

**Ph** 1800 033 660 | **E** bca@bca.org.au | **W** [bca.org.au](http://www.bca.org.au/) | **ABN** 90 006 985 226

# BCA Conversations Q&A with BCA members

### Will branches be able to seek assistance from BCA staff to arrange zoom bookings, promote events and accepting payments through Humanitix?

Yes. This support will not change.

### Will there be a point of contact at BCA where branches can seek information, advice and/or as needed assistance in relation to performing various aspects of their work?

Yes. The staff contact is currently Bettina Twyman and will move to Layal Hage, BCA’s Engagement and Consultation Officer. There is also no change to the support currently provided by Stephen Belbin, Director, as Branch Liaison.

### How will this change impact on the role and functioning of the NSW ACT Coordinating Committee (now known as the State Division Committee)? Will this committee have staff support and will the Shirley Fund continue to be used for the intended purposes of supporting the work of BCA in New South Wales as per the merger agreement between Blind Citizens NSW and Blind Citizens Australia?

The NSW ACT State Division Committee will still be supported by BCA staff at the same level currently, including supporting the committee with minute taking and other tasks.

The Shirley Fund will continue to be used for its intended purposes supporting the work of BCA in New South Wales with no change.

The tasks of the NSW ACT Advocacy Project Officer role will be covered by other staff. Martin Stewart has been providing advocacy to members in New South Wales as the National Advocacy Officer for some time now and this will continue.

Representative work within New South Wales will also continue and be shared among existing staff. With help from our members, we are confident that we will continue to have a representative voice on as many committees as we can.

### Fundamentally, what exactly will change or be cut more generally?

The main thing that will change is the number of staff at BCA. We will be reduced to eight staff, with some staff working less hours. This mainly impacts BCA’s ability to continue employing a projects team. Our policy and advocacy team has also been reduced from six people to three.

Ultimately, the type of work we do will not change, including developing policy positions, individual and systemic advocacy work and representation.

### How will a smaller team effect New South Wales in particular?

We are confident that we will continue to be able to meet our reporting requirements to the NSW government and the Shirley Fund.

Moving forward, we will need the support of our members in New South Wales to ensure representation continues within the sector at current capacity.

### Given the scaling back of individual advocacy support, what will this mean for those members for whom the organisation’s handling of direct advocacy cases has already commenced?

Martin Stewart will continue as the National Advocacy Officer. There will be times when we may need to prioritise based on urgency.

Unfortunately, BCA will no longer have the resources to provide direct support to members with NDIS reviews or with NDIS review related cases under the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT). BCA is currently scoping a referral process with another organisation and we encourage members to also engage additional supports.

### How will BCA support members with NDIS AAT issues moving forward?

Within BCA’s involvement as a member of the NDIA Disability Representative Community Organisations (DRCO) group and Reform for Outcomes working groups, this topic is being addressed. BCA was not actually funded to do this work previously. However, Peta Hogan, former National Advocacy Project Officer, came to BCA with this particular skills set and the role was re-designed to meet this need within the membership. BCA will continue to build their relationship with the NDIA and advocate for improvements regarding AAT issues.

BCA will develop a referral process to an advocacy ensure our members are able to be supported with NDIS reviews and NDIS AAT cases.

### Will the Executive Leadership Program (ELP) be funded again at this stage?

Unfortunately, no. Additional funding under the Individual Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) grant has not been received to run another session of this training. It was noted that by running this program for two years, BCA has been able to support a number of graduates and produced a large amount of information and resources for future use should similar funding be made available.

### How will changes in BCA funding impact the branches and branch activities?

There will be no impact on branches. All branches and branch activities, including the National Women’s’ Branch, will continue to run with no change.

### Can you clarify how the decrease in BCA staff resources will directly impact peer group leaders?

Currently, BCA peer connect groups run differently, depending on the group, with some operating very independently and others still requiring staff support to run the group. BCA no longer has the resources to support specific groups and will work to assist them to run more independently.

### Has BCA considered running the An Eye to the Future project as a Fee for Service program?

This has been considered and will explore all possibilities.

### Where will employment support for members go once the An Eye to the Future program ends?

The An Eye to the Future project team have prepared a referral process to support members post-program.

### Is BCA looked upon as favourably with regard to funding applications for advocacy?

There is a lot of work that goes into grant application submissions and a lot of competition for a very small amount of funding. In addition, we don’t always receive feedback, so it can be difficult to understand why we have not been successful. We are hoping the new fundraising position will assist BCA to be more successful in gaining untied funds that do not dictate when and how the funds are used.

BCA has built a strong relationship with our funding managers within the Department of Social Services.

### Does BCA know where the funding money is going or has there been a significant cut in funding overall?

Unfortunately, there isn’t a simple answer. Some of the funding is going to other organisations that have not received funding previously or have received less funding in the past. Some issues also relate to changes in how the funding has been split across the sector.

### Is there anything members can do to advocate for BCA to get more funding?

There is currently an active Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) campaign that members can contribute to by sharing media posts among their networks. More details are available on the AFDO website.

The more active members BCA has, the greater the voice. Members are encouraged to spread the word about the important work of BCA and refer more people who are blind or vision impaired to become members.

### What are the next steps?

The immediate next steps will be reforming our new team as of 1st July and continuing to deliver on our strategic plan and recruiting for the Fundraising Manager position.

# Original Q&A Document circulated 12 June 2024

# 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

### 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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