



PART TWO

Australia's democratic beliefs,
rights and liberties

Australia's democratic beliefs, rights and liberties

At the citizenship ceremony, you pledge that you will share Australia's democratic beliefs and respect its rights and liberties. It is very important that you understand Australia's democratic beliefs, and the rights and liberties shared by Australians.

This part of the booklet lists these beliefs, rights and liberties. For more information see *Part 4, Australian values*.

Our democratic beliefs

Parliamentary democracy

Australia's system of government is a parliamentary democracy. As part of this system, the power of the government comes from the Australian people because Australian citizens vote for people to represent them in parliament. The representatives in parliament must answer to the people, through elections, for the decisions they make.

The Rule of Law

All Australians are equal under the law. The Rule of Law means that no person, group or religious rule is above the law. Everyone, including people who hold positions of power in the Australian community, must obey Australia's laws. This includes government, community and religious leaders, as well as business people and the police.

Living peacefully

Australians are proud to live in a peaceful country with a stable system of government. Australians believe that change should occur through discussion, peaceful persuasion, and the democratic process. We reject violence as a way to change a person's mind or the law.

Respect for all individuals regardless of background

Australia's democratic system is based on the principle that every individual, regardless of their background, has rights and equality under Australian law. All Australians are expected to treat each other with dignity and respect, regardless of their race, country of origin, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, age, disability, heritage, culture, politics, wealth or religion.



Our freedoms

Freedom of speech and freedom of expression

Freedom of speech is a core Australian value and underpins our democratic system. Freedom of speech means people can say and write what they think, and discuss their ideas with others.

For example, people can criticise the government, protest peacefully against government decisions and campaign to change laws, so long as at all times they are still obeying Australian laws.

Freedom of expression means people can express their views, including through art, film, music and literature. People are free to meet in public or private places for social or political discussion.

At all times, even while engaging in freedom of speech and freedom of expression, the laws of Australia must be obeyed. We must also respect other people's freedom of speech and freedom of expression.

Freedom of association

Freedom of association is the right to form and join associations to pursue common goals. For example, in Australia people are free to join any legal organisation, such as a political party, trade union, religious, cultural or social group. People can also decide not to join, and cannot be forced into doing so.

Australians can gather with others to protest against a government action or an organisation. At all times, however, the laws of Australia must be obeyed.

This means that such gatherings must be peaceful, and must not injure any person or damage property.

Freedom of religion

Australia has a Judaeo-Christian heritage, and many Australians describe themselves as Christians, but there are people in Australia from all the large religions. Australia has public holidays on Christian days such as Good Friday, Easter Sunday and Christmas Day.

The government and the law treat all citizens equally, whatever their religion or beliefs. The government in Australia is secular, which means it operates separately from churches or other religious entities. Australia has no official national religion. People in Australia are free to follow any religion they choose. They may also not choose to follow a religion.

At all times, even while engaging in religious practices, the laws of Australia must be obeyed. Where there is a conflict between an Australian law and a religious practice, Australian law prevails.

Our equalities

There are a number of laws in Australia that ensure a person is not treated differently to others because of their gender, race, disability or age.

Gender equality

Men and women have equal rights in Australia. It is against the law to discriminate against a person because of their gender.

Equality of opportunity and a ‘fair go’

Australians value equal opportunity in our society; what is often called a ‘fair go’. This means that what someone achieves in life should be as a result of their talents, work and effort, rather than their wealth or background. This is to ensure that there are no formal class distinctions in Australian society.

Responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship

When you become an Australian citizen, you will have additional responsibilities and privileges.

Responsibilities—what you will give Australia

As an Australian citizen you must:

- obey the laws of Australia
- vote in federal and state or territory elections, and in a referendum
- defend Australia should the need arise
- serve on a jury if called to do so.

Privileges—what Australia will give you

As an Australian citizen you can:

- vote in federal and state or territory elections, and in a referendum
- apply for children born overseas to become Australian citizens by descent
- apply for a job in the Australian Public Service or in the Australian Defence Force
- seek election to parliament
- apply for an Australian passport and re-enter Australia freely
- ask for consular assistance from an Australian official while overseas.



Responsibilities

Obey the laws of Australia

Our representatives in government make laws to maintain an orderly, free and safe society and to protect our rights. All Australian citizens and other people in Australia must obey the laws of Australia.

More information about some important laws in Australia can be found in *Part 3, Government and the law in Australia*.

Voting in federal and state or territory elections, and in a referendum

Voting is an important responsibility, right and privilege for all Australian citizens aged 18 years or over.

It is a responsibility for Australian citizens aged 18 years or over to vote in federal and state or territory elections, and in a referendum, which is a vote to change the Australian Constitution. By doing this, Australian citizens have a say in how Australia is governed and contribute to its future.

Voting is compulsory in federal and state or territory elections. It may not be compulsory to vote in local government elections in some states.

More information about the Australian Constitution can be found in *Part 3, Government and the law in Australia*.

Defend Australia should the need arise

While service in the Australian Defence Force is voluntary, a responsibility for Australian citizens is to defend Australia should the need arise. It is vital that all Australian citizens be committed to joining together to defend the nation and its way of life if necessary.

Serve on a jury if called to do so

Jury service, if requested, is a responsibility for Australian citizens aged 18 years or over. A jury is a group of ordinary Australian men and women who listen to the evidence in a court case and decide if a person is guilty or not guilty.

Australian citizens who are on the electoral roll can be called to serve on a jury. Jury service helps to ensure that the court system is open and fair.

Privileges

Apply for work in the Australian Public Service and the Australian Defence Force

A privilege of Australian citizenship is to apply for a job in the Australian Public Service and work for the Australian Government, for example, in Services Australia or the Australian Taxation Office (ATO).

Australian citizens also have the right to apply for a job in the Australian Defence Force (the Army, Navy and Air Force).

Seek election to parliament

Australian citizens who are aged 18 years or over, and who are not dual citizens, can seek election to parliament at the federal, state or territory level. It is an honour and a serious responsibility to serve in an Australian parliament.

Apply for an Australian passport and re-enter Australia freely

When you become an Australian citizen, you have the right to live freely in Australia. You also have the privilege to apply for an Australian passport. If you travel overseas as an Australian citizen, you are free to return to Australia without the need for a visa.

Ask for consular assistance from an Australian official while overseas

In many countries, Australia has an embassy, high commission or consulate. While you are overseas, you can ask for help from an Australian government official in times of need. This includes in the case of emergencies such as civil unrest and natural disasters.

Australian officials can also help Australian citizens overseas with the issue of an emergency passport, and advice and support in the case of an accident, serious illness or death.

When in another country, you must obey the laws of that country.

Apply for children born overseas to become Australian citizens by descent

Australian citizens can apply for their child born overseas to become an Australian citizen by descent.

Participating in Australian society

Australia encourages all citizens to actively participate in society. Active citizens take on the responsibility and privilege of shaping Australia's future. For example, you can join neighbourhood and local community organisations, volunteer to do social and community work, join an arts or cultural organisation, and actively participate in political life.

Paying tax is another important way you directly contribute to the Australian community and is required by law. Tax is paid out of the money you earn, whether it is from a job, a business or investments, and is collected by the ATO. There are also taxes on many goods and services. The ATO works to ensure all citizens are aware of their tax rights and obligations to pay the correct amount of tax.

Many of the benefits that Australians enjoy are made possible through taxes. Taxes are spent on services including government-funded healthcare and education, defence, roads and railways, and social security.

By working and paying taxes, you support the government to provide these important services to the Australian community. State and territory governments and local councils also collect taxes to pay for services. These services help make Australia the peaceful and prosperous country it is today.