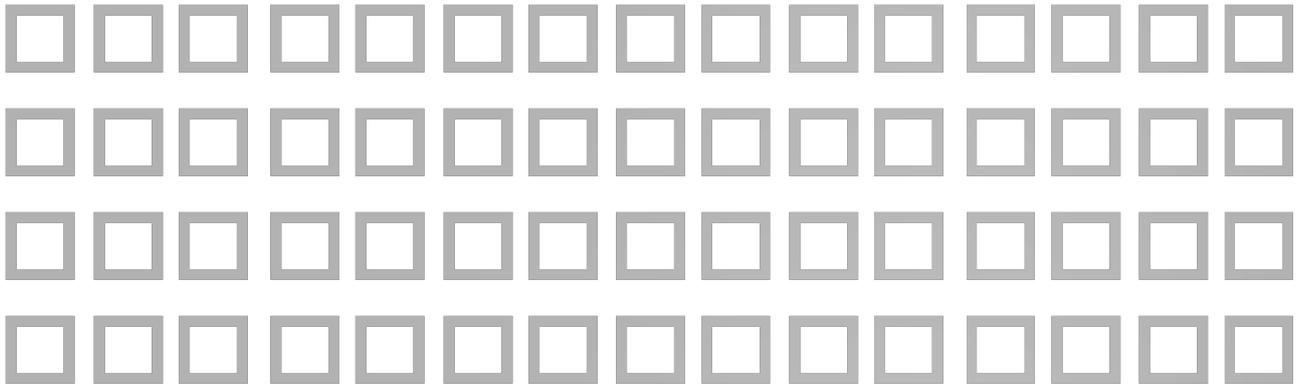


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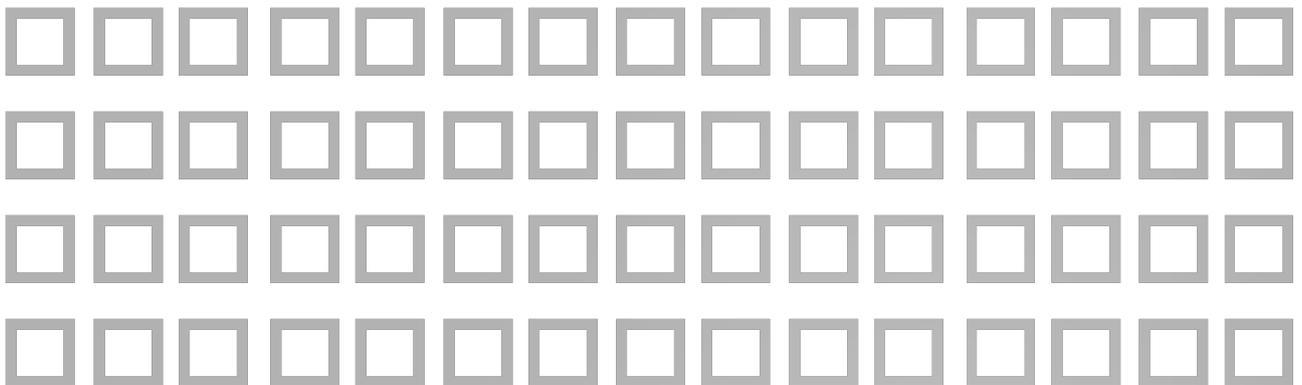
ACT ELECTORAL COMMISSION OFFICERS  
OF THE ACT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



# COVID Safe Election Service Delivery Plan

*2020 ACT Legislative Assembly Election*

August 2020



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## Overview

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Election ACT is committed to providing the highest standard of electoral services in the COVID Safe delivery of the 2020 ACT Legislative Assembly election. To meet this objective, Elections ACT has prepared this election service delivery plan which outlines several changes to processes and procedures for this election.

These measures are designed to comply with advice provided by the ACT Chief Health Officer and the federal government as at the time of publication. Elections ACT will adjust this service delivery plan as appropriate in response to any changed health advice or conditions.

## Scope

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This service delivery plan outlines COVID Safe protective measures for the health and safety of voters; parties, candidates and their staff and volunteers; and Elections ACT staff.

## Voters

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A range of COVID Safe protection measures will be in place to cater for voting options available to all ACT voters.

### Early voting

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Early voting is available from Monday 28 September to Friday 16 October 2020 at 15 Early Voting Centres (EVCs) to be established across ACT. Elections ACT encourages early voting as a key measure to help spread voter attendance across a three-week voting period, reducing the potential for large gatherings and risk of transmission of the COVID-19 virus especially on the final day of voting Saturday 17 October.

Recent amendments to the *Electoral Act 1992* have removed eligibility requirements for electors to cast an early vote, permitting all eligible electors to vote early at an EVC.

Elections ACT will establish 15 EVCs this election. EVCs will be open from 9 am to 5 pm seven days a week (with extended hours 9 am to 8 pm on Fridays) during the early voting period and from 8 am to 6 pm on the final day of the voting period, Saturday 17 October. EVCs will be located in town or suburban centres close to local shopping facilities so that voters can access voting services during regular outings.

At each EVC, the following measures will be in place to minimise risk of COVID-19 transmission:

- Queue controllers will be in place to ensure 1.5m social distancing is maintained among the voting public in queues;
- Floor markers or other signage will be used to guide proper social distancing;
- Prominent signage will be displayed promoting increased hygiene, social distancing, and requesting voters to remain at home if unwell;
- Hand sanitiser stations will be available at the entry and exit points of EVCs and electors will be requested to sanitise their hands before entering and exiting the venue.
- Hand sanitiser will be used by polling staff regularly during voting;
- Vote issuing tables where voters are marked off the roll and issued with their ballot paper will be spaced 1.5m apart.
- At each issuing table, there will be a Perspex sneeze screen in place to ensure protection of the voter and staff member.

- Electors will be offered a single-use pencil when issued with a ballot paper;
- Voting screens will be situated to allow for social distancing and queue controllers will be instructed to allocate voters to voting booths to ensure 1.5m distancing is maintained;
- Electronic voting screens will be cleaned with disinfectant after each use, and electors will have the option to request a sanitising wipe to use on the screen before use; and
- Common touch point surfaces such as issuing point tables will be regularly wiped down with disinfectant.

At the conclusion of each day of early voting, Elections ACT will publish information on the Elections ACT website that indicates when and where people are voting each day and throughout the voting period. This information will help electors to decide the best time to cast their vote. Electors in a high risk COVID-19 category are encouraged to consider voting at a non-peak time as indicated through this information.

## **Election Day Voting**

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Election day voting will take place as usual at 82 polling locations across ACT on Saturday 17 October, including at several school or community halls.

With an expected increase in early voting, voter numbers on election day will likely decline. This will serve to limit the number of people potentially gathering in one location on election day and to more readily facilitate compliance with social distancing requirements.

Measures for minimising the spread of COVID-19 at voting centres on election day are the same as those outlined above for EVCs.

## **Postal Voting**

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Postal voting will be available for eligible electors. Elections ACT staff and Australia Post staff handling postal voting materials will undertake additional protection measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. These measures will be applied at all stages of postal vote processing: during receipt of applications; preparation of postal packs; receipt of postal packs; and processing of postal voting material.

Electors wishing to cast a postal vote are encouraged to apply early, to ensure postal vote packs can be delivered and returned in time to be admitted to the count, and in the event of delays in postal delivery times due to the pandemic impacts.

Electors who are considered at high risk of contracting COVID-19 are encouraged to apply for a postal vote or to attend an EVC during non-peak times.

Electors in quarantine due to COVID-19, and therefore unable to attend a voting centre, are also encouraged to apply for a postal vote.

## **Mobile polling**

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Due to the high risk of COVID-19 transmission in aged care, prison and hospital settings, Elections ACT will not be providing mobile polling services for the 2020 ACT election. Mobile polling traditionally involves polling staff travelling to these eligible institutions to deliver voting services on site, including visiting patients in their own rooms. In lieu of this service, Elections ACT will promote postal voting as the preferred option and will facilitate distribution of postal vote packs for eligible residents.

## Overseas voting

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Eligible electors who are overseas during the 2020 ACT Legislative Assembly election will be able to cast an overseas e-vote. Overseas electors are encouraged to vote electronically via the newly developed limited electronic voting option provided by Elections ACT, rather than via an overseas postal vote. As international postage continues to experience significant delays, particularly in light of the COVID-19 situation, completed postal votes may not be received by Elections ACT prior to the last day permitted for the receipt of postal votes.

## Parties, candidates and scrutineers

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### Nominations

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The candidate nomination process will be conducted via face to face appointments with Elections ACT. Appropriate social distancing and hygiene practices will be enforced at each appointment.

The nomination form will be provided either in hardcopy or electronically. The Electoral Commission will make the nomination form available from 4 September upon request. Contactless payment will be available at the Elections ACT office for candidates paying nomination fees. Cash and banker's cheque will also be accepted however contactless payments are the preferred payment method to help limit risk of contamination.

The draw for party and candidate positions on the ballot papers will be conducted at a suitable location and format to ensure the health and safety of all attendees. This may include the provision of video conferencing facilities for candidates or the general public who wish to attend remotely. Appropriate hygiene practices and enforcement of social distancing arrangements will be in place at any physical location used in the nomination process.

### Canvassing

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Canvassing for votes is banned within 100 metres of a building in which a polling place is located, as per Section 303 of the *Electoral Act*. Parties, candidates and their staff and volunteers are responsible for complying with COVID Safe guidelines and measures. This includes maintaining appropriate physical distancing, following local and federal government health advice and not attending a voting location if they are feeling unwell.

### Scrutineers

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Scrutineers entering the polling place to observe polling will be offered hand sanitiser at the entry and exit of all venues and instructed to maintain social distancing within the polling place.

Scrutineers will be briefed on their rights, obligations and health and safety responsibilities by the Officer in Charge of the polling place at the commencement of scrutiny of ballot papers. The total number of electoral staff and scrutineers at any one scrutiny location or facility will be governed by room occupancy limits under COVID Safe provisions. Elections ACT will ensure equitable access by all scrutineers to enable conduct of their duties under COVID Safe requirements.

COVID Safe protection measures during the scrutiny include:

- Scrutineers will be requested to apply hand sanitiser at the entry and exit of the premises;
- Scrutineers and staff will all be required to wear face masks during the scrutiny process;

- Staff will sanitise their hands and clean the ballot box with disinfectant prior to handling seals and opening ballot boxes;
- Scrutineers and staff will be requested to maintain 1.5m social distancing during the process; and
- Staff will be instructed to apply hand sanitiser at regular intervals during the unfolding, sorting and counting process.

Staff will unfold and preliminarily sort ballot papers to candidates prior to the involvement of scrutineers. Scrutineers will then be permitted to view ballot papers at the point where they are being check sorted within candidate piles. The candidate check sort process will occur at a separate table equipped with Perspex sneeze screens so that scrutineers can scrutinise the ballot papers with additional COVID Safe protection measures in place for both staff and scrutineers. Scrutineers must stay 1.5 metres apart from one another during the scrutiny process. To accommodate this, polling officials may be requested by scrutineers to repeat the check sort for a candidate pile that they were unable to witness because of space restrictions during the initial check sort.

For scrutineers attending the Elections ACT scrutiny centre to observe post-election day activities including the scanning of ballot papers and counting of early voting centre paper ballots and postal votes, the following protection measures will be put in place:

- For EVC ballot paper counts occurring at the scrutiny centre, all the above measures outlined for polling places will apply;
- For postal ballot paper counts, all the measures will also apply. Staff will also apply hand sanitiser before opening batches of postal vote envelopes in addition to applying hand sanitiser during unfolding, sorting and counting of postal vote batches; and
- For scanning, in addition to these measures, scanning verification terminals will be situated 1.5m apart to protect data entry staff and scrutineers. Two display monitors per scanning verification terminal monitors (rather than the previous single monitor) will be provided to allow multiple scrutineers to observe scanned ballot papers at each verification terminal.

## **Election Staff**

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The health and safety of Elections ACT staff is paramount to running a successful election. Measures to help protect staff from contracting and spreading COVID-19 include:

- Online and Face-to-Face training will include information on the COVID Safe specific health measures that will be in place at all voting locations;
- All face-to-face training will adhere to social-distancing rules with hand sanitiser provided;
- Appropriate hygiene – hand sanitiser and disinfectant spray and wipes will be available for regular use by staff in all voting and staff locations;
- Touchpoints will be regularly wiped down and/or regular cleaning arranged at the site as required;
- Social distancing measures will be enforced in all voting and staff locations including materials distribution centres, voting centres, the postal vote processing centre and the scrutiny centre;
- Sneeze shields will be used on issuing tables during polling, and during the scrutiny of ballot papers, to help keep staff appropriately distanced from electors and scrutineers;
- Personal protective equipment such as masks will be worn by electoral staff throughout the voting period; and
- Individual identification vests for staff will not be shared with other staff members.

If there is a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 amongst any Elections ACT temporary or permanent staff, Elections ACT will follow the requirements for quarantine and contact tracing for all those affected in consultation with ACT Health.

## **Conclusion**

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Elections ACT is committed to delivering the highest possible standard of electoral services for the 2020 ACT Legislative Assembly election in a COVID safe manner. This will require the adoption of a number of COVID Safe practices informed by ACT Health advice across all aspects of the conduct of the election to facilitate the necessary safety of all electors, staff and participants.

As part of our commitment to continuous improvement I welcome any comments on this service plan to assist Elections ACT in the delivery of a successful and COVID Safe election in 2020.



Damian Cantwell, AM  
ACT Electoral Commissioner