 2026, Melbourne

| Witness           | Position and organisation                                                           |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Todd Wright       | Chief Executive Officer, Convo Communications Australia Pty Ltd                     |
| Lisa Briggs       | Chief Executive Officer, Ngaweeyan Maar-oo                                          |
| Reuben Leigh      | Policy Officer, Ngaweeyan Maar-oo                                                   |
| Martin Turnbull   | Senior Policy Advisor, Council on the Ageing Victoria                               |
| Dr Rose Capp      | Policy Advisor, Dementia Australia                                                  |
| Melanie Chatfield | Policy Officer, Blind Citizens Australia                                            |
| Stefan Slucki     | Board Director and National Policy Committee Chair, Blind Citizens Australia        |
| Joshua Lucey      | Senior Policy and Advocacy Advisor, Endeavour Foundation                            |
| Nicholas Brealey  | Supported Employee, Endeavour Foundation                                            |
| Rita Robert       | Employee Coordinator, Endeavour Foundation                                          |
| Judith Abbott     | Chief Executive Officer, Carers Victoria                                            |
| Lorraine Langley  | Acting General Manager Communications, Policy and Partnerships, Carers Victoria     |
| Simon Matuzelski  | Manager, Innovation and Impact, Centre for Innovative Justice                       |
| Emily Piggott     | Senior Advisor, Centre for Innovative Justice                                       |
| Morgan O'Sullivan | Principal Policy Lead, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service                           |
| Stella Trounce    | Senior Policy Officer, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service                           |
| Reece Blackett    | Academic, University of Technology Sydney, Department of Law                        |
| Ricky M           | Lived experience contributor                                                        |
| Fran              | Member, Voices for Change                                                           |
| Monique Hurley    | Associate Director, The Human Rights Law Centre                                     |
| Sven Bluemmel     | Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission                              |
| Ben Sutherland    | Assistant Commissioner, Event Strategy and Delivery, Victorian Electoral Commission |
| Melea Tarabay     | Chief Communications Officer, Victorian Electoral Commission                        |

### 27 March 2026, Melbourne

| Witness                | Position and organisation                                 |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Saumya Kaushik         | Policy Research Lead, Women with Disabilities Victoria    |
| Dr Trishima Mitra-Kahn | Chief Executive Officer, Women with Disabilities Victoria |



# Appendix B

## About the Committee

### B.1 Committee membership

#### Chair

Dylan Wight, Tarneit (to June 2026<sup>1</sup>)  
Mathew Hilakari, Point Cook (from June 2026<sup>2</sup>)

#### Deputy Chair

Chris Crewther, Mornington

#### Members

Jacinta Ermacora, Western Victoria  
David Ettershank, Western Metropolitan  
Emma Kealy, Lowan  
Nathan Lambert, Preston  
Dr Sarah Mansfield, Western Victoria  
Evan Mulholland, Northern Metropolitan  
Lee Tarlamis OAM, South-Eastern Metropolitan

### B.2 Functions

The Electoral Matters Committee is constituted under section 9A of the *Parliamentary Committees Act 2003*.

The Committee's functions are to inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament on any proposal, matter or thing concerned with:

- a. the conduct of parliamentary elections and referendums in Victoria
- b. the conduct of elections of councillors under the *Local Government Act 2020*
- c. the administration of, or practices associated with, the *Electoral Act 2002* and any other law relating to electoral matters.

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<sup>1</sup> Member and Chair until 2 June 2026.

<sup>2</sup> Member from 2 June 2026. Chair from 15 June 2026.

## B.3 Secretariat

Dr Christopher Gribbin, Executive Officer  
Aileen Clarke, Research Officer  
Dr Chiara De Lazzari, Research Officer  
Sarah Catherall, Committee Administrative Officer  
Nathan Chan Yam, Legal Research Assistant

## B.4 Contact details

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### Phone

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### Web

[parliament.vic.gov.au/emc](http://parliament.vic.gov.au/emc)

This report is available on the Committee's website.

# Appendix C

## Alternative text for figures

The following descriptions of the figures have been added to digital versions of this report. They are designed for people using assistive technologies to read the report.

C

### Chapter 3: How the VEC considers the needs of voters with disability

#### Figure 3.1 Targets for independent wheelchair access, 2022 and 2026

Bar graph showing targets, expressed as percentages of voting centres. The VEC increased the 2026 target for early voting centres to 35% after exceeding the 2022 target of 25%. The target for election-day voting centres remains unchanged at 25% after the VEC fell short of the 2022 target.

#### Figure 3.2 Targets for assisted wheelchair access, 2022 and 2026

Bar graph showing targets, expressed as percentages of voting centres. The target for early voting centres remains unchanged at 55% after the VEC fell short of the 2022 target. The VEC increased the 2026 target for election-day voting centres to 40% after exceeding the 2022 target of 15%.

### Chapter 6: Equipping voting centres

#### Figure 6.1 Standard compartments, low-level voting compartment and table-top voting screen

Photo 1: A row of eight standard voting compartments.

Photo 2: A low-level voting compartment, which is wider than the standard compartment, has a lower writing surface and has space for a wheelchair or chair under the writing surface.

Photo 3: A table-top voting screen sitting on a table. It has a flat writing surface and three vertical sides that form a privacy screen.

#### Figure 6.2 Communication board from the Voters Voice app

Screenshot of the Voters Voice app communication board. It has large icons of common phrases, high contrast colours, simple visual prompts and a space for the user to type.

## Chapter 7: Communication about voting and voting centres

### Figure 7.1 Unmet information needs at the 2022 election, based on respondents to the Committee's survey

Bar graph showing that respondents were most likely to need more information about who or what to vote for (7.8%). Other unmet information needs were about different ways to vote, how to fill out the ballot paper, how to vote with help from voting officials and how to enrol to vote.

### Figure 7.2 Information about the accessibility of voting centres on the VEC's website at the 2022 state election

Screenshot of a webpage listing three election-day voting centres. For each centre, there is an address and an accessibility rating (listed as 'AWA' or 'LNWA').

### Figure 7.3 Voting passport from the City of Bradford, United Kingdom

The two pages of the voting passport. It includes space to record personal details, support needs and preferred support arrangements. Plain language, large text, icons and check boxes are used, as well as photographs and illustrations related to voting and accessibility support.