

Vic Parliamentary Inquiry into voting centre accessibility 2026

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RESPONSE TO SURVEY QUESTIONS AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

Responses to the survey questions are a result of consultation with the Institute's Victorian Enabling Architecture Committee. Membership of this group include architects with significant experience and technical expertise in accessible design in the built environment and many have lived experience. Members of our committee would be willing to talk to the Inquiry committee should you wish.

1. What criteria should be used when choosing voting centres so that they're accessible to people with disability?

All voting centres, regardless of age or location, should comply with the premises standards for public buildings (Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards 2010 (Premises Standards) is legislated under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992). While venue options may be limited in some locations, this should be the minimum standard to meet community expectations, manage risks and provide equity.

As a Summary, we would like to highlight the following areas that we view essential and highly recommended:

- All minimum standards/ criteria also apply to pre-polling centres
- Accessible parking space(s) – essential. Voting centres that do not have accessible parking either in a carpark or on the street, with a clear path to the voting centre should be excluded.
- Continuous accessible path of travel from the footpath and the accessible parking space(s) to the building entrance, polling area, toilets – essential
- Undercover drop-off/pick-up space at/by the building entrance - preferred/ recommended, future option

- Accessible polling booths (with seating) – essential that staff are available at these booths if required and at least one wide booth (900mm wide) per centre and at least one (1):
 - Double width (1350 mm wide) accessible polling booths – located away from other booths to provide acoustic privacy - preferred/ recommended especially for neurodivergent and those with a support person
 - A polling booth with a lower height profile to support those in wheelchairs and an option to be seated for those requiring support
- Accessible toilet & ambulant toilet – essential
- Express polling lines for people with a disability and those requiring assistance – essential

2. What help should staff at voting centres offer to people with disability?

We highly recommend that as part of the induction training staff receive, a mandatory component should include disability awareness and basic principles and concepts in equity and assisting people with support needs.

Critical to this is communication skills and how to practically support people that require assistance or support in voting. We recommend these skills be listed as core competencies in position descriptions and be a critical factor in hiring decisions.

We highly recommend that a protocol be developed that provides supervisors and leadership staff especially, but all staff, prompts to support all voters (keeping in mind not all disabilities are visible), such as: Do you need assistance with voting today? Then the protocol should allow supervisors to escort people with support needs to an “express” line and organise the support they need and allow access to wider, more supportive booths. Signage is critical to this.

We recommend signage on the walk to the booths encouraging people who require assistance to identify themselves to election staff. This will also be helped by information on the VEC website AND will require election staff to manage lines not just stay in/near the voting room itself. This is linked to limiting the ability of volunteers handing out how to vote cards to not be permitted within a specified distance of the doors of the venue to not only ensure ease of access but also election staff integrity.

As a Summary, we would like to highlight the following areas that we view essential and highly recommended:

- Disability and accessibility awareness training as part of their induction – essential
- Disability awareness and communication skills as a key selection criteria for staff
- Active staff engagement with queues and have the authority to move voters with a disability to the head of the queue/express lane, if necessary.
- Signage and website notices advertising accessible centres (with specific details covering questions 1 & 2) and tell voters to identify themselves to staff at a centre if that person who requires assistance.
- Offer wayfinding guidance to voters who are blind or have low vision.
- Limit ability of volunteers to hand out flyers to single location to ensure neurodivergent and people with anxiety are not overwhelmed or fear voting at a centre

Similar to the AEC website, the VEC website should provide:

- Accessibility rating of the polling places.
- Detailed information on the level of accessibility of the polling place to meet minimum standards and the criteria listed in responses to questions 1 & 2.

3. If you have a disability (or help someone who does), have you had good or bad experiences at voting centres in previous Victorian elections? What was done well and what could have been better?

Overall, the members of the committee and their families reported significant challenges and past experiences that those people with lived experience choose postal voting as they feel they have no other viable option. In our consultations, those with lived experience rightly agreed that this was an equity issue and that they should have the option to vote in person should they wish to – that choice is not a reality currently.

The following quotes and stories are taken from members of the Institute’s enabling architecture committee and their families’ experiences.

“My son-in-law who is wheelchair borne tells me he has taken to postal voting because of the difficulties he has faced.”

“I am neurodivergent so I just postal vote as the long lines and being hassled by volunteers with flyers is overwhelming”

“I take my elderly parents voting and assist them in the booth. They are not disabled but need help in filling out the forms. The booths are not wide enough to stand next to them to support them.”

“The last time I voted there were so many tripping hazards – there was an accessible path but it was faster and all the signs pointed to crossing across a playground which if I was mobility impaired would have been a nightmare. The standard door size to the classroom where the booths are wasn’t very wide. These things need to be in halls with double or wider doors not classrooms in the school.”

There is no real other option that postal voting which is unfair. I should have the choice to be part of the process and vote on the day, get my democracy sausage like everyone else. I just don’t feel like this is an option anymore.”

“When the car park is full you need to be able to drop oldies or people you are supporting at the front so they don’t have to walk as far. But there is no seating and no shelter if it’s raining or very hot. Accessible parking is one option but chairs and even umbrellas would be an easy fix. Doesn’t have to be everywhere but a centre with designated drop off area would be good to know.”

“Parents of neurodivergent children or children with a disability have no real option but to postal vote. I remember going to vote with my parents and understanding the importance of democracy and the process. These children won’t experience that which is a real shame;

but movie theatres and supermarkets have quiet hours and special times to support access - surely we could do that for voting too?"

4. Any other matters related to the [terms of reference](#).

(a) compliance with disability access standards, including physical access and way finding;

To adequately address compliance we believe the definition of disability should not be limited to physical impairment disabilities as not all disabilities are visible. As a minimum the standard definition for disability should include people that are neurodivergent.

(b) signage, lighting and safety measures at polling places;

- Signage must include physical signage but also the same information on the VEC website. We support the AEC website as best practice that could be easily replicated.
- Quiet hours with no how to vote card volunteers or dimmed lighting could be trailed to support neurodivergent voters given this is a significantly growing cohort in the population.
- Accessible pathways and drop off points with no trip hazards

(c) the provision of information and assistance to voters with accessibility needs;

- We support the AEC website as best practice that could be easily replicated.

(d) examples of best practice from other jurisdictions; and

- Providing pictures of the voting space, doorways, car park and pathway reassures voters with accessibility needs that they can adequately and confidently navigate the spaces. In the future this could expand to a virtual walk through or what to expect. What we know is that people with accessibility needs extensively pre-plan any journey and visual elements are essential tools to support decision making.

(e) recommendations to improve accessibility for voters at future Victorian State elections to the Electoral Matters Committee for consideration and report no later than 30 September 2026.

The committee is cognisant that not all of our recommendations may be able to be completed before the November 2026 state elections however the majority require minimal additional planning and preparation that would demonstrate significant return of investment for those with people who require assistance.

We are also aware that while 100% compliance with the Disability (Access to Premises-Buildings) Standards 2010 is the recommended gold standard, we are realistic and comfortable suggesting that if it is a decision between more access through more voting centres (less congested, lower wait times) and buildings that meet at 50%-80% compliant and spread throughout an electorate, then we would prefer more choice. Our rationale is embedded with technical expertise and lived experience where we know that not everyone

with a disability requires fully AS 1428.1 compliance. An example provided was a smaller, older compliant toilet is sufficient.

Our solution is as stated above, providing written and photographic information such as the width of all doors from the carparking to the voting area, gradient of any paths, layout and dimensions of any toilet provided for the few that are not fully compliant would allow sufficient informed choice and decision making.

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The Institute exists to advance the interests of members, their professional standards and contemporary practice, and expand and advocate the value of architects and architecture to the sustainable growth of our communities, economy and culture.

The Institute actively works to maintain and improve the quality of our built environment by promoting better, responsible and environmental design.

PURPOSE

- This submission is made by the Victorian Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) Enabling Architecture Committee to provide input on survey questions proposed and the Terms of reference for the Inquiry .
- At the time of this submission the Victorian Chapter President is Stephanie Bullock FRAIA.
- The Victorian Chapter Executive Leader is Sarah Gafforini.

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