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BLIND CITIZENS AUSTRALIA POLICY STATEMENT



EDUCATION FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE
BLIND OR VISION IMPAIRED
Adopted April 1999

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1 PREAMBLE

- 1.1 Blind Citizens Australia is the united voice of blind and vision impaired Australians. Our mission is to achieve equity and equality by our empowerment, by promoting positive community attitudes, and by striving for high quality and accessible services which meet our needs.

- 1.2 This Policy Statement presents the considered and representative views of blind people with respect to their education and draws on their experience as students, parents and educators.
- 1.3 This Policy Statement consists of core principles applying to each sector of education and action points for the key stakeholders in the provision of education to blind people. It is intended that the core principles of the Policy Statement will be given effect by the various stakeholders implementing the action points recommended for them.
- 1.4 This Policy Statement is founded on the recognition of the educational rights of blind people as expressed in relevant international instruments, and Commonwealth, State and Territory Disability Discrimination Laws.

2 TERMINOLOGY

- 2.1 Except where otherwise stated, the term 'blind' includes both people who are totally blind and people who are vision impaired.
- 2.2 Except where otherwise stated the term 'parent' includes both parents and guardians.
- 2.3 'Educational setting' includes pre-school, primary, secondary and, tertiary education, also vocational and community education, delivered either on or off campus.
- 2.4 'Educational institution' includes a government or non-government institution that provides courses of study.
- 2.5 'Education authority' includes:
- a) A government or private body involved in curricula development or other aspects of education;
 - b) Boards of Study and University Admission Centres.
- 2.6 'Accessible format' includes large print, braille, audio and e-text formats.
- 2.7 'Preferred format' refers to the provision of material in an accessible format of the student's choice.
- 2.8 'Assistive technology' includes equipment which provides voice, large print, braille or tactile output from a computer.

- 2.9 'Blindness curriculum' means the curriculum of instruction in blindness specific skills which a blind student requires in order to participate successfully in education.
- 2.10 'Core curriculum' means the required components completed by all students undertaking a course of study.
- 2.11 'Support services' include: instruction in the blindness specific curriculum, provision of accessible format material, itinerant/special needs teachers and assistance from disability support staff.
- 2.12 'Blindness specific skills' means skills in effective vision use, braille literacy, use of tactile graphics, orientation and mobility, assistive technology, daily living skills, self-advocacy, interpersonal skills and study skills.

3 PRINCIPLES

3.1 ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

- 3.1.1 Each blind student is entitled to a comprehensive and ongoing assessment of his/her general and blindness specific educational needs. Such an assessment should be conducted as soon as possible after diagnosis of or change in vision impairment. Any reports or documentation produced following assessment should be available to the student and/or parents.
- 3.1.2 In the case of children, an educational needs

assessment must be conducted at least annually during pre-school, primary and secondary education.

- 3.1.3 In the case of students in post-secondary education, an educational needs assessment should be offered at the commencement of each year of the course, or for specific units of a course (if required).
- 3.1.4 An educational needs assessment should be available to children entering and participating in early intervention programs.
- 3.1.5 All educational needs assessments must be conducted by persons with appropriate qualifications and/or experience in the field of blindness and vision impairment. Persons are regarded as having appropriate qualifications to conduct educational assessments if:
- a) They have recognised qualifications in education or rehabilitation studies which have included specific blindness and vision impairment units;
- OR
- b) They have substantial experience in the field of education or rehabilitation of blind people.

3.2 CHOICE IN EDUCATION

- 3.2.1 Blind people should have the right to exercise educational choices on a non-discriminatory basis.
- 3.2.2 The educational choices of blind people should not be limited by discriminatory assumptions or

restrictions on available blindness support services. Such choice should not be limited by geographic location, choice of educational institution or course delivery mode, for example government or non-government setting, specialist or mainstream facility.

3.2.3 The educational opportunities available to blind people should not be restricted by: discriminatory assumptions, stereotypes about blindness and its implications for a person's academic success and personal safety or well-being. Blind people have the same rights as others to attempt courses of study. They have the right to experience the full range of learning opportunities and extra-curricular activities and to succeed or fail according to their personal ability.

3.2.4 The option of education in a specialist blindness school should be available to those students for whom this option is considered appropriate and where such special schools exist. The appropriateness of education in a special school setting should be determined by an informed decision made by the student and/or parents.

3.3 RESOURCING OF BLINDNESS SPECIFIC SERVICES AND SUPPORT SERVICES

3.3.1 Blindness specific services and support services should be resourced at a sufficient level to enable blind people to achieve their educational goals and to exercise educational choices on a non-discriminatory basis.

3.3.2 Procedures for the allocation of funds and services

to students should enable a student/parent to know their entitlements prior to the start of an academic year. Criteria and assessment measures should be framed and administered in a way which enables submissions for the allocation of funds and services to be made on the basis of a student's individual needs.

- 3.3.3 Where an application for funding is successful, funds should be provided in a suitable time period which enables the purchase of necessary services and equipment at the commencement of the funding period.

3.4 ADMISSION AND ENROLMENT

- 3.4.1 Blind people who meet the criteria for admission or enrolment in a course of study should be admitted and enrolled on the same basis as other students. Re-admission and re-enrolment and review of admission and enrolment should be on the same basis as for other students.
- 3.4.2 Information about the educational institution including its facilities, courses of study, enrolment procedures, administrative rules and student assistance services, should be available in accessible formats at the same time that it is available to other students/parents.
- 3.4.3 Educational institutions should provide assistance to blind students to complete practical tasks associated with the enrolment process, for example filling out the required forms.

- 3.4.4 Where an entrance examination is required for a course, examination methods and assessment procedures should enable a blind person to sit for the exam and be assessed under conditions which take account of his/her disability and are non-discriminatory.
- 3.4.5 Interviews for admission to an educational institution or to a course of study should be conducted in accordance with selection criteria that are non-discriminatory. Interviews should focus on a person's ability to satisfy the selection criteria and not on a person's disability so as to preserve the dignity of the interviewee.

3.5 CORE CURRICULUM

- 3.5.1 Blind students should have non-discriminatory access to core curriculum, extra-curricular activities, support services, work experience, sport and recreation and should not be excluded from these activities by reason of their blindness.
- 3.5.2 Where modifications or adaptations to the core curriculum or extra-curricular activities are required by reason of a person's blindness, these should be made in consultation with the student/parent and/or an advocate and/or a professional with appropriate qualifications in the field of vision impairment.
- 3.5.3 Core curriculum instruction, assessment material and material for extra-curricular activities should be available to blind students at the same time that it is available to other students and in their preferred format.

- 3.5.4 Material in accessible format includes prescribed textbooks, class notes, handouts and required reference material. This material should be available at the same time that it is available to other students.
- 3.5.5 All prescribed textbooks should be available in braille or in e-text form, suitable for braille production.
- 3.5.6 Information placed on web sites should be presented in compliance with accepted guidelines for web access for people who are blind. However, the placement of material on a web site should not be regarded as a substitute for providing that information to a blind student in his/her preferred format.

3.6 SPECIALIST BLINDNESS CURRICULUM

- 3.6.1 In addition to the core curriculum, blind students should have access to instruction in the blindness specific skills they require to participate in education.
- 3.6.2 Instruction in blindness specific skills should be provided by staff with appropriate training and professional qualifications in these skills. Blind people should not have to make do with instruction in these vital skills by unqualified people.

3.7 ASSESSMENT AND EXAMINATIONS

- 3.7.1 Assessment and examination materials, including material relating to administrative aspects of the assessment process, should be available to blind students in their preferred format at the same time that it is made available to other students.
- 3.7.2 Assessment procedures should include provision for reasonable accommodation, taking into account a person's specific needs and the preservation of academic standards.

3.8 SUPPORT SERVICES

- 3.8.1 Students should have access to sufficient hours of support services from qualified persons enabling them to complete the core curriculum, participate in extra-curricular activities and acquire the necessary blindness specific skills.

3.9 BRAILLE LITERACY

- 3.9.1 Educators should:
Recognise braille as the key to literacy for blind students;
Give braille instruction a high priority;
Encourage its use by blind students.
- 3.9.2 Instruction in braille should be provided by teachers who possess qualifications in braille instruction, which are recognised by the Australian Braille Authority.
- 3.9.3 Access to course materials and information relating to the education of blind students should be available in braille.

- 3.9.4 Instruction in braille should be available to vision impaired students who wish to learn braille or whose parents request this.
- 3.9.5 Educators should take care to identify and encourage the use of braille for students with deteriorating or expected to deteriorate eye conditions.
- 3.9.6 Educators should not regard e-text and audio as viable alternatives for a braille user when instructing a student in key literacy skills.
- 3.10 ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY**
- 3.10.1 The blindness curriculum for a student should include instruction in the appropriate use of assistive technology.
- 3.10.2 Students should have access to funding to acquire and upgrade assistive technology.
- 3.10.3 Any assistive technology used by blind students must be compatible with technology used in the educational institution.
- 3.10.4 Information and support services including choice of appropriate equipment, compatibility, repairs and maintenance for assistive technology should be available to the student and staff within the educational institution.

3.11 PHYSICAL ACCESS AND PERSONAL SAFETY

- 3.11.1 Educational institutions should maintain an accessible environment enabling a blind student to move around the campus with safety. In implementing this policy, educational institutions should have regard to documents such as the Advisory Notes on Access to Premises published by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.
- 3.11.2 An accessible environment includes:
Signage which is easily read by vision impaired people and which also contains tactile or braille characters;
Adequate lighting;
Use of colour or luminance contrasting;
Tactile ground surface indicators;
Clearly defined accessible pathways.
- 3.11.3 Educational institutions should implement procedures to ensure the safety of blind students, staff and visitors in the event of renovations or the requirement for an emergency evacuation.

3.12 PEER SUPPORT

- 3.12.1 Opportunities should be provided for students to gain peer support, role modelling and mentoring from other people who are blind. Children in primary and secondary education should be encouraged to participate in activities with students of their own age and to develop peer support networks with other blind people.

4 ACTION POINTS FOR KEY STAKEHOLDERS

4.1 BLIND CITIZENS AUSTRALIA MEMBERS

- 4.1.1 Take an active interest in issues affecting the provision of education to blind people.
- 4.1.2 Bring education issues before the Branches, Organisational Members and the National Policy and Development Council of Blind Citizens Australia.
- 4.1.3 Respond to requests for information about the education of blind people from: people who are blind and their parents, staff of educational institutions, blindness agencies, and professional associations.

4.2 BLIND CITIZENS AUSTRALIA BRANCHES AND ORGANISATIONAL MEMBERS

- 4.2.1 Serve as the focal point for discussion and action at the local level on the implementation of this Policy Statement and on education issues.
- 4.2.2 Refer education issues of a local nature to an appropriate Blind Citizens Australia co-ordination committee or if appropriate to the National Policy and Development Council of Blind Citizens Australia.
- 4.2.3 Promote awareness among members of education issues and the resources available to them as individuals.

4.3 BLIND CITIZENS AUSTRALIA NATIONAL POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

- 4.3.1 Communicate and promote this Policy Statement to Blind Citizens Australia, Members, Branches, Organisational Members, Service Provision Agencies, professional and student associations, State, Territory and Commonwealth education authorities and work with those organisations for its adoption.
- 4.3.2 Monitor changes in educational opportunities for blind people.
- 4.3.3 Act on specific educational issues which come to its attention, support action by Blind Citizens Australia Members, Branches and Organisational Members or refer the matter to an appropriate body eg. South Pacific Educators: Vision Impairment or the Tertiary Education Disability Council (Australia).
- 4.3.4 Foster membership of Blind Citizens Australia by students, teachers, disability services staff and other interested persons.
- 4.3.5 Encourage students, teachers, disability services staff and other interested persons to gain membership of professional organisations such as the South Pacific Educators: Vision Impairment.
- 4.3.6 Foster the development of parent support networks.
- 4.3.7 Use Commonwealth and State/Territory Disability Discrimination laws to achieve access to education for blind people and implement the core principles in this policy.
- 4.3.8 Work for the development of a standard under the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992

(DDA) with respect to education.

4.4 STUDENTS

- 4.4.1 Bring issues affecting their education to the attention of Blind Citizens Australia.
- 4.4.2 Take advantage of opportunities for interaction and peer support from other staff and students.
- 4.4.3 Develop blindness specific skills and peer support networks.

4.5 PARENTS

- 4.5.1 Through Blind Citizens Australia, develop networks to share experiences, broaden educational options and improve the quality and availability of support services.
- 4.5.2 Encourage children to be open to interaction with other blind students and to consider a broad range of core curriculum subjects and blindness curriculum.

4.6 EDUCATORS

- 4.6.1 when providing instruction in blindness curriculum, ensure appropriate professional qualifications in the relevant subject are possessed.
- 4.6.2 When providing instruction in blindness curriculum, encourage students to raise their expectations,

develop their blindness specific skills and foster positive attitudes to their identity and to their ability to succeed in education.

- 4.6.3 When providing instruction to blind students in general curriculum subjects, blindness awareness training should be undertaken.
- 4.6.4 Be open to curriculum modifications, flexible curriculum design and alternative methods of instruction to facilitate learning by blind students.
- 4.6.5 Provide course instruction material and assessment information to a student or his/her service provider, so that it can be produced and made available at the same time that it is available to other students and in his/her preferred format.
- 4.6.6 Consult with blind students, parents, support staff, blindness agencies and professional associations as to ways of meeting the educational needs of blind students.

4.7 SERVICE PROVISION AGENCIES

- 4.7.1 Provide students and/or parents with training and information to enable them to make informed educational choices.
- 4.7.2 Ensure that accessible format material provided is made available in time to be used in the course of study. This material should be prepared in accordance with the adopted standard for that particular format.
- 4.7.3 Ensure that costs for education and services

provided are not at a level which sets a barrier to accessing education.

- 4.7.4 Consider and act on the needs of students with deteriorating vision and assist them and their educational institution to make the necessary adjustments to achieve their educational goals.
- 4.7.5 Give special attention to the educational support of people who are blind and who also have other disabilities.
- 4.7.6 Set a positive example to blind students and parents by increasing the number of appropriately skilled blind people involved in the delivery of educational support services.
- 4.7.7 Develop opportunities for blind people to participate in the training of educators and other professionals who are responsible for teaching blindness specific skills.
- 4.7.8 Implement programs for providing blind students with access to funds for the acquisition of assistive technology required by them for their education.

4.8 EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

- 4.8.1 Observe the principles of this Policy.
- 4.8.2 Develop individual education action plans for students and implement the recommendations/changes identified in an educational needs assessment.
- 4.8.3 Establish links with Blind Citizens Australia,

blindness agencies and educational authorities to share information and ensure a co-ordinated approach to services.

- 4.8.4 Ensure that blind students are included and supported in work experience, practical components of courses and in career development programs.
- 4.8.5 Give consideration to the needs of students with deteriorating vision and assist them to adapt in their current educational environment by modifying support services where necessary.
- 4.8.6 Give special attention to the needs of people who are blind and who have other disabilities.
- 4.8.7 Develop Action Plans under the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) to improve students accessibility to courses of study, other services and facilities. The experience and expertise of blind students and staff should be used in developing such Action Plans.
- 4.8.8 Institute a program to provide up-to-date assistive technological resources for blind students and commit sufficient resources to maintain and upgrade such a program.
- 4.8.9 Provide study rooms for blind students containing up-to-date assistive equipment and general reference material in accessible formats. Blind students should have input into decisions relating to the use of such study rooms and the purchase of assistive equipment and reference material.
- 4.8.10 Ensure that staff are acquainted with current copyright laws relating to the copying of material for students with print disabilities so that blind

students do not experience delays in access to course study and reference material on the basis of incorrect application of these laws.

- 4.8.11 Provide blind students and other students with disabilities access to library facilities, borrowing rights, including reciprocal rights and equipment, which acknowledges the additional time that might be required to utilise those facilities due to disability.
- 4.8.12 Where a student is experiencing difficulties, the educational institution is responsible for ensuring that these are discussed in an open manner with the student. Subject to the student's agreement, these discussions could also include parents, advocates and/or staff from blindness agencies.

4.9 PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

- 4.9.1 Encourage members to adopt this Policy Statement and work with Blind Citizens Australia for its implementation.
- 4.9.2 Consult Blind Citizens Australia, its Branches and Organisational Members when considering matters relating to the education of blind students.
- 4.9.3 Enable blind members to fully participate in all activities by providing relevant information in accessible formats and conducting activities in a non-discriminatory fashion.
- 4.9.4 Offer members professional development opportunities aimed at increasing knowledge of educational and technological issues relevant to

blind students.

4.10 COMMONWEALTH, STATE AND TERRITORY GOVERNMENTS

- 4.10.1 Work together to develop an effective DDA Standard with respect to education.
- 4.10.2 Provide the authorities responsible for the provision of support services to blind students, educational institutions, blindness agencies and individuals, with sufficient funds to ensure ongoing non-discriminatory access to education for blind students irrespective of geographic location or educational setting.
- 4.10.3 Recognise and resource the role of special schools for blind students as:
 - Providers of education for students for whom education in an integrated setting is not the chosen option;
 - Centres of excellence in the provision of education for blind students;
 - Providers of support services and expertise to students in integrated educational settings.