

Submission to the Electoral Matters Committee inquiry into voting centre accessibility

February 2026



Acknowledgement of Country

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this nation, as the traditional custodians of the lands on which the VEC works and where we conduct our business. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past, present, and emerging. The VEC is committed to honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas and their rich contribution to society.

Version history

This document was prepared for submission to the Parliament of Victoria's Electoral Matters Committee in February 2026.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Disability access and inclusion.....	4
3. Selection of voting centres.....	8
4. Accessibility measures at voting centres.....	13
5. Communication and outreach	19
6. Alternative voting options	23
Appendices.....	28

1. Introduction

1.1 About us

The Victorian Electoral Commission (**VEC**) is an independent and impartial statutory authority established under the *Electoral Act 2002* (Vic) (**Electoral Act**). We conduct:

- state elections
- local government elections
- certain statutory elections and polls
- fee-for-service elections
- ward boundary reviews.

We are also responsible for:

- considering and reporting to the Minister responsible on issues affecting the conduct of parliamentary elections, including administrative issues requiring legislative remedy
- regulating obligations under the Electoral Act
- preparing electoral rolls for parliamentary elections, voters' rolls for local government elections, jury lists, and providing enrolment information to members of Parliament and registered political parties
- ensuring the enrolment of eligible voters
- administering and regulating Victoria's political funding and donation laws
- contributing to public understanding and awareness of elections and electoral matters through information and education programs
- conducting and promoting research into electoral matters that are in the public interest
- providing administrative and technical support to state electoral boundary reviews and local government electoral structure reviews, and leading local government ward boundary reviews
- reporting to Parliament on our activities.

Sven Bluemmel was appointed as Victoria's Electoral Commissioner by the Governor in Council in 2023 and Dana Fleming was appointed Deputy Electoral Commissioner by the Governor in Council in 2021.

1.2 About this submission

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the Electoral Matters Committee (**Committee**) inquiry into voting centre accessibility and look forward to informing the Committee's findings and recommendations. Our submission provides information about:

- our guiding principles and overarching approach to disability access and inclusion, including our Disability Education and Engagement Plan and Electoral Access Advisory Group (see **2. Disability access and inclusion**)
- our processes for selecting venues to be used as voting centres, including the criteria we consider, challenges we face securing suitable venues, and our plans for the 2026 state election (see **3. Selection of voting centres**)
- steps we're already taking to provide more accessible voting experiences at voting centres, including adjustments to the physical environment, supports provided by our election staff, and our plans to establish a low sensory voting option for voters in every district across Victoria (see **4. Accessibility measures at voting centres**)

- the way we communicate with Victorians and disability communities about the voting options available to them and what to expect at different voting centres (see **5. Communication and outreach**)
- alternative voting options available to voters who face barriers to voting at an in-person voting centre (see **6. Alternative voting options**).

Throughout this submission, we make 6 recommendations for the Committee's attention. Four of these reiterate recommendations which we have previously made or supported in past submissions and reports, and 2 are new recommendations.

No.	Recommendation	Page
1	We reiterate our recommendation to amend section 67 of the Electoral Act to require suitable publicly funded venues to be available for use as early voting centres. ¹ This recommendation was supported by the Committee and supported in principle by the Victorian Government. ² No associated amendment to the Electoral Act has been introduced yet. We are again facing a challenging commercial market in securing suitable venues for use as voting centres for the 2026 state election and we encourage the Committee to reiterate this recommendation.	12
2	We reiterate our previous recommendation that the Electoral Act should be amended to include a provision that a voter may not appoint a person to assist them to vote if that person is a scrutineer. ³ Given the implied political interest of scrutineers, this will help ensure that voters are not subject to undue political influence if they require assistance to vote.	15
3	We reiterate our support for the Committee's previous recommendation to amend the Electoral Act to provide the VEC with the ability to apply an extended campaigning exclusion zone at specified voting centres and for specified times so that we can provide dedicated periods of low sensory voting. ⁴ This would strengthen the existing model by reducing factors which reduce the accessibility of an in person voting experience for neurodivergent voters and their carers.	17
4	We reiterate our support for the Committee's position that mobile voting should be available for a period prior to the opening of early voting in order to support priority communities with an accessible voting service. ⁵ We recommend that any future changes to electoral legislation preserve the ability for communities to access mobile voting prior to the commencement of early voting.	24

¹ VEC submission to the Electoral Matters Committee inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 state election, recommendation 1 (p. 15); VEC Report to Parliament on the 2022 state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election, recommendation 2 (p. 22).

² Volume 2 of the Electoral Matters Committee report on the conduct of the 2022 state election, recommendation 12 (p. 71); Victorian Government response to recommendations made by the Electoral Matters Committee in its report on its inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 state election, p. 6.

³ VEC Report to Parliament on the 2022 state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election, technical recommendation 10 (p. 111).

⁴ Volume 2 of the Electoral Matters Committee report on the conduct of the 2022 state election, recommendation 27 (p. 118); VEC response to Electoral Matters Committee report on its inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election, p. 41.

⁵ Electoral Matters Committee report on the 2025 Prahran and Werribee by-elections, recommendation 6 (p. 29); Electoral Matters Committee, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, 20 June 2025, 41 (Dana Fleming, Deputy Electoral Commissioner).

No.	Recommendation	Page
5	We recommend expanding the general postal voter eligibility criteria in the Electoral Act to align with the federal eligibility criteria for people with, or caring for somebody with, a disability, in order to reduce barriers to participation which arise from eligibility criteria differing between state and federal elections. This would reduce the likelihood of electors missing out on voting due to confusion about general postal voter status and would support our engagement with the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) to improve alignment between the Victorian register of electors and the federal electoral roll.	25
6	<p>We reiterate our recommendation that the Electoral Regulations 2022 (Vic) should be amended to expand the classes of electors eligible for electronic assisted voting to include those who experience the greatest barriers to participation,⁶ including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interstate or overseas electors • electors who are unwell, infirm or caring for someone • electors experiencing homelessness or family or domestic violence • neurodivergent electors • Australian Antarctic Territory electors. 	27

In our Report to Parliament on the 2022 state election, we made 16 commitments for immediate areas to improve operations at future elections.⁷ Some of these commitments are relevant to voting centre accessibility, and an overview of our progress on those relevant commitments is provided at **Appendix 1** to this submission.

1.3 Prospect of adopting recommendations

We note the Committee is due to report on its inquiry by no later than 30 September 2026. By this date, operational delivery of the 2026 state election will be underway and our venue selection and operational planning will be significantly progressed. This reporting deadline gives very little prospect of the VEC being able to effectively consider and implement any recommendations made by the Committee in time for the election.

The Committee may wish to consider making recommendations with a focus on implementation at future elections, including the 2030 state election and any Parliamentary by-elections which occur during the intervening period.

⁶ VEC Report to Parliament on the 2022 state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election, recommendation 6 (p. 65).

⁷ VEC Report to Parliament on the 2022 state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election, p. 10.

2. Disability access and inclusion

2.1 Principles for accessible voting venues

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

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

Under the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic), people with disabilities have the right to participate fully in public life, including through access to voting.⁸ Our obligation to service this right informs how we select, assess, and operate voting centres, and requires us to identify and address barriers that may prevent people with disability from enrolling to vote, attending a voting centre, or participating confidently in elections.

Disability access and inclusion are embedded across our planning and service delivery, including decisions affecting voting centres. We recognise that people with disability may experience barriers that are:

- physical
- sensory
- cognitive
- communicative
- neurological
- systemic.

These barriers may be compounded by other factors, such as caring responsibilities, language background, or socio-economic disadvantage. Addressing venue accessibility therefore requires both practical, site-based measures and a broader organisational approach to inclusion.

In response, we focus our efforts on 3 overarching areas:

- **Access** by ensuring electoral processes, information, and facilities are usable and inclusive.
- **Knowledge and confidence** by supporting people with disabilities to understand electoral processes and feel confident participating in them.
- **Relationships, visibility, and representation** by engaging with people with lived experience of disability and the broader disability sector, and by increasing the visibility and representation of people with disabilities within our organisation and public materials.

These principles underpin our disability-related strategies, governance arrangements, and ongoing improvement work.

⁸ See section 18 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic).

2.2 Disability Education and Engagement Plan

Our [Disability Education and Engagement Plan 2025–27](#) (DEEP), launched in May 2025, provides the strategic framework guiding how we support access and inclusion for people with disability across the electoral lifecycle. The plan recognises the fact that more than 20% of Victorians are reported to have a disability, and that standard voting processes can present barriers for some members of the community.

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

The DEEP aligns with the *Disability Act 2006* (Vic), the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth), the Victorian Government's *Inclusive Victoria* framework, and broader human rights obligations, including the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic).

The DEEP was developed through extensive engagement with Victorian communities and in close collaboration with our Electoral Access Advisory Group (EAAG). We continue to work with the EAAG throughout the life of the plan to guide implementation and assess progress.

Focus areas and actions

Access

Actions to improve access include:

- reviewing accessible enrolment and voting options
- evaluating building access checklists and reasonable adjustments at voting centres and election offices
- expanding the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower initiative
- developing venue access guides for select voting centres
- supporting people impacted by the 'cognitive impairment' provision in legislation
- addressing barriers faced by parents, carers, and workers who support people to vote.

Knowledge and confidence

To increase understanding and confidence, we have committed to:

- recruiting, training, and supporting people with lived experience of disability to become VEC democracy ambassadors
- delivering tailored electoral education in specialist schools
- developing and promoting accessible electoral education resources for people with disabilities.

Relationships, visibility, and representation

The plan prioritises:

- maintaining strong relationships with the EAAG and disability stakeholders
- reviewing customer feedback related to accessibility
- building the capacity of carers and support workers to support people to vote
- reviewing the accessibility of recruitment and training processes for election staff

- delivering partnership programs with disability service providers
- increasing the representation of people with disabilities in our campaigns and publications.

Outcomes and evaluation

By the conclusion of the DEEP in 2027, we aim to achieve:

- more accessible and inclusive voting options available to a wider range of voters
- reduced reports of accessibility issues during and after elections
- increased enrolment and participation by people with disability
- stronger partnerships with disability organisations
- improved understanding of legislative provisions affecting voters with disability.

Progress on the DEEP is overseen by the Electoral Commissioner, our Executive Leadership Committee, and staff across the organisation. We invite feedback on our progress from the EAAG twice a year and publish a summary of progress in our annual reports. Monitoring and evaluation are guided by a dedicated program logic and reporting framework.

To date, the DEEP has informed the preparation of detailed training content and delivery resources for disability sector staff, an inclusive suite of accessible election materials to support diverse learning and communication needs, professional learning for VEC staff to strengthen their knowledge of neurodiversity in the workplace, and the development of site inspections and planning for low sensory voting. Many of the outcomes of the DEEP will be delivered statewide at the 2026 state election.

2.3 Electoral Access Advisory Group

The EAAG provides independent advice, feedback, and community perspectives to support accessible and inclusive electoral participation for people with disability. It includes people with lived experience of disability, advocates, and representatives from disability organisations and statutory bodies. Current organisations represented on the EAAG include:

- Scope
- Vision Australia
- Blind Citizens Australia
- Amaze
- Yooralla
- Carers Victoria
- VALID – Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability
- Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
- Action on Disability within Ethnic Communities
- Brotherhood of St. Laurence.

We engage with the EAAG through regular structured meetings, supported by targeted consultations on specific projects, election planning activities, and post-election reviews. Our engagement is intended to be iterative and consultative, allowing advice to shape policy development, operational planning, and service delivery.

Feedback we receive from the EAAG is documented and considered by relevant business areas, informing practical changes where feasible. This includes refining accessibility criteria, adjusting communications approaches, and identifying risks or barriers that may not be evident through compliance-based assessments alone.

We also close the feedback loop by reporting back to the EAAG on how advice has been used, what changes have been implemented, and where constraints remain. For example, we have reported back to the EAAG on the incorporation of its feedback on venue criteria into our audit checklist and selection process, and discussed the limitations created by venue availability and legislative requirements. This approach supports transparency and reinforces the EAAG's role as an active contributor to decision-making.

Co-design consultation in practice

In relation to voting centres, we have increasingly shifted from a compliance-only model to a more user-centred approach informed by consultation and lived experience.

Examples include:

- **Venue accessibility assessment** (see **3.1 Selection criteria**)
EAAG feedback has informed how accessibility features are prioritised and assessed, including step-free access, internal layout, lighting, signage, queuing space, and proximity to public transport.
- **Voting centre information** (see **5.2 Outreach initiatives**)
Consultation has shaped how accessibility information is communicated, enabling voters to make informed choices.
- **Voting experience design** (see **4.2 Supports available**)
Consultation has informed staff awareness, inclusive service delivery, and the interaction between voters and election staff.

In 2025, carers shared lived-experience insights in supporting the design of voter education session resources, user testing and social media campaigns, in raising awareness of people with disability and accessing electoral processes. We developed a social media campaign promoted during Carers' Week on VEC-owned channels, which generated more than 10,000 engagements. This campaign showcased carers and people with disability talking about their experiences participating in the electoral process for the first time and using accessible electoral resources.

2.4 Continuous improvement approach

Improving disability access and inclusion is an ongoing process. Our future work will continue to build on the outcomes of the DEEP, feedback from voters and stakeholders, and insights we gain through evaluation and post-election review processes.

Our key priorities include embedding accessibility earlier in election planning, strengthening evidence-based decision-making, expanding our partnerships with disability organisations, and improving the consistency of experiences across voting channels and locations. We will continue to engage with people with disability and their representative organisations to ensure future initiatives respond effectively to lived experience and emerging needs.

3. Selection of voting centres

The identification, procurement and preparation of voting centres is a critical component of election planning, recognising the role that suitable and compliant venues play in supporting efficient and inclusive electoral processes for the community. In appointing voting centres for an election, we are required to ensure that electors are provided with an accessible service that facilitates the opportunity to vote.⁹

The venue selection process begins up to 18 months before a general election, or in a matter of weeks for by-elections, with commercial and public leases spanning different rental periods depending on the category of each venue (e.g. early voting centre, election day voting centre). We have a reciprocal arrangement with the Australian Electoral Commission (**AEC**) and, in some cases, sub-lease AEC election venues that have been secured on a longer-term basis. It is important to recognise that our voting centres are also workplaces for our staff, and this factors into our decision making.

3.1 Selection criteria

We apply a comprehensive set of criteria in the process of selecting venues. For the 2026 state election, we are identifying and shortlisting potential election sites through a broad search across Victoria which is primarily based on local voting estimates and, where possible, favours previously used sites for a consistent voting experience. Procurement then involves a 2-stage process beginning with an initial site screening by an inspection team, followed by an evaluation of shortlisted venues by our venue assessment panel prior to final selection. The venue assessment panel is an internal, cross-functional advisory panel responsible for assessing the suitability and compliance of proposed election venues with regard to a range of factors.

Venue assessment checklist

We undertake venue inspections using an internal screening form that evaluates a wide range of operational and accessibility factors to determine the suitability of a site, including:

- cost considerations
- floor and spatial capacity
- location and pathway
- building entrance and ingress
- internal facilities and amenities
- external doors and ramps
- security risks
- logistics access and delivery pathways
- storage and disposal area
- parking availability
- utility connections
- access to networks and telecommunications
- access to amenities by campaigners.

Accessibility requirements feature across some of these factors, for example:

- proximity to public transport services

⁹ See section 65(3) of the *Electoral Act 2002 (Vic)* (**Electoral Act**)

- accessible parking, pathways, entrances, doors, ramps, handrails, toilets and, if needed, lifts
- availability of audible and Braille features
- adequate internal and external lighting
- reasonably free from hazards and risks.

We also consider a range of factors to uphold political neutrality, including:

- avoiding venues with political affiliations
- proximity to offices of Members of Parliament
- government or political signage.

Leasing environment

Even with fixed timeframes for Victorian general elections, sourcing a large number of appropriate venues remains difficult due to limited availability and budget considerations. Challenges also differ by rental types—commercial venues are expensive and typically hesitant to accept short-term leases, while community venues are more affordable but may be unable to host early voting centres for multiple weeks.

This is further complicated by a highly competitive rental market in many areas, which makes it rare to find comparable venues at the same time to compare and choose the more appropriate one having regard to all desired factors (including accessibility features). In some situations, holding out for a better or comparable option can lead us to lose an available venue and may jeopardise our ability to service local communities.

Additionally, the time of year impacts upon our ability to lease venues. Access to landlords and the shutdown of local councils, schools and other government agencies over the holiday period limits our ability to carry out venue selection during December and January.

In practice, we often must account for practical constraints and choose venues that satisfy most, not all, operational and accessibility criteria.

Wheelchair accessibility ratings

In addition to the selection criteria above, we conduct a separate assessment of wheelchair access to assign an accessibility rating for each election site:

- independent wheelchair access (**IWA**)
- assisted wheelchair access (**AWA**)
- limited or no wheelchair access (**LNWA**).

This rating is based on a detailed accessibility audit for voters with wheelchairs and/or mobility impairments, which examines the following factors:

- designated accessible parking spaces, with clear signage, a firm surface and free from hazards
- accessible kerb ramps and continuous pathways to the building entrance, including a firm surface and free from hazards
- accessible entrance and doorways providing clear opening and circulation space
- accessible corridors and voter flow areas clear of hazards and obstacles, with ample space for circulation
- if required, accessible lifts with clear opening, audible announcements, and Braille and tactile numbering.

Our wheelchair accessibility audit checklist is a critical tool which ensures that our venue selection is compliant with relevant legislation and access standards. The checklist is regularly audited by an accredited access consultant and is the mechanism through which we ensure up-to-date compliance of the venues we use as voting centres in accordance with the:

- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth)
- National Construction Code
- Australian Standards AS 1428.1:2021, AS 2890.6:2022 and AS 1735.12:2020.

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

Modifications and upgrades

In some cases, we upgrade venues to achieve higher wheelchair accessibility standards. Even then, modifications are limited by cost, consent of commercial landlords, and the length of time we have access to the site, noting that in these circumstances we bear the cost of the upgrade. Modifications may include installing actuators on doors, thereby turning manual opening doors into automatic doors, or fitting temporary ramps.

Broadly, we cannot often secure voting sites early enough to complete upgrades across multiple locations in time for election delivery. In particular, most election day voting centres are sites we only operate for a single day and it is not feasible to make any modifications to these venues. This is another reason why availability of already accessible venues is so important.

3.2 Ongoing and future improvements

2026 state election

Wheelchair accessibility targets

For the 2026 state election, we have set the following wheelchair accessibility targets for each category of election venue:

- 35% of venues rated as IWA and 55% as AWA for early voting centres
- 25% of venues rated as IWA and 40% as AWA for election day voting centres.

This will represent a considerable uplift from the 2022 state election, where 32% of early voting centres were rated as IWA and 49% were rated as AWA, while 21% of election day voting centres were rated as IWA and 37% were rated as AWA. Our 2026 state election targets represent our planned uplift to the overall wheelchair accessibility of election venues. Though multiple factors need to be balanced when venues do not satisfy all requirements, wheelchair accessibility will continue to be a priority target for the upcoming election.

Voting footprint

For the 2026 state election, we are expanding and diversifying our voting footprint (the planned number, type and distribution of election venues used to deliver an election across all districts and regions). While the changes are broad and intended to benefit all Victorian voters and provide opportunities for streamlining election operations, they will also have benefits for the overall accessibility of voting centres at the election.

- **Number of early voting centres**

We are increasing the number of early voting centres to approximately 220, an increase from 155 at the 2022 state election. As explained above, early voting centres have higher targets for wheelchair accessibility, which means this expansion will significantly benefit voters with wheelchair access needs. The longer use of these venues may also make it more feasible to make modifications to improve accessibility (noting this is still not always a possibility).

- **Joint early voting centres**

We will set up 100 of the early voting centres as joint early voting centres servicing multiple districts, reducing queue times caused by out-of-district voting that pose additional problems for voters who have difficulty standing for long periods of time.

- **Use of early voting centres on election day**

For the first time, we will also be converting all venues used as early voting centres to also operate as election day voting centres, providing a consistent voter experience while also having a positive impact on the overall availability of more accessible sites on election day.

- **Low sensory mobile voting centres**

In each district, we will establish a low sensory mobile voting centre to operate on Tuesday 17 November from 10 am to 4 pm. For these sites, we will ensure high standards of physical accessibility and tailor sensory conditions to support neurodivergent voters to cast an in person vote in a more accessible environment. More information is provided in **4.3 Low sensory voting centres**.

Future opportunities

Harmonisation of accessibility standards across jurisdictions

Voters expect to have a consistent voting experience across elections, and there is a significant overlap of venues used as voting centres between state and federal elections. We acknowledge that the distinction between the AEC and VEC is not well understood by all voters and a voter's experience at an election may impact their perception of all elections.

While there are many commonalities in our approaches, there are also some differences in the methodologies between our audit-based ratings and the ratings used by the AEC. Both jurisdictions operate methodologies that meet and exceed disability access standards, but they are also informed by varying local contexts.

We are continuing to work with the AEC to improve alignment between our approaches and support accessible voting experiences regardless of the type of election.

Use of suitable publicly funded venues for early voting

We note that there is an opportunity to further improve accessibility for voters by expanding the availability of publicly funded community venues for elections. We have previously noted our challenges with sourcing suitable venues for use as early voting centres, and noted that our ability to access 'prescribed premises' under section 67 of the Electoral Act for use as

voting centres only applies to election day. 'Prescribed premises' are defined as schools or buildings that are not used exclusively for religious services and are supported wholly or in part by public funds.

For example, community facilities owned and operated by local councils are ideal for the placement of early voting centres and in many cases already meet high standards of accessibility, yet there is no obligation for local councils or their facility operators to make these venues available to us for the early voting period. This also creates a significant cost disparity between using a publicly funded venue as an early voting centre as opposed to an election day voting centre, noting that at the 2026 state election all early voting centres will also become election day voting centres.

Recommendation 1

We reiterate our recommendation to amend section 67 of the Electoral Act to require suitable publicly funded venues to be available for use as early voting centres.¹⁰ This recommendation was supported by the Committee and supported in principle by the Victorian Government.¹¹ No associated amendment to the Electoral Act has been introduced yet. We are again facing a challenging commercial market in securing suitable venues for use as voting centres for the 2026 state election and we encourage the Committee to reiterate this recommendation.

¹⁰ *VEC submission to the Electoral Matters Committee inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 state election*, recommendation 1 (p. 15); *VEC Report to Parliament on the 2022 state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, recommendation 2 (p. 22).

¹¹ Volume 2 of the *Electoral Matters Committee report on the conduct of the 2022 state election*, recommendation 12 (p. 71); Victorian Government response to recommendations made by the Electoral Matters Committee in its report on its inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 state election, p. 6.

4. Accessibility measures at voting centres

In addition to selecting or upgrading venues satisfying broader accessibility standards and ratings, we provide a range of on-site facilities, resources, accommodations and reasonable adjustments that enable voters to cast their votes without obstacles.

4.1 Physical environment

Signage

We display wayfinding and informational signage to assist voters to access the information, resources and guidance they require to navigate voting centres and engage with the voting process safely, comfortably and efficiently. We aim for our signage to be clear, meaningful and accessible to assist voters to identify entrances and exits, locate additional resources and services, and progress through the stages of the voting process. We prioritise the use of plain language and recognisable images for voters with vision, language and literacy needs.

Where practical, external signage includes A-frame signs and large banners identifying the building as a voting centre and directing voters to the entrance. We also provide voting centres with internal signage for issuing points, enquiries and the exit, as well as generic arrow signage to support wayfinding.

We also provide dedicated signage designed to guide voters with accessibility needs to available supports, for example:

- accessibility signage identifying the wheelchair accessibility rating of the voting centre
- accessible parking signs
- *Priority* poster advising voters in queues to come to the front of the line and notify staff if they require any assistance with wheelchair use, difficulty standing or other needs
- *Listening device is available here* poster for voters with hearing impairment, if a personal hearing amplifier is available at that voting centre
- *Magnifier available here* poster for voters with vision impairment
- *Help with voting* poster with a QR code for in-language support, including Auslan
- *I speak...* interpreter badges worn by election officials for voters speaking a language other than English

Sample signage used at previous elections is provided at **Appendix 2** to this submission.

Lighting

We ensure voting centres have adequate lighting so that they are accessible, safe and welcoming for all voters. Adequate lighting is particularly important for voters with accessibility requirements because it:

- ensures voters can identify entrances, pathways, queues and service points
- reduces the risk of falls, anxiety and disorientation
- allows voters to read signage and ballot papers without strain.

We ensure the following conditions are met to provide appropriate lighting in voting centres:

- operational external lighting
- operational internal lighting

- illuminated staff parking areas
- illuminated pathway to parking areas
- illuminated emergency exit signage.

It is not usually feasible for us to modify the existing light fittings and windows in venues we use as voting centres, given they would require major electrical works or renovations. Where lighting is adequate, there are unlikely to be changes we can make to further improve lighting for additional criteria.

Health, safety and wellbeing

Recognising that risks are often higher for those with accessibility needs, our existing health, safety and wellbeing considerations help voters with mobility or vision impairment to cast their votes in a safe and inclusive environment, reducing participation barriers. This also supports voting centre efficiency and staff wellbeing by providing a safe and predictable environment where voting is not disrupted and staff can perform their responsibilities effectively.

Given that election venues are not purpose-built for electoral activity, the following steps apply to each voting centre:

- venue selection satisfying accessibility and occupational health and safety compliance obligations, including security, floor space, queuing area, floors, lighting, lifts, ramps, delivery, storage, parking, pathways, entrances and firefighting equipment
- accessibility audit to evaluate wheelchair accessibility ratings
- a rigorous risk management process to identify, control, and/or eliminate potential hazards, including obstacles
- staff site induction and training on working safely and addressing key risks such as manual handling, slips trips and falls, occupational violence and aggression, managing fatigue and emergency processes.

4.2 Supports available

Resources and environmental supports

We equip voting centres with the following resources:

- low height voting compartments providing access for voters who use a wheelchair or need to be seated
- large ergonomic-grip pencils supporting controlled writing and reducing hand strain
- magnifying sheets for enlarging ballot papers and other written materials
- a dedicated phone line offering interpreter services for voters requiring language assistance
- Convo service offering remote Auslan interpreter services for voters who are deaf or hard of hearing
- personal hearing amplifier for voters with hearing impairment (only available at early voting centres and low sensory mobile voting centres for general elections due to a limited number of devices).

In some cases, uptake of these services has been lower than expected as many voters with disability plan ahead and arrive with personal adjustments that they already use in their day to day lives. Nonetheless, we continue to provide these resources and environmental supports for voters who need them and we regularly review the services that we provide to ensure they are fit for purpose and providing the intended value to voters.

Voters with registered assistance animals are welcome to bring them into voting centres with them, including guide dogs, hearing dogs and other animals trained to support people with disabilities.

Adjustments to the voting experience

Prescribed adjustments

Some adjustments to voting processes are expressly provided for in the Electoral Act.

For example, voters requiring assistance may nominate a support person who may accompany them to the voting compartment and complete the ballot papers according to the voter's directions.¹² This must be conducted in the presence of a scrutineer or, if no scrutineer is present, in the presence of another election official or a person appointed by the voter.

Recommendation 2

We reiterate our previous recommendation that the Electoral Act should be amended to include a provision that a voter may not appoint a person to assist them to vote if that person is a scrutineer.¹³ Given the implied political interest of scrutineers, this will help ensure that voters are not subject to undue political influence if they require assistance to vote.

In addition, voters who are unable to write or sign their name on declaration envelopes may make a distinguishable mark and have it witnessed or request another person to record that the voter cannot sign their name due to physical incapacity.¹⁴

Responsive customer service

Our training of election staff prioritises a culture of positive and responsive customer service. For example, we provide instructions to election officials outlining the following protocols if a voter is using a mobility aid or experiencing difficulty in standing or walking:

- asking whether the voter would like to move to the front of the queue
- offering the voter a seat
- directing the voter to a seated voting compartment.

Similarly, the protocols for assisting a voter with vision impairment include:

- asking the voter how they would like to be assisted after introduction
- offering an elbow if the voter needs guidance to the voting area
- explaining what election staff are doing at each step, such as searching the electoral roll
- providing a magnifier at the voting compartment
- checking whether the voter requires any further assistance while exiting the voting area.

While our priority is to provide proactive, customer-centred support to help voters comfortably and safely participate in electoral processes, it is not possible to anticipate all needs. To this end, our training program for the 2026 state election will focus on fostering a culture of

¹² See section 94 of the Electoral Act.

¹³ *VEC Report to Parliament on the 2022 state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election*, technical recommendation 10 (p. 111).

¹⁴ See section 95 of the Electoral Act.

customer service and responsive accessibility by incorporating scenario-based role-playing to strengthen staff capability and understanding in managing a range of accessibility needs.

Other reasonable adjustments

Our responsive approach to customer service also allows adjustments to be made to the voting experience if reasonable and practical. While we aim to deliver services consistently across all our venues, it is important to note that contextual factors impact whether it is feasible for voting centre staff to offer adjustments. We have written procedures for certain adjustments to ensure that if they can be made, they are carried out without impacting the integrity of election activities.

Some examples of reasonable adjustments may include:

- voters experiencing difficulty standing or requiring accessibility support may receive priority access in queues
- voters who are unable to enter a voting centre may be supported by the voting centre manager to cast their vote outside in exceptional circumstances, if safe to do so.¹⁵

The generally less time-pressured environment in early voting centres is conducive to more personalised supports compared to election day voting centres. We note that this would be impacted by a shortened early voting period, as has been previously recommended by the Committee.

The environmental layout may also impact the available adjustments. For example, the distance of car parking from the voting centre itself or any traffic management in place may limit the ability for voting centre staff to assist voters with mobility impairment to cast their vote from their car.

As adjustments are not always available, are context-specific and are generally at the discretion of the voting centre manager, we cannot advertise these as available services more broadly as has been previously suggested by the Committee.¹⁶ This risks misleading voters with accessibility needs about the voting experience and impacts their ability to plan ahead. Our public communication instead focuses on alternative voting channels which are always available, including postal voting and telephone-assisted voting (see **6. Alternative voting options**).

4.3 Low sensory voting centres

We have been progressively trialling low sensory voting across recent state by-elections with the aim of providing a more inclusive environment for neurodivergent voters and voters responsible for caring for people that are neurodiverse. When in operation, these centres provide a calmer, quieter environment that enables voters with sensory sensitivities, elevated anxieties and other neurodiverse conditions to more comfortably participate in the electoral process. Low sensory voting centres offer particular benefits for voters with autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among other conditions, and voters with caring responsibilities for children who require low sensory environments.

Our first trial took place during the 2023 Warrandyte District by-election, where we set aside a dedicated morning at an early voting centre. Campaigners were asked not to attend, with the

¹⁵ This is permitted, but not required, under section 94(3) of the Electoral Act.

¹⁶ *Electoral Matters Committee report on the 2025 Prahran and Werribee by-elections*, p. 17.

goal of creating a quieter, lower stimulus environment. We conducted a second trial during the 2025 Prahran and Werribee District by-elections, operating a low sensory mobile voting site in each district on the day before the start of early voting opening to the public at early voting centres.

Across all trials, we found that current restrictions on campaigning near voting centres are inadequate to guarantee a fully low sensory experience and identified a need for legislative change to boost the effectiveness of this initiative.

Recommendation 3

We reiterate our support for the Committee's previous recommendation to amend the Electoral Act to provide the VEC with the ability to apply an extended campaigning exclusion zone at specified voting centres and for specified times so that we can provide dedicated periods of low sensory voting.¹⁷ This would strengthen the existing model by reducing factors which reduce the accessibility of an in person voting experience for neurodivergent voters and their carers.

For the 2026 state election, we are expanding this model and targeting at least one low sensory mobile voting centre in every district. These sites will operate on Tuesday 17 November from 10 am to 4 pm to provide eligible voters the opportunity to vote in a quieter, more accessible environment, serviced by our mobile voting teams.

For this initiative, we are selecting venues using a rigorous process focusing strongly on accessibility and maintaining a low-stimulus environment. We are looking to ensure the following conditions at low sensory voting centres:

- reduced sound:
 - echo control
 - no public address speakers, background music and noise
 - no vibration from trams, trains or heavy traffic
 - no humming from electrical equipment
 - seeking co-operation from campaigners to be mindful of their volume
- moderated lighting:
 - full or partial natural light
 - operational dimmable lights
 - curtains or blinds to regulate sunlight
 - no fluorescent lighting
- subdued visuals:
 - no glare, flashing or flickering from lights, screens and signs
 - no brightly coloured walls or mirrored surfaces
 - line-of-sight to service points
- regulated crowd levels:
 - well-spaced voting compartments
 - physical distancing in queues
 - seeking co-operation from campaigners to allow voters to approach them rather than approaching voters
- other sensory considerations:
 - carpeted flooring
 - fresh air or ventilation

¹⁷ Volume 2 of the *Electoral Matters Committee report on the conduct of the 2022 state election*, recommendation 27 (p. 118); VEC response to Electoral Matters Committee report on its inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election, p. 41.

- no strong smells or scents.

We are also planning for supporting a low-stimulus environment outside low sensory voting centres. We will be communicating our expectations for campaigning outside these centres to parties and candidates ahead of and during the election period. A dedicated election official will actively monitor and enforce the 6-metre campaigning exclusion zone for campaigners and signage, including monitoring the conduct of campaigners to prevent sensory overload for voters.

All low sensory voting centre staff will be trained to support the initiative and will wear sunflower 'supporter' lanyards to make themselves more accessible to voters with non-visible disabilities.

We will continue to engage with disability rights and advocacy organisations to encourage the use of low sensory voting centres by voters with accessibility requirements. We also plan to make available a venue access guide for each low sensory voting centre, providing venue-specific information allowing voters to plan ahead. For more information, see **5.2 Outreach initiatives**.

5. Communication and outreach

Our digital communication and online platforms play a key role in supporting voters to identify and access voting options that meet their needs, complementing traditional channels such as media and print advertising. We aim to provide clear, accessible information about voting services, targeted voter communications and ongoing improvements to digital tools to better support voters with disability.

5.1 Statewide communications

Advertising

We communicate information about voting locations and their accessibility features through a range of channels to support voter awareness and decision-making. We publish voting location details and accessibility ratings in print materials and online, alongside information about available supports such as interpreter phone lines and early and postal voting options. Through these materials, we aim to help voters understand what to expect at a voting centre and to identify venues that best meet their access needs prior to attending. We use advertising and broader communications to direct voters to this information and reinforce awareness of accessible voting options.

EasyVote guide

At the 2026 state election, we will send all households an EasyVote Guide by post, providing access to information about when, where, and how to vote. This guide will include accessibility ratings for all venues and will have QR codes linking to our online election venue locator and to an interpreter phone line.

Online information about voting options

For each state election, we publish a dedicated webpage outlining the range of voting options available to voters. This includes information on early voting, postal voting, telephone assisted voting (TAV), braille ballot paper registration, and other options such as low sensory mobile voting and large print ballot paper registration when offered.

This page is intended to provide a clear overview of available services and to support voters to make informed decisions about how and where to vote based on their individual circumstances.

Election venue locator

We encourage voters to use our online election venue locator application to find their nearest voting centre by entering their address. This tool provides location-based information and directions to voting centres during election periods. Users can view the wheelchair accessibility rating and any accompanying information regarding the accessibility of individual voting centres using this map tool.

We are working to develop an automated data extraction solution that would enable venue information, including accessibility ratings recorded in our election management system, to be presented in a text-based (HTML) format. This would improve access to this information for voters who use assistive technologies such as screen readers, or who may have limited

access to or experience with digital mapping tools. Subject to development timelines and testing, we intend for this functionality to be available for the 2026 state election.

Social media

Our social media channels support the distribution of accessible voting information. We develop content using accessible formats, including Easy English, and design our messaging to complement our broader digital and community engagement activities.

We have used social media to share information through *BeHeard*, our digital newsletter distributed to subscribers, which regularly includes content relating to voting centres, voting options, and our community outreach.

During the 2024 local government elections we published AUSLAN-interpreted videos outlining how to vote and explaining failure to vote notices, and we will again produce AUSLAN videos for the 2026 state election. We have also used social media to communicate information about interstate voting centre options, including noting wheelchair accessibility where relevant.

Where appropriate, our social media posts include links to the election venue locator to support voters to find nearby voting centres.

5.2 Outreach initiatives

VoterAlert

VoterAlert is a digital notification service we use to send enrolled voters timely, election-related information by email and SMS. We use VoterAlert to communicate key updates such as voting options, important dates, and, where relevant, information about voting services and venues. VoterAlert supports targeted outreach to an overall subscriber base of currently more than 2.97 million Victorian electors (approximately 63% of all enrolled electors).

VoterAlert for low sensory voting at recent by-elections

Ahead of our trial of low sensory mobile voting centres at the 2025 Prahran and Werribee District by-elections, we informed voters of the availability of these centres for neurodivergent voters and their support persons.

We directed our communications and outreach primarily through relevant diversity partners and peak body organisations such as the Disability Advocacy Resource Unit (DARU), local community organisations and facilities, as well as VoterAlert. We supported these communications by references in statewide media releases. As part of this approach, we distributed an EasyVote guide via VoterAlert in both districts, providing information about low sensory voting alongside other available voting options.

Across Prahran and Werribee Districts, the VoterAlert campaign reached a total of 73,813 enrolled voters through a combination of email and SMS channels, out of a total 104,628 voters enrolled at the by-elections. We did not undertake paid advertising or amplified promotional activity in relation to low sensory voting.

Through this approach, we sought to balance awareness of the service with the purpose of the low sensory trial—to provide a calm, predictable, and low-stimulus voting environment. When planning our communications for the trial, we considered how promotion levels might affect the experience at low sensory sites. In particular, there was a need to manage potential

impacts associated with increased foot traffic, campaign activity, or attendance by voters for whom the service was not designed, including those seeking to avoid queues at early voting or election day voting centres. Our communications were therefore framed to support appropriate awareness while preserving the conditions necessary for a low sensory voting experience.

Vision Australia

For all major election events, both state and local government, we work in partnership with Vision Australia to distribute accessible election information directly to their Victorian client database. These mailouts are designed to support voters who are blind or have low vision by providing clear, accessible information about:

- enrolling to vote
- voting options
- key dates
- available supports, including telephone assisted voting, braille ballot materials, and assistance at voting centres.

The mailouts are issued on our behalf and tailored to the specific election, ensuring key information is provided in advance in a format that supports informed participation. This partnership enables us to reach voters who may not otherwise access online or mainstream election communications and forms part of our broader approach to targeted outreach for major election events.

Venue access guides

We are developing venue access guides to certain voting centres to support voters who would most benefit from advance information about venues. The guides are intended to communicate the practical realities of specific venues, helping voters or their support persons to make informed decisions about how and where they vote and plan their visit.

We will aim for each guide to provide venue-specific information, including photographs of key features, directions and arrival points, public transport options, opening hours, and clear wayfinding once on site. The information will be presented visually and plainly, acknowledging that accessibility is not only about physical features, but also about how clearly information is communicated.

For the 2026 state election, we intend to pilot a venue access guide for as many low sensory mobile voting centres as possible. This will ensure that voters who are neurodivergent, or who benefit from calm and predictable environments, can access detailed information ahead of time to help them prepare.

Accessibility-by-design approach

The guides are being developed with a strong focus on digital accessibility and usability. In doing so, we have considered that some users:

- rely on older devices or small screens to access the internet
- access information via shared or assisted services such as disability support providers or public libraries
- have limited data allowances or inconsistent internet connectivity
- rely on mobile access rather than fixed wired or wireless connections

- increasingly use generative AI tools to search for information instead of traditional search engines.

To support these needs, guides will be published on our website and made available as downloadable PDFs. This will allow voters to save, print, or access them offline if required.

Purpose of venue guides

Venue access guides are not intended to influence venue selection or alter accessibility standards. Their primary purpose is to clearly communicate the realities of each venue, including known limitations, in a way that is transparent and easy to understand.

Feedback from our EAAG indicates a strong understanding that no venue is perfect, and that practical constraints will always exist. Providing advance information allows voters to plan accordingly, reducing uncertainty and anxiety. Where possible, this transparency may also initiate a feedback loop informing future accessibility improvements.

This approach aligns with broader practices seen across local councils, libraries, and private organisations, including the historical use of ‘access keys’ to summarise venue features.

Other outreach initiatives

Our broader suite of accessibility tools and outreach activities designed to support inclusive participation in elections includes:

- ‘social stories’, which provide a step-by-step visual approach to voting in a state election and will be available on our website
- general informational videos
- resources for carers and support workers
- education sessions
- information brochures
- Easy Read guides, particularly for voters with intellectual disability and their families or carers.

We are also working to consider how these tools are best promoted and surfaced.

6. Alternative voting options

While we take measures to provide accessible in-person voting experiences at early voting centres and election day voting centres, this is not always the most convenient or preferred option for every voter with accessibility needs. There are several alternative voting options which form an important part of our engagement with disability communities to boost the electoral participation and engagement of Victorians living with disability.

6.1 Mobile voting

Purpose of mobile voting

Mobile voting involves the temporary establishment of a voting centre at a specific location to assist a cohort of voters who experience barriers to accessing other voting methods. It allows eligible voters to vote in person in familiar or supported environments when attending a standard early or election day voting centre may be impractical, unsafe, or otherwise challenging. Mobile voting complements other alternative voting options by providing a face-to-face voting experience for voters who cannot readily access postal voting or telephone assisted voting, and for whom travel to a voting centre presents a barrier.

Mobile voting has long formed part of our approach to supporting electoral access for voters who face significant barriers to attendance voting. Mobile voting teams have primarily supported voters in aged care and healthcare settings, as well as at homelessness services, prisons, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community locations. More recently our low sensory voting initiative has been delivered as a mobile voting service. In many mobile voting centres, our mobile voting teams move around the venue issuing votes directly to patients or residents. In other mobile voting centres, our teams will set up a voting area within a venue.

Mobile voting plays a critical role in reducing reliance on standard voting centres for voters who face the greatest barriers to attendance voting. While it cannot replace the need for accessible venues, mobile voting allows us to respond flexibly to diverse accessibility needs and to reach voters who would otherwise struggle to participate.

Delivery of mobile voting services

At the 2022 state election, we established 322 mobile voting centres, a significant decrease from past state elections in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and an influenza epidemic that was affecting aged care facilities and hospitals around the time of the election. Our delivery of mobile voting focused on specialist and priority settings, supported by targeted engagement and outreach. Stakeholder feedback from specialist mobile voting locations was strongly positive, reinforcing that mobile voting is an effective and trusted way to support participation where standard voting centres are inaccessible.

For the 2026 state election, we are planning a significant re-expansion of mobile voting, increasing the number of mobile voting locations to approximately 900. This expansion reflects a recalibration toward pre-pandemic service levels—comparatively, there were 1,131 mobile voting centres at the 2018 state election.

Mobile voting teams will attend aged care facilities, homelessness and crisis accommodation services, health clinics, hospitals, prisons, Aboriginal community locations, and other specialist institutions during the early voting period. Many of these visits will be supported by earlier enrolment sessions, education programs, and accessible information, including easy-read

materials, delivered through community and sector partnerships. A low sensory voting centre will also be operated as a mobile voting service in each district.

The Committee has previously recommended that the available early voting period for state elections should be shortened to 7 days, and that the available mobile voting period should be shortened to 9 days.¹⁸ While the VEC already has responsibility to appoint the times of operation for each early voting centre and mobile voting centre,¹⁹ we support safeguarding our ability to deliver mobile voting services for any period prior to the opening of early voting centres to the public.

Recommendation 4

We reiterate our support for the Committee's position that mobile voting should be available for a period prior to the opening of early voting in order to support priority communities with an accessible voting service.²⁰ We recommend that any future changes to electoral legislation preserve the ability for communities to access mobile voting prior to the commencement of early voting.

6.2 Postal voting

Postal voting allows voters to cast their vote without attending a voting centre and remains a long-standing alternative for people who face barriers to in-person voting. It plays an important role in supporting voters whose health, mobility, caring responsibilities, or personal safety concerns make attendance at a voting centre difficult or unsafe.

Postal voting has been available across Victorian elections for many years and continues to be widely used. Electors can either apply for a postal vote for a specific state election until 6 pm on the last Wednesday before election day or can be registered as a general postal voter (GPV), a special category of enrolment.

General postal voters

We automatically send postal ballot papers to electors registered as a GPV for an election.

There are eligibility rules for registering as a GPV, and these differ between state elections and Australian federal elections due to varying legislation.

An elector is eligible to register as a GPV for state and federal elections if they are:

- an elector whose principal place of residence is more than 20 km from an election day voting centre
- registered as an eligible overseas elector
- unable to travel to an election day voting centre due to being seriously ill or infirm
- unable to travel to an election day voting centre because they will be at a place (other than a hospital) caring for a person who is seriously ill or infirm
- a silent elector

¹⁸ *Electoral Matters Committee report on the 2025 Prahran and Werribee by-elections*, recommendation 6 (p. 29)

¹⁹ See s 65(1)(b) of the Electoral Act.

²⁰ *Electoral Matters Committee report on the 2025 Prahran and Werribee by-elections*, recommendation 6 (p. 29); Electoral Matters Committee, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, 20 June 2025, 41 (Dana Fleming, Deputy Electoral Commissioner).

- an elector who is precluded from attending a voting centre on all, or the greater part, of election day because of a religious belief or membership of a religious order
- eligible persons serving a sentence of imprisonment or otherwise in lawful custody or detention (less than 5 years for state elections and less than 3 years for federal elections).

Conversely, there are several eligibility criteria for registering as a GPV which apply only to federal elections and not state elections. Relevantly, among other reasons, the GPV eligibility criteria for federal elections now include electors:

- with a disability and unable to travel to a voting centre from their place of residence
- unable to attend a voting centre due to caring for a person with a disability who is not in a hospital.

The above reasons were introduced to the federal eligibility criteria in 2025.²¹ Electors registered with the AEC as a GPV for either of these two reasons will not automatically receive postal ballot papers for state elections and must apply for a postal vote at each election. We note there is now an opportunity to harmonise state and federal GPV eligibility to better support electors with, or caring for a person with, a disability.

Recommendation 5

We recommend expanding the general postal voter eligibility criteria in the Electoral Act to align with the federal eligibility criteria for people with, or caring for somebody with, a disability, in order to reduce barriers to participation which arise from eligibility criteria differing between state and federal elections. This would reduce the likelihood of electors missing out on voting due to confusion about general postal voter status and would support our engagement with the AEC to improve alignment between the Victorian register of electors and the federal electoral roll.

Trends in postal voting

The overall uptake of postal voting has increased steadily over recent elections, particularly through growth in GPV enrolments. Between the 2018 and 2022 state elections, the number of GPVs almost doubled, driven largely by voters aged over 70 years registering to be GPVs. This indicates growing reliance on non-attendance voting options, though the increase was also likely a result of a variety of factors such as the activities of registered political parties, members of parliament and candidates distributing applications to register as a GPV in the lead-up to the election.

Postal voting has also supported electors enrolled in special categories, including silent electors, itinerant electors, and eligible overseas voters, where voting in person is challenging or impractical. At the 2025 Prahran and Werribee District by-elections, GPV enrolment remained stable and slightly below the state average, suggesting consistent but targeted use.

While postal voting reduces reliance on voting centres, we note it does not remove all barriers to participation. Postal voting requires access to mail services, literacy, and the ability to complete written material accurately. These limitations mean postal voting does not meet the needs of all voters who also experience barriers to attending a voting centre. We are also alert to the permanent decline of postal networks in Australia and overseas and we are monitoring the impact on specific cohorts who are likely to otherwise rely on postal voting, such as rural and regional electors living with disability.

²¹ See sections 184A(2)(caa) and (cab) of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (Cth).

We continue to improve the accessibility and reinforce the integrity of postal voting and we are currently redesigning the postal declaration envelope to reduce the prevalence of common voter errors and lower the rate of rejections. At the same time, we recognise that postal voting alone cannot address all accessibility barriers associated with voting centre attendance. Postal voting therefore remains one part of a broader suite of alternative voting options, complementing accessible voting centres and other assisted voting services.

Braille and large print ballot papers

We work closely with Vision Australia and Blind Citizens Australia to identify and contact voters who use their services and require election information in accessible formats. At the 2024 local government elections, we received and processed requests for 37 braille ballot packs and 208 large-print ballot packs, compared with 26 braille ballot packs at the 2022 state election. We cannot provide large print ballot material for state elections due to production timeline constraints.

For the 2026 state election, during September and October 2026 voters who are blind or have low vision can register to receive braille ballot material. Vision Australia and Blind Citizens Australia will undertake an initial mail-out to ensure all Victorian voters who are blind or have low vision receive accessible information for the election and invite them to register for braille ballot material.

6.3 Telephone assisted voting

Telephone assisted voting (**TAV**) is an accessible voting service that allows eligible electors to cast a secret and independent vote without attending a voting centre or completing a postal vote. The prescribed classes of electors currently eligible to access electronic assisted voting, delivered through our TAV service, are cohorts facing significant barriers to in person voting:

- electors who are blind or have low vision
- electors living with a motor impairment
- electors impacted by a declared emergency.

How the service operates

The TAV service uses standard telephone infrastructure and does not require internet access or specialist equipment, making it a reliable and widely accessible option as well as being easily scalable.

TAV uses a secure 2-step process that preserves ballot secrecy while allowing eligible voters to vote without attending a voting centre. Votes are recorded on physical ballot papers and counted in the same way as in-person votes, with an independent observer present during the voting call to ensure the vote is recorded in accordance with the elector's instructions. This can also be observed by scrutineers. The service operates during the early voting period and on election day, aligning with voting centre hours.

TAV was first introduced at the 2018 state election and we expanded its use following amendments to the Electoral Act ahead of the 2022 state election. In 2022, the service operated at a significantly larger scale and demonstrated that it is secure, scalable, and capable of maintaining ballot secrecy and electoral integrity.

Future considerations

Evidence from recent elections shows that illness, infirmity, and caring responsibilities are among the most common reasons non-voters give for failing to vote. When these circumstances arise after postal vote applications close, voters may have no practical alternative to attending a voting centre. At the 2022 state election, we excused more than 24,000 non-voters from compulsory voting enforcement due to illness or caring duties.

Research and stakeholder feedback also indicate that some cohorts face ongoing barriers to safely accessing voting services. These include voters experiencing homelessness, family or domestic violence, and some neurodivergent voters who may find the sensory environment of voting centres overwhelming and are less likely to attend a voting centre or vote at all.

Further, the only option for interstate and overseas electors to vote in Victorian elections is to cast a postal vote. This voting method is reliant on the efficiency of overseas postal services, and a significant proportion arrive after the deadline for postal votes to be admitted to the count. At the 2022 State election, 21.4% of votes cast in overseas locations were received after the deadline and could not be admitted to the count.

We continue to assess the role of TAV as part of its broader suite of accessible voting options. Past elections demonstrate that the service is secure, trusted by voters, and capable of operating at scale.

Recommendation 6

We reiterate our recommendation that the Electoral Regulations 2022 (Vic) should be amended to expand the classes of electors eligible for electronic assisted voting to include those who experience the greatest barriers to participation,²² including:

- interstate or overseas electors
- electors who are unwell, infirm or caring for someone
- electors experiencing homelessness or family or domestic violence
- neurodivergent electors
- Australian Antarctic Territory electors.²³

²² VEC Report to Parliament on the 2022 state election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election, recommendation 6 (p. 65).

²³ In Volume 2, recommendation 22 (p. 98) of its Report on the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election, the Electoral Matters Committee recommended expanding eligibility for electronic assisted voting at state elections to include Australian Antarctic Territory electors.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Operational commitments

The below tables summarise progress to date on those operational commitments made in our *Report to Parliament on the 2022 state election* that are relevant to the terms of reference of this inquiry and the broader themes of our submission.

Actioned

Operational commitment	Progress to date
<p>The VEC will increase the number of early voting centres at future elections to respond to the increasing demand amongst Victorian voters to vote early.</p>	<p>This operational commitment was successfully deployed in the 2023 Warrandyte District and Mulgrave District by-elections and the 2025 Prahran District and Werribee District by-elections.</p> <p>As part of our commitment to ensuring the OHS risk profile of the site and its surrounds are understood and treatments and controls are appropriately deployed, we committed to broadening our site assessments to extend beyond the leased site to the surrounding environment to ensure the safety of electoral participants.</p> <p>As a direct result, a campaigner registration trial was deployed for the 2025 Prahran District and Werribee District by-elections, as an extension of the risk management approach deployed in previous events. Findings from this trial are informing refinements for the 2026 Nepean District by-election and planning for the 2026 state election.</p> <p>We have now adopted the increase in early voting centres into our operating model, and this commitment is completed.</p>
<p>The VEC intends to consolidate the number of election day voting centres to be able to more efficiently allocate resources to early voting.</p>	<p>This operational commitment was successfully deployed in the 2023 Warrandyte District and Mulgrave District by-elections and the 2025 Prahran District and Werribee District by-elections.</p> <p>We have now adopted this approach into our operating model for future elections, and this commitment is completed.</p>

In progress

Operational commitment	Progress to date
<p>The VEC will conduct a website content review to ensure that all website content is up-to-date and accurate, remains accessible, and meets the needs of its audiences.</p>	<p>This operational commitment was deployed in the 2023 Warrandyte District and Mulgrave District by-elections and the 2025 Prahran District and Werribee District by-elections.</p> <p>The content specific to the events was developed to be plain, accessible and audience centred.</p> <p>We plan to further progress this approach into our operating model for future electoral events.</p>

Not yet actioned

Operational commitment	Progress to date
<p>The VEC will consider better promotion opportunities for Auslan interpreting services with the aim to boost access and usage.</p>	<p>This commitment will be progressed in future elections.</p>

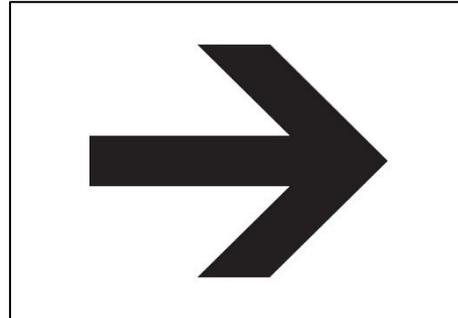
Appendix 2: Sample voting centre signage

Wayfinding signage

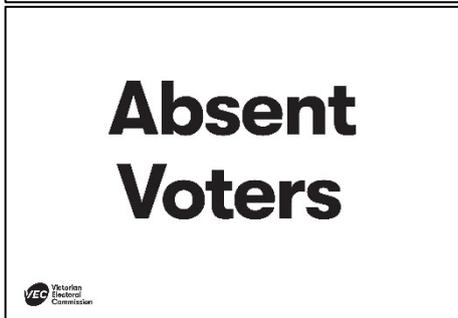
Entry and exit signage



Generic wayfinding



Assistance and issuing point signage

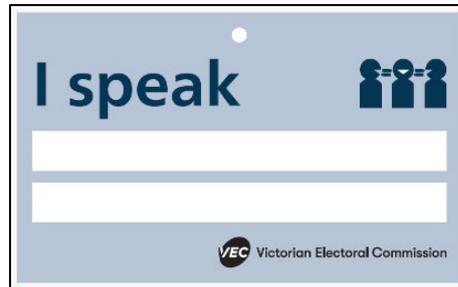


Accessibility support signage

Hearing assistance poster



Language interpreter badge



Language support and interpreter poster



Magnifier sign



