

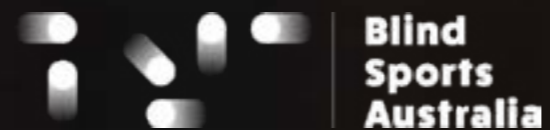


# **Blind Sports Australia Community Sport Guide**

**delivering sport to people with a vision impairment**



**Blind  
Sports  
Australia**






## Blind Sports Australia

A.B.N. 68 008 621 252  
Foundation member of the Australian  
Paralympic Committee

P.O. Box 8030 / 454 Glenferrie Road  
Kooyong VICTORIA 3144  
03 9864 9409

admin@blindsportsaustralia.com.au  
www.blindsportsaustralia.com.au

 Facebook | @BlindSportsAust  
 LinkedIn | @blind-sports  
 Instagram | @blindsportsaustralia

## Acknowledgement

Blind Sports Australia acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We pay respect to their cultures, Elders past, present and emerging, and we commit to working together for our shared future. We also acknowledge support from the Commonwealth Department of Health under the Driving Social Inclusion through Sport and Physical Activity Grant and British Blind Sport for their support and access to key Intellectual Property.

**Front Cover:** close up of Australian Blind Football player Amir Abdi facing the camera with blackout eye shades on.

**Inside Front:** Oscar Stubbs in action at the 2021 Tennis Victoria Blind and Low Vision State Championships.

# Table of Contents

- 04 Introduction**
- 05 Words from Matt Clayton - BSA CEO**
- 06 Understanding vision impairment**
  - 06 What is 'vision impairment'
  - 06 Understanding common conditions
  - 08 Case study: Greg Kennedy - ABBA president
- 09 Making sport accessible**
  - 09 Benefits of sport
  - 10 Developing programs
  - 14 Case study - Goalball
- 15 Guiding and safety principles**
  - 15 Communication & guiding system
  - 18 Health and safety considerations
  - 19 Safeguarding children & vulnerable people
- 20 Coaching education and philosophy**
  - 20 S.T.E.P.S principles
  - 22 Specific teaching approaches - adaptive sports
- 24 Competitive sport for athletes**
  - 24 Classification
  - 26 Participation pathways
  - 28 Blind and vision impaired sports locations
- 30 Further information**
  - 30 Sport contact details
  - 31 Case study: Meica Horsburgh - Paralympian goalball
  - 32 Support services



## Introduction

Welcome to Blind Sports Australia's Community Sport Guide. We hope this will be a great resource in helping deliver sport to people with a vision impairment. This resource has been produced in conjunction with key information from Vision Australia, Sports Australia and British Blind Sports. Blind Sports Australia acknowledges the support of the Commonwealth Department of Health for funding through the Driving Social Inclusion through Sport and Physical Activity Grant, to enable the production of this guide.

At Blind Sports Australia we believe that every person with a vision impairment (VI) has the right to participate in sport and physical activity. We understand there are often hurdles and barriers that need to be overcome in order for someone with a vision impairment to have the same accessibility as a sighted person.

This resource has been created with the specific purpose to assist anyone who is delivering sport and physical activities with support, ideas and guidance on how to create an inclusive environment that welcomes people with a vision impairment. This resource is all about helping sport providers to become VI friendly through their provision of activities, training, resources, and support.

Sporting providers include these groups:

- sports coaches
- PE teachers
- community coaches
- multi-sport / multi-skill coaches
- sports clubs
- volunteers
- fitness industry professionals
- sport development professionals
- parents and carers

This resource will enable coaches, leaders and parents/carers to:

- learn about sight loss and eye conditions
- increase their understanding of the needs of people with a vision impairment
- apply their knowledge to meet the needs of people with a vision impairment
- use basic communication skills to support the needs of people with a vision impairment in sport and physical activity
- understand where you can obtain further support to ensure your club/group is fully accessible to, and inclusive of, people with a vision impairment

**Image shows:** a young student wearing vision simulation glasses waving their hands around in enjoyment.

## Words from Matt Clayton Blind Sports Australia CEO

Blind Sports Australia (BSA) is committed to growing sporting opportunities for people who are blind or vision impaired nationally; from the community level, to the elite pathways at competitive national or international level. We achieve this by working in collaboration with our member organisations, other national sporting organisations, vision-based service organisations, clubs, and schools to grow awareness of the sporting opportunities available, and providing education on how best to engage participants who may be blind or vision impaired.

We know that sport provides a wonderful vehicle for people to get fit and active. It also provides a springboard for developing skills such as teamwork, leadership, communication, and goal setting. Improving these personal skills

has a demonstrated impact in areas such as employment, education, and relationships.

Our Community Sport resource assists current and prospective coaches, clubs, educators, and volunteers to successfully engage with participants who are blind or vision impaired, and help them thrive in a sporting or active environment and achieve their goals in sport.

We acknowledge the support of various stakeholders in helping us to produce this valuable resource. Our thanks to British Blind Sports and Vision Australia for their information and guidance, as well as our member organisations for their input, support and imagery.

**Image shows:** A junior blind cricket participant lining up to hit a cricketball with the help of his brother.



# Understanding vision impairment

## What is 'vision impairment'

Vision impairment is the partial or full loss of sight in one or both eyes. Vision impairment may be the result of disease or injury, may progress over time, and may be permanent or corrected with vision aids (such as glasses) or with surgery.

A vision impairment can be identified by a standard vision test carried out by an ophthalmologist, optometrist, or doctor.

There are four terms used to describe different levels of vision impairment and blindness:

**Partially sighted** - means a person has partial vision, either in one or both eyes.

**Low vision** - refers to a severe vision impairment in which vision acuity is 20/70 or poorer in the better-seeing eye and cannot be improved with glasses or contacts.

**Legally blind** - means a person has a corrected vision of 20/200 in their best-seeing eye. If vision aids such as glasses can correct a person's vision to 20/20, they are not considered legally blind.

**Totally blind** - refers to a complete loss of sight.

Further details can be found at: [Vision Australia](#)

## Understanding common conditions

It is important to remember that individuals have different levels of vision and varying support needs. These varying conditions affect people who are blind and partially sighted in different ways. For example, a person with a vision impairment may be totally blind, have tunnel vision or have blurred peripheral vision.

Here are four common conditions and corresponding images simulating what a person with those conditions may see. This provides an overview of how sight loss affects a person with a vision impairment:



Image as seen by a person with 20/20 vision



**Macular degeneration** is an eye condition that affects a small part of the retina at the back of the eye called the macular. It causes a loss of vision in the centre of the vision field, affecting vision when looking directly at something. People with this condition will usually have peripheral vision but may struggle to recognise the faces of their teammates.



**Glaucoma** causes a loss of peripheral vision due to damage to the optic nerve or increased eye pressure. This condition occurs gradually and will result in a significant reduction of peripheral vision over time. While treatment exists for glaucoma, it can't repair the existing sight loss.



**Cataracts** cause blurred or cloudy vision, as result of yellowy pigment on the lens of the eyes. This condition is the main cause of vision impairment across the globe. To treat cataracts, surgery can be used to remove the cloudy lens.



**Diabetic retinopathy** can affect anyone with diabetes. It causes floaters and blurred vision, resulting from damage to the retina due to high blood sugar levels.

Along with these four conditions, there are many other causes of sight loss. Visit the Vision Australia website for more information on specific eye condition, following this link: [Vision Australia Eye Conditions](#)

## Case Study: Greg Kennedy - President of Australia Blind Bowlers Association (ABBA)

Greg has been actively involved in sport for many years, continuing to participate and enjoy sport even as his vision diminished due to diabetic retinopathy. He lost his vision in 2003, and is now completely blind in one eye, with 20% vision in the other eye. Always interested in sport of all types, prior to losing his vision Greg was an AFL Goal Umpire and cites umpiring in front of an MCG crowd of 95,000 as a highlight. He also played golf, cricket and football in his youth, and later was actively involved in the administration of the Olinda-Ferny Creek Football and Netball club.

Greg and his wife took up lawn bowls in 2015 after some time playing golf. As a sport that has a capacity to specifically cater for inclusion, bowls enables people with a disability to compete against others with minimal modifications.

In Greg's role with ABBA he particularly enjoys organising and competing in the annual ABBA National Championships which attracts blind bowlers from all around Australia for ten days of competition.

**"We all get together once a year to have a Championship against each other. We are all like-minded, we all put our blindness to one side and compete like people do on any other sport field."**

Greg Kennedy - President of ABBA

In encouraging other people with a vision impairment to discover blind sports, Greg has this advice:

**"Don't be frightened of taking that step. Once you understand your role it will be less confronting, the positives are more important than the negatives. In the words of Nike; Just do it!"**

Greg Kennedy - President of ABBA

**Image shows:** Australian Blind Bowlers Association president Greg Kennedy kneeling on the bowling green smiling at the camera.

## Making sport accessible

### Benefits of sport

Sport and physical activity can be a very effective catalyst to ensuring a healthier and happier lifestyle.

**"As a young girl I believed I couldn't play sport because of my vision impairment (retinitis pigmentosa). Finding a team sport specifically designed for people with a vision impairment has allowed me to develop both as an athlete and as a person."**

Brodie Smith - Australian Goalball Paralympian

Sport and recreation is important in encouraging people with vision loss to get involved in leading an active lifestyle, which in many cases results in improving a participant's general health, social interaction, balance, motor skill acquisition, communication and teamwork.

**"Sport has offered me the ability to be a part of a family of people who have an understanding of who I am and what I have been through."**

Oscar Stubbs - multi sport athlete

Sport and recreation is invaluable for peer integration and social inclusion, some of the benefits include:

- creating bonds and friendships
- improving communication skills, leadership and teamwork raising confidence and

**Image shows:** Blind golfer Glenn Niciejewski wearing pink shorts and polo top, setting up to tee off with the assistance of a caddie.

self-esteem which allows for further independence and achievement

- developing spatial awareness, muscle strength and balance acquiring motor skills

It is important that participants who have a pre-existing medical condition or haven't exercised regularly for a long-time check with their doctor before starting any type of sport or exercise program.

Information and assistance for blind and vision impaired participants:

- Local doctor
- Vision specialist
- Vision Australia
- Other vision support services around the country
- Blind Sports Australia
- State vision organisation



## Developing programs

Offering equal and consistent participation opportunities for people with a vision impairment is an important part of social inclusion. This section outlines key factors to consider when planning and delivering sport sessions to help ensure a participant with a vision impairment has an enjoyable and welcoming experience.

### Preparation

Just like any sports or activity session, preparation is paramount. The following proverbs are a good reminder to sports coaches and leaders of the importance of preparation.

- prior planning prevents poor performance
- fail to plan – plan to fail

### Advertising

The promotion and marketing of your sports session, club or activity is important to ensure people are aware of what your club offers, where you are located and what activities and programmes are accessible.

The way in which people with a vision impairment communicate and source information may be different to sighted people, so it is important to consider:

- providing information in an accessible format if required (e.g. braille, clear print or suitable electronic version for a screen reader)
- promoting your sessions with the assistance of local and national vision impairment organisations such as Blind Sports Australia, Vision Australia or your local or state blind sport and recreation association

- contacting your local council's with a Sight Support Service that can be used to promote your programs and engage with vision impaired people. Blind Sports Australia can advise on your local contacts
- using social media to promote your sessions, as it is very accessible and a popular medium for vision impaired people, don't forget to turn on the embedded accessibility feature on these platforms
- using appropriate images of athletes with a vision impairment in your marketing material to help connect and inspire people with a vision impairment to take part in a program
- including image descriptions of any pictures or photographs in your marketing content, so that they can be accurately described by screen readers

### Further reading

Vision Australia - [Virtual Classroom](#)

Media accessibility - [Rosie Luscombe](#)

## Travel

Many people with a vision impairment rely heavily on public transport, it is advisable to check public transport options and to include information and directions for the nearest train station or bus route in any promotional information.

Check if other community transport options are available, your local council's Sight Support Services can provide further information. Some participants may rely on a sighted guide or support worker to assist them in getting to and from your club or session.

### Session venue and time

It might be necessary to provide a meet and greet service for a participant with a vision impairment, especially on their first visit. This can be discussed and arranged during any prior communication with the participant.

Ensure that staff at the venue have been briefed that a person with a vision impairment will be attending the session.

It is important to consider how sunlight, and the time of the session may affect a person's ability to participate. Indoor poorly lit spaces may be particularly difficult for a person with a vision impairment. Where possible and if practical, organise sessions in good light or evenly lit indoor spaces.

## Equipment and facilities

To ensure a person with a vision impairment can be included in your session you may need to source some accessible equipment.

Depending on which sport is being played, the modifications or adaptations can be as simple as using larger or brighter equipment, which is easier to see, making the equipment audible (able to be heard).

Common adaptations used are:

- audible balls – balls with ball bearings in them are popular sports equipment for blind or vision impaired sports, such as cricket, goalball, football
- sound balls – tennis balls with bells inserted inside used for tennis
- tactile markings – using raised tape, or taping string to the boundaries of a playing area will help a vision impaired person understand where a court, pitch or playing area is

It is advisable to guide a vision impaired person around the venue or facility to help with orientation. Consider the acoustics in the facility, is it easy for instructions/explanations to be heard.

For equipment ideas and purchasing visit the BSA online store <https://blind-sports-australia.square.site> or contact: [admin@blindsportsaustralia.com.au](mailto:admin@blindsportsaustralia.com.au)



**Images shows:** NSW lawn bowls volunteer in a blue polo shirt and sunglasses smiling at the camera.



**Images from left clockwise:** A youth and adult blind cricket participant in the motion of bowling at a Tasmanian blind cricket come & try session in Hobart.

Being inclusive is about providing a range of choices to cater for people of all ages, ability and backgrounds, in the most appropriate manner possible. Inclusion encompasses a broad range of choices in many different settings.

**Inclusion spectrum:** a common misconception about inclusion is that it is solely about including people with disability in regular sport activities without any modification. Inclusion in sport can be viewed in terms of a spectrum. Each section of the spectrum is as important as the next, and ideally there would be programs for people with disability available in all sections to choose from.

**Examples of the inclusion spectrum in action:**

**No modifications:** an athlete with an intellectual disability may train and compete with athletes without intellectual disability at a local swimming club.

**Minor modifications:** in the sport of lawn bowls a person with a vision impairment will use a sighted director to assist with placement of the bowl in relation to the jack.

**Major modifications:** a swish athlete competing under modified rules using modified equipment against other athletes with a vision impairment.

**Primarily for people with disability:** goalball is an exciting team sport played by athletes with a vision impairment classification at an international level.

**Only for people with disability:** blind footballers

participating in paralympic competition exclusively for people who have been internationally classified to have a vision impairment

**Non-playing role:** people with disability can be officials, coaches, club presidents, volunteers and spectators.

**Future possibilities:** there should be a choice to explore what might be possible in the future. People with disability should not be limited by what is already available. Advances in technology have created new choices for people with disability.

The following factors influence which section/s of the spectrum an individual chooses to participate in:

- their functional ability
- the sport in which they are participating
- the opportunities within their local environment
- their personal preferences.

The inclusion spectrum allows games and activities to be delivered in different ways, with more choices.

The aim is to encourage higher quality participation by people with disability, both with or away from their able-bodied peers. Clubs can provide a range of choices by adapting and modifying their sport in different environments.

**Further reading**

- Learn more about inclusive sport at
- [Sport Aus](#)
  - [Inclusion Spectrum](#)
  - [Play by the Rules](#)



**Images from top clockwise: 1.** Judoka representatives in fight stance **2.** QLD lawn bowler in motion **3.** Swish participants holding up bat and ball **4.** Tandem cyclists riding in a road race **5.** Blind cricket coach directing a session **6.** Australian goalball player throwing the ball down the court.

## Case study - Goalball

Goalball is the exciting team sport played competitively by athletes with vision impairment. The sport was created in 1946 after World War II by Austrian, Hanz Lorenzen, and German, Sepp Reindle, in an effort to rehabilitate and keep veterans with blindness and low vision active. Shortly after the sport originated in Europe, goalball was inaugurated to the world stage during the 1976 Paralympic Games in Toronto, Canada and has been showcased at the event ever since.

Goalball is played by two teams of three players with a maximum of three substitutions on each team. It is open to both male and female vision impaired athletes. Sighted players can also play at a domestic level.

The games are required to be played in silence, as the three players on each team, who are completely blindfolded by 'blackout' eyeshades, use their entire body to block a 1.25 kg audible ball from making it into the opponent's goal.

The attacking team aim to score a goal by bowling the ball along the floor so that it crosses the goal

line of the opposing team. The defending team prevents the ball going into their goal by using their entire body to block the ball while remaining in their team area. They must then try to control the ball and attack back by bowling the ball again thereby trying to score in the opposing goal.

### Main features:

- all players wear 'blackout' eyeshades so that they are totally blindfolded
- Goalball is played on an indoor court that is 18m long and 9m wide
- the goals are positioned at the end of both sides of the court, they are 1.3 metres in height and span the entirety of the back court
- the ball is 1.25kg in weight and contains internal bells, which help players locate it during play

Including Goalball as part of a sport and recreation session requires minimal adaption, only needing an audible ball with internal bells and eyeshades or a blindfold for each player.

Further information at [Goalball Australia](#)

**Image shows:** Goalball participant with black out goggles on, in the motion of throwing a blue goalball down the court.

## Guiding and safety principles

### Communication & guiding system

It is important to understand the needs of a person with a vision impairment. Do not be afraid to ask questions to obtain as much information as you can that will aid in coaching and delivery.

- use the person's name to gain attention
- use clear, accurate verbal instructions and check they understand them
- make sure the participant knows when you have finished and are moving away from them
- make sure the area in which you are working is free of obstacles and clutter
- supply any written information (if necessary) in a suitable format such as audio recording large print or braille copy
- agree a method of communication (for example, specific words or gestures) that works for both you and the person with the vision impairment and review it as needed
- ask a person who is blind or with a vision impairment if and how they prefer to be guided. Some people prefer to hold the guide's elbow while walking half a step behind as this gives information about direction and slope
- to overcome any safety issues with young children, discuss options with the child's parents, guardians or carers beforehand

**Image shows:** Blind AFL community coach assisting a child with a vision impairment to hand ball a football during an AFL clinic.

### Correct terminology

It is important to always use the correct terminology when referring to people with a vision impairment and discussing sight loss in general. Using the wrong type of language can create a barrier, so by using appropriate terminology it will help you build lasting relationships with your participants and grow your participation programmes.

### Words to use

- person with a vision impairment
- person with sight loss
- person who is partially sighted
- person who is blind
- has an impairment

### Words to avoid

- the blind
- the handicapped
- the disabled
- vision impaired (when referring to an individual)
- suffers from

While it is important to use correct terminology, do not over think every sentence you say.



## General guiding principles

A participant who is blind or vision impaired may rely on a sighted person to assist with access to a sports facility. Not having access to a sighted guide may cause a barrier to participation.

One method of overcoming this barrier is to access the services of organisations such as Vision Australia. This service matches people with vision impairment with a trained volunteer who acts as a sighted guide and enables people to do the things they want to do, which can include taking part in sport and physical activity.

## Key points

- identify yourself and ask if the person would like some assistance; don't just presume that they do or don't
- offer your elbow or shoulder to hold
- ask which side they prefer to be guided
- when guiding a child, discuss options with the child's parents, guardians, or carers beforehand
- aim to be one step in front, don't walk too fast or slow, ask if they are happy with the pace
- communicate at all times by describing what is

coming up, for example steps (up or down) or handrails

- describe what objects are close by and explain any changes in ground surface
- show the person where a chair is by placing their hand on the back of the chair without backing them onto the seat
- ensure the person steps behind you when moving through doorways so they do not get struck by the door or catch their fingers
- explain any loud noises
- keep your guiding arm still and relaxed without waving it about or pointing
- give the person adequate space to safely manoeuvre around obstacles

## Guiding during sports activities

A participant with a vision impairment may require assistance during the session, especially when changing drills or sets and particularly when equipment is involved.

It is recommended that the guide is not the lead coach but acts as an assistant coach, sports volunteer or support worker.

Consider using a buddy system to provide the necessary guiding support during sports activities.

## Sports that require a sighted guide

Some sports will require a sighted guide for any participant with a vision impairment to fully participate, some popular examples include, golf, lawn bowls, guide running and tandem cycling. Further information about blind sports can be found on the Blind Sports Australia website:

[www.blindsportsaustralia.com.au](http://www.blindsportsaustralia.com.au)

## Creating a buddy system

A simple and very effective method of including a person with a vision impairment into a sports and physical activity session and to increase communication is to develop a "buddy" system. This involves identifying another participant in the group to support, help and guide the vision impaired participant.

The role of a "buddy" may consist of simply telling the person with a vision impairment when to pass, or when to expect to receive the ball, explaining the next section of the session or guiding the participant to the next activity.

A buddy system ensures that a person with a vision impairment is made to feel part of the group and isn't completely reliant on the coach or leader. This enables the coach to focus on all participants. A buddy system also encourages communication, promotes social interaction, and allows friendships to develop.

It is important, if possible, to ensure that the same individual is not always acting as a buddy to a person with a vision impairment. Another favourable outcome of the buddy system is that individuals who take on the responsibility of being a buddy can develop their leadership and communication skills.

**For more information about communication and guiding principles visit:**

[Guiding Principles](#)

[Effective Communication](#)

[Approach, Assist, Ask](#)



**Image shows:** A participant is bending down with a blindfold on reaching for an orange foam ball while being directed by a guide.



**Images from bottom left clockwise:** Two South Australian vision challenge tandem cycling competitors and two vision challenge runners, one wearing a blindfold and tethered to a guide runner.

## Health and safety considerations

There are some key health and safety considerations that sports coaches/leaders and parents/carers may need to consider when a person with a vision impairment takes part in a sport and recreational activity.

Health and Safety considerations should not be a barrier to including participants, however specific risks should be considered as part of your organisations daily risk assessment for the activity.

A template risk assessment form is available at:

[www.blindsportsaustralia.com.au](http://www.blindsportsaustralia.com.au)

Any action taken to minimise potential risks should be provided on the form in detail.

Below is a list of some of the most common risks and how to negate these risks:

**Obstacles:** a participant may not see obstacles and be unable to avoid them. Provide detailed verbal descriptions of the activity area and explain in advance any obstacles or hazards.

- always let the person with a vision impairment know if they need to spend any period of time on their own
- use a guide if necessary
- make other coaches/leaders and participants using the facility aware that there is a person with a vision impairment who may not see other participants or equipment

**Fire evacuation:** ensure procedures are in place to support a person with a vision impairment in the event of an emergency evacuation such as fire or security threat, and that the person with the vision impairment understands that procedure. For example, assigning a buddy, or providing a guide to assist.

**Insurance:** ensure all sports sessions have adequate insurance cover to protect you, your participants, and your Club.

### Further information

Sports Australia - [Safe and Inclusive Sport](#)

## Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults

As a Club, sport coach, leader or volunteer it is vitally important to have safeguards in place to prioritise the welfare of children and vulnerable adults, and these should be made available to all participants and their carers/parents.

In this resource the term 'children' refers to children and young people under the age of 18.

### Anyone directly or indirectly involved with providing sport and physical activity opportunities has a responsibility to:

- ensure child safety policies and procedures are in place
- adhere to Code of Conduct / Code of Practice policies
- recognise the signs of child abuse and understand the impact of abuse on children
- respond in an appropriate manner to children who may disclose that they are being abused
- take appropriate action if concerns are raised

- know where to go for further information
- ensure a clear process is in place and communicated to staff/volunteers to gain a Working with Children's check (WWCC)
- check if staff or volunteers require a Working with Vulnerable People check
- understand the protocols and ensure that policies and procedures are in place for taking photography and videography of children and vulnerable adults

### Further information about a safeguarding children:

[Working with Childrens Check](#)

[Clearing house for sport - child safety](#)

[Sport integrity - safe guarding children](#)

[Play by the rules](#)



Image shows: First aid equipment bags.



Image shows: Three junior participants at a NSW youth camp playing with audible tennis balls.

# Coaching education and philosophy

## S.T.E.P.S Principles

The principles of STEPS provides a framework to assist sports coaches to make adaptations to specific elements of coaching and activity sessions. These elements are: **Space, Task, Equipment, People and Speed (STEPS).**

Adaptions can be made to the whole group or for just an individual. It is important to remember that not all people with a vision impairment will require the same adaptations, just as not every participant will have the same abilities and needs.

Listed below are some considerations to ensure the inclusion of a participant with a vision impairment:

**S**

- organise the coaching/playing area for each session in a way that assists orientation
- increase the size and height of goals, targets or playing areas
- guide a person with a vision impairment around the facility and coaching space whilst describing important safety hazards and identifying features and sounds
- consider the impact of light and noise during the session

**T**

- give clear oral explanations and test them with another coach by asking them to close their eyes, describing the activity to them and asking them to tell you how much they understood
- if possible provide details of complex skills, drills or rules to a person with a vision impairment in large print or electronically so they are able to read the written instructions to better understand the task and session
- modify the rules to increase aspects of participation (e.g. all players must pass after three seconds in team games)

**E**

- use audible balls
- use larger, brighter equipment
- consider the colour of equipment used, for example avoid placing green cones on the grass.
- wear brightly coloured clothes to ensure you are recognisable.
- create tactile makers to determine the boundaries of playing areas which can easily be created by using tape and string

**P**

- create a buddy system with other participants who can help, support and assist any person with a vision impairment
- sighted guides may require specific training to assist with sports such as cycling, athletics, recreational activities
- create activities that involve all participants

**S**

- slow down the session or game to ensure each skill is practiced and learned effectively, for example increase the time the ball can be held in netball to allow attackers and defenders to get into position

## Coaching approaches

It is important that coaches and volunteers are knowledgeable about working with participants with a vision impairment. Like any interaction between people, it is about assessing a situation and behaving appropriately.

Remember we are all different, and blindness is a spectrum, so each individual vision impairment will also differ. Their degree of sight, ability, personality and fitness levels will vary. It is important not to generalise about vision impairments across participants, but to understand how much the person can see and how to maximise the use of any sight they have.

## General coaching advice

- when approaching a person or group, always say who you by name and be aware that you may need to repeat this to allow them to become familiar with the sound of your voice
- consider what descriptive language you use when describing an activity or action as some participants with a vision impairment may not understand certain descriptions due to knowledge gaps or having no reference for that action such as high knees
- try and verbalise any body language you might be using as some participants with sight loss may not be able to read facial expressions or make eye contact
- address a participant with a vision impairment by name or lightly touch them on the side of the arm to indicate you are talking to them but ensure you always ask before touching a participant
- use everyday language to describe something such as “see” or “look”

- listening to coaching sessions with your eyes closed to try and understand sight loss and whether enough information is being provided for a person with a vision impairment and that the techniques required are adequately described
- clear communication is vital, so provide detailed verbal explanations of drill, skills and rules
- physical demonstrations of a task or action may be necessary when working with a participant with a vision impairment and it is essential that you ask the participants permission to do this
- some participants with a vision impairment may require additional support, such as hands-on support, guiding or assisting with skills repetition
- remove obstacles from the activity area, such as spare balls or cones
- keep equipment in a well-defined area and inform the participants of the location
- give precise instructions to help participants with a vision impairment find their way by saying “the equipment is on your left side” instead of pointing and vaguely saying “its over there”
- involve participants in all aspects of the clubs operations including social activities, canteen operations and committee participation

Learn more regarding coaching styles and training principles for individual sports at [blindsportsaustralia.com.au](http://blindsportsaustralia.com.au)

## Specific coaching approaches - adaptive sports

Many sports are made accessible for participants with a vision impairment by making some simple changes to the rules, modifying the playing area or adapting the equipment used. The information below provides some useful hints and tips to demonstrate how sport is currently played, or can be adapted to improve accessibility.

### Rule adaptations

- there are two modified formats of football, blind football and partially sighted football which both have five players per side
- blind football is played with an audible bell ball, partially sighted football with a bright futsal ball (size 3 football)
- tennis and cricket have modified the rule regarding the number of times the ball can bounce before reaching the player, and this number varies depending on the participants individual sight classification
- guide runners support people with a vision impairment in athletic track and road events
- cyclists with a vision impairment ride on

- tandem bikes and are supported by a sighted person called a 'stoker'
- sighted guides support para-triathletes during the race
- directors (sighted guides) assist lawn bowlers with vision impairments in their bowling action and by describing the direction and distance of the jack
- golf participants with a vision impairment have a sighted caddy or director who describe the distance required and hole location, helps with club selection, and ensures the club head is directly behind the ball
- sports including tenpin bowling and golf use a handicap system to ensure fair inclusion for participants with a vision impairment

### Equipment considerations

- many sports make use of an individuals sense of touch and create tactile aids to support participants
- tactile maps in sailing are used to help people with vision impairment navigate
- tactile board is used in boccia to enable vision impaired players to be aware of the position of their ball on the court

- tennis equipment is modified so the racket is shorter
- acoustic shooting sights are modified to collect and measure the level of light reflected from the target and convert it into sound
- the centre of a shooting target is white and the outward circles are increasingly darker grey so that as the shooter approaches the white centre, more light is reflected into the sight and a higher frequency sound is heard
- blindfolds are worn by vision impaired players in blind football, goalball, boccia and equestrian events, while black out goggles are used by B1 classified swimmers

- blind AFL is played in an indoor stadium, in a controlled environment on a smaller field allowing players with a vision impairment to utilise sound to locate the ball, goals and other players more easily
- the blind soccer field dimensions are shorter at 40m X 20m and has side kickboards to help keep the ball and players on the pitch

**For full information about adaptations, modification and sport specific rules visit Blind Sports Australia for advice and guidance:**

[blindsportsaustralia.com.au](http://blindsportsaustralia.com.au)

### Venue considerations

- court/pitch sizes are adapted in sports such as tennis and goalball, and boundaries are raised so a person with a vision impairment can feel with their feet or hands the areas of the court



**Image shows:** Three blind football players in blue uniforms with eyeshades on smiling at the camera.



**Above images:** Steve Obeid in a blue Bulldogs uniform in the motion of handpassing the football to a team mate while being defended by a St Kilda player.

# Competitive sport for athletes

## Classification

Classification is the process by which athletes with a vision impairment are grouped together with athletes who have a similar level of impairment into classes for competition in their sport. Each Paralympic sport has a different classification system and classification may be based on a physical, intellectual or vision impairment.

VI athletes are classified according to their level of corrected vision and must have an impairment in both eyes that meets the minimal disability criteria of vision acuity that is less than or equal to LogMAR = 1.00 (6/60) and/or a vision field that is less than a radius of 20 degrees.

Athletes are required to provide medical documentation from their ophthalmologist prior to seeking a classification.

### Why is classification required?

By grouping similar athletes together, an athlete's impairment has less of an impact on the competitive outcome. Classification enables the fastest, strongest or best athletes in each class to succeed in their chosen sport.

### When is classification required?

To compete in sport as an athlete with a disability, you must undergo a sports-specific classification assessment and hold a classification class. This isn't necessary for general participation or social involvement in sport.

**Image shows:** A person receiving an eye examination on a specific examination machine.

### What is the role of a classifier?

Classifiers are trained and certified to assess an athlete's impairments and determine their sport class and sport class status, according to the international classification rules that apply to their sport. Classifiers have either medical or technical qualifications, combined with specific expertise in that sport. In Australia, they are trained and certified by the Australian Paralympic Committee and National sports federations, and work as volunteers at the state, national and international level. To be eligible to commence training as a Classifier, individuals should contact Paralympics Australia at [classification@paralympic.org.au](mailto:classification@paralympic.org.au)

### Medical classifiers:

Currently registered medical professional (physiotherapist or medical doctor); with minimum of five years clinical experience working with people with physical disabilities; or currently registered Ophthalmic professional (Orthoptist, Ophthalmologist) with a minimum of five years clinical experience working with people who are vision impaired and must be based in one of the major low vision centres in Australia.

## What are the classes for vision impairment?

The list below is intended as a guide only. Only authorised classifiers are able to provide a formal para sport classification.

### Category

### Examples (guide only)

**B1**

From no light perception in either eye to light perception, but inability to recognise the shape of a hand at any distance or in any direction. – Vision acuity is poorer than LogMAR 2.60 with best corrected vision.

**B2**

Ability to recognise objects up to a distance of 2 metres. – Vision acuity ranges from LogMAR 1.5 to 2.60 (below 2/60) with best corrected vision; and/or Vision field of less than ten (10) degrees diameter.

**B3**

Can recognise contours between 2 and 6 metres away. – Vision acuity ranges from LogMAR 1.40 – 1.0 (2/60 – 6/60) with best corrected vision; and/or – Vision field of more than ten (10) degrees and less than forty (40) degrees diameter.

Further details in relation to classification can be found on the following websites.

[Blind Sports Australia - Classification](#)

[Paralympics Australia - Classification](#)

[IBSA - Classification](#)





## Participation pathways

Sport can provide many amazing opportunities for people with a vision impairment. Many sports offer exciting competitive opportunities from local domestic, regional and national competition, right through to high performance international competitions such as the Paralympic Games. As a sport coach/leader it is important to have an understanding of this sporting landscape and the competitive opportunities that may be available to a participant with a vision impairment.

### Access all abilities

Access all abilities (AAA) programs support inclusive sport and recreation opportunities for people of all abilities to get active nationally. Blind Sports Australia connects participants directly the relevant state/territory based association via email: [admin@blindsportsaustralia.com.au](mailto:admin@blindsportsaustralia.com.au)

### Come and try sessions

Come along and try a new sport or meet a sport club for a friendly game. No experience is necessary, and these sessions are held throughout the year at different venues nationally.

### Multi sports days

Are one day programs designed to promote the pathways for inclusive sport and active recreation programs in local community areas and encourage students with a disability to participate in community sport and active recreation on a regular basis.

### School competitions

Organised by School Sports Australia with support from State School Sports Organisations. Children with a vision impairment of school age will have the opportunity to be included in School Games. School Games is national initiative funded by Government and development by the Youth Sport Trust. [schoolsportaustralia.edu.au](http://schoolsportaustralia.edu.au)

### Club/Community competitions

Competitions are held between local clubs, which is often the first experience of competition for a participant. Having a low level competitive experience is incredibly valued for any participant, it introduces rules, structure and officials. It also promotes and develops team cohesion.

**Image shows:** A young student holding a bell ball in the motion of throwing at the NT Activate Inclusion Sports Day.

### State competitions

Many sports will offer a state competition structure. Events for athletes with a vision impairment will either be included in mainstream competitions, included as part of a pan disability competition or be a separate VI competition. In some cases athletes may compete in a mainstream event without any adaptations or specific event for a person with a vision impairment.

### National competitions

National competition is next step in the player pathway. Often athletes who access this level of competition are part of the State competition structure and/or identified through the individual sports.

### International competitions

Elite competition can bring life changing experiences and opportunities including; employment, sponsorship, overseas travel and the opportunity to compete on the world stage. It is important as a coach to understand the potential and possibilities available for athletes with a vision impairment in any given sport.

### World championships

Beginning in 1998 in Madrid, Spain, the IBSA World Games have become the world's biggest sport event for athletes with a vision impairment. With various names over the years including the 'World Blind Sports Championships' and 'IBSA World Championships and Games', the multi-sport competition is held every four years. The World Games are a chance for new and established athletes to compete against a strong field of their peers in both Paralympic and non-Paralympic

**Image shows:** A young student wearing vision simulation glasses smiling and giving a thumbs up.

sports. Further information about the International Blind Sports Association can be found at [ibsasport.org](http://ibsasport.org)

### Paralympic games

The Paralympics are a major international sports competition for athletes with a disability. The Paralympics are split into Winter Games and Summer Games, which alternately occur every two years. Paralympics Australia are responsible for preparing the Australian Paralympic Summer and Winter Teams for the Paralympic Games. Further information about Paralympics Australia can be found at [www.paralympic.org.au](http://www.paralympic.org.au)

### Other international and professional pathways

The Paralympic Games are not the only elite international competitions available to athletes with a vision impairment. Many sports do not have a Paralympic pathway, but athletes do participate professionally and compete internationally.

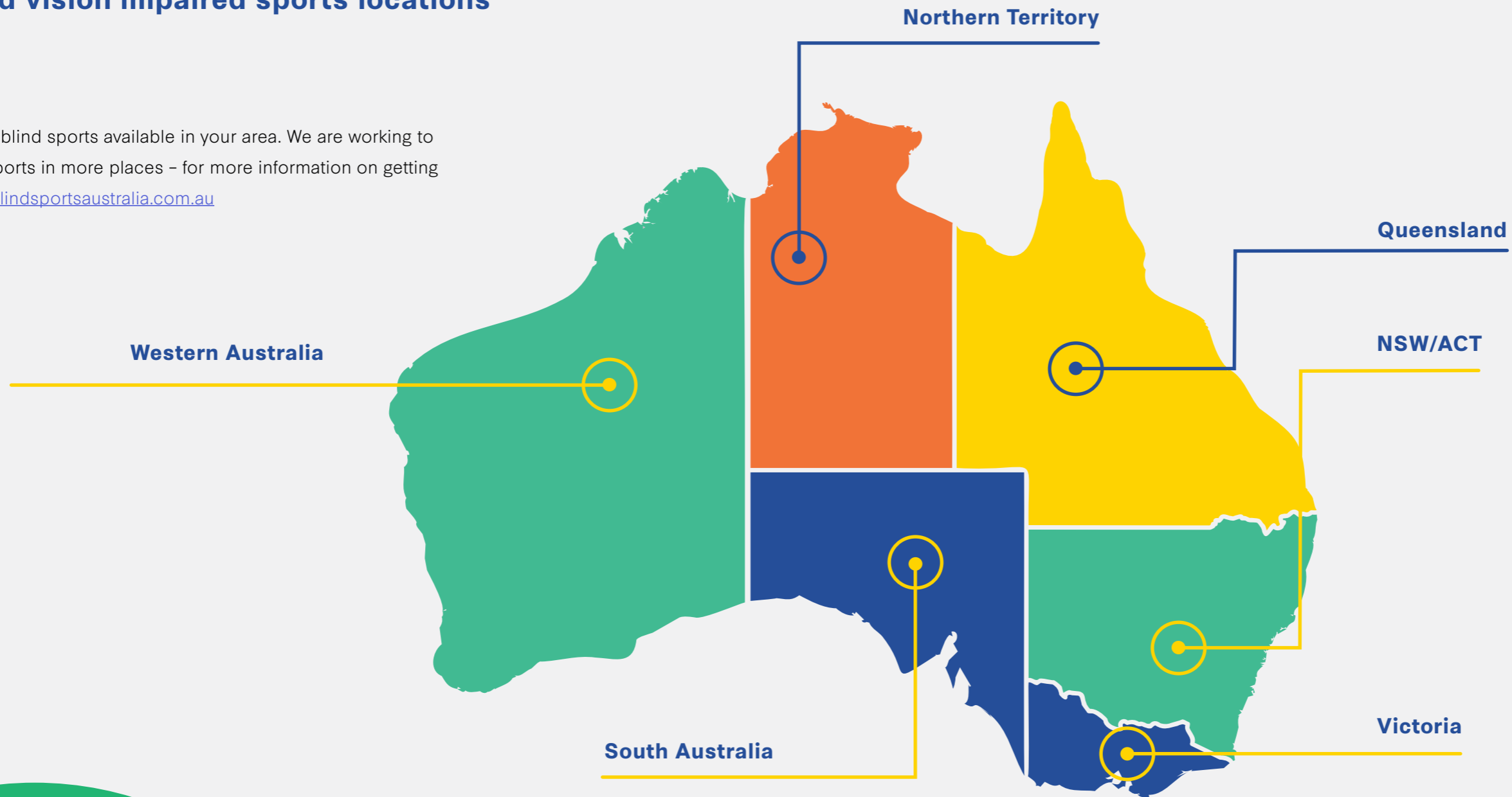
Cricket is an excellent example of a professional sport for athletes that are blind and vision impaired with an elite competition pathway outside of the Paralympic Games.

Further information about the state sporting services, competition structures and player pathways can be found on the respective state blind sport websites. Contact information for BSA member organisations can be found on page 32 of this document.



## Blind and vision impaired sports locations

Check out the blind sports available in your area. We are working to create more sports in more places – for more information on getting involved visit [blindsportsaustralia.com.au](http://blindsportsaustralia.com.au)



**Image shows:** Coaches and parents cheering on children participating in a come and try blind soccer session.

### Tasmania



- AFL
- Shooting
- Swish (Table Tennis)
- Tandem Cycling
- Tenpin Bowling
- Archery
- Cricket
- Football (Soccer)
- Golf
- Horse Riding/Equestrian
- Lawn Bowls
- Sailing
- Swimming
- Tennis
- Triathlon
- Winter Sports
- Rowing
- Athletics
- Goalball
- Gymnastics
- Judo

## Further information

### Sport contact details

#### Golf

Blind Golf Australia was formed to promote the game of golf amongst blind and vision impaired people and to co-ordinate blind golf between the states of Australia.

[blindgolf.com.au](http://blindgolf.com.au)

#### Lawn bowls

Australian Blind Bowlers Association (ABBA) is a not-for-profit organisation which started in the mid 70's. ABBA are the peak body for State Associations and have affiliations with Bowls Australia, Blind Sports Australia and the International Blind Bowls Association.

[blindbowlsaustralia.com](http://blindbowlsaustralia.com)

#### Goalball

Goalball Australia provides national governance and globally competitive pathways for the sport of goalball in Australia.

[goalballaustralia.org](http://goalballaustralia.org)

#### Cricket

Blind Cricket Australia oversees competitions in all mainland states and is developing the game in Tasmania and the Northern Territory.

[blindcricketaustralia.org.au](http://blindcricketaustralia.org.au)

#### Blind Football & Partially Sighted Football

Australian Blind Football is an initiative of Blind Sports Australia and continues to work with State Football Federations to provide national pathways for people who are blind or vision impaired to play football for Australia.

[ausblindfootball.com.au](http://ausblindfootball.com.au)

#### Tennis

Tennis Australia is the governing body for the sport of tennis in Australia. Tennis Australia embraces diversity and aims to make tennis welcoming, safe and inclusive for everyone. They provide competitive pathways for blind and low vision tennis which include state tournaments and a national championship. International blind and low vision tennis tournaments are organised and run through the International Blind Tennis Association (IBTA) <https://www.tennis.com.au/play/inclusion-and-diversity/blind-and-low-vision>

#### Tenpin bowling

Blind and Vision Impaired Tenpin Bowling (BVIT) is an Incorporated Association set up to further the goals of blind and vision impaired Australians in the sport of tenpin bowling.

[bvit.asn.au](http://bvit.asn.au)

#### AFL

AFL Blind is a modified version of Australian Football played in an indoor football field and governed by the Australian Football League. The Victorian Blind Football League provides an environment that promotes fitness, fun, friendship and a sense of belonging, enhancing life skills, developing self-esteem, confidence and improved health.

[aflvic.com.au/inclusion](http://aflvic.com.au/inclusion)

For further details about other blind and vision impaired sports across Australia please visit: [blindsportsaustralia.com.au](http://blindsportsaustralia.com.au)

## Case study: Meica Horsburgh Paralympian Goalball

As the longest serving member and most experiences of the Australian women's goalball team, Meica was selected to compete in her third and final Paralympics in Tokyo 2020.

The Aussie Belles made history in Tokyo, becoming the first Australian women's Goalball team to make the quarter finals at a Paralympics, with Meica scoring many of the team goals.

As a young girl, Meica played a range of sports, but it wasn't until high school that she discovered a sport that one day would take her to the Paralympics. Soon enough, she was invited to a national goalball camp, where her talents were noticed and Meica joined the Queensland state team. Playing alongside some of the country's strongest players, Meica fine-tuned her skills and was asked to train with the Australian women's squad.

In 2004, aged 15 at her first international competition, Meica keenly watched the skills of Asya Miller from the USA goalball team and was inspired to play better, to be the best. Focussed and training hard, Meica set herself the goal of qualifying for 2008 Paralympic Games in Beijing.

However, it wasn't until 2012 that the Australian team earned its qualification for London Games. Meica lists qualifying for her first Paralympics and walking out at the London 2012 opening ceremony as the highlight of her career. Despite losing all four preliminary matches and missing out on a medal, Meica powered on to become the highest goal scorer at the 2015 Asian qualifier in China. In 2016 in Rio, the Australian team achieved one better than their London result, tying 2-2 in their match against the Ukraine. However, the point differential saw the team once again place fifth behind Turkey, China, Canada and the Ukraine. Describing herself as outgoing, crazy and kind Meica is passionate about goalball and continues to be involved in the sport by mentoring and coaching goalball players.

**"I love that everyone is equal. It doesn't matter what level of sight you have as wearing eyeshades creates an equal playing field. I would encourage anyone to find something they like and give it a go, Goalball certainly changed my life."**

**Meica Horsburgh - Paralympian, Goalball**

**Image shows:** Meica Horsburgh in the motion of throwing a blue goalball during an international event.





## Support services

### Vision Australia

Vision Australia is a leading national provider of blindness and low vision services in Australia. If you have any questions regarding VA services or what they do please contact Monday to Friday, 8:30am – 5:00pm EST.

**Phone:** 1300 84 74 66

**Email:** [info@visionaustralia.org](mailto:info@visionaustralia.org)

### Blind Sports & Recreation NSW/ACT

**Postal Address:** 8 Parkview Drive, Sydney Olympic Park - PO Box W292, Parramatta, NSW 2150

**Email:** [info@blindsportsnsw.com.au](mailto:info@blindsportsnsw.com.au)

**Website:** [blindsportsnsw.com.au](http://blindsportsnsw.com.au)

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/blindsportsnsw](https://facebook.com/blindsportsnsw)

### Sporting Wheelies and Disabled Association of Queensland

**Postal Address:** 31 Dover Street, Albion Brisbane, QLD, Australia 4010

**Landline:** 07 3253 3333

**Email:** [mailbox@sportingwheelies.org.au](mailto:mailbox@sportingwheelies.org.au)

**Website:** [sportingwheelies.org.au](http://sportingwheelies.org.au)

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/sportingwheelies](https://facebook.com/sportingwheelies)

### Blind Sporting SA

**Postal Address:** PO Box 7089, Hutt Street, Adelaide, 5000

**Email:** [info@blindsportssa.org.au](mailto:info@blindsportssa.org.au)

**Website:** [blindsportssa.org.au](http://blindsportssa.org.au)

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/blindsportssa](https://facebook.com/blindsportssa)

### Blind Sports WA

**Email:** [blindsportswa@gmail.com](mailto:blindsportswa@gmail.com)

**Website:** [www.blindsportswa.com.au](http://www.blindsportswa.com.au)

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/wablindsportswa](https://facebook.com/wablindsportswa)

### Blind Sports & Recreation Victoria

**Postal Address:** 454 Glenferrie Road, Kooyong

**Email:** [info@blindsports.org.au](mailto:info@blindsports.org.au)

**Website:** [blindsports.org.au](http://blindsports.org.au)

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/blindsportsvictoria](https://facebook.com/blindsportsvictoria)

### Inclusive Innovations Tasmania

**Website:** [inclusiveinnovationtasmmania.com.au](http://inclusiveinnovationtasmmania.com.au)

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/](https://facebook.com/inclusiveinnovationstas)

[inclusiveinnovationstas](https://facebook.com/inclusiveinnovationstas)

### Blind Sports Australia

**Postal Address:** PO Box 8030, Kooyong

**Email:** [admin@blindsportsaustralia.com.au](mailto:admin@blindsportsaustralia.com.au)

**Website:** [blindsportsaustralia.com.au](http://blindsportsaustralia.com.au)

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/blindsportsaustr](https://facebook.com/blindsportsaustr)



**Blind  
Sports  
Australia**

[blindsportsaustralia.com.au](http://blindsportsaustralia.com.au)

**Image shows:** Back cover image shows the Aussie Belles goalball team and coaches on court at the Tokyo Paralympic huddled together wearing green and gold Australia uniforms.