**Jury duty**

I believe that a person who is blind or vision impaired should serve on a jury and have access to the appropriate supports and resources to do so.

**Secondary disability**

We didn’t get to talk about how a person with a secondary disability such as deafness, Autism, Acquired Brain Injury or mild Intellectual or Learning Disability could serve on a jury.

**Audio Description AD**

AD has been around in many forms for a while now. It’s not equally available or accessible to all members of the blindness/low vision community.

In addition to the types of AD mentioned at the consultation there are also audio tours provided by some art galleries for major exhibitions. The audio tours can be hired by anyone and give a description of each artwork highlighting particular details as well as providing extra background information. I have used audio tours at the National Gallery of Victoria and the Australian Centre for the Moving Image.

Description Victoria not only provides AD for plays and opera, but also for live events and festivals such as the Melbourne Fringe Festival. They are working to expand their AD services into other areas including hiring an audio describer to accompany individuals to exhibitions etc.

For AD to be effective in the courtroom it would need to be accurate, concise, and without interpretation or judgement.

**Rural jury members**

As I mentioned I have a real concern about standing out and not being able to blend in with other jurors. Country people who are blind or vision impaired tend to be noticed. My concern is serving on a jury and having someone approach me whilst I’m out shopping because they have recognized me from a case and want to express their opinion on the case/verdict. Or abuse me because they didn’t agree with the jury’s decision.

**Travel**

There are also travel issues for out of town jurors due to lack of public transport and/or taxi services.

For example, the Horsham Court serves four local councils in that area. If a juror comes from another town they have limited public transport options, if they have them at all, for getting to and from Horsham for court. Some examples, Warracknabeal is about 45minutes drive north of Horsham but there isn’t a bus service. Dimboola and Nhil are 45minutes and 1hour respectively west of Horsham. There are only two V-line services in the morning, one arrives at 6:40am and the other at 10:35am.

Would the court system pick up the tab for people’s travel costs so they could arrive at court on time?

Where both public transport and taxi use are not an option what alternative would the court provide?

**Accessing video and photo evidence by a juror with a vision impairment**

A juror with a vision impairment could access Photo and video evidence via the use of a court provided iPad. This would allow them to adjust the size of the photo and zoom in on areas of interest. This also allows the juror to bring the iPad closer to their face to make it easier to see. The juror could have the option to use AD or not.

**Changing attitudes/culture**

Prejudice towards people who are blind or vision impaired seems to be quite deep seeded. Although when questioned many people would deny being prejudiced or biased.

To change attitudes and culture any disability awareness training etc needs to strike at the heart of the prejudice/bias rather than just what appears on the surface.

The below list of reasons for prejudice/bias is by no means exhaustive and I have not pulled any punches;

* Blindness/vision impairment is seen as a death sentence
* Blindness/vision impairment is their worst nightmare for many sighted people, they would rather be deaf than blind
* For some reason sight seems to be given far more value than the other senses. Some sighted people have even admitted that sight is their primary sense.
* When you are blind or vision impaired you are totally dependent
* People who are blind or vision impaired are a constant reminder to sighted people of the frailty of life, everyone ends up with a vision impairment eventually due to age
* For some sighted people it is about dividing the community into us and them
* If a blind or vision impaired person misses a social cue it is because they are daft or have an intellectual disability rather than the cue being visual
* Ignorance
* Stupidity, including not thinking it through such as when being asked to eat a meal under blindfold and complaining that you won’t be able to see where your mouth is!!!
* Lack of imagination, not being able to imagine how they would operate in that situation

**Making jury duty accessible**

* Inclusion of information regarding the types of support available to jurors who are blind or vision impaired in the jury call out document.
* Given the above encourage jury candidates who are blind or vision impaired to disclose.
* All written material to be provided in the juror’s preferred format and in a timely manner.
* Physical orientation to the courtroom, the courthouse and its facilities prior to the trial.
* Blindness awareness training to be provided to all court staff including alternative document formats, assisting a person who is blind or vision impaired, guide dog etiquette, and familiarisation with adaptive technology that will be used.
* The Keeper of the Jury to assist a blind or vision impaired juror to access the facilities, move between different parts of the courthouse, access the guide dog toileting area etc.
* If the court provides adaptive technology for use during the trial then the juror needs time prior to the trial to adjust settings to their personal preferences and to familiarise themselves with it.
* Where required provide assistance with travel to and from court.
* If jurors are permitted to take notes during a trial then jurors who are blind or vision impaired are allowed to take notes in their preferred format.
* If voting in a jury room is by secret ballot then a means for a blind or vision impaired juror to cast a secret, independent and verifiable vote must be provided.