**BCA Inform: December, AI and Digital Accessibility**

On Tuesday 3rd December, BCA Inform was held to discuss the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital accessibility and how innovation is impacting the lives of people who are blind or vision impaired.

The session commenced with Santiago Valesquez, founder and CEO of EyeSyght and Hailo. Santiago discussed the development of Halo which is designed to improve accessibility for public transport users. Santiago explained that while Halo is devised to provide a comprehensive experience, it also allows other apps to integrate its features. The app allows users to select their destination and access requirements, such as being a dog guide user or wheelchair user and provides alerts to both the driver and the user. Santiago then explained how Halo offers flexibility in public transport planning, timetable information, real-time vehicle location updates, and the ability to hail a bus.

Santiago emphasized that Halo was developed to be accessible to everyone. Its main goal is to assist in developing a public transport system that prioritizes accessibility and is reliable to people with different disabilities. He also highlighted the challenges faced by software developers in creating accessible products and services, and the ongoing need for a better understanding of accessibility issues.

Santiago then discussed the challenges of making technology accessible, particularly in the context of AI and software development. The importance of user testing to improve accessibility was emphasized. Santiago also shared his experience in developing a new user interface for the version 2.0 of the app and discussed how software updates pose new obstacles which app developers constantly aim to overcome.

The session then moved onto Jackson Reynolds-Ryan, BCA’s Senior Policy officer who led a discussion on the rapid development and application of AI technology, highlighting its potential benefits and risks. Jackson spoke about BCA’s plan to develop policy documents on AI to ensure informed submissions to government inquiries.

Attendees expressed concern about finding a balance between the potential of AI and the necessity for human interaction and intervention, particularly for older people or those with multiple disabilities. Concerns over governments adopting a one-size-fits-all approach and relying solely on AI solutions was voiced, as this could lead to some people being left behind.

And finally, the session ended with a discussion about acknowledging the lack of privacy in the digital age we live in and the importance of being aware of how companies use our data and in turn taking necessary precautions as users.