PWDA Election Participation & Disability Webinar: Questions and AEC Answers

# Physical access

## Andrew asks:

**“As the President of Physical Disability Australia, my community would like to know how you ‘train’ election workers to understand physical access and all that is involved with a PWD with a physical disability exercising their right to vote. We would also like to see guidelines developed to stop political parties using ACROD bays and footpaths for their party stalls.”**

**Answer:**

The AEC has a responsibility to offer all eligible Australians access to electoral services. It is our goal to ensure electoral participation is accessible and dignified for all electors. The AEC continues to enhance its service offerings to maximise physical accessibility to polling places and provide alternative and assisted voting options. The AEC is also continuing to enhance its website so that voters can find polling places with service offerings and access that best suit their requirements.

Under the provisions of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* political parties must not engage in any of the following activities within 6 metres of an entrance to a polling booth on election day, or at a pre-poll voting office or office of a Divisional Returning Officer during early voting:

* Canvassing for votes
* Soliciting the vote of any elector
* Inducing any elector not to vote for any particular candidate
* Inducing any elector not to vote at the election
* Exhibiting any notice or sign (other than an official notice) relating to an election.

AEC staff, throughout polling, constantly monitor the entrance to polling places to ensure pathways remain clear and that ACROD bays are not being used as party stalls.

The AEC worked with a number of disability organisations to develop a training module for AEC staff to provide dignified assistance to electors. An example of the training can be found [here.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJ8sr9zWw8c&t=57s)

## Tammy asks:

**Last election here in Tasmania, a woman died after being involved in an accident trying to vote at a polling booth where there was a dodgy ramp. Has there been some learning from this?**

**Answer:** In June 2020, the AEC engaged disability experts to review and enhance the AEC’s polling place questionnaire. Relevant accessibility standards and better practice information was used to enable the AEC to better assess the capability of a facility to cater for all types of disabilities and includes additional considerations to support electors with disability.

Detailed information on the accessibility and service offerings available at polling places can be found at <https://www.aec.gov.au/election/voting.htm#start>

## Meaney asks:

**Does the Commonwealth Electoral Act not require polling places to be accessible?**

**Answer:**

The *Commonwealth Electoral Act* does not prescribe what venues are to be leased. The AEC inspects all premises and completes an accessibility assessment. The results are made available on the AEC’s website so voters can see information about the polling place’s accessibility.

## Louisa asks:

**What accommodations should be available if voting in person? I had a very bad experience last time when I tried to request a quiet place to wait. I haven't got round to making a complaint.**

**Answer:** In March 2021, the AEC engaged a service provider to facilitate focus groups with the disability sector to seek perspectives from the community on accessible service offerings that would support electors at polling places. Following the focus groups, the AEC has updated its polling place inspection questionnaire to incorporate information on service offerings that may support electors, including access to quiet rooms.

Detailed information on the accessibility and service offerings available at polling places can be found at <https://www.aec.gov.au/election/voting.htm#start>

## Jodie asks:

**How about the quality of the individual booths for accessibility? I know someone with balance issues and the flimsy cardboard booths/dividers do not support the person. They are worried about knocking the whole lot over by accident and don't feel safe using them. It would be good if every polling place had a sturdier option that still provided privacy (not an open table as offered on a previous occasion where others can see the marking).**

**Answer:**

Following the 2019 federal election, the AEC engaged technical experts and sought input from the AEC’s Disability Advisory Committee on the redesign of voting screens for the 2022 federal election.

The redesigned screens being used for the 2022 federal election have a strengthened table, achieved by both improved cardboard, and a “boxed” fold, supported by side fold-out supports.

Tabletop Voting Screens will also be available at polling places.

## Jen asks:

**I feel like there could easily be an outreach, where an AEC delegate could come round to witness and collect the votes from those who were otherwise unable to make it to a post office drop off point safely.**

**Answer:**

The AEC provides a number different voting options before election day and on election day. This includes:

* In person at an early voting centre - If you can’t get to a polling place on election day you can vote at an early voting centre in Australia.
* If you're overseas - If you’re overseas during the federal election period, you may be able to vote at an overseas voting centre or by post.
* Postal voting - You are eligible to apply for a postal vote if you are unable to get to a polling place on election day.
* AEC mobile voting - AEC Mobile polling teams will visit some residential care facilities and remote areas of Australia. Mobile polling is carried out around Australia during the election period.
* Telephone voting - If you are blind or have low vision, or an elector working in Antarctica (or on a ship that is in transit to or from the Antarctic), you can cast your vote through the AEC’s telephone voting service.
* Voting on election day - You can vote at any polling place in your state or territory on election day. Polling places are usually located at local schools, churches and community halls, or public buildings.
* If on election day you are outside the state or territory where you are enrolled, you will need to vote at an interstate voting centre

## Sangeeta says:

**More jobs need to be created to make voting cards in braille.**

**Answer:**

The AEC makes available, on request, candidates lists for the federal election. Information is available in large print, audio and braille,

## Nancy asks:

**Can a version of ballots with bigger fonts and boxes be available?**

**Answer:**

Unfortunately, this will not be possible for this election.

## Louisa asks:

**To Alex [AEC rep], staff pretty much put the blame on me and suggested I should have requested a postal vote (which wouldn't have been accessible for me). I didn't need the building to have special features. I needed staff to be trained in the needs of people with disabilities. This was prepoll but a very large number of people turned up to the polling centre. Shouldn't people with disabilities be prioritised?**

**Answer:**

The AEC worked with a number of disability organisations to develop a training module for AEC staff to provide dignified assistance to electors. An example of the training can be found [here.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJ8sr9zWw8c&t=57s) Please ask polling staff if you require assistance.

# Alternative voting methods: Phone, postal, online

## Shirley asks:

**If someone wants to do a postal vote but can’t sign, what do they do?**

**Answer:**

Following the 2019 federal election, the AEC enhanced its Online Postal Vote Application system, to maximise usability on a range of devices including desktops, small screen and mobile telephone devices.

Digital Access at Vision Australia was commissioned to undertake an Accessibility Audit and Post-rectification Review on the OPVA form.

Vision Australia provided the AEC with a Statement of Accessibility and verification that the form satisfies all conformance levels of A and AA success criteria of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 specification.

This includes the following accessible features:

* Content is presented and interpreted correctly by assistive technologies, such as screen readers and Braille displays.
* A consistent layout and navigation system is used throughout the application; including visual means of conveying information, indicating an action, or prompting a response such as colour contrast, underlining links within paragraph text.
* Correct heading levels to assist the blind low vision to understand the structure of the page.
* All content and functionality are keyboard accessible.

For the hard copy postal vote application and when completing the postal voting pack, electors are asked to provide a signature or *mark.* Note that a mark is sufficient.

## Nidhi asks:

**What are the telephone voting options for people with low vision & or legally blind in NSW?**

**Answer:**

Telephone voting registration is available on weekdays between 8.30am and 5.30pm AEST from Monday 9 May 2022 until Friday 20 May 2022. It is also available from 8am to 12 midday AEST Saturday 21 May 2022.

To register, call 1800 913 993. You will be asked questions to check your details on the electoral roll, and you will also be asked to choose a PIN.

You will then receive a telephone voting registration number by your choice of an email, SMS, phone call or mail.

## Louisa asks:

**I think iVote has only ever been available for NSW elections. Why isn't there an online voting system for all elections?**

**Answer:**

The Commonwealth Electoral Act does not allow the AEC to offer online voting.

## Craig asks:

**My understanding is that telephone voting is limited to a very narrow group of people such as people who have COVID and need to isolate on election day. For the rest of us, the pathway is likely to be a postal vote. I gather you need to get a postal vote witnessed by another person and then post it - I think this is problematic in the times we find ourselves in where some people are having literally no contact whatsoever due to COVID. There needs to be a completely contact free pathway.**

**Craig also says: It’s ridiculous - a removal of the franchise. I know you need to work within the Act but I'm furious. We've been in COVID for three years. We should have non-contact options for disabled people. We don't all have carers or people who can just drop stuff up to the post office. Could the witnessing be done virtually?**

**Answer:**

Under the Commonwealth Electoral Act, there is no electronic voting option. When completing postal voting packs, the elector and witness need to sign and/or mark. This is done in hard copy.

## Keith says:

**If the internet is so insecure, does this mean the AEC has insufficient resources provided to it to make this possible, is it that politicians want to exclude PWD, or should I just stop internet banking because the internet is so insecure? BIG issues here that need investigation.**

**Answer:**

Under the Commonwealth Electoral Act, there is no electronic voting option.

## Jodie asks:

**How will the AEC reconcile the need for transparency (which is one of the benefits of physical paper ballots the counting of which can be witnessed easier), against the rights of people to cast their votes using technology - some democracy academics feel that any technology reduces transparency.**

**Answer:**

Under the Commonwealth Electoral Act, there is no electronic voting option and the AEC uses physical paper ballots. Telephone voting is available to a limited number of electors.

## Jodie asks:

**Question about confirming status on postal voting - on the AEC site I went to check my enrolment (and I was enrolled as expected) but it did not confirm whether my registration as a postal voter was still current - why is postal voting status not shown? In the end, I went through the process to apply for postal voting again.**

**Answer:**

If eligible, you can pre-register as a general postal voter. This means you will automatically receive ballot papers in the mail after an election has been announced for all federal electoral events.

You are eligible to register as a general postal voter if you are already on the electoral roll and you are unable to attend a polling place because you are:

* enrolled at an address more than 20 km away from a polling place
* a patient at a hospital or nursing home and unable to travel to a polling place
* unable to travel due to being infirm at home
* caring for a seriously ill or infirm person
* serving a prison sentence of less than 3 years
* registered as a silent elector
* unable to attend a polling place due to religious beliefs
* unable to sign your name due to a physical incapacity
* registered as an overseas elector
* a member of the defence force, or a defence civilian serving outside Australia
* an Australian Federal Police officer or staff member serving outside Australia.

## Cathy says:

**I feel telephone voting is good. Perhaps more training for the folk on the phone when working with blind and visual impairment. It would be good to have the keypad using the numbers back.**

**Answer:**

Thank you for your feedback. We will pass this information onto the Call Centre.

# Other access needs

## Louisa says:

**Would be great if the parties could communicate in Easy English. They have enough trouble with Plain English.**

**Answer:**

The AEC does not have authority to enforce how parties communicate with electors

## Keith asks:

**What supports does the AEC provide for people with Intellectual Disability and other cognitive disabilities?**

**Answer:**

If you need assistance to vote at a polling place, you can ask someone to help you. Polling place staff are trained to assist you or you can nominate any person (other than a candidate) to assist. This could be a friend, relative or another person. If you do not nominate someone, then the polling official in charge may provide assistance.

If you cannot get out of the car and the polling official in charge is satisfied that you cannot enter the polling place, someone may bring the ballot papers to you.

In March 2021, the AEC engaged a service provider to facilitate focus groups with the disability sector to seek opinions on accessible service offerings that would support electors at polling places. Following the focus groups, the AEC has updated its polling place inspection questionnaire to incorporate information on service offerings that may support electors including access to quiet rooms.

Detailed information on the accessibility and service offerings available at polling places can be found at <https://www.aec.gov.au/election/voting.htm#start>

Electoral participation information is also provided in Easy Read <https://www.aec.gov.au/assistance/>

# Working on the election

## Gareth says:

**Due to ongoing access issues this has created major barriers for individuals living with disability to apply to work on Election Day.**

## Jodie says:

**On AEC employment - I also got the impression that there were no part time hours available and someone else who did sign up for full day work was pressured to work longer hours than they were physically prepared to do. There needs to be roles that can be shared so people can contribute what they can even if it is only a couple of hours at a time.**

**Answer:**

Thank you. We will pass this information onto the Temporary Election Workforce team for future event consideration. The AEC works to ensure our Temporary Election Workforce is representative of the community and we aim to have people with disability represented in our workforce.

# General questions

## Mark asks:

**Will the AEC have the information pre-election day on facilities for people with disabilities?**

**Answer:**

Information can be found [here.](http://www.dev.aec.local/assistance/)

## Sangeeta asks:

**Does AEC have a disability committee for this?**

**Answer:**

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

The aim of the Committee is to enable the AEC to promote greater accessibility, inclusion and participation in the electoral process by people with disability.

The role of the Committee is to:

* seek feedback from relevant Australian peak disability organisations on the

programmes and services that the AEC delivers,

* understand new and emerging issues of concern for people with disability,
* collaborate with our Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand (ECANZ)

partners in the delivery of accessible electoral services across jurisdictions,

* learn about initiatives being developed in other sectors for people with disability, and
* seek the assistance of Committee members in promoting relevant AEC initiatives to their members.