



VISION IMPAIRMENT

LOW VISION AND BLINDNESS

Vision impairment is a partial or full loss in the ability to see. There are various terms used to describe different categories of vision impairment including 'partially sighted', 'low vision', 'legally blind', 'totally blind', depending on factors such as visual acuity (ability to see details and distinguish between objects at specific distances), level of ability to correct the impairment (e.g. through glasses, contacts, surgery), and how the vision loss impacts on functioning.



TYPES OF VISION IMPAIRMENT

As well as poor acuity, issues may include:

- Blurred vision
- Loss of part of the visual field (e.g. central vision, peripheral vision)
- Double-vision
- Poor night vision
- Issues with colour vision
- Depth perception
- Coordination of the eyes
- Total loss of vision

Potential Causes

Vision impairment can be present at birth or happen later due to disease, injury, or a medical condition.

USE OF A WHITE CANE

Some people with vision impairment may use a long white cane to assist with mobility and independence. The cane can assist with detecting hazards (e.g. obstacles, changes in height and surface such as a step), and can help identify to others that the person has a vision impairment which can help with safety particularly in crowds and with road safety.

GUIDE DOGS FOR VISION IMPAIRMENT

Some people who are blind or who have very low vision have a guide dog. Guide dogs are a specific assistance dog trained to help a person with a vision impairment to safely navigate their environment by following owner's directions, identifying safe paths, locating doors and steps, navigating through crowds and obstacles and stopping at curbs and roadways. Training a guide dog can take around 2 years and considerable cost. The application process to apply for a guide dog also takes considerable time and many steps to ensure success.

SUPPORTING THE PERSON AT NETBALL

1

Get to know the person and support them to get to know your club facilities

- Get to know the person and ask what assistance they may need/how you can help if needed
- Offer a time for the person to visit to orient themselves to the club and facilities (i.e. walk around)



2

Communication tips

- Communicate directly with the person rather than anyone with them
- Use the person's name to gain their attention
- Introduce yourself as you approach the person

3

Have a low vision friendly environment

- Make sure the person knows who and what is in their environment (particularly if things are changing/ moving position such as during a coaching session)
- Consider aspects of the environment such as lighting – is the person looking into the sun because of where you are standing? Is there glare or reflective surfaces impacting them?
- Keep areas, particularly walkways, pathways and doorways free of clutter and try not to move things such as furniture around wherever possible

4

Adapting sessions

- Consider use of adapted sports equipment such as audible balls or those with contrasting colours to the background (i.e. the court) and larger equipment (e.g. bigger markers)
- Use contrasting colours for directional markings (e.g. court outlines, markers for drills during training etc.) and for coaches and assistants (e.g. wear a consistent bright coloured vest or hat)
- Verbally explain the things you are demonstrating with specific details
- Provide visuals and written information in a suitable format for the person (e.g. large print and pictures for session schedule, contrasting colours, non-glare paper)
- Try to keep consistent in your sessions in relation to how things are physically set up and how you move from one task (e.g. drill/activity) to another
- Practice activities/drills in smaller groups first

5

Guiding the person and Guide dogs

Guiding is assisting someone with a vision impairment to safely negotiate their environment

- If the person requires guiding ask them how they would prefer this to be done (e.g. them holding your elbow, what side do they prefer to be on, what pace they would like to go etc.) and by whom (e.g. coach, peer, support person).
- If the person has a guide dog, respect that the guide dog is there to work, don't pat or distract the dog. If the person removes the dog's harness it means the dog is having a break and, with owner's permission, they may be okay for you to talk to or pat the dog

REMEMBER

Each person is an individual and will have different strengths, interests and support needs even when they have the same disability or condition.

- Utilise the 'All About Me' form and have a conversation with the person
- Create a culture where the person will feel comfortable asking for assistance if they need it
- Don't worry if you make a mistake, it's all a part of learning
- Small changes will make a big difference



INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

The 'accessible environments' resource

Please refer to the 'accessible environments' resource for tips and strategies for supporting someone with a vision impairment at your club

Assistance animals



[Assistance Dogs Australia website](#) →

Guide Dogs



[Guide Dogs website](#) →

Vision Australia



[Vision Australia website](#) →

Information in this resource card has been adapted from:

- <https://www.littleathletics.com.au/inclusion/disability-health/vision-impairment-2/>
- <https://disability-resource.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/5.-Sensory-Disabilities.pdf>
- <https://blindsportsaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/vicommunitysportresourcefinal.pdf>
- <https://www.visioncenter.org/resources/visual-acuity-score/>
- <https://guidedogs.com.au/vision-resources/technology-visual-aids/long-white-cane/>
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