

Strengthening Australia's Democracy Green Paper

Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) Response

Contact:

Leah Hobson

National Policy Officer

Australian Federation of Disability Organisations

247 Flinders Lane

MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Ph: 03 9662 3324

Fax: 03 9662 3325

Email: leah.hobson@afdo.org.au

Introduction

The Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) has been established as a primary national voice to Government that fully represents the interests of all people with disability across Australia. The mission of AFDO is to champion the rights of people with disability in Australia and help them participate fully in Australian life.

Like many Australians, people with disability cherish the right to vote as a fundamental part of being a citizen and participating in society. That right is enshrined in Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), which protects the right of people with disability to participate in political and public life. More broadly, implementation of Article 29 can only be achieved through following the principles laid out in Article 9 – Accessibility, which discusses the need for accessible buildings, information, technology, transport and attitudes. It should not be surprising then, that these themes are recurrent throughout this submission because they should be recurrent throughout our electoral processes. Critical to ensuring effective accessibility is the need to ensure that information is gathered about the levels of civics education, voter turnout rates and nominations for positions of political office by people with disability.

From a moral and social perspective, the inclusion of people with disability in electoral processes enriches our democracy and our society. One in every five Australians experiences some kind of disability, and that number is set to increase as the population ages. If the views, needs and democratic rights of people with disability are to be part of our social fabric into the future, then electoral equality and accessibility needs to be addressed now.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That universality and flexibility be considered as critical to Australia's electoral frameworks, and that provisions for accessibility in line with those listed in this submission should be developed in conjunction with people with disability.

Recommendation 2: That Australian governments move to implement harmonization and Plain English revision of electoral laws and practices. This should include consideration of any additional information or support required by people with disability to understand laws and practices.

Recommendation 3: That the franchise be extended to all prisoners regardless of sentence.

Recommendation 4: That the provisions for exempting people of 'unsound mind' from voting be removed, and that a system allowing people with disability to register with the option of not voting be implemented. This procedure, alongside appropriate appeals and support processes should be developed in conjunction with people with disability.

Recommendation 5: To promote consistency and accessibility, the franchise should be uniform across Australia.

Recommendation 6: Any alternative enrolment mechanism should be developed in consultation with people with disability to ensure accessibility. Current physical enrolment processes should not be replaced completely.

Recommendation 7: That Proof of Age, Medicare and Centrelink cards be given the same status as photo ID when enrolling or changing enrolment details to ensure that people with disability are able to enrol without taking extra steps to do so.

Recommendation 8: To allow people with disability as much time as possible to enrol or change their details, enrolment should be available on the day of any election. If this recommendation is rejected, then enrolment should be open until as close as possible to election day.

Recommendation 9: Electoral education should be made mandatory for students across Australia. Accessibility of electoral education should be evaluated, with appropriate measures put in place after consultation with people with disability. Students with disability should have the opportunity to be identified as part of any civics competency test so that systemic issues in civics education for students with disability can be identified.

Recommendation 10: The needs of people with disability in general should be considered separately as part of electoral education campaigns, and people with disability experiencing double disadvantages should be especially catered for. Information regarding the electoral education levels of people with disability should be gathered regularly and made public.

Recommendation 11: That electoral authorities use as wide an array of voting options as is possible, and that these methods be evaluated for accessibility on a regular basis.

Recommendation 12: Postal ballots should not be returned through political party offices to prevent abuse of personal details.

Recommendation 13: That an electronic voting system in line with the system used by the ACT should be introduced across Australia to improve accessibility for people with disability and to ensure their right to vote independently.

Recommendation 14: Identification should not be required on election day. If it is required, non-photo ID such as a Centrelink or Medicare card should be adequate.

Recommendation 15: That electoral authorities should develop a plan to evaluate polling locations based on accessibility, and to prioritise the most accessible venues. The plan should include a goal for all polling stations to be fully accessible within a certain timeframe.

Discussion Points Chapter 2: Standards, Qualities and Expectations

There are likely to be differing views about which principles should be given priority in Australia's electoral systems, and about the best ways to ensure that particular principles are given effect. Alternatively, it might be argued that all principles are essential and that it is not appropriate to raise any one principle above others. In addition to the principles discussed above, there may be additional principles which might be considered to be important for Australia's electoral system. Comments are invited on these issues. In particular, submissions are invited on the following questions:

Which of the principles discussed above are the most important to you, and why?

Are there any other principles that you consider to be key principles for an Australian electoral system?

For people with disability, participation in the electoral system requires a well balanced and well functioning system in which all of the principles outlined in the discussion paper are valued. The creation of a civic culture which includes people with disability has great importance because often lived experience of disability is about having your opinions and your voice devalued and pushed aside. There are areas in society where people with disability are considered 'not qualified' to participate, or they are simply not given the tools they need to do so, such as Auslan interpreters or accessible venues for participation. These barriers mean that broader community participation for people with disability remains challenging when it comes to many everyday experiences such as employment, access to health services or recreation and leisure. Ensuring that the basic right to have a vote is available to all people with disability in Australia sends a powerful overall message about our society's belief that people with disability can participate in mainstream political processes and by association, mainstream life.

Having said that, universality is particularly critical to ensuring that people with disability can exercise their right to vote, nominate as a candidate and scrutinize election outcomes. Making an electoral system universally accessible means a number of things, including:

1. Providing accessible written and multimedia materials related to elections and voting, including offering alternative formats such as Easy English, large print, Braille and electronic copies of all information related to elections, and offering captioning, Auslan (Australian Sign Language) translations and audio description on any filmed material. All websites related to elections, including those of participating political parties, should meet the Web Accessibility User Guidelines put out by the W3C Consortium.

2. Using physically accessible venues for electoral commissions, polling stations and one-off training or community liaison sessions. Physically accessible venues should have adequate accessible parking spaces, ramp or lift access to all areas, designated accessible toilets, installed audio loops in meeting rooms and at customer service desks, tactile ground surface indicators and clear raised tactile and Braille signage.

For many people with disability, 'physically accessible' also means 'easy to get to'. This means all venues should be located close to public transport, and community transport options should be offered for those venues in rural, regional and outer suburban areas where regular public transport is not possible. There should always be clear instructions available regarding getting to and navigating a venue. This should include information on the accessibility features of the building. Compensation for travel costs should also be offered where necessary for events or consultations held by electoral commissions.

3. Offering reasonable adjustments for accessing face-to-face interactions such as training sessions or in-person customer service. This should include the provision of personal care attendants for people with physical disability, Auslan interpreters, foreign language interpreters or a general

support person (for people with intellectual or cognitive disability). People with disability should not be expected to pay for these services, and they should be given as much say as possible if they have preferences in terms of the gender, age and qualifications of any assistant. It is critical that people with disability are also able to refuse assistance if it is offered.

4. Offering tailored accessible voting processes and procedures. This should include longer periods for postal votes for people experiencing episodic disabilities (such as psychosocial disability, sometimes called mental illness), or chronic illnesses.

Flexibility is another important principle when it comes to ensuring access to voting. For example, people who are blind or vision impaired should be given an independent, secret and verifiable vote, and the methods for doing so should be flexible enough to keep up with changes in technology. At present, the Australian Electoral Commission is considering the use of a telephone based voting system for people who are blind or vision impaired. In this instance, there would need to be consideration of costs to people with disability as people move from using landlines to mobile phones as their main form of phone communication, and the ability of the system to be used by an increasing number of people with multiple disabilities such as vision and hearing impairments (who may access the voting line via the National Relay Service or a captioned telephone) or vision impairment and physical disability. Both of these groups would require more time to respond to prompts from a phone system.

5. Proactively working to include people with disability. This means that Electoral Commissions across the country should have Disability Action Plans, including measures to increase the employment of people with disability and their representation on Commission committees. The introduction of the above accessibility measures in Points 1 - 4 as standard practices should also be addressed by a Disability Action Plan.

Recommendation 1: That universality and flexibility be considered as critical to Australia's electoral frameworks, and that provisions for

accessibility in line with those listed in this submission should be developed in conjunction with people with disability.

Discussion Points Chapter 3: The Legal Framework for Elections

The following questions may assist in contemplating specific options for reform:

Given the inherent challenges of achieving and maintaining harmonisation in a federal system, which areas of harmonisation should be given priority attention?

How prescriptive should our electoral laws be?

How flexible should our electoral laws be to adapt to the changing electoral environment?

What is the best way to ensure that our electoral laws are easily understood by participants in the electoral process?

Harmonisation is important for people with disability, because consistency allows people with disability to have certainty about the law and the processes stemming from it. Accessibility to election processes could be especially increased for some people with intellectual or cognitive disability and people with disability from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB) through the need to only remember or understand one broad set of rules about how to vote.

For people with physical or sensory disability, consistency in the implementation of election processes would provide certainty about how accessible an election, nomination or enrolment process might be and what adjustments they might need to have in place to participate fully. For example, if a person in a wheelchair knows there will be a wheelchair height polling booth available at every polling station, they do not need to find someone to assist them in the polling booth if they choose to vote on election day.

From a disability perspective, harmonization of franchise laws which exclude people with disability from voting should be a high priority. As set out later in this submission, the variously phrased disqualifications on the basis of 'unsound mind' should be removed from all relevant Acts.

As noted under the discussion points for Chapter 2, there are many things which can be done to make electoral laws and processes more accessible to people with disability. Plain language revisions of the relevant laws would be extremely helpful; however, it is important to note that a plain language version of the law is only useful if it is complemented by effective community awareness raising and education programs which allow people to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of the law. It is also important to be aware that plain language revisions of the law will not render it easy to read for everyone; people with intellectual disability will still require Easy English explanations. Auslan translations via video and translations into community languages will also be necessary.

Recommendation 2: That Australian governments move to implement harmonization and Plain English revision of electoral laws and practices. This should include consideration of any additional information or support required by people with disability to understand laws and practices.

Discussion Points Chapter 4: The Franchise

4.62 Comments are invited on the type of franchise that should appropriately reflect a modern and inclusive Australian society. In particular, submissions are invited on the following questions:

- *Should the current exclusions from the franchise be maintained, amended or abolished,*

in particular for:

– persons serving a prison sentence of three years or more?

People with disability can have significantly higher imprisonment rates than the general population. For example, it is estimated that people with intellectual disability make up 12 – 13% of the prison population, when they comprise only 2 – 3% of the general population¹. Further disadvantaging people who may have already experienced multiple disadvantages in the social and justice systems leading them to become prisoners would not allow those people to feel a part of society nor would it serve to protect their rights.

Recommendation 3: That the franchise be extended to all prisoners regardless of sentence.

– *persons of unsound mind?*

As outlined in the discussion paper, Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) allows for the recognition of legal capacity among all people with disability. The discussion paper also rightly states that the understanding of disability has shifted in recent times to reflect that (a) disability is not always permanent, and (b) people with disability should not be presumed to have diminished capacity as a default when we do not assume that of other citizens. However, AFDO also recognises that there are legitimate circumstances where people with disability may not be in a position to vote because their disability prevents them from understanding the processes involved. In these cases, receiving penalty notices for not voting is not only a distressing outcome but also an inequitable one, especially if the persons' ability to respond to correspondence is also diminished.

It is AFDO's position that preserving the right to vote should be paramount. The provisions across the country which exempt people of 'unsound mind' from voting should be removed from the law entirely to ensure compliance

¹ Law Reform Commission NSW, 1996, *Report 80 (1996) – People with Intellectual Disability and the Criminal Justice System*, viewed online at: <http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lrc.nsf/pages/R80CHP2>

with the UN CRPD. The reference within the WA Electoral Act (s18.1) to disqualification of those to whom the Criminal Law (Mentally Impaired Accused) Act 1996 applies should also be removed. The Criminal Law (Mentally Impaired Accused) Act 1996 relates to 'a person charged with an offence, whether a simple offence or an indictable offence' (Section 3), who has 'intellectual disability, mental illness, brain damage or senility' (Section 8). This means that under the current law, a person accused of a crime can be disqualified from voting if they have a certain disability and are deemed unfit to stand trial, regardless of their capacity to understand the voting process or their guilt or innocence in the crime of which they are accused.

Instead, people with disability should be able to lodge a medical certificate stating that their disability may affect their ability to vote. Lodging that certificate should only mean they are not penalised for failing to vote. They should not be stopped from voting if they feel able to do so, and their right to vote should not be subject to any test of their competency unless such a test is used for everyone. Again, the discussion paper touches on the fact that we don't test the capacity of most voters: we do not test voters for drug or alcohol abuse, nor do we ask them if they have had adequate sleep or if they are literate enough to complete the forms on their own.

To prevent abuse of the system, if a medical certificate exempting a person with disability from voting is lodged by a family member or carer, the person with disability should have access to simple, easy to use appeals processes which include ready access to an independent advocate. As per the response to Chapter 2, assistance to make the appeals process accessible, such as interpreters or real time captioning, should also be made available.

In order to effectively ensure that people with disability who may previously have been deemed 'of unsound mind' are given an equal chance to vote, appropriate supports should be put in place to assist them to enrol, vote and change their details. This could include:

- Community based voter education programs and enrolment days for people with disability who are homeless or institutionalised;
- Specialised support to vote via postal vote or in person, through person-to-person advice from trained staff, community transport which assists people with disability to get from a set point (home or community centre) to the polling station, and creating clear and accessible information.

Any work undertaken to provide supports especially for people with disability should be done in consultation with disabled person's organisations.

Recommendation 4: That the provisions for exempting people of 'unsound mind' from voting be removed, and that a system allowing people with disability to register with the option of not voting be implemented. This procedure, alongside appropriate appeals and support processes should be developed in conjunction with people with disability.

- *Should the franchise be uniform across Australia?*

Yes. As noted above, people with disability are protected not just by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, but also by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. All Australian governments are obliged to meet the criteria laid out in these treaties. The best way to allow consumers to easily access the electoral system and to ensure that their access is equitable is to have consistent access to the franchise for people with disability.

Recommendation 5: To promote consistency and accessibility, the franchise should be uniform across Australia.

Discussion Points Chapter 7: Enrolment and Participation

7.111 Submissions are invited on the extent to which current enrolment processes should be changed, if at all. In particular, comments are invited on the following questions:

- *Are there any changes that you think should be introduced to enrolment processes, such as:*
 - *automatic enrolment?*
 - *automatic update of enrolment details?*
 - *online enrolment?*
 - *online update of enrolment details?*

Given that people with disability may find it difficult to physically fill out forms and scan them, or to get to a place for collecting forms and then posting them out, AFDO sees a strong argument for some change to the current system of enrolment. From the perspective of people with disability, the models which have been proposed would all have advantages and disadvantages.

For instance, automatic enrolment and change of details would assist people with disability who have difficulty completing these processes, but it would also create issues around gaining explicit consent to 'opt in' or 'opt out' from some people with disability who have difficulty understanding what they are giving consent to and why. On the other hand, online enrolment systems offer a clearer, less abstract chance to provide consent, but would need to meet web accessibility guidelines.

People with disability need a variety of choices available to meet their needs. If either system is introduced, physical enrolment forms should not be done away with. Accessibility should always be ensured. For example, automatic enrolment processes should include Easy English or plain English consent forms. Online enrolments should be done using a system compatible with adaptive technology, such as screen reading software used by people who are blind or vision impaired and on-screen keyboards used by people with physical disability.

Recommendation 6: Any alternative enrolment mechanism should be developed in consultation with people with disability to ensure accessibility. Current physical enrolment processes should not be replaced completely.

- *What changes could be made to the proof of identity requirements to improve the enrolment process, while continuing to protect the integrity of the roll?*

Many people with disability do not have driver's licences because of their disability, such as those who are blind or vision impaired and some people with intellectual disability. For these people, the existence of Tier 2 and Tier 3 provisions is discriminatory because it does not allow for a similar process to gain access – they must go through extra steps simply because they do not have a licence.

The ability to use Proof of Age, Medicare and Centrelink cards as identification would be especially useful for people with disability. Passports are less useful; many people with disability are unemployed or on low incomes and have limited opportunity to travel overseas. Because of the barriers outlined above, people with disability should not, under any circumstances, be asked to provide photo ID.

Recommendation 7: That Proof of Age, Medicare and Centrelink cards be given the same status as photo ID when enrolling or changing enrolment details to ensure that people with disability are able to enrol without taking extra steps to do so.

- *What 'close of rolls' period do you think is appropriate?*
 - *Should the roll close date be set later in the election period?*
 - *Should enrolment on polling day be permitted?*

Getting access to information about the call of an election is not always easy for people with disability. Someone, for instance, with an episodic psychosocial disability may not be able to follow the news for the three day time period currently allowed, but may have recovered enough several weeks later to be able to change their enrolment details.

Furthermore, people with disability require enough time to enrol or re-enrol. An older person with a physical disability may have no access to the internet and may be dependent on assistance from a friend or family member to get a copy of the form. People with intellectual or cognitive

disability might require support to understand the process of re-enrolling if they have moved, and people with disability from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds may require someone to interpret the form for them. A maximum of three days is completely unreasonable to ensure that these people have equitable access to their right to vote.

From the perspective of providing equitable access, being able to enrol on the day would be preferred. People with disability would then have access to on-site assistance if they had difficulty, and would not need to expend what is sometimes precious time and energy to go through two separate processes at two separate times. If voting before election day is the preferred option, then voting should be open as close to election day as possible.

Recommendation 8: To allow people with disability as much time as possible to enrol or change their details, enrolment should be available on the day of any election. If this recommendation is rejected, then enrolment should be open until as close as possible to election day.

Discussion Points: Chapter 9

This chapter has suggested some options for electoral education initiatives, with the objectives of improving participation in, knowledge of and support for Australia's electoral system.

Submissions are invited on the following questions:

- *Should electoral education be mandatory in all Australian schools?*

Yes. As outlined earlier in this paper, AFDO believes that an effective civil society is an accessible one. This applies to education within the school system, including for students with disability. Electoral education bodies should make materials available in accessible formats, and should provide training in accessible facilities (for example, ensuring the accessibility of Old Parliament House to students with physical disability).

In the case of students with disability, any educational programs should take into account the particular needs of certain student groups, as per the Disability Standard for Education under the Disability Discrimination Act. Ideally, all students with disability should be able to undertake civics and electoral education alongside their non-disabled peers. This could be done, for example, by offering interpreters for school or grade-wide education sessions, or by negotiating to ensure that teacher's aides or itinerant teachers would be available for the education session to offer extra one-to-one assistance for those students requiring it. Information about voting processes should include disability specific processes such as any future voting method for people who are blind or vision impaired.

There may be some occasions where groups of students with disability would benefit from learning in a smaller classroom setting. For example, students with some intellectual disabilities may gain more insight from tailored electoral education material for special education classes. Regardless of where and how they are educated, the default assumption should be that every child with disability has the potential ability to learn about voting and the electoral system.

Testing to determine the level of civics and citizenship competency among school students should give students with disability the opportunity to disclose their disability so that information can be gathered about how well they are learning compared to others, and whether systemic issues need to be addressed in terms of making civics education more accessible. Again, all tests should be accessible, with opportunities for one-on-one assistance, accessible materials and extra time made available.

Recommendation 9: Electoral education should be made mandatory for students across Australia. Accessibility of electoral education should be evaluated, with appropriate measures put in place after consultation with people with disability. Students with disability should have the opportunity to be identified as part of any civics competency test so that systemic issues in civics education for students with disability can be identified.

• *Do you think that any new electoral education strategies should be introduced to improve the electoral participation of particular groups, such as:*

- *youth?*
- *Indigenous Australians?*
- *migrant citizens?*
- *persons experiencing homelessness?*

Yes. It is important to note that people with disability exist in all of these categories, and thus face double disadvantage. This is particularly true of indigenous Australians, where rates of some kinds of disability are higher than in the broader population², and among people who are experiencing homelessness, where there are higher rates of psychosocial disability in particular³.

As noted in a response further on, AFDO also believes that people with disability should be a group considered for further engagement.

• *If so, what strategies do you think should be developed?*

AFDO does not have any particular preference from among the strategies suggested within the discussion paper. However, all strategies should be developed in close consultation with the relevant communities, and should uphold principles of inclusion and accessibility.

• *Are there any specific groups not discussed in this chapter who you think would benefit from better electoral education?*

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008, *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 2008* viewed online at:

<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/0/CD7B08487DC811C4CA2574390014D153?opendocument>

³ Department of Health and Ageing, 2008, *Homelessness and Mental Health Linkages: Review of National and International Literature*, viewed online at:

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-homeless-toc~mental-homeless-1~mental-homeless-1-4>

While some of the disadvantaged groups identified contain high numbers of people with disability, AFDO is deeply concerned that the discussion paper does not touch on the education of people with disability. This may be due to a lack of data in the area, or to a lack of priority for disability related issues. Both data collection about people with disability and offering participation in civil and political life to people with disability are covered by the UN CRPD, and should be a strong priority for electoral authorities across Australia. This is especially true given the Australian government obligation to report on compliance with the UNCRPD to the United Nations Treaty Committee on an ongoing basis.

Recommendation 10: The needs of people with disability in general should be considered separately as part of electoral education campaigns, and people with disability experiencing double disadvantages should be especially catered for. Information regarding the electoral education levels of people with disability should be gathered regularly and made public.

Discussion Points – Chapter 11

11.88 Submissions are invited on what aspects (if any) of the polling process in Australia should be reformed, having regard to the overarching objective of developing an effective and efficient overall package of electoral reforms. In particular, comments are invited on the following questions:

Should any actions be taken in response to the rise in early voting?

For people with disability, a greater number of choices means a greater chance of finding an accessible way to achieve a goal. This applies to voting; some people with disability will find physical attendance at a polling booth difficult while others need the face-to-face assistance that comes with going to a polling station. When it comes to pre-poll voting, people with

disability would again get benefit from many different methods: people who are blind or vision impaired would benefit from electronic voting while people with an intellectual or cognitive disability may find a visitation scheme helps alleviate coercion of their right to vote, assuming visitation officers do not themselves coerce the person. For this reason, AFDO believes that all methods for pre-poll voting should be explored further, and any studies conducted to provide feedback on their success should include information about accessibility features and their use.

Recommendation 11: That electoral authorities use as wide an array of voting options as is possible, and that these methods be evaluated for accessibility on a regular basis.

What changes, if any, are needed to the current postal vote processes for federal elections?

It is AFDO's strong belief that postal ballots should not be returned to the electoral commission in question via a political party. As noted in the discussion paper, this can cause confusion and disenfranchisement among voters, and they may not be clear that their personal details could be used by the political party receiving the ballot. This is particularly an issue for people with disability who have difficulty reading or retaining information, and those with low English proficiency.

Recommendation 12: Postal ballots should not be returned through political party offices to prevent abuse of personal details.

Should electronic voting be utilised to a greater extent in Australia?

– *If so, what form of electronic voting should be used?*

The provision of electronic voting is critical to allowing people who are blind or vision impaired to access an independent, secret and verifiable vote. Without this provision, people who are blind or vision impaired are unable to act as equal citizens in Australian society, a position which is in direct contravention of the UN CRPD. Depending on the method of electronic

voting, it may also have a profound impact on the independence of people with physical disability, and people with disability from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds.

Blind Citizens Australia have stated in their submission that electronic voting should take the form used in ACT elections, where all voters are able to vote via computer if they wish. AFDO fully supports this position, and reiterates the fact that this method provides a secure method for voting which is proving increasingly popular among the general population.

Recommendation 13: That an electronic voting system in line with the system used by the ACT should be introduced across Australia to improve accessibility for people with disability and to ensure their right to vote independently.

Should a requirement for voters to provide identification on election day be introduced?

– *If so, what form/s of identification should be required?*

While AFDO acknowledges that providing identification on election day could help with security, especially for provisional voters, it also creates a situation of disadvantage for people who do not carry ‘high points’ forms of identification. Many people with disability do not drive, and many more are on such low incomes that travel outside of Australia requiring a passport is rare.

It is AFDO’s belief that identification should not be required on polling day, and that a person’s signature should be taken for comparison with their original enrolment form if they are a provisional voter. If a person has a disability which prevents them from giving a signature, then a non-photographic form of ID which requires rigorous checks before it is issued – such as a Medicare or Centrelink card – should be provided.

Recommendation 14: Identification should not be required on election day. If it is required, non-photo ID such as a Centrelink or Medicare card should be adequate.

Do you have any suggestions for the future location of polling places within Australia?

The location of polling stations should be accessible as per the criteria outlined earlier in this document. Some buildings used at present, such as older school buildings, are not accessible and may not be able to be changed on the grounds of high cost or heritage value. All polling stations should be chosen with the highest level of accessibility in mind. It is our view that each electorate should have as many clearly designated accessible polling stations as possible, with the aim of all polling stations becoming fully accessible in time.

Recommendation 15: That electoral authorities should develop a plan to evaluate polling locations based on accessibility, and to prioritise the most accessible venues. The plan should include a goal for all polling stations to be fully accessible within a certain timeframe.

What areas of the current polling arrangements do you think would particularly benefit from harmonisation between the Commonwealth, states and territories?

Harmonising the voting process in all of the areas outlined in the discussion paper, but especially staff training, polling station layout, equipment and signage and the identification of common polling stations for all elections would assist people with disability to participate by improving consistency and allowing a standard for accessibility to be introduced. Any standards for accessibility or providing information about the needs of people with disability should be developed in close consultation with people with disability themselves.