

Electoral Matters Committee

Secretariat

Via email: emc@parliament.vic.gov.au

Inquiry into Voting Centre Accessibility

Dear Committee Members,

The Youth Disability Advocacy Service (YDAS) and the Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into Voting Centre Accessibility in Victoria – an issue that is critical for disabled young people’s human rights and participation in democracy.

YDAS is the only advocacy organisation in Victoria dedicated to supporting disabled young people to achieve their human rights. YDAS designs and champions youth-centred solutions, making sure disabled young people are part of creating solutions for the systemic issues that impact their lives. YDAS champions the human rights and social models of disability.

YACVic is the peak body for young people and the youth sector in Victoria. A key part of our work is elevating the voices of young people to government and ensuring our advice is based on meaningful youth participation. Young people have a right to participate in decision-making that affects them, and our vision is to ensure young people are respected, and they are active, visible and valued in their communities.

YDAS currently operates as a service of YACVic, however YDAS is transitioning to operating as an independent organisation in 2026. Both organisations use our expertise in youth policy, co-design, and participation to provide evidence-based policy advice to government. We operate as a vital bridge between young people and the government, ensuring young people are informed and meaningfully represented in decisions shaping their future.

Access and inclusion in democracy

Disabled young people make up almost 14% of young people aged between 15 – 24 in Australia (ABS).¹ This means that there are many disabled young Victorians voting for the first time in the upcoming 2026 Victorian Election. Accessibility and inclusivity of voting centres is critical for ensuring disabled people have their say on policies that directly impact their lives – such as accessibility standards, human rights protections, income support payments, access to services, and how

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state-based services and initiatives interfaces with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), including the roll out of foundational supports.

The right of disabled people to vote and participate in decision-making processes that impact their lives is enshrined in both the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD)² and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR).³ These rights to democratic inclusion must be supported with an intersectional lens, taking into account the multiple and intersecting barriers experienced by disabled young people.

Disabled young people (aged 15 to 24 years) are more likely to report experiences of discrimination (20.5%) compared with those aged 65 years and over (2.1%).⁴ Data obtained from the YDAS Individual Advocacy service also show that disabled young people experience significant barriers when accessing state services in conjunction with other services due to their age-specific needs not being well understood.

There is a lack of accessible information and resources targeted at young and first-time voters who have a disability. As part of the Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 State Election, a survey with disabled Victorians revealed:

- a desire for information about candidates and their policies in a central and easy-to-understand format.
- the need for increased support and resources on enrolling and how to vote, including in easy English.
- Voting venue accessibility issues including the need for better support standing in line, improved staff training, increased infection protection measures, stronger support for neurodivergent voters (such as designated low-sensory voting times), and a lack of wheelchair-accessible centres.

Other concerns highlighted in the Committee's detailed analysis report included the significant barriers faced by people with an intellectual and cognitive disability to participate in elections, including inadequate resources and support to enable people to make informed decisions about politics and government.

Consultation with disabled young people

Due to resource constraints, YDAS and YACVic were not in a position to conduct meaningful and comprehensive consultations with disabled young people to ensure a diverse range of voices underpin this submission. As such, we will not be making detailed recommendations regarding voting accessibility.

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Instead, we ask that the Committee:

- **Provide dedicated funding for YDAS to conduct paid consultations with disabled young people to support this Inquiry, ensuring their unique experiences, views and recommendations are appropriately considered by the Committee.**

It is critical that the Committee consults meaningfully with disabled young people to ensure any outcomes from this Inquiry are genuinely reflective of their views and experiences. This is particularly important during a period of significant systemic reform regarding disability and service provision following the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability⁵ and the NDIS Review.⁶ The Victorian Government will soon be developing the new State Disability Plan for implementation in 2027.

YDAS is well positioned to support and lead consultations with disabled young people. All work at YDAS is co-designed and co-delivered by, with, and for disabled young people. YDAS has a pool of young facilitators with lived experience of disability who lead consultations and run access and inclusion training. Our approach ensures consultations are delivered in a manner that is fully accessible and inclusive for participants. YDAS has previously supported the Victorian Government with targeted consultations for disabled young people, including in the development of the 2022 – 2026 State Disability Plan and the 2022-2027 Victorian Youth Strategy.

YDAS also runs programs for workers and disabled young people, including workshops and consultations which are an opportunity for disabled young people to learn and advocate for their rights, and to support workers to ensure their programs are accessible.

Recently, the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee appointed paid Youth Associates to consult with a diverse range of other young people as part of the [Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries](#). This approach aligns with best practice, and we encourage the Committee to consider a similar process through its engagement with disabled young people.

YDAS and YACVic funding constraints

Young people are the experts of their own lives and have a right to participate in decision making that affects them. But, too often, their voices are underrepresented in community consultation, and they are given limited opportunities to contribute in accessible and youth-specific ways.

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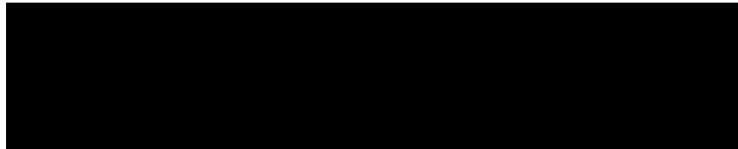
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Both YACVic and YDAS deliver essential advocacy and use our expertise in co-design and youth participation to ensure our policy submissions to Government inquiries remain meaningfully informed by young people's voices and experiences. However, over recent years this role has been threatened. Both organisations core funding has declined in real terms while workforce and compliance costs have risen sharply. YDAS has inadequate funding to employ a policy position, while YACVic's policy team has been significantly reduced.

We would welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with the Committee to conduct meaningful consultations with disabled young people.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Mija, Head of YDAS, at mgwyn@ydas.org.au or Mary, CEO of YACVic, at MNega@YACVic.org.au.

Sincerely,



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CEO YACVic

Mija Gwyn
Head of YDAS

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