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# Information for Members regarding changes to BCA’s Organisational Structure June 2024

Members may have read in recent Member Updates and noticed in recent media that BCA, like many other disability-led organisations, has experienced a significant decrease in our funding for the next financial year.

BCA receives government funding from various sources, which can be summarised as advocacy funding and project funding. Our advocacy funding supports us to consult, advocate and represent our members and other Australians who are blind or vision impaired. Our project funding has enabled us to undertake specific activities of high value to our members, including the An Eye to The Future, the Executive Leadership Program, Peer Connect Program, BCA Inform and BCA Conversations. Although we first secured specific project funding in late 2019, members may remember that it was last renewed in October 2022, for lower amounts than previously. Both our representative and project funding were secured until 30 June 2024. In late May, we were advised regarding funding that would be made available to us in the 2024-2025 financial year.

Unfortunately, our funding has been reduced in both categories. The projects currently running will end on 30 June 2024. Along with many other previous recipients, we were not successful in obtaining any of the Department of Social Services Information, Linkages and Capacity Building funding for the latest open funding rounds. The funding we receive as a Disability Representative Organisation (DRO) from the Department of Social Services (DSS) and distributed through Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO), has also been reduced. Many other disability representative organisations find themselves in similar situations. We have only had a short time to react to these developments. We have been forced to undertake a reorganisation of the staffing structure to ensure BCA continues into the future in a sustainable way. This includes changing the way we operate and redistributing staff responsibilities. We have already committed to increase our fundraising efforts, in cooperation with the Jeffrey Blyth Foundation, and these efforts will continue. We will also further embrace existing and new partnerships.

Our Financial Year budget for 2024-2025 will decrease from $2 million to $1 million. To continue to achieve BCA's purpose, we must reduce our most important asset — our paid workforce. The toughest of decisions has been made harder as each employee is so evidently dedicated, passionate and emotionally connected to BCA and our members. We will be saying farewell to some team members. Other staff members will be working fewer hours. Some positions recently vacated will not be filled. The board believes that these changes will enable BCA to continue to fulfil our purpose of informing, connecting and empowering and to deliver our Strategic Plan.

With AFDO and its member organisations, we are campaigning for additional funding as a DRO from DSS. We retain funding for our representation and advocacy work from the NSW and Victorian governments and from the National Disability Insurance Agency. In this time of uncertainty, we are immensely appreciative for the ongoing support of our partners: Vision Australia, Guide Dogs Australia and EverAbility. We are especially grateful for the security provided to us by regular contributions from the Jeffrey Blyth Foundation, and our regular donors through BCA Backers. Those of you who donate when you can, are more valuable to us than ever.

We have prepared a question and answer below to give more detailed answers to the many questions members and supporters may have. I know many of you have read similar communications to this in the past. You will do so again, while the essential funding of disability representative organisations continues to be inadequate and short-term.

I would like to acknowledge the leadership of all directors and Deb Deshayes, our Chief Executive Officer, for striving to put in place a solution most likely to guarantee BCA's survival into the future. Through all this uncertainty and turmoil, the staff has remained professional, dedicated and committed. I thank each of them for everything they have contributed to BCA.

 Fiona Woods, President, and Deb Deshayes, CEO

## Q&A for BCA members

### Question: What has happened?

### Answer:

BCA, as with many other disability representative organisations, is substantially reliant on government funding, with 80% of our funding coming from government grants. We receive funding as a Disability Representative Organisation (DRO) from the Department of Social Services (DSS). In recent years, BCA has also been very successful in gaining grants through the DSS Information, Linkages and Capacity-building (ILC) grants program. The ILC grants have funded projects such as Eye to the Future, Peer Connect, Executive Leadership Programs and some aspects of our policy and advocacy services. The grants vary in duration between one and three years. They are not recurrent which means we are required to apply for new grants when funding rounds are announced. We were not successful in achieving the grants we applied for this year. As a result, we are not in a position to renew contracts for staff funded through project grants beyond 30 June 2024.

### Question: Why are the changes happening?

### Answer:

We have not received feedback on why our grant applications were unsuccessful. Many previous recipients were also unsuccessful. We want to ensure that BCA is sustainable into the future. The funding cycle on which we are reliant means many of our staff can only be employed on short-term contracts. We need to re-think the way we operate and re-design responsibilities across all levels of the organisation.

### Question: What is the impact on BCA?

### Answer:

In order to operate within our current level of income, significant staffing reductions are required. Fewer staff means we have to make changes to the type and amount of services we currently provide.

### Question: Does BCA rely on any other forms of income?

### Answer:

Yes. BCA receives Victorian and NSW state government funding to deliver advocacy services. We also receive funding from the NDIA as a Disability Representative and Carer Organisation. Through partnership agreements, we are grateful to receive funding from Vision Australia, Guide Dogs Australia, EverAbility, and the Jeffrey Blyth Foundation. We especially value donations from our BCA Backers and from our members.

### Question: When will the changes take effect?

### Answer:

Our new staffing structure will commence on 1 July this year.

### Question: Which staff roles will be affected?

### Answer:

Most staff roles will be affected, either through a reduction in hours, modification to some duties and job roles, or by non-renewal of contracts. The Eye to the Future project will end on 30 June.

We will no longer be able to maintain our Project team: Bettina Twyman, Claire Dorling, Madison Braim and Natasha Brake. Our Policy Officer role will be restructured into a Senior Policy Officer position, resulting in Corey Crawford also leaving BCA. The Advocacy Projects Officer role, which supported members with NDIS reviews and Administrative Appeals Tribunal cases is not able to continue. The NSW/ACT Advocacy Projects Officer role and responsibilities will be covered by advocacy, policy, and engagement and consultation roles.

As of 1 July 2024, the BCA team will be:

Chief Executive Officer – Deb Deshayes

General Manager Operations – Angela Jaeschke

Executive Assistant – Christina Micallef

Communications Coordinator – Amila Dedovic

Administration and Information Officer – Samantha Marsh

National Advocacy Officer – Martin Stewart

Senior Policy Officer – Jackson Reynolds-Ryan

Engagement and Consultation Officer – Layal Hage

These employee positions will be supported by contractors who cover Finance, IT Support and Fundraising.

### Question: How will the re-design of BCA affect members?

### Answer:

There will be a stronger focus on supporting members to undertake self-advocacy. Peer Connect Groups will be asked to be more self-reliant around their co-ordination and use of Zoom. Less administrative support will be available to the CEO and board. Representation roles to government and other access committees will be taken up by members, in line with BCA’s Representation Policy and procedures.

### Question: Will there be staff to answer the phones and email?

### Answer:

Yes. As always, we are committed to being responsive to members’ needs. There will be staff available to answer phone calls and emails. However, the reduction in staff numbers may impact on the time taken to attend to calls and emails, especially as we adjust to these changes.

### Question: What changes will there be to advocacy services?

### Answer:

We will still have staff dedicated to support member advocacy. However, encouragement and support for self-advocacy will be increased as staff capacity to advocate on behalf of members is reduced. BCA will no longer have the resources to provide direct support to members with NDIS reviews or with cases to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal regarding NDIS matters. Members will be supported to engage with other advocacy organisations or groups in specific situations, such as when appealing NDIS decisions.

### Question: How will this affect BCA campaigns, such as audio description and accessible voting?

### Answer:

BCA will continue to focus on policy areas relevant to people who are blind or vision impaired and run campaigns relating to them. The Senior Policy Officer role will be coordinating activities and encouraging members to participate.

BCA will continue to work closely with our blindness sector partners in our campaign and policy activities.

### Question: How will BCA continue to do its policy work?

### Answer:

We will still have a staff member in a policy role, which will include liaison with the Government. There will also be a staff member with responsibility for vital consultation and engagement with members. The members of the National Policy Committee and other volunteers will take a more active role in writing policy.

### Question: Will there be changes to the Peer Connect groups?

### Answer:

The greatest strength of BCA is peer connection. It is who we are, and we will continue to do it well. The establishment of a formal Peer Connect program has been one of our great successes, building on decades of our members' experiences and contributions. Peer Connect has been member driven and continues to attract high participation numbers. The Peer Connect Groups will continue. However, facilitators will need to take a more active role in hosting Zoom meetings. Staff will still set up Zoom links and promote group activities in BCA publications.

### Question: What will happen with the Member Update, BCA Inform, BCA Connect, Yarning Circles and BCA Conversations?

### Answer:

At this stage, our intention is that all these communications and engagement activities will continue.

### Question: What is happening to the An Eye to the Future program?

### Answer:

The project will come to an end on 30 June 2024. Valuable resources developed by the team will remain on the An Eye to the Future website. BCA members currently involved in the An Eye to the Future program will be supported to link in with other specialist disability employment services.

### Question: What is happening to the NSW Advocacy & Projects position that was recently advertised?

### Answer:

We feel it would not be in the best interests of our staff to bring in new employees whilst others are losing their positions or facing a reduction in hours. The duties of the position will be undertaken by existing staff with strong advocacy and representation skills. Where additional representation is desirable, qualified members will be engaged to provide this. We are committed to ensuring that BCA continues to meet its obligations to provide significant and continuing benefits to former members of Blind Citizens NSW and to fulfil our obligations to the NSW government.

### Question: Does BCA have a plan to generate more income?

### Answer:

Yes, BCA and the Jeffrey Blyth Foundation (JBF) are jointly employing a dedicated Fundraising Manager. We are confident this will help to improve our financial position.

### Question: What does this mean for the celebration of our 50th anniversary convention next year?

### Answer:

Now more than ever, we feel it is important for our members to gather in 2025 to acknowledge BCA's resilience and legacy. Staff and volunteers will continue to support the three organising committees, to plan for and develop the 2025 Convention program and 50th anniversary celebrations. Part of our planning already involves seeking grants and sponsorship opportunities, which will be led by the staff logistics committee.

### Question: How many staff do we now have? And how many of them are blind or vision impaired?

### Answer:

BCA will now have a staff of eight people, reduced from the current total of thirteen. There will also be a Fundraising Manager. Half of our staff will be people who are blind or vision impaired.

### Question: What is being done to support staff?

### Answer:

All staff have been reminded that BCA provides them with access to the Employee Assistance Program, which offers a confidential counselling service.

BCA leadership has communicated and engaged regularly with both individual staff and as a whole team, throughout the process. We will continue to offer extra support and flexibility as needed.

### Question: What can members do to support BCA after the redesign?

### Answer:

We know that members will be considerate in their dealings with staff as we adjust to these changes and they complete their projects. Please consider your ability to contribute to our fundraising campaign. Members have always been the heart of BCA. We trust you will show us how much you value our organisation by responding to our requests for consultation and representation, as you always have.

### Question: Why doesn't BCA use its reserves to meet the funding shortfall?

### Answer:

BCA has worked hard to build up its reserves over the years. The dividends and earned interest on our investments form part of BCA’s untied funds in our annual budget.

If we were to use the invested funds to prop up an unsustainable organisation model, it would not take too long before our hard-earned reserves were depleted.

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