

**Improving access to the Victorian electoral system
A Disability Action Plan
2016–2019**



VEC

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Electoral Commissioner's foreword

I am pleased to present the Victorian Electoral Commission's Disability Action Plan for 2016–2019.

The Electoral Access Advisory Group (EAAG) has been a feature of the VEC's public consultation in the disability field since 2005 and grew out of a consultation process commenced in 2001. This Group is one of our more active groups, and the tireless efforts of its members have resulted in a number of unique disability initiatives and several pieces of research. So to members past and present, I offer my thanks and sincere appreciation.

Interestingly, one of the issues raised in the beginning is still an issue all these years later; physical access to voting centres. Despite having raised this complex issue in our reports to Parliament at every opportunity and having it included in the Victorian Government's State Disability Action Plan, there has been virtually no traction. The VEC leases voting centres typically for one day every four years. The vast majority of buildings leased are school premises. In a number of electorates we are still unable to find and lease a single fully wheelchair accessible venue. I am aware of recommendations made on this matter by the Parliamentary Committee for Family and Community Development in its Inquiry into Social Inclusion and Victorians with Disability in 2014 and the Victorian Government's response. I very much hope that at long last, some positive progress may be made. To complement these efforts, the VEC has committed to work with councils' metro and rural access workers in identifying new or refurbished buildings that may offer improved wheelchair access.

The other considerable challenge is to continue to ensure that a person with a disability is able to cast a secret, independent vote and expanding access (where appropriate and within legislative guidelines) accordingly.

This document details a number of concrete actions the VEC will take over the next three to four years — some of them quite challenging. However, I am confident that with the assistance of the EAAG, the VEC is well placed to deliver on its commitments.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Warwick Gately". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the name.

Warwick Gately AM
Electoral Commissioner
July 2015

Definitions

Accessibility

Accessibility is the accessible design of products, services and the environment to accommodate the widest range of user needs, preferences and abilities¹. Closely aligned with 'universal design'.

Accessibility initiative

An activity, product or service designed to increase the range of people who can utilise/access it regardless of ability.

Audio files

Typically .mp3 files located on the VEC's website or distributed to people who are blind or who have low vision to explain aspects of voting and elections.

Auslan (Australian Sign Language)

A sign language of the Australian deaf community. It is recognised by the Australian Government as a community language other than English, and the preferred language of the deaf community in policy statements in 1987 and 1991.

Captions (or captioning)

A process of converting audio content into text and displaying that text on a screen.

There are two types of captions:

1. Open Caption: all text will be shown at all times, and captions are permanently embedded on the audio-visual materials.

¹ Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities – United Nations eNable

2. Closed Caption: text is visible only when selected and activated with a switch.

Carers — unpaid (e.g. families and friends)

People who provide **unpaid** support and assistance to a person who has a disability, chronic illness, or who is frail and aged.

Carers — paid

People who are paid to provide support and assistance to people with a disability, chronic illness etc; this may include family members. This group includes personal care workers, education and training workers and nursing care, residential care and community care staff.

CCTV

Closed-circuit television, commonly used for magnification of documents for people with low vision.

Strategic plan

A strategic outlook document, containing the VEC’s operational objectives for the present and future.

Easy English

Information presented that is ‘easy to read’, which may or may not have images. It assists the reader to understand the written information and make more meaningful choices.

Elector

A person whose name appears on the register of electors and who is entitled to vote in elections.

Electoral Access Advisory Group

A group of representatives from peak disability advocacy groups and private individuals.

Electronic voting

The casting of a vote on a computer, which enables large print, high contrast display and instructions and options provided in audio or written format, in English and other languages.

In Victoria, electronic voting is restricted by legislation to State elections only — for those who are blind or who have low vision, those for whom English is a second language, those with literacy issues and those with a motor-skill impairment.

Enrolment

Only electors who are recorded on the register or electors (the roll) are entitled to vote. To be eligible to enrol, a person must be an Australian citizen, over the age of 18 and have been living at their current address for one month or more. Enrolment can be via a printed form or online application.

Disability Act 2006

The Disability Act 2006 (DA) reaffirms and strengthens the rights and responsibilities of persons with a disability and is based on the recognition that support to achieve this aim will be required from government agencies and the community.

DA compliance

Meeting the minimum obligations set out in the Disability Act 2006.

Jumbo pencils

Large circumference pencils with specialised grips for use by people who have trouble using small or thin writing implements.

General Postal Voter

An elector who has difficulty getting to a voting centre on election day can register as a General Postal Voter (GPV). GPVs include people with a disability, prisoners, those in remote communities and people who are 70 years of age or

over. After the close of nominations for an election, GPVs are automatically sent a postal ballot pack.

Magnifying sheets

A4 size magnifying sheets to enlarge voter instructions, ballot papers and group voting tickets in voting centres — an aid for people with low vision.

Mobile voting

Mobile voting facilities are provided to assist electors in such places as hospitals, aged care facilities and nursing homes to cast a vote. The voting is mobile because election officials visit the premises and in some instances, move around the premises — taking portable ballot boxes and voting compartments directly to patients or residents.

Plain English

Also referred to as 'plain language' the aim is to write content for readers in an easily understood form. It is generally seen as short sentences in active voice with common words.

Secret vote

A vote made in secret — first introduced in Victoria in 1856. Sometimes called the 'Australian ballot'.

Senior election official

Trained electoral officer who may be appointed to act as an Election Manager/Returning Officer or Assistant Election Manager/Deputy Returning Officer, for a Parliamentary or local government election respectively.

Telephone voting

The system of using a telephone keypad to record votes in an election.

Universal access/universal service

The design of products, environments, programs and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible.²

Voter

An elector who has cast their vote in an election.

Voting centre/venue

A place where electors can vote in an election. There are five types in State elections:

- early voting centres;
- mobile voting centres;
- election day voting centres
- interstate or
- overseas voting centres.

Voting compartment

A small compartment at the voting centre where people fill in their ballot papers in secret at elections.

Wayfinding

Wayfinding covers all of the ways in which people can navigate from place to place.

² United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability.

About the Victorian Electoral Commission

Department of Premier and Cabinet, within the portfolio of the Special Minister of State. The Commission is not subject to the direction or control of the Minister in respect of the performance of its responsibilities and functions and the exercise of its powers.

The VEC's primary responsibilities include:

- conducting parliamentary, local government, and certain statutory elections
- maintaining the register of Victorian electors
- implementing electoral representation reviews of local councils
- promoting public awareness and understanding of electoral issues.

The VEC's vision is all Victorians actively participating in their democracy.

The VEC's purpose is to deliver high quality, accessible electoral services with innovation, integrity and independence.

The organisation's values underpin all decisions made. The articulated values include:

- Independence — acting with impartiality and integrity;
- Accountability — transparent reporting and effective stewardship of resources;
- Innovation — shaping our future through creativity and leadership;
- Respect — consideration of self, others and the environment; and

- Collaboration — working as a team with partners and communities.

The working environment

Two government agencies are responsible for the conduct of elections in Victoria. The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) is responsible for conducting elections for the Federal Parliament and industrial ballots, and the VEC is responsible for conducting elections and referendums for the Parliament of Victoria. The VEC also conducts local council elections and other elections and polls on a fee-for-service basis in Victoria.

Victorian State elections are held on the last weekend in November every four years. Barring exceptional circumstances, the next State election will be held on Saturday, 24 November 2018.

State elections are conducted within a legal framework established by the *Electoral Act 2002*. The legal environment in which elections are conducted is characterised by compulsory enrolment and compulsory voting.

To be able to vote in an election, an elector must first be on the register of electors (the roll). To be eligible to enrol, an elector must be an Australian citizen over the age of 18 and have been living at their current address for more than one month.

Electors can enrol via a paper-based form or online. Due to data-sharing between government organisations, some electors may find themselves enrolled automatically upon the VEC confirming that they have become eligible or have moved home. All electors in this category are notified by mail to this effect and provided an opportunity to object.

In a State election, most Victorians vote by attending a voting centre on election day. However, Victorians aged over 70, or those who find it difficult to attend a voting centre, may apply to become a 'general postal voter'. This means that they are automatically sent postal voting material at electoral events.

Alternatively, electors unable to attend a voting centre on election day may apply for a postal vote. The VEC also establishes early voting centres during the two weeks prior to election day. More than four million Victorians will vote in the next State election.

The *Local Government Act 1989* establishes the legal framework in which local council elections are conducted. Voting in local council elections is compulsory for residents and encouraged for non-residents and those over 70; however, *all* voters on the City of Melbourne roll must vote. All 79 councils have concurrent elections on the fourth Saturday in October every four years — two years apart from the State elections. The next council elections will be held in October 2016.

Local council elections are conducted as either attendance or postal elections, with the great majority being conducted by post.

Considerations in developing the plan

The legislative framework — disability services

The primary piece of legislation in Victoria in regard to this plan is the *Disability Act 2006* (DA). The purpose of the DA is to reaffirm and strengthen the rights and responsibilities of persons with a disability, and is based on the recognition that this requires support across the government sector and within the community.

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) aims to eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote equal opportunity in Victoria, through the Victorian *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*. The VEOHRC Commissioner for Victoria oversees this legislation. Also at the State level, the VEC observes the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006* (which mirrors the UN Convention on the Rights of People with a Disability 2009).

At the Federal level, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) monitors compliance with the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*.

The VEC has obligations under both Federal and State legislation, regarding minimum standards, and therefore aims to comply with the requirements of both Federal and State legislation. Federal and State legislation operate concurrently, and one or other Act may relate to specific circumstances.

What is a disability?

The definition of "disability" in the DA in relation to a person means:

- (a) a sensory, physical or neurological impairment or acquired brain injury or any combination thereof, which —
 - (i) is, or is likely to be, permanent; and
 - (ii) causes a substantially reduced capacity in at least one of the areas of self-care, self-management, mobility or communication; and
 - (iii) requires significant ongoing or long term episodic support; and
 - (iv) is not related to ageing; or
- (b) an intellectual disability; or
- (c) a developmental delay.

Consultation

Consultation has taken place with the VEC's Electoral Access Advisory Group to report on the delivery of the previous Action Plan; to carry forward any incomplete or continuing initiatives; and also to provide new ideas and suggestions for this Plan.

This Plan also takes into account feedback from other disability organisations not represented on the EAAG, but to which the draft Plan was circulated, as well as Victorian municipal councils. A sincere thank you to all contributors.

The Disability Action Plan is a living document. As such, the VEC will continue to consult through its established Advisory Group (see objective two), as well as working groups and focus groups where necessary. Progress against the plan will be reported to the Advisory Group at each meeting.

Disability Action Plan Policy Statement

(this is also the VEC's diversity policy statement)

Equality, diversity and inclusion are at the heart of how the VEC employs and manages people; engages with voters and stakeholders; and delivers enrolment and voting services.

Plan Goal and Strategies

The goal of this Disability Action Plan is to:

Improve access to enrolment and voting for Victorians living with a disability.

This Disability Action Plan has six key strategies:

1. Improve physical access to enrolment and voting.
2. Develop partnerships with people and peak bodies to facilitate improved access to enrolment and voting.
3. Improve the accessibility and clarity of information on enrolment and voting.
4. Provide for more Victorians to have a secret, independent vote.
5. Improve staff awareness and assistance to people living with a disability.
6. Improve the VEC's capacity to employ and appropriately task people living with a disability.

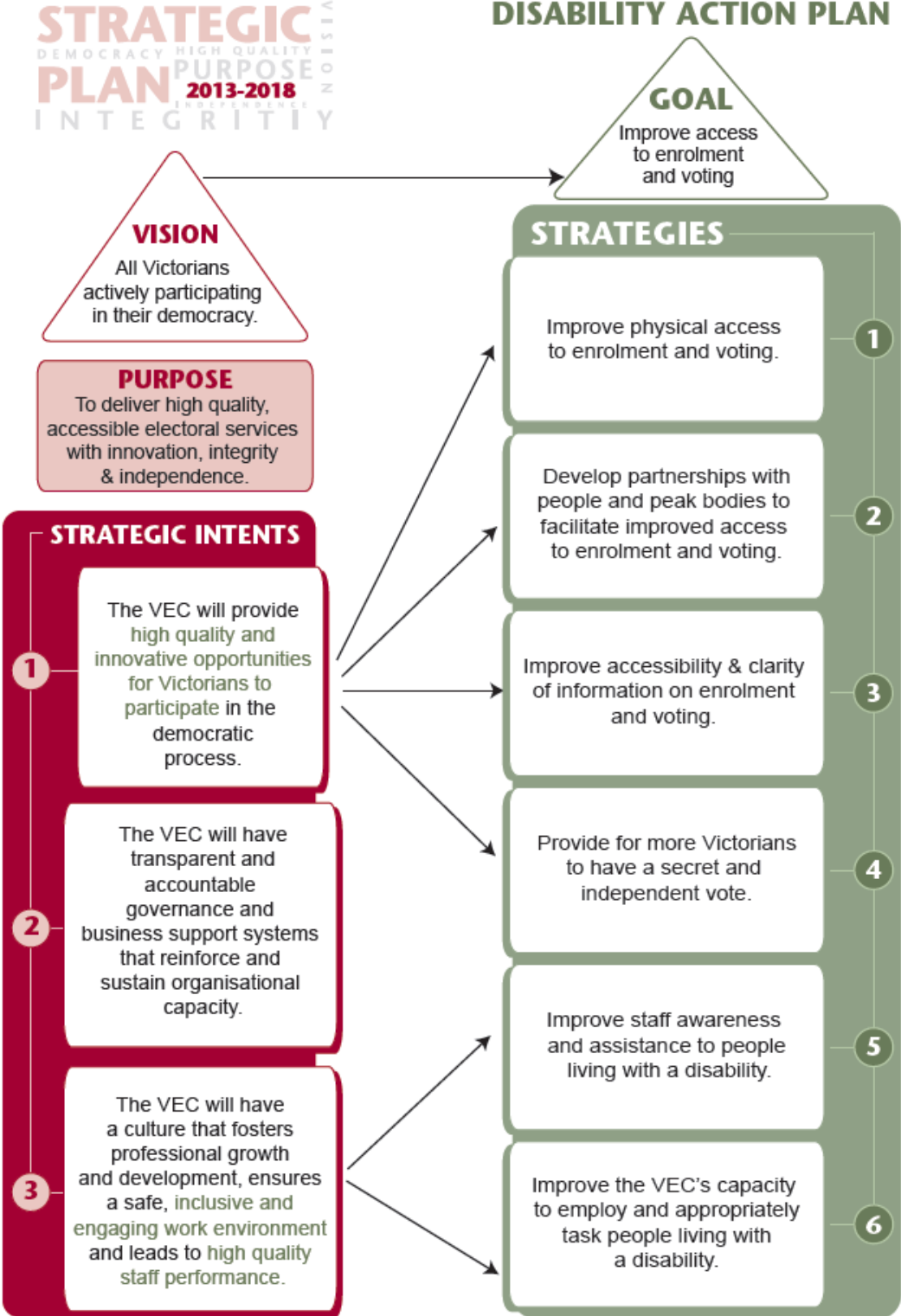
Performance measures have been included for each action relevant to each strategy. In addition, outcome measures have been included for each strategy.

Outcome measures

Strategies	Outcomes
<p>Improve physical access to enrolment and voting</p>	<p>Programs and services are delivered in ways that meet needs of people living with a disability</p> <p>100% of Assisted Wheelchair Access and No Wheelchair Access rated voting centres have access features listed on website</p> <p>All voting centre managers implement an access plan based on access audit results</p>
<p>Develop partnerships with people and peak bodies to facilitate improved access to enrolment and voting</p>	<p>Positive feedback from EAAG members and project partners regarding commitment to accessibility</p> <p>Increased understanding of access and legislative constraints by EAAG and project partners</p>
<p>Improve the accessibility and clarity of information on enrolment and voting</p>	<p>People living with a disability have access to information about enrolment and voting</p> <p>Increased use of the VEC’s website accessibility features and views of the ‘Assistance for Voters’ page of the services, materials and products available to them</p> <p>The VEC embeds the use of multimedia in its communication practices</p>
<p>Provide for more</p>	<p>VEC actively pursues technology to</p>

Strategies	Outcomes
Victorians to have a secret, independent vote	<p>facilitate inclusion and participation</p> <p>Increased awareness amongst community guardians with regard to ensuring the rights of their charges to enrol and vote</p>
Improve staff awareness and assistance to people living with a disability	<p>The VEC culture is inclusive of people living with a disability</p> <p>People living with a disability do not experience discriminatory behaviours and attitudes when enrolling and voting</p> <p>Increased understanding and awareness of diversity and disability amongst VEC employees</p>
Improve the VEC's capacity to employ and appropriately task people living with a disability	<p>VEC workplaces, buildings and facilities are safe and accessible for all people</p> <p>The VEC is seen to be an employer of choice by people living with a disability</p> <p>There is an awareness amongst VEC employees living with a disability that they can request assistance and consideration in the work environment, amenities and tools required to be able to do their job</p> <p>Reasonable adjustments become an embedded part of operational practices</p>

Alignment of this Plan with the VEC's Strategic Plan:



Summary of strategy one: Improve physical access to enrolment and voting

Background

The November 2018 State election will require the VEC to lease approximately 1,800 buildings across the State for use as voting centres. The voting centres need to accommodate the needs of approximately four million Victorian voters. Voting is by attendance, with the option for people to register as a general postal voter or apply for a postal vote at election time, if they find it difficult to attend a voting centre on election day.

The VEC assesses locations as suitable based on many parameters:

- prominent locations that are easily identifiable
- suitable size
- availability
- proximity to, and accessibility of public transport
- accessible parking
- accessibility of venue
- accessible toilet
- cost; and
- uniformity with Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) locations.

For many years, the VEC has incorporated wheelchair accessibility as an objective and assessed locations as either:

- fully wheelchair accessible;
- wheelchair accessible with assistance; or

- no wheelchair access.

At the 2014 State election, the wheelchair accessibility rating was promoted on the VEC's online voting centre lookup facility, along with press advertisements (which listed all voting centres in the State) and a personalised EasyVote Guide (which listed every voting centre and early voting centre in the voter's district).

Feedback from EAAG members after the 2014 State election was that the rating of voting centre accessibility is not particularly helpful, and that the VEC should consider specifying the features of the centre, so that individuals can make their own decisions about whether it will be suitable for them. However, there still needs to be some uniformity with ratings advised by other electoral agencies for the same venues.

The VEC has set a forward looking target of 25% for the total number of fully wheelchair accessible voting centres across all electorates.

There was also feedback that wayfinding information would be useful (e.g. tactile ground surface indicators, signage). However, there was also acknowledgement that wayfinding instructions did not cover important information such as ground surface conditions e.g. potholes that could pose a very real barrier to access.

The accessibility within a voting centre is determined by the layout of the furniture, floor coverings and lighting.

The layout of a venue is very important for the efficient running of the election, particularly in terms of limiting congestion and ensuring adequate privacy and security. The layout of the voting centre considers issues such as ease of entry and egress, and flow-through for people with limited mobility.

The VEC already provides — as standard — at least one specialised lower level voting compartment per voting centre.

The VEC ensures that senior election officials receive training and manuals on the set-up of a voting centre to ensure adequate space in the layout, as well as ensuring that the lower level height voting compartments are used.

Further, the voting centre managers manage their venues in order to best facilitate access for each individual site. This forms part of the voting centre manager's performance assessment.

Further feedback from the EAAG members after the 2014 State election also centred on discontinuing an approach of having some accessibility supercentres³, but instead to focus on best practice accessibility across all voting centres and early voting centres in particular.

Challenge

Physical access to voting centres remains the VEC's primary concern and focus. The VEC continues to receive complaints regarding the lack of suitable fully wheelchair accessible voting centres available.

³ Supercentres were trialled in 2014 as being centres that had all forms of accessibility assistance provided by the VEC — there were six in total.

Strategy 1 – Actions, responsibilities and timelines

1.1 Continue to monitor the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s Accessible Building Program for updates to school buildings identified by the VEC as requiring accessibility works (as part of commitment in the Victorian Government’s Disability Action Plan).

Timeline: Ongoing

Performance measure: Report numbers to Electoral Commissioner and EAAG twice yearly.

Upgrades reported to Election Services immediately upon receipt of details.

Manager responsible: Communication, Education and Research

1.2 Ensure the VEC’s involvement in consultation on the development of the Victorian Government’s Disability Action Plan 2017-2020

Timeline: As per the Victorian Government’s development timeframe (anticipated to be in 2016)

Performance measure: Initiatives captured in the Plan regarding access to public buildings used for voting.

Manager responsible: Communication, Education and Research

- 1.3 Continue to provide training to senior election officials on how to assess voting centres for access provisions and include this information along with any special features in the audit of voting centres.

Timeline: May 2016 and May 2018

Performance measure: Training provided

Special feature info captured and included in Election Management System

Managers responsible: Election Administration/Services

- 1.4 Write to the Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Equality, Minister for Local Government and the Special Minister of State to request notification of any potentially suitable venues that could be used as accessible voting centres for State elections.

Timeline: October 2017

Performance measure: Letters sent

Any potential venues inspected

Manager responsible: Election Services

- 1.5 Consider how best to enhance communication regarding the accessibility of every voting centre and other accessibility initiatives for major electoral events.

Timeline: October 2016 and November 2018

Performance measure: Communication products and VEC website list voting locations with accessibility audit ratings and specific features for individuals to make informed decision about where to vote.

Include voting centre audit tool on VEC website

Manager responsible: Communication, Education and Research

- 1.6 Ensure accessibility audit ratings and specific features of voting centres are extracted from the Election Management System for automation onto website for use by the public and VEC call centre operators.

Timeline: August 2016 and August 2018

Performance measure: Information on website.

Manager responsible: Election Services

- 1.7 Continue to make mobile voting available upon request for Victorian disability agencies.

Timeline: November 2018

Performance measure: The VEC provides mobile voting services upon request for voters with limited access to standard voting services.

Manager responsible: Election Services,
Communication Education and
Research

1.8 Consult with EAAG and other relevant user groups where new technology is to be implemented for trialling and feedback.

Timeline: As appropriate

Performance measure: New technology is trialled with EAAG members and/or user groups where relevant.

Manager responsible: Relevant area manager

1.9 Work with the EAAG members to consider cost effective options that could combine helpful access information about getting to a voting centre location.

Timeline: October 2016

Performance measure: Cost effective options developed for consideration by Electoral Commissioner.

Manager responsible: Election Services,
Communication Education and
Research

1.10 Use email network of council access officers to identify and capture information on new or refurbished buildings within municipal areas that may qualify as wheelchair accessible voting centres (see Action 2.4).

Timeline: At the time of sourcing voting centres for inspection and audit in election years

Performance measure: Requests go out on time
All venues proposed are investigated and if suitable – booked for use

Manager responsible: Election Services,
Communication Education and Research

1.11 VEC to investigate alternative temporary signage for use outside of voting centres to identify the centre and its access rating.

Timeline: Ready for council attendance elections in October 2016.

Performance measure: Signage purchased and used where by-laws permit

Manager responsible: Manager Election Services

1.12 Where possible, work with councils that have portable augmented hearing systems to have them in use at early voting centres.

Timeline: Oct 2016 and Nov 2018.

Performance measure: Hearing systems trialled in early voting systems.

Manager responsible: Manager Election Services

1.13 Conduct testing on new online enrolment feature to ensure it is accessible.

Timeline: September 2015

Performance measure: Accessibility testing conducted.

Any recommendations
addressed asap

Summary of strategy 2: Develop partnerships with people and peak bodies to facilitate improved access to enrolment and voting

Background

The VEC will continue to pursue partnership opportunities with disability groups, in order to actively seek advice on access issues for Victorians with a disability.

The Electoral Access Advisory Group (EAAG) will continue to meet as required to further ongoing consultation with key agencies in the disability sector and individuals with a disability. The EAAG will be an essential forum to provide advice and expert knowledge to the VEC, as well as to continually challenge the VEC to make real improvements with regard to universal access issues and conduct appropriate research.

The VEC is committed to ensuring meaningful consultation by sharing election plans, training materials, and communication and education products with the EAAG.

The EAAG will also be an important mechanism through which the VEC can provide information about the electoral legislative and operational environment to disability groups. Although the EAAG usually meets 2–3 times per year, it will specifically meet in the lead-up to the 2016 council elections and the 2018 State election to review proposed activities, and also play a role in evaluation at their conclusion.

Challenge

Maintaining the membership of the EAAG and ensuring that it represents a diversity of views and types of disability.

Strategy 2 – Actions, responsibilities and timelines

2.1 Develop Terms of Reference for the Electoral Access Advisory Group (EAAG) and outline expectations of members.

Timeline: January 2016 (or prior)

Performance measure: Terms developed, agreed and provided to all EAAG members.

Manager responsible: Communication, Education and Research

2.2 Maintain the EAAG, comprising those groups/agencies that represent people with a disability, or people with a disability, to advise the VEC on relevant issues. Seek involvement of agencies in regional/rural areas where possible and invite the Victorian Disability Advisory Committee and the Victorian Local Government Disability Planners Network to become members.

Timeline: Ongoing

Performance measure: The EAAG meets as required to assist the VEC to implement the Disability Action Plan and advise on disability issues.

Members who retire from the Group are replaced and new members welcomed.

Regional/rural associations, VDAC and VLGDPN are invited to become members.

Manager responsible: Communication, Education and Research

2.3 Where necessary, establish working parties (from the Advisory Group) and focus groups to provide feedback to the VEC.

Timeline: Ongoing

Performance measure: Decisions that may affect people with a disability are canvassed with people who have a disability, and then documented and included in plans where relevant.

Manager responsible: Communication, Education and Research and EAAG members

2.4 Develop an email network, in addition to the EAAG, that includes metro and rural access workers, through which to promote and distribute electoral information and education to Victorians with a disability and to identify possible new FWA voting venues.

Timeline: Have an expanded email network in place by February 2016

Performance measure: Electoral information and education products are distributed via a range of

organisations/roles as appropriate.

Manager responsible: Communication, Education and Research

2.5 Seek feedback from people with a disability and EAAG members, before and after the 2016 council elections and 2018 State election.

Timeline: At least three months either side of both major events.

Performance measure: Meetings held and feedback minuted.

Feedback on the progress against VEC's Disability Action Plan is documented and reported to EAAG.

Manager responsible: Communication, Education and Research

2.6 Review the Disability Action Plan after the 2018 State election, in consultation with the EAAG.

Timeline: June 2019

Performance measure: New Action Plan is developed.

Manager responsible: Communication, Education and Research

2.7 In instances where a State by-election is called and time permits, the VEC will communicate with EAAG members

and relevant municipal access workers – to maximise opportunities to identify accessible venues within the district.

Timeline: As required

Performance measure: State by-election checklist is updated to include EAAG notification (2015)

Alerts are communicated and venues identified/inspected as appropriate.

Manager responsible: Communication, Education and Research

Summary of strategy 3: Improve the accessibility and clarity of information on enrolment and voting

Background

The VEC has a responsibility to provide Victorians with information on the electoral system, as well as demonstrating the relevance of the democratic system to people's lives and their communities. This includes communicating enrolment and voting information during and between elections.

The VEC provides the majority of information to Victorians during election times e.g. how to update their enrolment, when, where and how to vote, and the results of the election.

However, education outreach activities year round ensure that information, education and assistance are provided to groups that face particular barriers to enrolling and voting.

The VEC's website fully complies with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 and won a national accessibility award in 2014 for best Victorian Government website (current site). The site provides text to speech capability, dyslexic font, translated text and audio files for non-English speakers and Easy English conversions of content on key pages. It is also understood that some Victorians may not be able to access the website, so printed material will continue to be produced on enrolment and voting rights and responsibilities. Alternative formats are available upon request.

Research has found that for particular groups, the provision of electoral information alone is not sufficient, and education/outreach strategies are an important component of increasing participation and engagement with the electoral system. The VEC will consider strategies for the delivery of its education/outreach services within the disability community.

Challenge

Ensuring that information services, products and materials are available, simple and clear, and that key community guardians understand and are equipped to promote participation.

Strategy 3 – Actions, responsibilities and timelines

3.1 Regularly review Easy English publications and also other publications that could be converted to Easy English. Consider appropriate format and distribution.

Timeline: Ongoing

Performance measure: Delivery of Easy English publications as requested.

New publications developed are in plain English as a minimum and/or Easy English if required (audience dependent).

Manager responsible: Communication, Education and Research

3.2 Continually update information available on the VEC’s website about assistance available to Victorians with a disability. Also, include key information in Easy English on web pages, with an easy navigation path.

Timeline: Ongoing

Performance measure: Current information included on VEC website outlining assistance available.

Easy English sections included where appropriate.

Manager responsible: Communication, Education and Research

3.3 Develop and implement a capacity building module as part of the VEC’s Education Program for community guardians:

- staff and management of special schools, adult day programs, supported employment workshops, supported residential services and rooming houses;
- council access officers; and
- paid carers.

Timeline: June 2016

Performance measure: Program developed and implemented.

No. of registrations for program

70% confidence levels post delivery

Manager responsible: Communication, Education and Research

3.4 Review approach of providing Auslan information for council and State elections and include any new material on YouTube.

Timeline: June/July 2016 and 2018

Performance measure: Delivery mechanism identified and implemented.

Included on YouTube.

Manager responsible: Communication, Education and Research

3.5 Continue to encourage political parties to consider alternative formats for how-to-vote cards and election information during briefing sessions.

Timeline: October 2018

Performance measure: Included on briefing agenda for all parties.

Manager responsible: Communication, Education and Research

3.6 Develop and distribute a 'how to' manual for candidates and parties to produce accessible election information.

Timeline: December 2015

Performance measure: Manual produced and distributed to all parties and candidates prior to electoral events.

Make manual available online.

Manager responsible: Manager Communication, Education and Research and Manager Election Administration

3.7 Partner with SCOPE and technology provider to explore the feasibility of an app for use on 'bring your own' technology to replace the need for talking boards and Auslan interpreters at voting centres.

Timeline: August 2016 if project proceeds

Performance measure: Feasibility exercise undertaken by December 2015

Manager responsible: Communication, Education and Research

3.8 Ensure all VEC communication staff receive communication training, particularly in Easy English.

Timeline: As required

Performance measure: Training provided within 3 months of commencement

Manager responsible: Communication, Education and Research

3.9 Use closed captioning and audio descriptions as and where appropriate on any DVDs, advertising or digital footage used for information and training purposes.

Timeline: As new footage/material is developed

Performance measure: Captions/descriptions on new footage/materials

Manager responsible: Manager Communication, Education and Research and Manager Election Administration

Summary of strategy 4: Provide for more Victorians to have a secret, independent vote

Background

The blind/low vision and deaf/blind community in particular, along with those in nursing homes/aged care facilities are the primary focus for this objective.

However, the VEC will make every effort to ensure that carers and/or the management of aged care/nursing facilities understand the importance of, and are equipped to support, voting arrangements for those in their care. This will include ensuring each person's vote is secret and cast in accordance with that person's wishes.

Challenge

Ensure that those who require assistance to vote are assisted in an ethical manner.

Strategy 4 – Actions, responsibilities and timelines

- 4.1 Continue to suggest changes to legislation to support more flexible forms of electronically assisted voting.

Timeline: As relevant

Performance measure: Options for improving access to electronically assisted voting facilities are put forward to Parliament.

Manager responsible: Election Administration/Election Services

- 4.2 Develop and implement a capacity building module as part of the VEC's Education Program for paid staff and management of nursing homes/aged care facilities.

Timeline: June–November 2018

Performance measure: Program delivered.

Manager responsible: Communication, Education and Research

- 4.3 Communicate the ramifications of the Power of Attorney Bill due for implementation on 1 September 2015 to relevant VEC staff.

Timeline: August 2015

Performance measure: Bill provisions reviewed, legal advice sought and training provided to relevant VEC staff.

Manager responsible: Communication, Education and Research/Manager Electoral Enrolment

4.4 Review user feedback of the VEC's electronically assisted voting technology and assess other electronic voting systems, with a view to determining future voting options for blind/low vision voters.

Timeline: 2016–2017

Performance measure: Improvements incorporated for roll out in 2018

Manager responsible: Manager Election Services

Summary of strategy 5: Improve staff awareness and assistance to people living with a disability

Background

The type and level of assistance made available to a person at an election has a significant impact on that person's voting experience. Electoral officials are appointed to ensure that the election is run within legislative requirements, as well as providing assistance over the phone or in person at voting centres.

At a State election, the VEC appoints approximately 200 senior election officials (SEO) who work for several months at leased election offices around the State, and around 20,000 staff to work very short-term at voting locations across the State - including on election day.

Senior election officials are given the equivalent to five days training face to face training and a further five days home-study prior to commencing work. Training for SEOs includes a session in dealing with various voter groups, including those who have a disability, those experiencing homelessness, and those whose first language is not English. The training covers being culturally appropriate and sensitive with language, offering assistance or information, giving queue priority and physically guiding a voter through the centre.

The vast majority of voting centre staff are employed on a casual basis for one day, which presents significant challenges in developing appropriate training packages for them. It is important that staff have the competencies required to ensure the highest standards of election integrity and customer service, including an awareness of the particular needs of a variety of electors and that they treat all electors with dignity and respect.

Voting centre staff are always provided with audio visual training materials to ensure they provide appropriate customer

assistance and appreciate the range of needs of people with physical, sensory, cognitive and communication impairments.

The VEC was the first Victorian Government agency to achieve communication access registration with Scope.

Challenge

Ensuring employees understand issues around living with a disability and deliver an excellent standard of service when dealing with employees or voters living with a disability.

Strategy 5 – Actions, responsibilities and timelines

5.1 Ensure key voting centre staff are fully trained and become ambassadors for accessible and independent voting, including electronic voting.

Timeline: A week prior to Early Voting Centre opening for State elections

Performance measure: Training conducted.
Positive feedback on staff assistance in market research

Manager responsible: Election Administration

5.2 Deliver appropriate cultural awareness training to core VEC staff.

Timeline: March 2016 and then annually from that date

Performance measure: Training conducted.
Positive feedback in staff surveys

Manager responsible: Manager Communication, Education and Research

5.3 Incorporate the development and reporting of the Disability Action Plan as part of the VEC’s corporate reporting framework.

Timeline: December 2017

Performance measure: Formal decision documented at Management Group level.

Manager responsible: Electoral Commissioner

- 5.4 Register this plan with the Human Rights Commission to indicate the importance the VEC places on accessibility and the plan's implementation.

Timeline: September 2016

Performance measure: Disability Action Plan registered with the Human Rights Commission

Manager responsible: Manager Communication, Education and Research

- 5.5 The VEC will communicate and promote its Disability Action Plan to core staff and alert them to expectations, achievements and relevant policies relating to the Plan.

Timeline: Ongoing

Performance measure: Staff awareness of plan and related expectations

Relevant item included in at least one general staff meeting per year.

Manager responsible: Manager Communication, Education and Research

5.6 The VEC will aim to have an employee with a disability delivering the training to Senior Election Officials, wherever possible.

Timeline: SEO training for 2016 council elections and 2018 State election

Performance measure: Training delivered by an employee with a disability

Manager responsible: Manager Election Administration, Manager Communication, Education and Research/Election Services

Summary of strategy 6: Improve the VEC's capacity to employ and appropriately task people living with a disability

Background

To complement training strategies, the VEC will continue its focus on employment strategies for people with a disability, as well as actively encouraging people who have 'lived experience' to apply for positions in voting centres.

Consideration will also be given to the type of work and working locations of people with a disability to ensure aids, amenities, fittings and fixtures are appropriate and do not pose a health or safety hazard.

Challenge

People living with a disability should be able to expect to be employed and appropriately tasked, without having their dignity or their health and safety compromised.

Strategy 6 – Actions, responsibilities and timelines

6.1 Maintain recruitment advertising policies to ensure that they attract and retain a workforce that is reflective of community diversity.

- Timeline:** Ongoing
- Performance measure:** Policies are regularly reviewed.
Employment vacancies are advertised through EAAG member networks.
- Manager responsible:** Manager Human Resources

6.2 If a person with a disability meets the inherent requirements of a job, upon employment they should be asked to nominate reasonable adjustments they may require.

- Timeline:** Ongoing
- Performance measure:** Online recruitment register is maintained to ensure that any requirements are captured and implemented upon employment.
- Manager responsible:** Manager Human Resources

6.3 Maintain language used in recruitment register to ensure ease of understanding for people with mild cognitive impairments.

Timeline: March 2018

Performance measure: Recruitment helper reviewed.

Manager responsible: Manager Election Administration

6.4 After the 2018 State election, survey those people with a disability employed regarding how well they were tasked and how well their stated needs were addressed in their employment.

Timeline: December 2018

Performance measure: Survey conducted and results reported to EAAG in debrief.

Manager responsible: Manager Election Administration

Monitoring, reporting and evaluation of this plan

Primary responsibility for the production and implementation of this plan lies with the Communication, Education and Research Branch of the VEC.

Reporting against plan activities will occur in writing at the Electoral Access Advisory Group (EAAG) meetings held each year (usually at least two meetings). In addition, a report will be made available within the VEC's Annual Report each year.

In terms of the evaluation of any specific projects (as opposed to 'business as usual' activities), this is incorporated into the project plan itself (included in closure report) and will be reported to the EAAG as specific agenda items at EAAG meetings. Any improvements or innovations in 'business as usual' activities will also be advised to the EAAG at the next scheduled meeting.

Grievance procedure in relation to this plan

If any member of the public or a VEC employee has a complaint in relation to the content, compliance with or quality of a service, product or materials delivered as part of this plan, they should:

Forward a written complaint (letter, email, or fax) addressed to:

Manager Communication, Education and Research
Disability Action Plan Complaint
Level 11, 530 Collins St, Melbourne VIC 3000

Email: complaints@vec.vic.gov.au

Fax: (03) 9629 8632

If a person is unable to provide a complaint in writing, they should contact the Manager Communication, Education and Research by telephone on (03) 8620 1239.

All complaints will be acknowledged and/or responded to within 24 hours of business day receipt by the Victorian Electoral Commissioner.

In the case where the complainant is dissatisfied with the response of the Electoral Commissioner, the complainant may choose to contact the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission on:

Telephone: 1300 891 848

TTY: 1300 289 621

Fax:

Email: complaints@veohrc.vic.gov.au

The VEC circulates information regarding initiatives, resources and the activities contained within this Disability Action Plan to the following groups/organisations and individuals:

- Action on Disability within Ethnic Communities
- Arthritis Victoria
- Blind Citizens Australia
- Carers Victoria
- Chronic Illness Alliance
- Communication Rights Australia
- disAbility connections (Victoria)
- Disability Justice Advocacy
- Independence Australia
- Motor Neurone Disease Australia
- MS Australia
- National Disability Services
- People with Multiple Sclerosis
- Physical Disability Council Victoria
- SCOPE
- Vicdeaf
- Victorian Disability Advisory Council
- Victorian Local Government Disability Planners Network
- Vision Australia
- Yooralla
- Mr Alan Lane
- Ms Helen Gwilliam
- Ms Kerrie Brindell
- Mr Mark Oswald
- Mr Michael Hollman
- Ms Trish Malowney