

Disability Inclusion Action Plan

2024



Acknowledgment of Country

The NSW Electoral Commission acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout New South Wales and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. Our head office is located on Gadigal land. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

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Background

About the NSW Electoral Commission

Our purpose is to deliver trusted and independent systems, processes, oversight and engagement that support democracy in New South Wales.

Our vision is to maintain confidence in the integrity of the democratic process and make it easy for people to understand and participate.

What we do

The NSW Electoral Commission is central to delivering democracy with integrity and fairness in New South Wales.

We conduct, regulate, and report on general elections and by-elections for the Parliament of New South Wales. We regulate and provide electoral services for local government elections. We also conduct the NSW Aboriginal Land Council elections and elections for registered clubs, statutory boards and state-registered industrial organisations (if engaged to do so). Our work includes:

- running independent, fair and accessible elections
 - providing transparent processes and guidance to assist political participants (including candidates, parties, elected members, donors, third-party campaigners and lobbyists) to comply with their obligations
 - publishing political donation and expenditure disclosures and registers of political parties, candidates' agents, third-party campaigners and third-party lobbyists
 - engaging with the public to make it easier for people to understand and participate in the democratic process
 - investigating possible offences and enforcing breaches of electoral, funding and disclosure, and lobbying laws
 - administering public funding schemes for the benefit of parliamentary parties, State candidates and independent Members of Parliament.
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Policy context and strategic alignment

The *Disability Inclusion Act 2014* (NSW) is designed to improve the lives of people with disability. According to Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 Census data, more than five per cent of Australians need help with day-to-day activities due to disability. The NSW Electoral Commission has a responsibility to provide accessible electoral services to citizens of New South Wales that experience barriers to accessing democracy due to their disability.

The purpose of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) is to implement a set of actions to improve access to elections for people with disability. The NSW Electoral Commission develops a DIAP aligned with the NSW Disability Inclusion Action Plan Guidelines and the [NSW Disability Inclusion Plan 2021-2025 published by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice](#). Although not required by the *Disability Inclusion Act 2014* to have a DIAP, the NSW Electoral Commission implements one to encompass best practices to create sustainable inclusion for our people, our customers, our suppliers and our community.

The NSW Disability Inclusion Action Plan framework has four focus areas that set out how the NSW Government will improve the lives of people with disability: (1) developing positive community attitudes and behaviours, (2) creating liveable communities, (3) supporting access to meaningful employment, and (4) improving access to mainstream services through better systems and processes.

This Disability Inclusion Action Plan supports the delivery of the NSW Electoral Commission's *Strategic Plan*.

Development of 2024 interim plan

The NSW Electoral Commission aims to update its DIAP every three years. For 2023, a one-year interim plan was developed to ensure the outcomes of several inter-dependencies, such as the 2023 NSW State election, and the Electoral Commission's technology-assisted voting review, could be incorporated into future plans.

See the Appendix for the overview of the 2023 interim plan.

A new interim plan has been developed for 2024, with the purpose of covering the delivery of the 2024 Local Government elections scheduled for September. Establishing a 2024 interim plan ensures the NSW Electoral Commission can align a future three-year plan, covering 2025-28, to inter-dependencies such as request for information (RFI) for technology assisted voting and the next NSW Electoral Commission Strategic Plan. Further to this, the Electoral Commission has requested additional funding for resourcing its stakeholder engagement. The outcome of this request will inform the design and scale of future DIAPs.

Governance and consultation

When developing its DIAP, the Electoral Commission engages with the Equal Access to Democracy (Disability) Reference Group to discuss key focus areas. This provides an opportunity to reflect on the barriers faced by people with disability and to determine priorities for the future. The NSW Electoral Commission's Equal Access to Democracy Disability Reference Group includes representatives from peak bodies, government and non-government organisations. The group provides valuable guidance and supports the NSW Electoral Commission to reduce barriers to electoral participation.

Equal Access to Democracy Disability Reference Group members

The NSW Electoral Commission is grateful for the ongoing support of its Equal Access to Democracy (EAD) Disability Reference Group members, which presently include:

- Vision Australia
- Blind Citizens Australia
- National Ethnic Disability Alliance
- NSW Council for Intellectual Disability
- Local Government NSW
- Guide Dogs NSW
- Physical Disability Council of NSW
- Mental Health Coordinating Council
- Synapse NSW
- Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association
- Carers NSW
- People with Disability Australia
- First Peoples Disability Network
- DeafConnect

Action Plan

1. Increasing disability awareness and supporting positive attitudes and behaviours

Actions

- Provide disability awareness information and education, such as inclusive language and accessibility options, to staff working at elections.
- Develop a Disability Inclusion Plan 2025-27, engaging all public facing business units of the NSW Electoral Commission.
 - Engage and consult with people with disability at all stages of future planning, including for the Disability Inclusion Plan 2025-27.
- Communicate advice and feedback provided by the Equal Access to Democracy Disability Reference Group to relevant teams and divisions.
- Share and promote information about disability inclusion actions, planning and implementation through NSW Electoral Commission internal communication channels.
- Make the NSW Public Service Commission's disability awareness training module available to all staff.

How we will measure success

- Disability awareness information is available to staff working at elections.
- A Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2025-28 is developed, and an internal working group is established.
- Advice and feedback from the Equal Access to Democracy Disability Reference Group is documented and shared with relevant teams.
- Future planning includes wide consultation and collaboration with people with disability, peak organisations, and advocacy groups.
- Disability awareness is included in internal communication plans.

Focus area

- Positive community attitudes and behaviours.
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2. Access to voting and elections

Actions

- Continue to provide accurate information on the accessibility of voting centres on our website.
 - NSW Electoral Commission to conduct a review of the number and location of early voting centres in NSW prior to the 2024 Local Government elections to maintain levels of accessibility.
- Ensure non-attendance voting options are accessible for people who are blind or have low vision.
 - Provide access to operator assisted telephone voting for people who are blind or have low vision for the 2024 Local Government elections.
 - Involve people who are blind or have low vision in the testing phases of telephone assisted voting, prior to the 2024 Local Government elections, and enhance the service based on feedback.
- Continue to provide maxi pens, magnifying sheets and accessible voting screens at voting centres.
- Increase voting support to pre-pandemic level for people living in retirement homes, hospitals, and similar facilities to participate in elections (declared facilities).
- Raise awareness of voting options available for the 2024 Local Government elections, through messages in mainstream media and through networks for people with disability.
- Engage with the Equal Access to Democracy Disability Reference Group for the NSW Electoral Commissions technology assisted voting request for information (RFI).

How we will measure success

- Information on the accessibility ratings of voting centres is available on our website.
- Operator assisted telephone voting is available and used by people who are blind or have low vision.
- Declared facility voting opportunities are increased to pre-pandemic levels.
- Awareness of assistive tools available at voting centres, such as maxi pens and magnifying sheets and Auslan interpreting.
- Interested Equal Access to Democracy Disability Reference Group members participate and have views included in the NSW Electoral Commissioner's technology assisted voting review.

Focus area

- Creating liveable communities (accessible elections and services).
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3. Accessible information and systems

Actions

- Continue to develop easy read guides on key information about voting and elections.
- Provide candidate information for 2024 Local Government elections in accessible formats.
- Engage a relevant community organisation to develop targeted video content on elections that is clear and easy to understand.
- Provide audio description on awareness videos for the 2024 Local Government elections.
- Continue to enhance the user-centred digital experience by regularly testing our website and online services in line with Level AA of WCAC 2.1 guidelines.
- Continue to provide support to access information where it is not available in an accessible format.
- Produce public documents, reports and reviews in accessible formats.
- Publish a community resources page on the NSW Electoral Commission's website.
- Provide Auslan interpreter services for elections and produce Auslan videos with key information on voting and elections.
- Provide communication supports, such as Auslan interpreters, when required for Equal Access to Democracy Disability Reference Group meetings.
- Develop relevant community resources, such as the factsheet for people with disability and mobility restrictions, and:
 - Provide resources to Equal Access to Democracy Disability Reference Group for review, feedback and distribution
 - Work with community and government organisations to distribute resources and information in accessible formats.

How we will measure success

- Easy read guides and a video on the 2024 Local Government elections is produced and distributed to target communities.
- Audio described versions of awareness videos are produced and distributed for the 2024 Local Government elections.
- Maintain regular testing of our websites and online services in line Level AA of WCAC 2.1 guidelines and provide support for people if they encounter accessibility issues.
- All new reports published by the NSW Electoral Commission are available in accessible formats.
- Community resources are available and shared on our website.
- Auslan interpretation is offered and used for the 2024 Local Government elections.

Focus area

- Improving access to mainstream services through **systems and processes**.
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4. The election workforce reflects the population of New South Wales.

Actions

- Continue to employ a diverse election workforce to reflect the population of New South Wales, by:
 - consulting with the Equal Access to Democracy Disability Reference Group to determine distribution channels for recruitment opportunities
 - continue to include the NSW Electoral Commission diversity statement in job advertisements
 - supporting election managers to recruit diverse staff for voting centres, including people with no prior election experience
 - reaching out to existing and new disability stakeholders to promote the election work opportunities.
- Provide workplace adjustments where possible.
- Actively develop respectful and welcoming work cultures.

How we will measure success

- Election managers implement the diversity, inclusion and accessibility program when undertaking recruitment.
- The election workforce reflects the population of New South Wales.

Focus area

- Supporting access to meaningful employment.
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Appendix

Disability Inclusion Interim Action Plan 2023 achievements

The NSW Electoral Commission seeks to deliver elections that meet the diverse access needs of voters across the State. The following information reports on the services provided for people living with disability at the NSW State election in March 2023. Further information regarding services provided can be found in the [2023 NSW State election report](#).

1. Improving access to voting and elections

The NSW Electoral Commission continued to publish on its website the accessibility level of every voting centre; that is, fully wheelchair accessible, partially accessible (assisted access) and not accessible (no wheelchair access). This enabled people with disability to assess the venue most suitable for them. A wheelchair accessible voting screen, maxi pens and magnifiers were provided at every voting centre during the 2023 NSW State election.

For the 2023 NSW State election:

1. 26 per cent of voting centres were fully accessible – no change from the 2021 Local Government elections, and an increase on the 2019 NSW State election (19 per cent).
2. 48 per cent of early voting centres were fully accessible – an increase from 2021, however a decrease from 2019 (50 per cent) due to the extra number of venues required.
3. 41 per cent of election managers' offices were fully accessible – a decrease from 2021 (44 per cent), however an increase from 2019 (34 per cent)

The NSW Electoral Commission offered an Auslan interpreter service via Skype, for early voting Saturday, 18 March (9am-5pm) and election day Saturday, 25 March 2023 (8am-6pm). Two Auslan interpreters were available each day, covering the opening hours of voting centres. Three calls were received on election day. The Electoral Commission could also be contacted via the National Relay Service (NRS) during standard office hours: Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm.

For the 2023 NSW State election, the NSW Electoral Commission continued to provide and support the use of telephone assisted voting for electors who are blind or have low vision.

2. Accessible information and systems

For the 2023 NSW State election, the NSW Electoral Commission worked with Deaf Connect to develop an Auslan election videos series. These videos covered key information on the election, how and where to vote, postal voting and how to fill out your ballot papers. These videos were included on our 'Assistance in your language – Auslan' page, published 31 January 2023. Topics included:

- general information about the 2023 NSW State election
- postal voting
- voting in person
- filling out Legislative Assembly ballot papers
- filling out Legislative Council ballot papers.

Based on advice from Vision Australia, audio description opening messages were included on all five awareness videos. These were published on the Electoral Commission's YouTube channel and community resources web page.

Deaf Connect also developed a reminder video in Auslan about election day Saturday, 25 March, including information about the Auslan interpreter service available through Skype. These resources were shared through their networks.

Two easy read guides were produced for the 2023 NSW State election. These resources were developed by the Council for Intellectual Disability (CID):

- [Your right to vote – 2023 NSW State election](#)
- [Homelessness and voting](#)

The Council for Intellectual Disability also produced the [Your right to vote video](#), a resource tailored for people with intellectual disability about enrolling, voting and the 2023 NSW State election.

The NSW Electoral Commission’s website was tested to WCAG 2.1 Level AA compliance. While some content and online services were not yet fully compliant to this level, support was available in those instances.

3. Diversity of the election workforce to reflect the population of New South Wales.

For the 2023 NSW State election, 742 staff advised that they were living with disability (a 27 per cent increase from the 2019 NSW State election), 141 of whom required reasonable adjustments to the workplace.

Election day staff	2023 State election (election day officials only)	2019 State election
People with disability	2.57%	2.56%

Employment opportunities for the 2023 NSW State election were shared with Equal Access to Democracy Disability Reference Group members.

The following diversity statement is included in all NSW Electoral Commission job advertisements: *The NSW Electoral Commission embraces diversity and inclusion and is committed to creating a workplace that reflects the population of New South Wales. All candidates are supplied with contact details for adjustments to the recruitment process.*

4. Equal Access to Democracy Disability Reference Group engagement

For the 2023 NSW State election, the NSW Electoral Commission consulted with EAD Disability Reference Group. These consultations formed the basis of the planning for the election.

The reference group provide guidance, information, and feedback to the NSW Electoral Commission in relation to services for electors and to ensure that accessibility barriers to these services are identified and solutions to these barriers are reflected in the programs and services. This included ensuring that a range of communication formats and channels are used to inform people about enrolment, elections, and voting.

During 2023 the NSW Electoral Commission held three formal meetings with the reference group.

Review into Technology Assisted Voting (TAV)

In November 2022, the Electoral Commissioner published an [issues and questions paper](#) to:

- consider options for technology assisted voting in New South Wales for the 2027 NSW State general election and subsequent state and local government elections and by-elections.
- invite submissions from the stakeholders to inform the Technology Assisted Voting review.

Following the [interim report](#) published in August 2023, the NSW Electoral Commission released its [final report](#) of the review into technology assisted voting in November 2023.

The Commission thanks all stakeholders, including members of the EAD Disability reference group, who provided submissions for the review.

The final report outlines 22 findings that will inform the future direction of TAV in NSW for the 2027 NSW State election.

2023 NSW State election evaluation

An external research provider was engaged to [undertake research on behalf of the NSW Electoral Commission](#) (Fiftyfive5).

Qualitative research using semi-structured telephone interviews with 20 voters who used telephone voting, 20 voters who used postal voting and 20 voters who live with disability were conducted to obtain insights into:

- opportunities for service improvement
- understanding the information needs and election experience for people living with disability in NSW

Qualitative research indicated satisfaction was generally high for people living with disability, driven by five key factors:

- overall positive voting experience (when nothing goes wrong satisfaction is high, regardless of the voting method used)
- familiarity (electors using a familiar voting method know what to expect and therefore tend to view the experience positively)
- ease (for many electors in the surveyed groups, the process was simple, straightforward, and easy to follow)
- independence (for electors living with disability, having voting methods that offer independence is viewed favourably)
- convenience (having a variety of voting options enabled electors to choose the most convenient method).

Quantitative surveys of 105 electors who identified as living with disability demonstrated an overall net satisfaction (81%) of the election process.

The findings from the 2023 State Government election evaluation will be used to inform future action plans.