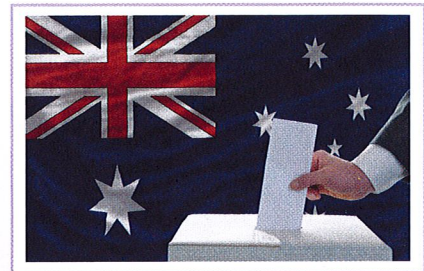


Who Can Vote?

All Australian citizens who are 18 years of age or older can and must vote in local, state and federal elections. The only exceptions are people who are in prison and have received sentences of greater than five years, and people who have a severe intellectual disability. Before they can vote, citizens must register. Their name is entered on a list of electors called the Commonwealth Electoral Roll. If a citizen does not vote, and does not supply a 'valid and sufficient' reason for not voting, they may receive a fine.

Compulsory Voting

Australia is one of the few nations in the world to have compulsory voting. It was first adopted in Queensland in 1915, and then by the Commonwealth Parliament in 1924. Compulsory voting was introduced to ensure that the parliament represented the views of all the people, not just of those who voted.



Universal Suffrage

The right to vote is called suffrage. During the late 1800s, throughout much of the world, there was a campaign for what was termed 'universal suffrage', or the right for everybody to vote no matter how rich they were. At Australia's first election in 1843, for the New South Wales Legislative Council, only men who owned houses or land were allowed to vote. No women could vote or become a member of the Council. Other colonies also had similar restrictions.

Many people campaigned for universal suffrage, although at first it was just universal male suffrage. Women were not considered to be 'informed' enough to vote. After the 1860s, many women joined organisations to fight for the right to vote. They felt that this was the best way of ensuring that laws would protect women, children and families. They also campaigned for other reforms in women's education and health. By 1901, women had achieved the vote in South Australia, but were not allowed to vote in other states.

Votes for Aboriginal People

When the colonial parliaments were set up in the 1850s, only men who owned a certain amount of property could vote. Very few Aboriginal people owned enough property for them to qualify. When the right to vote was extended to all men regardless of wealth, this included all Aboriginal men in New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia. However, most Aboriginal people were unaware that they could vote, and very few took part in elections.

Western Australia and Queensland made laws forbidding Aboriginal people from voting. These laws were not changed until 1962 (Western Australia) and 1965 (Queensland). In 1962 the Commonwealth Government introduced a law granting all Aboriginal people the right to vote, although those from New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia already had that right because they had the right to vote in state elections.

Suffrage in Australia

Parliament	All men granted vote	All women granted vote	All Aboriginal people granted vote	Compulsory voting
Australia	1902	1902	1962	1924
NSW	1858	1902	1858	1928
Queensland	1872	1905	1965	1915
South Australia	1856	1895	1856	1942
Tasmania	1896	1903	1896	1928
Victoria	1857	1908	1857	1926
Western Australia	1893	1899	1962	1936