

**Submission
No 41**

INQUIRY INTO VOTING CENTRE ACCESSIBILITY

Organisation: Carers Victoria

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Carers Victoria Submission to the Victorian Parliament's Electoral Matters Committee Inquiry into Victorian Voting Centre Accessibility

Setting the Scene

Accessible voting centres and processes are fundamental to enabling all Victorians, and in particular those from historically marginalised citizens or communities, exercise their rights to vote. Carers Victoria welcomes the Committee's Inquiry into how accessibility can be improved and the specific call-out to Victorians who support those with disability to provide their ideas and feedback.

For unpaid carers, exercising their own right to vote and/or supporting the person or people they care for to do so can sometimes be fraught with complexity. Providing often intensive and complex support means carers may have limited capacity to plan ahead and identify the voting centre most appropriate to the needs of the person they care for or themselves. In addition to managing their time to attend a voting centre, carers may also need to support the care receiver's physical or emotional needs (e.g. capacity to stand in line for long periods, or response to an unfamiliar setting) alongside voting centre staff and community expectations. The unique nature of their role gives them invaluable insight into the design of accessible voting centres and processes.

At the same time, it is also important to recognise that many carers themselves also have disability - approximately 40% of carers nation-wide.¹

Carers Victoria recognises that the perspectives of both carers and care recipients are essential to help ensure accessible voting centres and practices. In this submission, we highlight carers' experiences and perspectives on what is working and what can be improved.

About Carers Victoria

Carers Victoria is a for-purpose organisation working to ensure that the almost 1 million unpaid carers across the state are understood, recognised and supported as while it is an important role, it can also be a challenging one. To progress our vision of a future in which all unpaid carers are recognised, valued and supported, we:

- provide them with free advice and information to help them in their role
- connect them to respite activities that allow them to take a break and recharge
- deliver events and education for carers and carer-interested organisations

¹ [Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#), accessed 20/2/2026.



Carers Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work, the Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin Nation, and pay our respect to Elders past and present. We acknowledge the continuing connection to land and waters. Sovereignty was never ceded.



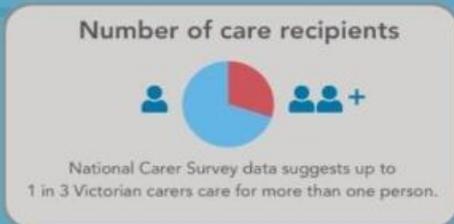
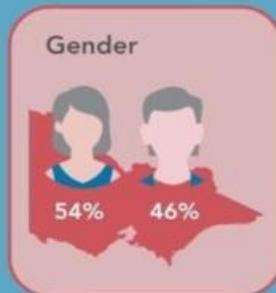
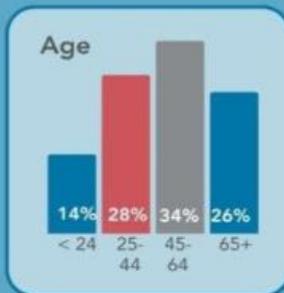
- collect, analyse and release information about carers so their role and their needs are better understood.

These contribute to our purpose of advancing understanding of Victoria's unpaid carers and improving their access to assistance - whoever they are, wherever they live, and whomever may be their care recipient. Every Victorian will know, need and/or be an unpaid carer at some point in their lives so the potential reach of our work is significant.²

² Further information about Carers Victoria can be accessed via our website, [Home page - Carers Victoria](#).

The Caring Facts

750,000+
Victorians are
unpaid carers



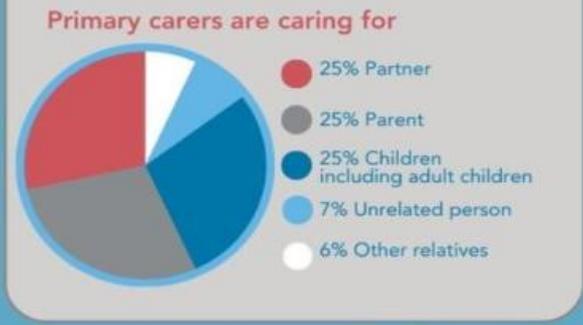
Primary carers

39% of Victorian carers are identified as primary carers, that is a person who provides the most assistance with the core activities of mobility, self-care and communication.

70% of primary carers are women

50% of primary carers are working

Compared to **73%** of the general population who work



First Nations carers

Higher prevalence of first nations carers compared to the non-indigenous community

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022) Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, TableBuilder.
 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) Population Census, QuickStats
 Carers NSW, 2024: 2024 National Carer Survey. Summary tables for Victoria.

Improving accessibility at voting centres for all Victorians

Carers Victoria welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Electoral Matters Committee Inquiry into voting centre accessibility and supports the Parliament's priority to make voting centres more accessible and to increase voter turnout by people with disabilities.

Our longstanding membership of the Victorian Electoral Commission's Electoral Access Advisory Group reflects our commitment to increasing the recognition, that for some people with disability, carers are the primary support to assist them to exercise their right to vote. In recognition of this important role, we have worked with the VEC to develop resources for carers to support people with disability exercise their right to vote including guides to enrolment and voting (including Easy English versions).

The role of Victoria's unpaid carers

Under the *Victorian Carer Recognition Act 2012*, a carer is defined as anyone who provides care to another person in a 'care relationship', including carers aged under 18 years, who has a disability, mental illness, is an older person with care needs, or has an ongoing medical condition.

Unpaid carers commonly provide the most support and assistance to people living with disabilities (compared to formal services) and are essential to their health, wellbeing and livelihood, whether they are a child, partner, parent, sibling, other family member, neighbour or friend. Their range of responsibilities often include personal care, healthcare, transport, advocacy, communication assistance, service navigation, cognitive and/or emotional support, household tasks and behaviour support.

Considering the breadth of responsibilities carers undertake, it is no surprise carers are often a key support to enable the care recipient to exercise their right to vote in person at a voting centre or through postal ballots. In the context of this Inquiry, it makes carers' experiences and perspectives not only unique, but valuable for strategic planning on ways to best ensure voting centres and processes are accessible.

Capturing carer voice to inform our submission

To support our submission, Carers Victoria administered a brief survey to carers as an opportunity to reflect on their own experiences voting in Victoria and supporting the person or people they care for to vote. We adapted the Committee's own questions when seeking community input, asking the following questions:

1. Had they changed their voting location to better accommodate their care role? If yes, what were the reasons.
2. What criteria should be used when choosing voting centres so they're accessible to people with disability and carers?
3. What help should staff at voting centres offer to people with disability and carers?
4. As a carer, what was done well and what could have been improved at voting centres in previous Victorian elections?

5. Anything else they wished to add.

The responses reflect the need for voting centre accessibility to go beyond accommodating physical restrictions and toward accommodating different limitations that may hinder the right to vote including psychosocial, neurodiversity and cognitive impairments such as dementia.

To advocate for carers as voters in their own right, we asked if carers had changed their voting location to better accommodate their care role. Their responses reflect that they prioritise the needs of the care recipient when choosing a voting centre, taking into account physical limitations and safety.

"[I chose a] location with activities for children i.e. playground on site"

"[We opted for postal] voting because my wife cannot stand for extended periods of time."

"I couldn't leave the person I care for alone for too long. I previously worked and voted in the city, but I am now at home in the suburbs"

Survey respondents

Physically accessible voting centres are important to carers

Carers identified the need for greater consistency in physical accessibility across voting centres. This includes wheelchair-accessible entrances, disabled parking, wide and unobstructed pathways, space to accommodate assistance animals, flat flooring, accessible toilets, and low-height voting booths. Additional space to manoeuvre mobility aids, seating while progressing in the queue, and rest areas were also recommended. Good lighting, clear signage and simple layout was also needed. Carers noted that overcrowding and long queues should be actively considered, as standing for extended periods can be distressing or physically difficult for some.

"Where centres were physically accessible and clearly laid out, the voting process was straightforward and dignified. However, accessibility was inconsistent between locations. Some centres had steps, narrow entrances, limited seating or long queues, which made voting difficult for the person I support."

"Accessibility should be embedded in voting centre planning from the outset, rather than addressed through last-minute adjustments on polling day. Consistent standards for venue selection, clearer public information about accessibility, and mandatory disability awareness training for all voting centre staff would help ensure a more equitable and dignified voting experience for people with disability and carers across Victoria."

Survey respondents

Voting centre accessibility must also include accommodations for people with non-physical disabilities

Respondents emphasised that measures to improve accessibility should extend beyond those needed for people with physical disabilities. Supporting people who are neurodiverse, have mental health challenges or cognitive impairment to exercise their vote is important. Suggested improvements included the provision of quiet or sensory-

friendly spaces, formal recognition of hidden disabilities (e.g. people using the 'Sunflower' lanyard), and priority or dedicated queues for people who experience difficulty with waiting or crowded environments.

"It's great that there are low booths for wheelchairs, but disabilities are not just physical"

"I once asked a staff member if we could have priority entrance, as queueing was causing my son distress. The gentleman escorted us in, and helped us in the booth. In the next election, I went to a different place and we were not able to have priority entrance, there were no staff available to help, and there was only a wheelchair-level booth, no other provision for other types of disability."

"The Sunflower Hidden Disability Program could assist with this identification at future voting centres."

Survey respondents

Staff training and supports should be strengthened and consistent

Carers expected a higher degree of knowledge, awareness and lived experience of disability and/or caring by volunteers and staff. Respondents highlighted the importance of staff being patient, compassionate and calm. Suggestions for improvement included clearer guidance for voters on where to go and what to do and staff asking about whether assistance was required rather than making assumptions. Some carers reported witnessing impatience or a lack of understanding by staff, indicating a need for improved training and consistency.

"[It was done well] when voting centre staff have observed the need for my family to be prioritised in a queue".

[I've witnessed the] kindness of staff supporting person with disability [but also poor support when being separated] from the person who needed support"

"People with disabilities may need help from their carers. This shouldn't be questioned by electoral staff as it can make the person with the disability embarrassed to be publicly outed as needing help."

Survey respondents

While some carers described positive experiences where staff provided priority access and appropriate assistance, others reported limited support, refusal of priority access, or accessibility provisions focused only on wheelchair use. Carers noted that inconsistent practices between voting centres and elections created stress and uncertainty and called for more uniform implementation of accessibility measures statewide.

"As a carer, previous voting centre experiences in Victoria have been mixed. In many cases, staff were polite, patient and willing to assist when asked, and support people were generally welcomed. [But] not all staff appeared confident in supporting people with sensory, cognitive or communication needs. Greater consistency in accessible venue

selection, clearer information in advance, shorter wait times, and improved staff training would significantly improve the experience for carers and people with disability.”

Survey respondent

Improving accessibility goes beyond voting centres on polling day.

We note that the Inquiry’s focus is increasing accessibility of voting centres for people to physically attend to cast their vote. However, it is important to recognise the increasing number of people opting for postal votes during state elections and that postal voting is the only form of voting in local government elections. Postal voting process should also reflect best-practice accessibility standards and taking into account Australia Post’s reduced capacity to deliver mail.

“Need...an easier process for people using postal votes as there were quite a few people at the last election who did not receive their postal votes in time.”

Survey respondent

Insight from the Australian Capital Territory dedicated low sensory voting location

We note that the Committee is interested in examples in other jurisdictions of work undertaken to enhance accessibility of voting centres. We have consulted with our colleagues at Carers ACT who provided insight about their involvement in the Territory’s Accessibility Advisory Committee in the lead-up to that jurisdiction’s 2024 election.

Elections ACT, the office of the ACT Electoral Commissioner, convened a group of advocacy and peak bodies to inform accessible voting initiatives and communications, including Easy Read materials, instructional videos, and guidance for carers supporting someone to vote.

A key outcome was the co-design of a *dedicated low sensory voting location* that operated for the full voting period. The centre featured natural lighting, increased space, and calming environmental elements, allowing people to attend when comfortable and take time to adjust.

Elections ACT was encouraged to especially recruit community services workers with experience working with people with disability or mental health challenges as polling officials. This approach was seen as preferable to providing voting staff with disability awareness training and intended to support voter autonomy and reduce pressure on carers. Carer awareness was also embedded in staff training, and Carers ACT provided information on Carer Gateway and available supports at the centre. Post-election evaluation included targeted surveys of voters and carers, designed to minimise further obligations on carers. We have included a screenshot of the information on the Election ACT’s website and their recruitment advertisement overleaf.^{3 4}

³ [Information for people with a disability - Elections ACT](#)

⁴ [Polling Official - Low Sensory / Neurodiverse Polling Place - Job in Canberra & ACT - ACT Electoral Commission](#)

Low sensory voting location

A new polling location will be available at the 2024 ACT election. The low sensory voting centre is a specialised Early Voting Centre for neurodivergent voters who may require a quieter, calmer environment to cast their vote.

Features include:

- fewer voting booths with greater space between
- natural light and adjustable individual lighting at booths
- access to a waiting room if you need extra time before or after voting
- one completely separate voting room separate from the main voting room

Trained staff will be happy help with reasonable adjustments and provide assistance to ensure your voting experience allows you to have your say in your way.

Located at:

[Canberra Museum and Gallery - in Civic Square \(next to the Civic Library\)](#) [↗](#)

[See early voting opening hours](#)

Figure 1, Screenshot of dedicated low sensory voting location description on Election ACT's website.

The screenshot shows a job advertisement on the EthicalJobs website. The page has a green header with the EthicalJobs logo and navigation links for Job search, About us, Career advice, Join us, Sign in, and Employers. The main content area has a dark green background. The job title is "Polling Official - Low Sensory / Neurodiverse Polling Place" by the ACT Electoral Commission. The description states that Elections ACT is offering a unique opportunity for enthusiastic and dedicated individuals to work as casual staff in a new low-sensory polling place for the 2024 ACT Legislative Assembly. The location is Civic, Canberra City. The dates are early voting from 8 October to 18 October, and Election Day on 19 October. The role involves assisting voters, issuing ballot papers, managing queues, monitoring ballot boxes, and ensuring that all votes are accurately sorted and counted. The advertisement also includes a "KEY DETAILS" section with location, dates, and role information, and a "WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR" section with requirements for experience in supporting neurodiverse individuals and high-quality customer service skills. On the right side, there is a "SHARE JOB" section with social media icons and a "More from this Employer" section.

Figure 2, Screenshot of Elections ACT Polling Official advertisement