

# ACTIVE CITIZENS PROJECT MDAA ELECTION FORUM

17 May 2022

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*Figure 1 Political candidates panel at the Election Forum event*

## 1. Background

The Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association (MDAA) is a not-for-profit organisation that aims to promote, protect and secure the rights and interests of people from non-English speaking backgrounds with disability and their families and carers in NSW.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> May 2022, in the lead up to the 2022 Federal Election, MDAA hosted an Election Forum with people living with disability, families and carers.

The main objective of the workshop was to enhance individual agency and capacity to drive change in their lives and others as well as in their communities and society they live in.

Specifically, in the context of the Federal Election, at the end of the forum it was intended that participants will have:

- An increased awareness and understanding of issues to make an informed choice about voting preferences
- Identified enablers and barriers for their participation in the voting process and making informed choices

The Forum activities are strategically aligned with MDAA's vision: A society where everyone, regardless of background or disability, feels welcome, included, and supported.<sup>1</sup>

The forum took place at Granville Diggers Club. 30 participants attended in person. 1 person joined by Zoom. 6 staff were present.

This document summarises the activities conducted at the workshop, identifies the key themes from the discussions and makes recommendations to achieve the goals and objectives of the Active Citizens project.

## 2. Workshop activities

MDAA engaged Dr. Michael Camit (PhD), Honorary Fellow at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) to develop the activities and facilitate the workshop.<sup>2</sup>

The workshop activities included:

- A facilitated discussion with participants on driving change for oneself and others

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<sup>1</sup> Active Citizens Grant Application

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Michael Camit (PhD) has over 25 years' experience as a practitioner and researcher exploring, literacy and participatory approaches to communication and engagement with minority and marginalised communities. He is also currently Manager of Health Literacy at South Western Sydney Local Health District.

- Pre and post workshop questionnaires<sup>3</sup> on
  - Awareness of the role Members of Parliament (MPs) play in one's life
  - Interest in learning about issues for the forthcoming elections
  - Understanding ways to assess information and claims made by political parties
  - Understanding of the voting procedures
  - Awareness of key parties and candidates in one's electorate
  - Questions to ask politicians standing for elections
  - Assistance required for voting
  
- A panel discussion and presentation inviting representatives of key political parties and their message/ policies for people with disability.
 

Panel presentations were made by:

  - Andrew Charlton, Labor Party (Parramatta)
  - Rohan Laxmanlal, Animal Justice Party (Parramatta)
  - Councillor Phil Bradley, Greens Party (Parramatta)
  - Chetan Sahai, Greens Party (Sydney)
  - Paula Sanchez from Socialist Alliance (NSW Senate)
  - Kristina Keneally, Labor Party (Fowler) could not join in person, and made a video recording in response to Labor Party's message and policies for people with disability
  
- Discussing the links between individual agency and environmental and structural barriers to self-actualisation

The workshop attracted:

- 30 face-to-face participants attending the workshop
- 1 participant attending online

Of the 31 participants, 2 were members of the Governance Committee and 29 was the number of consumers. 6 staff members were in attendance.

Based on the responses from the invitations sent to MDAA's consumer, member, and volunteer network, MDAA staff organised relevant support for consumers. There was a support worker for a consumer/ member with an intellectual disability and a bicultural Vietnamese community educator who is also a qualified interpreter that was contracted to work with consumers from Vietnamese backgrounds who expressed a need for language assistance.

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<sup>3</sup>Participants were asked the same questions one month after the MDAA Election Forum to allow time for reflection.



*Figure 2 Dr Michael Camit facilitating the workshop at the Election Forum*

### 3. Results of workshop activities

#### 3.1 Pre and Post workshop surveys

A total of 23 participants completed the pre workshop surveys, either by themselves or with the assistance of their support workers and when required, an interpreter/ bicultural worker. 52% (n=12) of those who filled in the pre workshop survey completed both pre and post surveys.

##### 3.1.1 Knowledge of the role of Members of Parliament

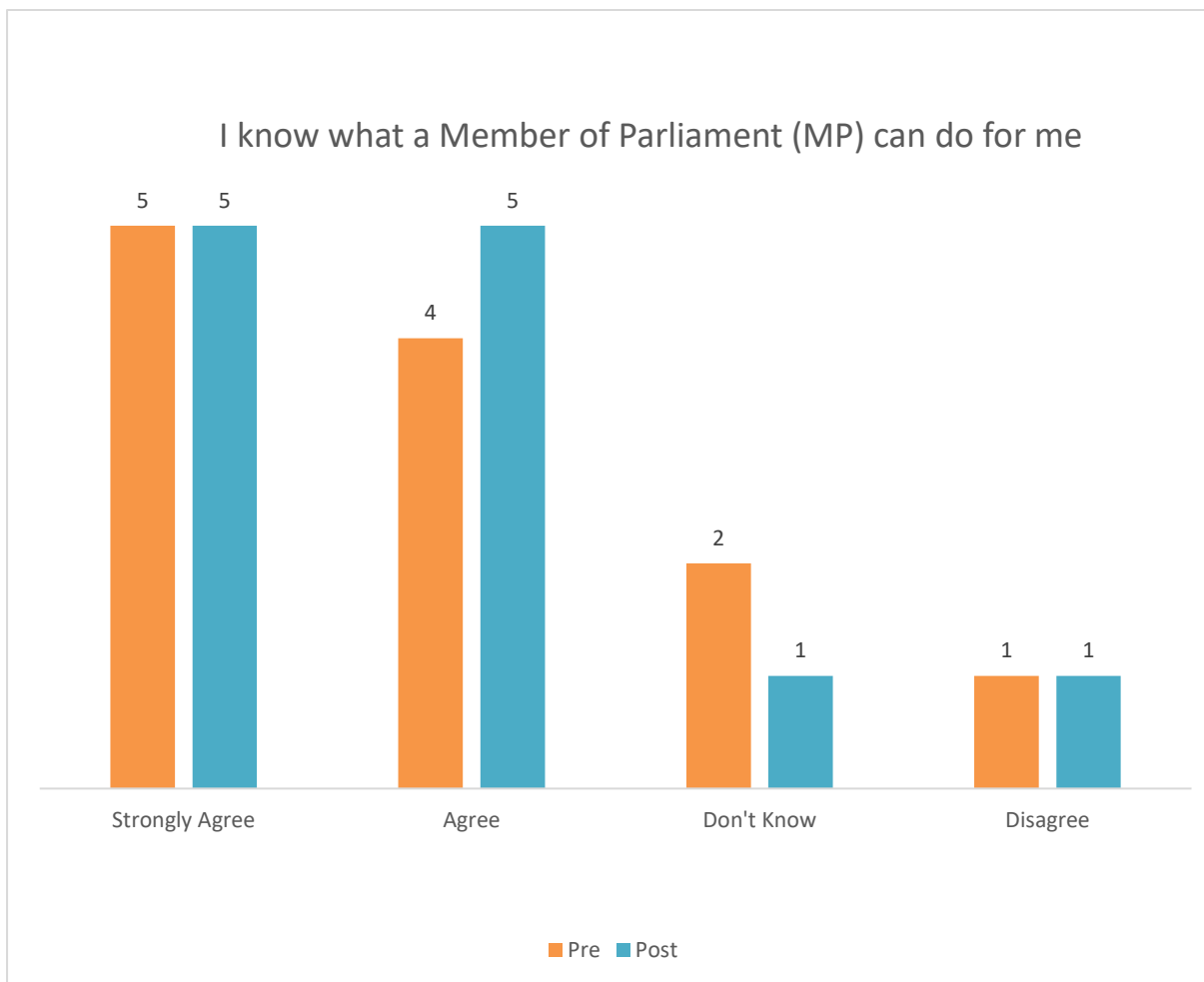


Figure 3 Knowledge of what a MP can do for me

Using a semantic scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree), participants reported their reaction to the statement **“I know what a Member of Parliament (MP) can do for me”**

The responses of those that completed the pre and post surveys suggest there was very minor shifts in understanding (one person less reporting “Don’t Know”).

### 3.1.2 Active engagement (reading or learning) about forthcoming elections

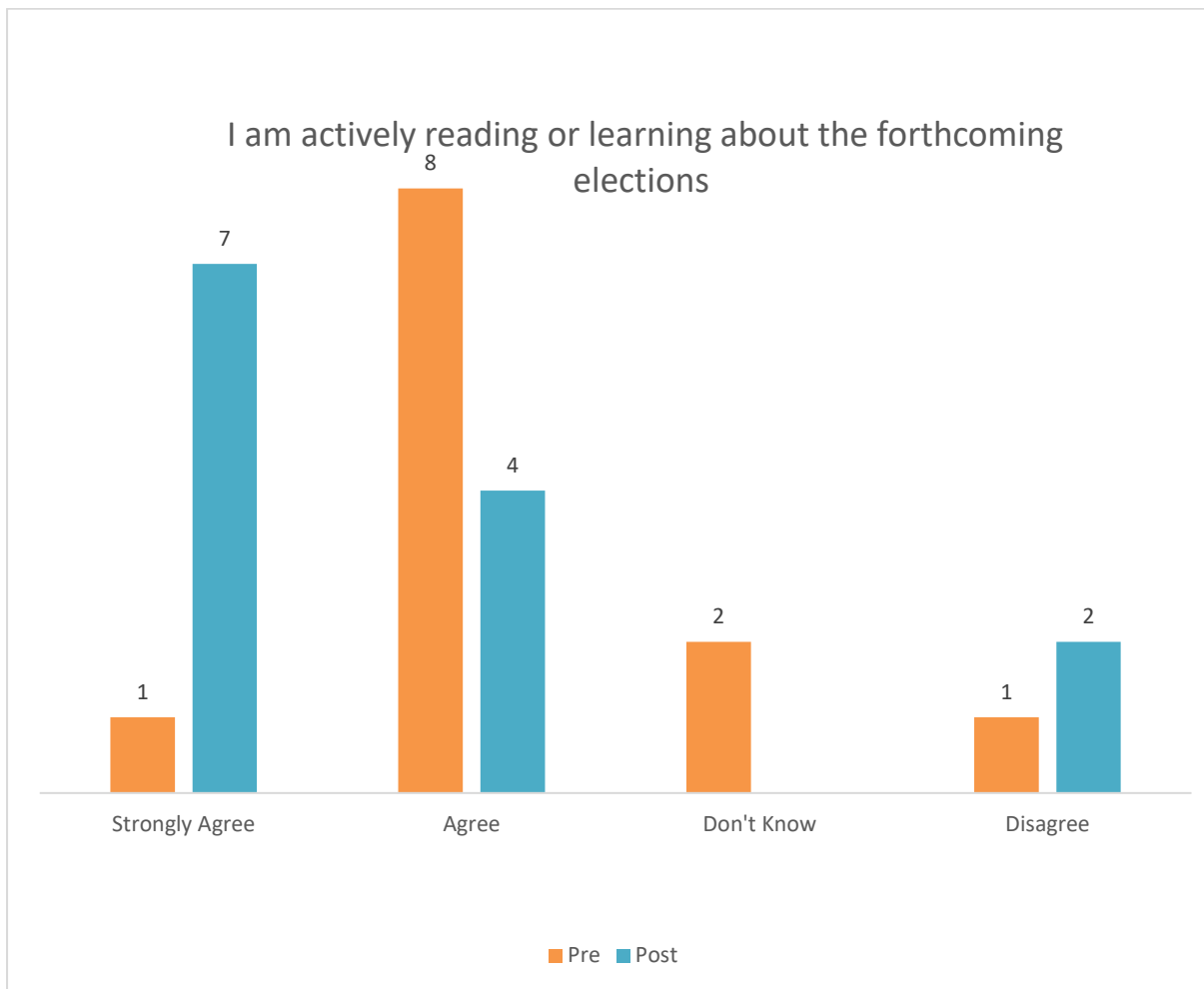


Figure 4 Self-reported engagement (reading or learning about elections)

Using a semantic scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree), participants reported their reaction to the statement **“I am actively reading or learning about the forthcoming elections.”**

The responses of those that completed the pre and post surveys suggest there was a shift in interest with participants being actively engaged in election reporting “Strongly Agree” (pre workshop=1/ post workshop= 7) and “Agree” (pre workshop= 8 and post workshop= 4).



### 3.1.3 Interest in forthcoming elections

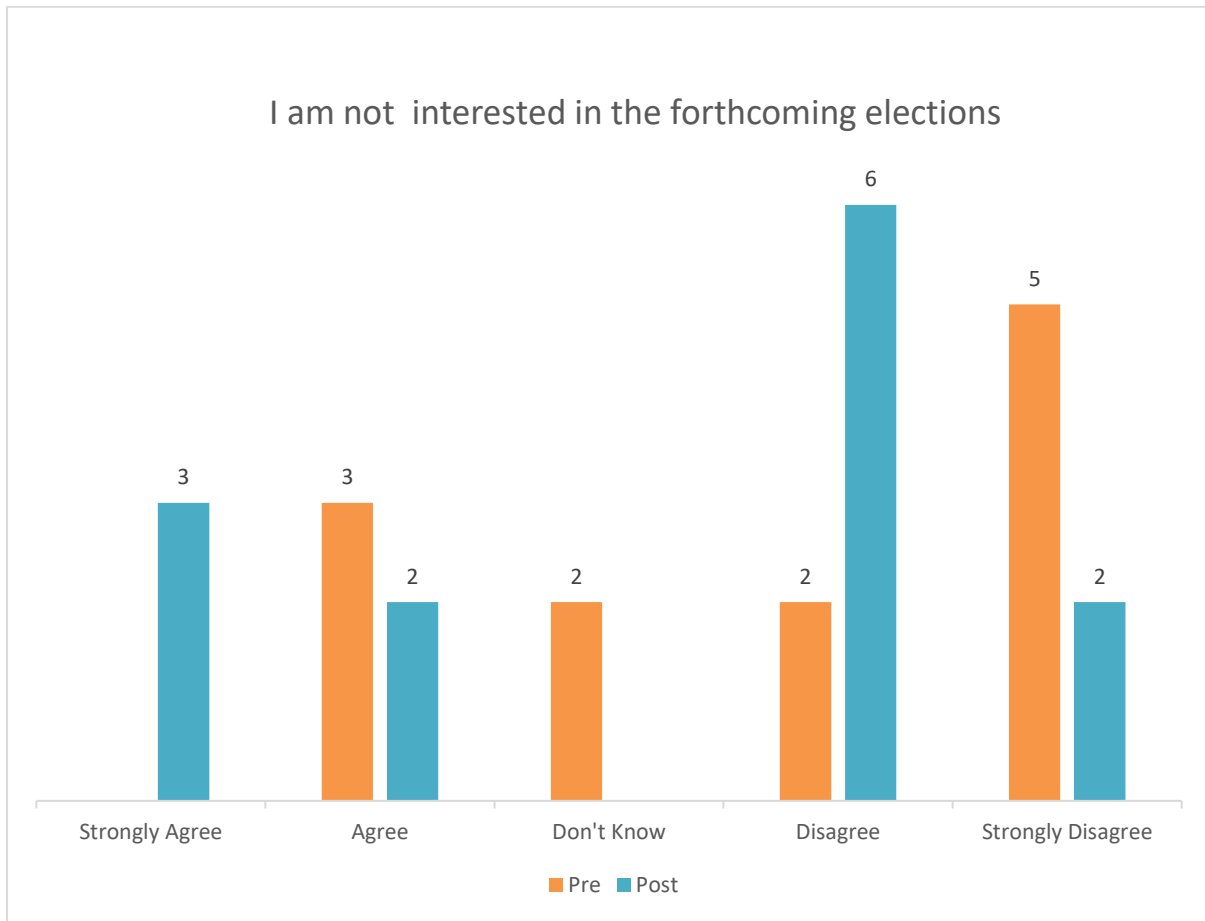


Figure 5 Participant's reaction to the statement "I am not interested in any forthcoming elections"

Using a semantic scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree), participants reported their reaction to the statement **"I am not interested in any forthcoming elections."**

The responses of those that completed the pre and post surveys suggest there was a major shift in interest with participants being actively engaged in forthcoming elections with participants disagreeing (pre workshop= 2 and post workshop= 6 ) and strongly disagreeing with the statement (pre workshop= 5 and post workshop= 2).

### 3.1.4 Certainty about candidate preferences

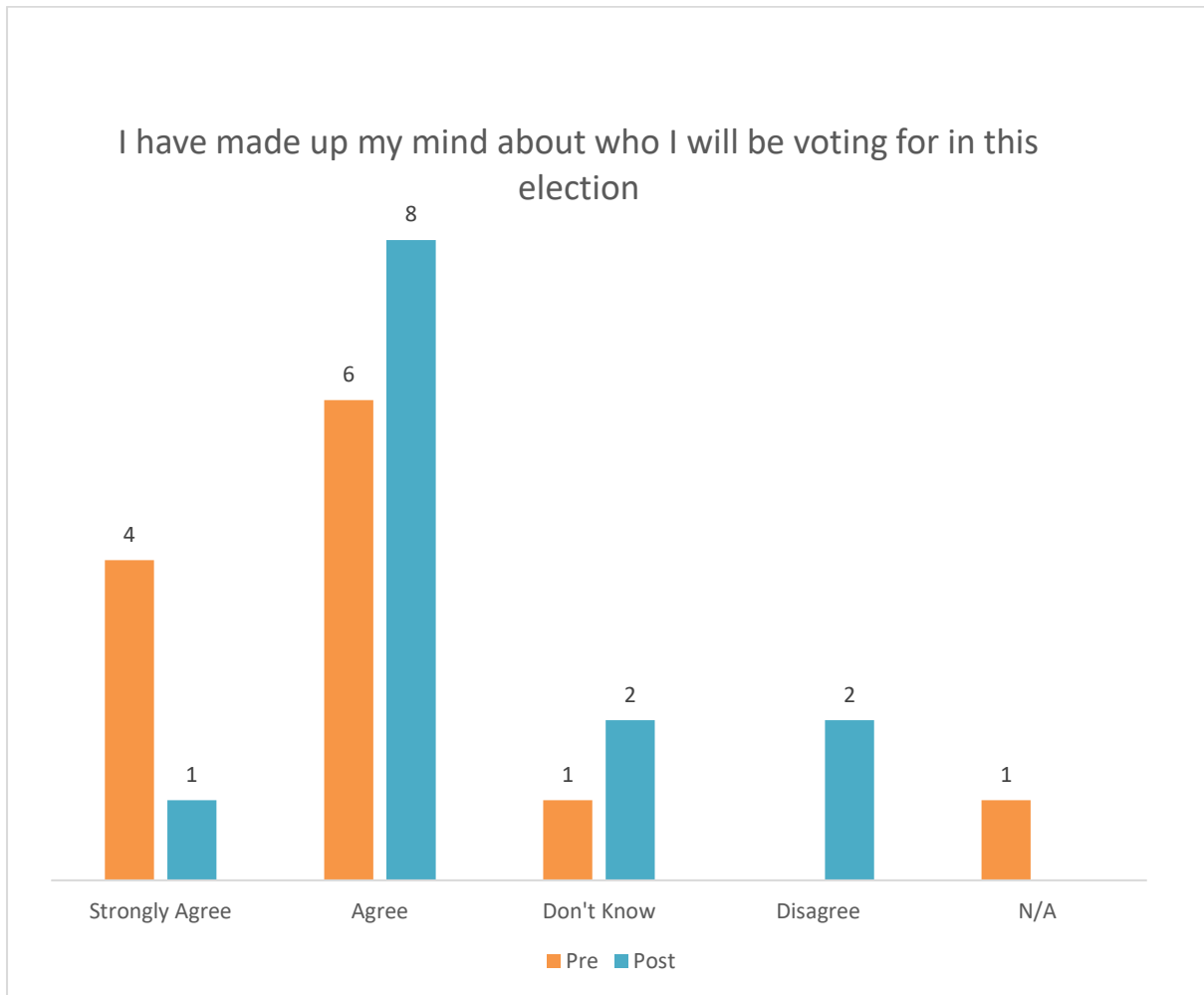


Figure 6 Participant's reaction to the statement "I have made up my mind about who I will be voting for in this election."

Using a semantic scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree), participants reported their reaction to the statement **"I have made up my mind about who I will be voting for in this election."**

The responses of those that completed the pre and post surveys suggest that while most participants had an idea of who they will vote for, post survey data suggest some participants had more certainty after the forum ("Agree" pre workshop= 6, post workshop= 8).

### 3.1.5 Knowledge of how to verify information or claims of political parties and politicians

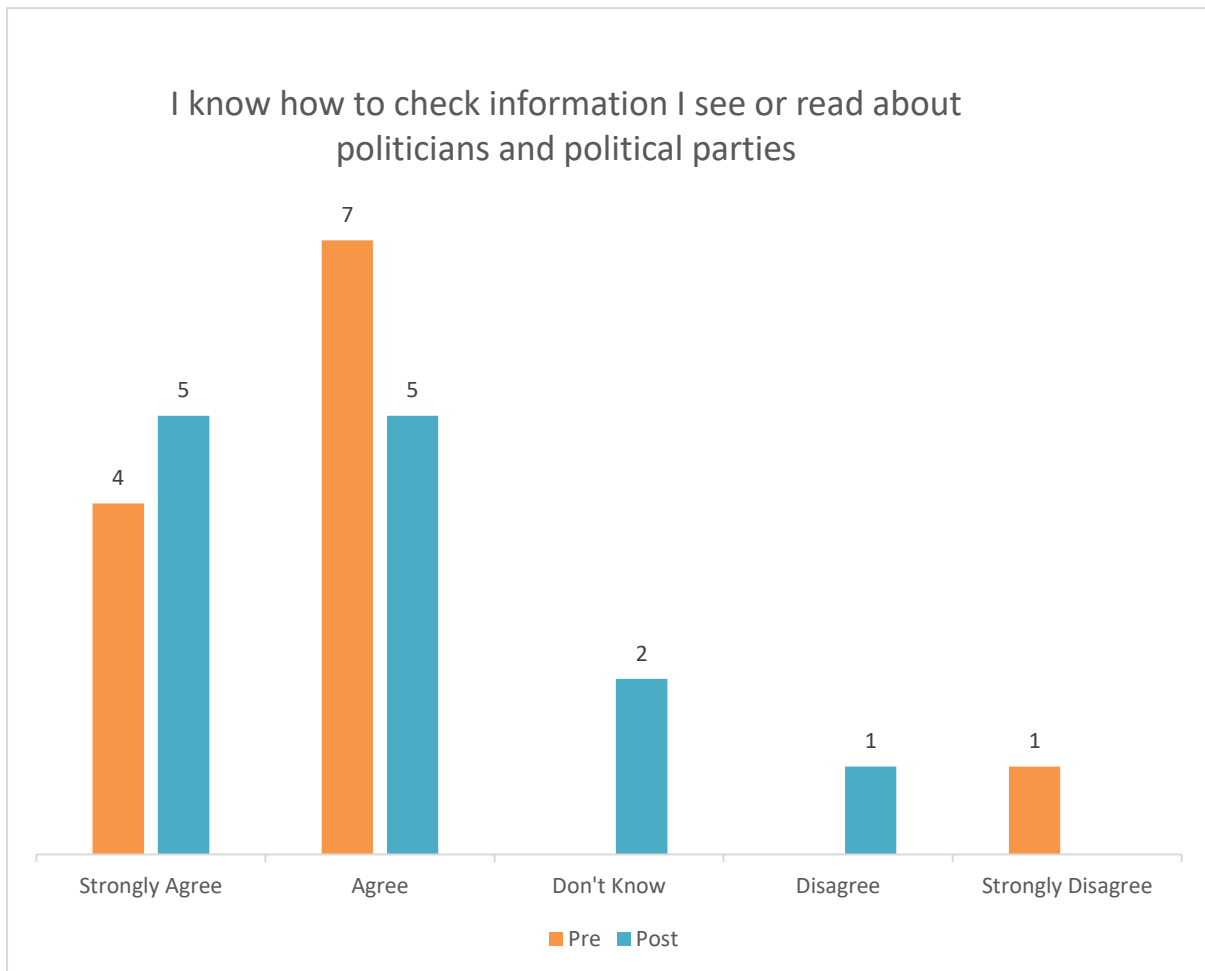


Figure 7 Participant's reaction to checking information about politicians and political parties

Using a semantic scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree), participants reported their reaction to the statement **“I know how to check information I see or read about politicians and political parties.”**

The responses of those that completed the pre and post surveys suggest most participants were confident about ways to check information about politicians and political parties. However, while post survey data suggest there were participants who are not confident in this area (post survey reporting “Don’t Know”= 2, and “Disagree”= 2)<sup>4</sup> that while most participants had an idea of who they will vote for, post survey data suggest some participants had more certainty after the forum (“Agree” pre workshop= 6, post workshop= 8)

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<sup>4</sup> No participants in the pre workshop survey reported “don’t know”, “disagree” in relation to the statement. No participant in the post workshop survey reported “strongly disagree” in relation to the statement.

### 3.1.6 Questions to ask politicians

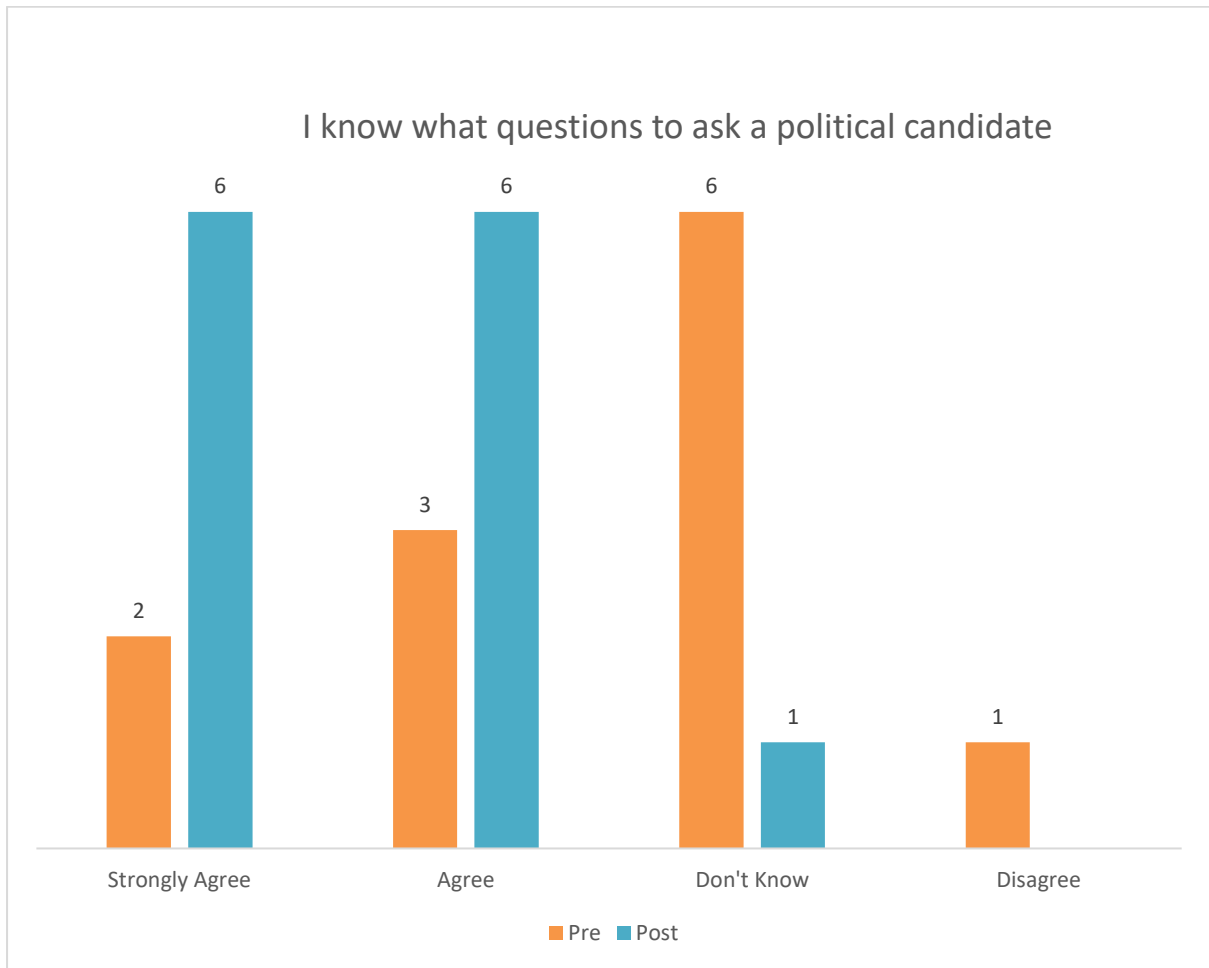


Figure 8 Participant's reaction to knowing what questions to ask a political candidate

Using a semantic scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree), participants reported their reaction to the statement **“I know what questions to ask a political candidate.”**

The responses of those that completed the pre and post surveys suggest a significant shift between pre and post workshop responses. Participants at pre workshop surveys reported “Don't Know”= 6 and “Disagree”= 1 to having a question for a political candidate. Post workshop, participants reported strongly agreeing= 6 and agreeing= 6 to this statement.

### 3.1.7 Understanding how to vote

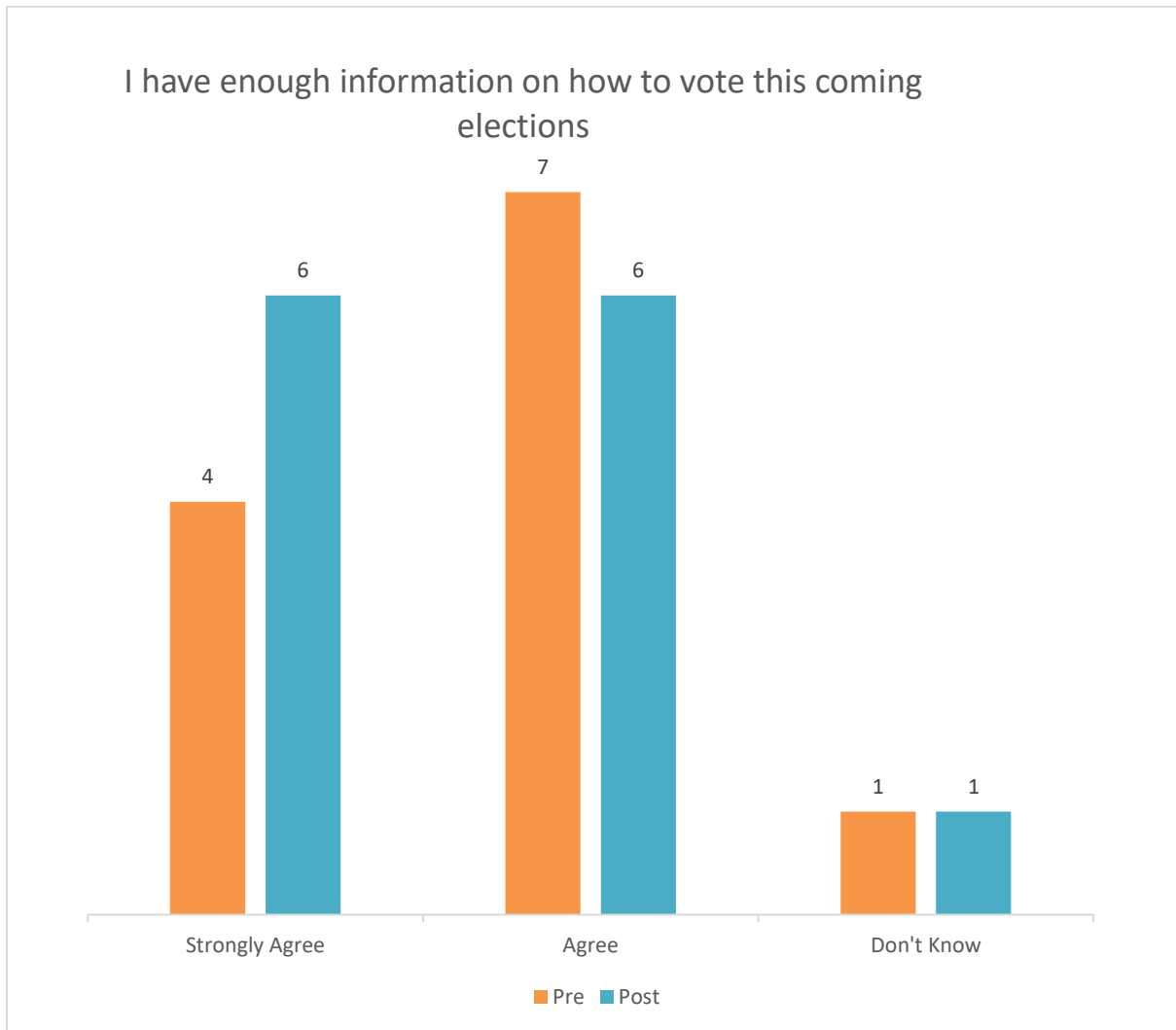


Figure 9 Participant's reaction to the statement "I know the steps in voting during elections"

Using a semantic scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree), participants reported their reaction to the statement **"I know the steps in voting during elections."**

The responses of those that completed the pre and post surveys suggest most participants were aware of how to vote.

## 4. Key issues and themes

The following were key issues and themes identified through written feedback from participants, discussions at the Forum and notes from the workshop facilitator:

### 4.1 What matters to participants

When asked what issues mattered to them, participants identified the following themes:

#### 4.1.1 Health and COVID-19

- Affordable costs for healthcare, including dental
- Too expensive can't keep up with dental care
- Increases of pension still doesn't help with dental because of other costs for example, rent, bills, medication, etc.
- What happens to elderly - long waiting time - aged care
- Doctors and specialist very expensive
- Free Flu shots - how to help people with injections
- What happens if we get lockdown again?
- Fear of being isolated again if the next COVID-19 lockdown happens
- Aged Care - Don't want to fall in gaps – 65 y/o – 75 y/o, takes time to get services. Labor promised no gaps. Hope they can keep their promise
- I want to know if they will be supporting Eye Testing

#### 4.1.2 Literacy and navigating system

- Changing electricity providers – am Illiterate cannot do it (written by support worker)

#### 4.1.3 NDIS

- Minimise gaps between mainstream services and NDIS
- “NDIS doesn't cover everything”
- “NDIS access to be processed quicker - service gaps for people that miss out”

#### 4.1.4 Independent living for people with a disability

- Better accessibility in one's home
- Learning to cook independently with little or no support worker
- Improvement in technology to improve capacity for driving for example, GPS navigation (for people with intellectual disability)

#### 4.1.5 Increasing cost of living

- "For son (with disability) to get training; he needs to get employment to be able to afford cost of living, rising costs"
- “It's not easy to work out how much money from the pension”

- "Pension – will they cut off Pension? Will it increase or decrease with cost of living?"
- Help with electricity, dental, community shopping

#### **4.1.6 Education and employment**

- Young children with disability - education for young people looking for work
- More services for young people – they need to be independent to get a job and for NDIS to help them
- How can grandchildren with disability have a good education?
- How can we assist carers to go back to work?
- More employment and training opportunity for people with a disability as well as retraining options

#### **4.1.7 Carers**

- Help carers who care for older parents
- "More support for carers - carers need respite/rest especially for planning for emergency. For example, hospital operations for carer and recovery."

#### **4.1.8 Young people and children**

- Services for older people with a disability
- Need workers to cook and care for children with disability and elderly parents

#### **4.1.9 Advocacy Services**

- "More services funded for advocacy for people living with a disability."

## **4.2 Awareness of the role of a Member of Parliament (MP)**

Both pre and post survey results suggest that apart from 3 respondents, most participants were aware of the role of a Member of Parliament (MP).

- "Cares about the future of people living with a disability in our communities"
- "Supporting the new NDIS scheme and families and provide care and support they need"
- "Member of Parliament means to represent the people who live within the electorate that they are representing by raising their concerns to the relevant authorities, parties and/or parliament"
- "Need to know what is our community concerns, especially PWD"
- "Represents constituents in own electorate to advocate for change and make systems better for everyone"
- "Listen to community – give feedback for example, telling hospital needs upgrade"

However, three participants expressed concern about engaging with them:

- “I do not call them. When you call them, they don't call back when they say they will. Writing is better to them.” – Vietnamese participant
- “I can only see the politician when its voting time”
- “I don't have the confidence to call because my English”

### 4.3 Awareness of specific politicians

Participants were able to identify the following politicians and political parties because of either their work with people with a disability or relating to them at an individual level:

- “Jason Clare – because he helps people living with a disability and the NDIS scheme”
- “Anthony Albanese has a heart to poor people. He grew up in Housing with his mum and works hard. I believe he cares and will help those from other countries especially children”
- “Greens - Jordan Steele - Inclusion policy for people with disability”
- “Morrison - he is open and supports people with disability”
- “Bill Shorten - passionate about people with a disability (PWD), making change on what people want - make NDIS better so people not worse off. Wants to settle matters with AAT”
- “I like Labor Government. I liked Julia Gillard - good for immigration and Aged Care people. Thought economy was good then”
- “Gladys (Berejiklian) she was upfront - tell us about COVID 19 everyday”

It was interesting to note that Dr Kerry Chant who appeared with ex-premier Gladys Berejiklian, was identified as a politician by one of the participants.

While at least 6 participants mentioned the Labor Party as a party of choice for refugees, migrants, and people with a disability, one participant recommended the Liberal Party:

- "Liberal - seems practical - don't do dole out...In my area, lots of young people are not working, but they don't work - they rely on government money"



#### 4.4 Voting decision

While 3 participants were unsure of who they will vote for others suggested voting for Labor identifying politicians such as Nick Lalich, Tony Burke and Chris Hayes.

One long time Labor supporter, expressed her frustration about the choice of candidate:

- “I live in the seat of Fowler where local electors decided to successfully challenge the notion of safe labor seat since 70s. The electorate of Fowler had elected an independent candidate, Ms Dai Le instead of the ALP nominated high power Christina Kennelly”

#### 4.5 Questions for politicians about the elections/questions about the elections

- “After being elected how will you fulfil your promise?”
- "What will you do about inflation and rising costs of living?"
- “How can you deliver the things you promised for example, interest rate to go down?"
- “How can we know you'll do the right thing - fix NDIS and hospital waiting times and waiting time for Specialists”
- “What is the best for the election of the pension and the NDIS and get the Liberals away?”
- “How can new citizens have a fair go/ opportunity?”
- “How will you address discrimination in Australia?”
- “Why is the voting process so confusing?”
- "What will happen to those areas who don't have a Labor candidate and Liberal has won the seat?"
- “How can community be safe from criminals?”

#### 4.6 Source of information on politicians

Most of the participants reported that they verify information about politicians through

- The major TV channels 7, 9, 10 and ABC

However, one participant explained that he “does not understand (the language) of ABC TV.”

- Most reported they get their information on social media platforms and family/friends

While one participant checked the website of United Australia Party to review platform for people with a disability, there was a least 5 participants who did not know how to verify the claims of political parties.

For example, one participant carrying a flyer from the United Australia Party, identified one candidate who he said he will vote for, as his friends told him she has good ideas. The participant was not able to explain how he would verify this information.

#### **4.7 What assistance needed**

Participants identified the following to provide them assistance with voting:

- Support worker
- Interpreter who can help read through the information and interprets for people with a disability and their carers
- For people with intellectual disability: more time to review information; in consultations – pre reading of questions and working with support worker and interpreter.

### **5. Recommendations**

#### **5.1 Build on individual responses and with permission, assist participants with their concern and encourage civic participation**

The pre and post surveys provided an opportunity for participants at the Election Forum to identify themselves for future follow-up. MDAA can follow up and assist participants to address issues and help individuals find answer to questions. In addition, those who expressed interest in knowing and contacting their local representatives (politicians) can also be assisted and if required be represented through MDAA's advocacy service. The actions, if any, that result from individual follow-up can provide indicators as to the level of engagement and participation achieved as a result of the Election Forum and MDAA's assistance.

#### **5.2 Be aware of potential disruption caused by group interpreters**

A Vietnamese interpreter/ bicultural worker was requested by MDAA consumers. The interpreter sat next to a group of Vietnamese speakers and conducted simultaneous interpreting during the various candidates' presentations. This distracted other audience members.

Future forums should plan how best to manage any language/ support work for CALD consumers and minimise disruption.

### 5.3 Co-design capacity building workshops for people with disability and carers

As part of MDAA’s engagement activities and encouraging active participation of its consumers and carers, co-design workshops ought to focus on civic responsibilities. As people are encouraged to participate, they can realise their contribution to making positive changes in their lives and toward societal changes. These changes can affect the local, state and federal levels of government. Some of the activities that can be incorporated to build their skills in this area are how to lobby, writing letters to their local MP, how to visit their local member of parliament.

Co-design workshops provide an ideal platform to empower consumers and carers to have a voice in issues that matter to them.

One useful framework is Western Australia’s Connect with Me co-design toolkit for working with people with a disability:

[https://www.pwdwa.org/documents/connect\\_with\\_me/co-design-toolkit/](https://www.pwdwa.org/documents/connect_with_me/co-design-toolkit/)

