

**Submission
No 13**

INQUIRY INTO CONDUCT OF ELECTIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Carers NSW

Date Received: 19 July 2022

19 July 2022

Parliament of New South Wales
6 Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000
elections@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Carers NSW welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Select Committee on the conduct of elections in New South Wales (NSW). This brief submission will highlight the need to expand iVote eligibility to include family and friend carers for state and local elections in NSW.

Carers NSW is the peak non-government organisation for carers in New South Wales (NSW). A carer is any individual who provides care and support to a family member or friend who has a disability, mental illness, drug and/or alcohol dependency, chronic condition, terminal illness or who is frail. Carers NSW is part of the National Carer Network and a member of Carers Australia. Our vision is an Australia that values and supports all carers, and our goals are to:

- Be a leading carer organisation in which carers have confidence
- Actively promote carer recognition and support
- Actively support carers to navigate a changing service landscape that will be characterised by ongoing policy reform
- Promote connected community experiences and opportunities for carers that are inclusive of diverse carer groups
- Lead and advocate for carer-specific and carer-inclusive policy making, research and service delivery
- Continue to be a quality-driven, responsive and carer-focused organisation.

Carers NSW recognises the work of NSW Electoral Commission (the Commission) to ensure electoral processes are inclusive and accessible for all citizens. As a member of the Equal Access to Democracy Disability Reference Group, Carers NSW has observed the Commission's ongoing commitment to provide accessible electoral services that meet a wide range of needs, expectations and levels of understanding of the democratic system.

Provisions such as iVote have facilitated greater independence for electors with disability, including people who are blind or have low vision, people who have reading difficulties or live with other disabilities. Improving electoral processes to ensure citizens with diverse access needs can engage in democratic activities independently can help reduce their reliance on family and friends to participate in elections.

Although inclusive and accessible voting options like iVote support greater independence for electors with disability, many family and friend carers often remain highly involved in supporting the person they care for engage in democratic activities. Carers NSW recognises that not all people with disability receive informal support or would identify with having a 'carer', the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reports that the majority of Australians with a reported disability who need assistance receive at least some of that assistance from a family member or friend; in many cases, on a daily basis.¹ Many carers

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019) *Survey of Ageing, Disability and Carers 2018*, TableBuilder Dataset, available online at: www.abs.gov.au.

(37.4% of primary carers) also live with a reported disability themselves; higher than the incidence of disability reported in the broader population.²

For many people with disability, the care provided by family members and friends plays a critical role in supporting their individual wellbeing, community engagement and self-determination. In addition to providing direct personal care and other practical and emotional support, carers are often active in supporting people with disability to navigate, access and coordinate mainstream and specialised services. This includes services aimed at promoting inclusion, as well as supporting participation in the community and in education and employment.³

In addition to highlighting the role carers play in supporting the democratic rights of the person they care for, Carers NSW wishes to emphasise the importance of ensuring that carers' rights are appropriately considered and upheld. Under the NSW *Carers (Recognition) Act 2010* and associated NSW Carers Charter state-based agencies and organisations are obligated to ensure carers are recognised and supported in their own right and that they receive adequate assistance unique to their individual needs. In the context of current electoral conduct in NSW, particularly with respect to initiatives such as iVote, Carers NSW believes that eligibility should be broadened to explicitly include family and friend carers, especially as they are likely to be participating in elections alongside or at the same time as the person they care for. Carers NSW also believes that accessible voting options like iVote should be implemented more consistently to ensure people with disability, their families and carers can confidently expect all available voting options across all state and local elections,

Thank you for accepting our submission. For further information, please contact _____,
Policy Officer at _____ or on _____,

Yours sincerely,

Elena Katrakis
CEO
Carers NSW

² Ibid.

³ Carers NSW (2020) *Carers NSW 2020 National Carer Survey – unpublished data.*