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Equity, Access and Inclusion Strategy

Yarra Ranges Council

2013 – 2023





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Introduction

Council recognises that inclusion of people with a disability in all aspects of community life is a human right that also brings many social, cultural and economic benefits for the wider community.

The *Equity, Access and Inclusion Strategy* outlines the way Council will work to create more accessible and inclusive communities that encourage participation by people with a disability in all spheres of life. This Strategy also encourages greater community and business participation in providing inclusive services and facilities.

Council is committed to supporting access and inclusion across the municipality in a variety of ways, including the appointment of the Disability Advisory Committee (DAC) in 2012. The DAC provides advice on access and inclusion issues and informs priorities to maximise opportunities for people with a disability within Yarra Ranges. The DAC will continue to play an important role in strengthening equity, access and inclusion outcomes.

The development of the Strategy has taken account of the achievements, challenges and learning throughout the life of Council's previous Disability Action Plan 2009-2012.





Vision

Yarra Ranges is an accessible, inclusive and equitable society that enables people with a disability to fulfil their potential as equal citizens.

Goals

There are four goals in the Strategy, each with objectives, strategies and targets. The Strategy guides what Council will do to increase equity, access and inclusion for people with a disability, including how community can work with Council. Our goals are:

Goal 1

Information and communication from Council is accessible to everyone in our community and supports equitable participation and inclusion in civic life.

Goal 2

Council buildings and infrastructure are accessible to everyone in our community.

Goal 3

Yarra Ranges is an inclusive community where all citizens can participate equally.

Goal 4

Council's commitment to equity, access and inclusion is demonstrated in all aspects of the business.


Understanding Disability

Social Model of Disability

The *Council's Equity, Access and Inclusion Strategy* embraces the Social Model of Disability.

This model assumes there are multifaceted barriers in our community that prevent inclusion for people with a disability. These barriers might be a lack of accessible infrastructure, attitudes towards disability or simply the absence of planning for inclusiveness, for example, in organising events.

The *Yarra Ranges Equity, Access and Inclusion Strategy* addresses these barriers to enhance inclusion.



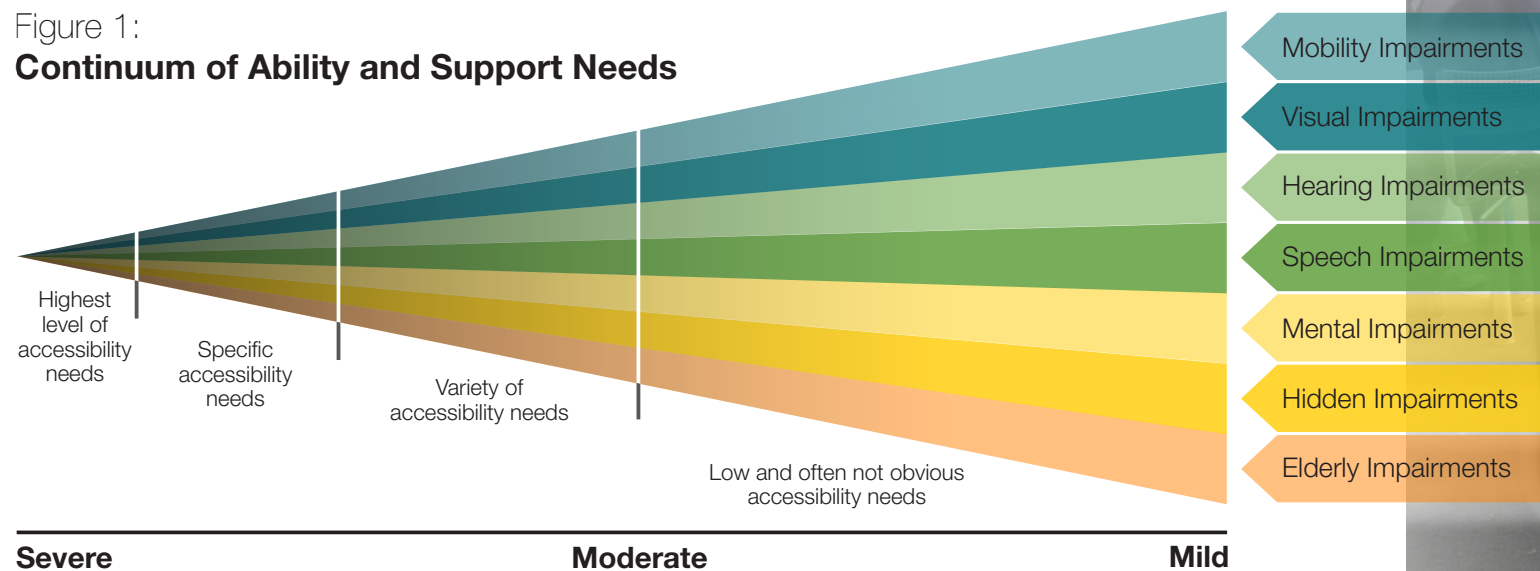
Alison Davis, an advocate who identifies as having spina bifida, writes: "If I lived in a society where being in a wheelchair was no more remarkable than wearing glasses, and if the community was completely accepting and accessible, my disability would be an inconvenience and not much more than that. It is society which handicaps me far more seriously and completely than the fact that I have spina bifida."^[1]



Council also acknowledges that disability is far reaching and can occur at any time in life. People can be born with a disability or acquire a disability suddenly through an injury. Some forms of disability are episodic, others are temporary.

Figure 1:

Continuum of Ability and Support Needs



Adapted from Dimitrios Buhalis and Simon Darcy: Accessible tourism concepts and issues Channel view publications, 2010

Some disabilities may be obvious while others are hidden. In reality, disability is a continuum of different levels of ability with a wide ranging set of needs for services and support (Figure 1).



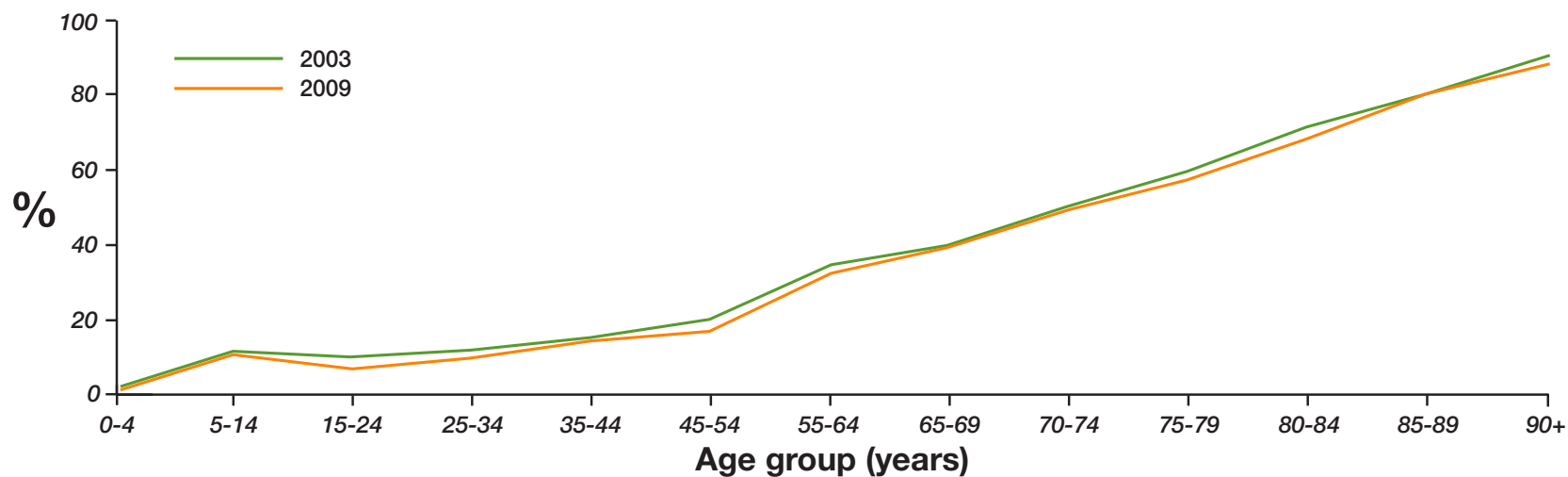


Ageing Population and Disability

With an ageing population, the prevalence of disability in Yarra Ranges will increase in future years. Because of this, it is crucial that further investment in disability access is made and inclusion to ensure that our ageing population is able to participate fully in the community. There is a social and monetary return for investment in inclusion for people with all abilities.

Figure 2:

Age Specific Disability Rates, Australia, 2003-2009



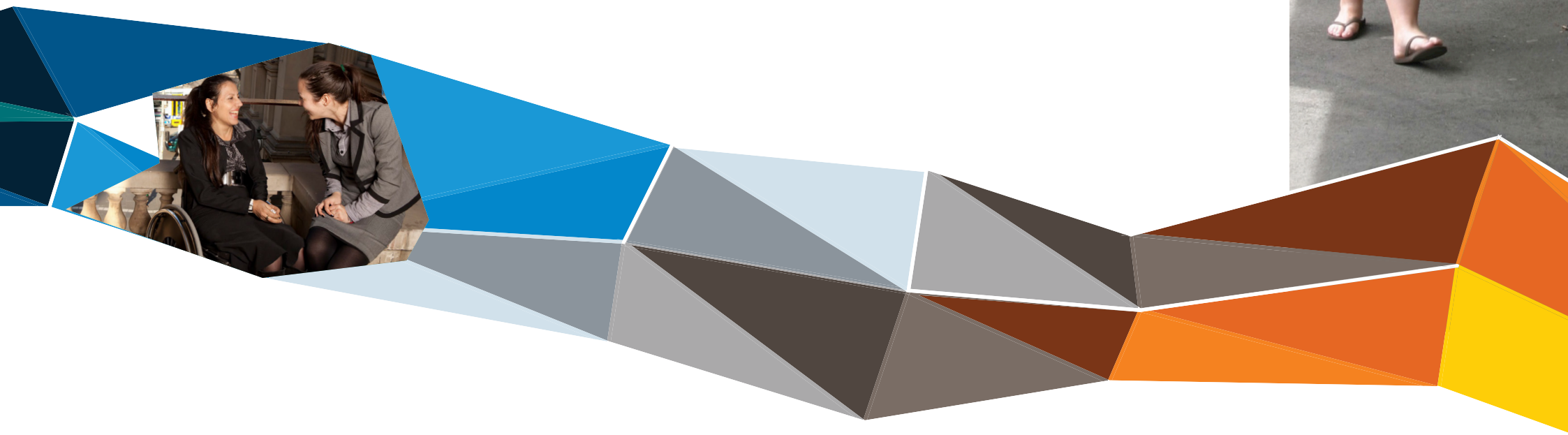
Source: ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2003 and 2009, (cat.no.4430.0)

Disability in the Yarra Ranges

In the 2009 ABS Survey of Disability and Carers 18.5% of Australia's population identified themselves as having a disability.¹ The 2009 estimates indicate that approximately 20% of the Yarra Ranges residents identified themselves as having a disability (of varying severity), including; more than 2,390 children, 17,460 people of working age and 8,950 older residents.² It is estimated that in 2009, 8,741 Yarra Ranges residents, or 6.1% of the population, had disabilities causing profound or severe restriction of communication, mobility and self-care. This is the same as the Victorian average. For 13,640 residents, their disabilities placed some limits upon employment and/or educational opportunities.

¹ <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4446.0main+features42009>

² Based on the 2009 Survey of Disability and Carers.





Strategic, Policy and Legislative Context

This Strategy supports Council's strategic objective of: Active and engaged communities – a resilient, healthy, active community that is safe and has opportunities and access to quality services.



Active and Engaged Communities

A resilient, healthy, active community that is safe and has opportunities and access to quality services



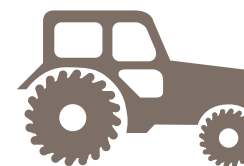
Quality Community Infrastructure

A built environment where facilities and infrastructure meet current and future needs.



Protected and enhanced Natural Environment

A healthier environment for future generations



Vibrant Economy, Agriculture and Tourism

A sustainable and prosperous economy that supports local enterprise



High Performing Organisation

A great place to work where innovation is expected and customers are our focus

Yarra Ranges Council's response to improving Equity, Access and Inclusion across the community is also informed by a number of legislative directions.

The **Victorian Disability Act 2006** requires public sector bodies, including Local Government, to prepare Disability Action Plans for the purposes of:

- reducing barriers to persons with a disability accessing goods, services and facilities;
- reducing barriers to persons with a disability obtaining and maintaining employment;
- promoting inclusion and participation in the community of persons with a disability; and
- achieving tangible changes in attitudes and practices which discriminate against persons with a disability.

The **Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 1995** makes discrimination based on disability against the law.

The **National Disability Strategy 2010-2020** is a ten year national policy framework that sets out six priority areas for action to improve the lives of people with a disability, their families and carers. These are:

Priority 1

Inclusive and accessible communities

Priority 2

Rights protection, justice and legislation

Priority 3

Economic security

Priority 4

Personal and community support

Priority 5

Learning and skills

Priority 6

Health and wellbeing





The Commonwealth ***Disability Discrimination Act 1992*** establishes a responsibility for the Council to:

- eliminate, as far as possible, discrimination against persons on the ground of disability in the areas of work, accommodation, education, access to premises, clubs and sport, and through the provision of goods, facilities, services and land;
- ensure, as far as practicable, that persons with disabilities have the same rights to equality before the law as the rest of the community; and
- promote recognition and acceptance within the community of the principle that persons with disabilities have the same fundamental rights as the rest of the community.

Australia is also a signatory to the ***United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities***, a legally binding convention, recognising people with a disability as equal and active citizens.

The ***Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*** provides a set of rights, freedoms and responsibilities that governments must observe when creating laws, public policy or developing services. As a public authority, Council is required to demonstrate that it has properly considered human rights in all its decisions when making laws, developing policy and providing its services.

Strategy: 2014-2024

Goal 1: Information and communication from Council is accessible to everyone in our community and supports equitable participation and inclusion in civic life.

Objective	Strategies	Target: Progressive over 10 years
Council's communication, information approaches and systems continue to be progressively reviewed to ensure they appropriately address the needs and include people with a disability.	Embed accessibility standards in Council's web design, content management plan and style guide.	Council's website and content meet W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) standards for 90% of the content. Inaccessible content is available to all through other means, e.g. at community links
	Embed information about accessible public facilities and other supports across the municipality, so that it is easily obtained and highly visible.	Information about accessible public facilities is prominent on Council's website.
	Promote accessibility and inclusiveness in all Council documents, including using images of people with diverse abilities.	80% of all Council documents are available in large font versions. Images in Council documents include and profile people with a disability in all their diversity.
	Improve accessibility at Council's Community Links/Hubs.	100% of the community have access to information and services at Community Links and Hubs.

Goal 2: Council buildings and infrastructure are accessible to everyone in our community.

Objective	Strategies	Target
<p>Incorporate universal design principles to maximise the accessibility of all infrastructure owned by Council.</p> <p><i>This includes buildings, parks, open space, signage, roads, kerbs, footpaths, playgrounds, and street furniture.</i></p>	Design and build all new buildings, maintenance programs and upgrades to include legislated accessibility standards, and, wherever possible, enhance accessibility features that facilitate access for all community members.	All new buildings and building maintenance meet standards or above. The number of buildings exceeding disability standards to be reported to internal reference group – Community for Everyone.
	Incorporate community needs identified by a cross organisational team into annual planning of footpath programs.	Footpaths are constructed based on consultation with relevant departments within Council.
	Seek advice from the Disability Advisory Committee during the ‘master planning’ processes for public spaces, and during the delivery of capital works projects with capacity to influence best practice into the future.	The Disability Advisory Committee provides advice to Council regarding all master plans and at least 2 capital works projects per annum.
	Design and build, regional and district playgrounds to provide something for everyone and a range of challenges to accommodate for a diversity of need, abilities and family experiences.	All playgrounds in the capital works program meet a wide diversity of needs and incorporate ‘best practice’ access for children and their families.
Council continues to implement programs that progressively improve accessibility at existing Council owned facilities.	Seek advice on the prioritisation of accessibility improvements of Council facilities from the Disability Advisory Committee, Access Consultants and Metro Access Officer.	Annual process to prioritise improvements.

Goal 3: Yarra Ranges is an inclusive community where all citizens can participate equally.

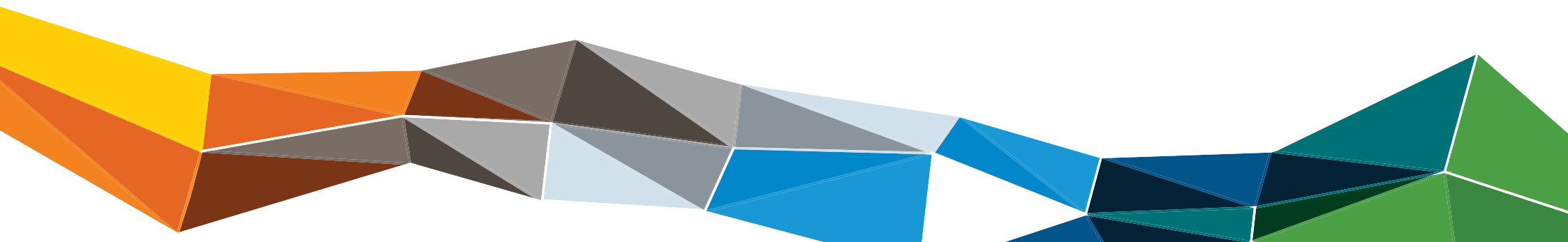
Objective	Strategies	Target
Council will model best practice and influence individuals and community organisations to increase access and promote inclusiveness.	Facilitate community managed events funded by Council's Festivals and Events Grants, to implement Council's 'Access Guidelines' and provide information (education) with grant agreements and offer access to equipment.	Three year target: 15% of events is inclusive and accessible. Ten year target: 75% of events are inclusive and accessible.
	Work with service providers to coordinate the efficient use of current community transport and advocate for more accessible public transport.	Coordination of community transport is occurring across the municipality. Advocacy opportunities to State and Federal Govt evidenced.
	Develop and implement a public awareness program to promote and demonstrate 'best practice' to support access for people with a disability.	Awareness program developed, implemented and evaluated. One 'best practice' event held.
	Encourage sporting clubs to be welcoming and inclusive to people with a disability through partnerships with peak sporting bodies.	Council will facilitate one partnership every two years to influence clubs.
	Encourage businesses (across the whole sector), through Council's networks, to increase access for people with a disability.	Patronage at local businesses increased due to access and inclusion improvements.



Objective	Strategies	Target
Council will model best practice and influence individuals and community organisations to increase access and promote inclusiveness.	Work with Yarra Ranges Tourism Ltd (YRTL), Trader Groups and other tourism groups to encourage businesses to promote disability access, increase access and inclusion and tap into this growing market.	Tourism operators are responding to the needs of people with a disability and a growth in accessible tourism is measured.
	Encourage community and organisations to provide and promote community activities that are accessible to people with a disability through the provision of support, training and advocacy.	Participation by people with a disability is increased.
Council services, programs and events are inclusive and accessible to people with a disability, promotes their participation and provides people with a disability with opportunities to participate equitably alongside other members of the community.	Council's own programs and events will actively work at being accessible and inclusive.	Council adheres to the "Access Guidelines".
	Consultation planning will specifically engage people with a disability e.g. through the DAC, inclusive engagement techniques and other mechanisms.	All consultation engages with people with a disability.

Goal 4: Council's commitment to equity, access and inclusion is demonstrated in all aspects of the business.

Objective	Strategies	Target
Develop the capacity of all in Council (Councillors, senior managers and officers) to systematically address the barriers created by attitudes, practices and structures that limit the opportunities for people with a disability.	Develop and support organisational change through a cross organisational team, Community 4 Everyone, to embed access and inclusion into Council operations.	Meets bi-monthly and reports through Strategy reporting process.
	Provide targeted development opportunities for staff and, where appropriate, utilise the expertise of the DAC to deepen the understanding of disability and inclusion principles.	All officers have received relevant training over the first five years and maintenance training is ongoing.
	Embed equity, access and inclusion into the development of all Council strategies and communication.	Officers have an understanding of the needs of people with a disability during consultation processes, and consult as required. DAC advice sought on all major strategies and plans.
	Councillor delegates to the DAC report on the advice of the DAC to Council through their regular reports.	Council receive at least four delegate DAC reports per year.





Objective	Strategies	Target
Utilise statutory and regulatory roles to lead and influence improved inclusion, participation and accessibility for all members of the community.	Enhance emergency planning procedures to ensure those in the community with special needs are included in all aspects of emergency planning, crisis management and recovery.	All emergency planning procedures reflect inclusion of people with special needs.
	Develop guidelines to encourage planning permit applicants to provide inclusive designs and support more affordable housing options in order to increase access to diverse housing options.	Guidelines developed and distributed.
Enhance local employment opportunities for people with a disability.	Develop employment policies and procedures that support employment for people with a disability.	Employment policies modified to address a variety of needs and support inclusive employment.
Adequate funding is available to support access and inclusion initiatives across the municipality.	Develop funding partnerships to deliver access initiatives and programs, for example, State and Federal Government funding.	Three opportunities for external funding sought annually.





Development of Strategy

Council is internal Reference Group, the Community for Everyone, has guided and overseen the development of this Strategy. Reference Group has also been involved in a review of the achievements, barriers and learning, of the past plan.

The strategy was developed with reference to the MAV's Strategic Framework for Local Government "Creating a more inclusive community for people with a disability" and staff workshop.

The Strategy was refined with the support of expert assistance and further engagement with staff and the Disability Advisory Committee.

Council's Disability Advisory Committee also represented the community in the development of the Strategy and was involved at a number of stages during development.

The DAC members are:

Rod Mellis
Cliff Wise
Max Heuston
Cr Len Cox

Rosalind Marilanda
Chris Reed
Penny Kendall
Cr Fiona McAllister

June Silvia Smith
Ian Lawther
Antony O'Donnell



Measuring Success

A framework to monitor and evaluate this Strategy includes a mixed methods approach and measure outcomes and community change over a 5 and 10 year period based on the targets identified in the Strategy.

Implementation of the Strategy is undertaken by the responsible Departments, and represented on the cross organisational group, 'Community for Everyone'.

The 'Community for Everyone' meets quarterly to monitor and track the progress of the implementation of the Equity, Access and Inclusion Strategy.

Community feedback on the implementation of the Strategy is primarily through the Disability Advisory Group.

Reporting

'Community for Everyone' provides six monthly reports to Council's Strategic Leadership Team noting highlights, achievements and any barriers to implementation of the Strategy.

Progress on actions in Council's Business Plans is reported through Interplan quarterly reports and in Council's Annual Report. Additionally, Council receives an annual report including the opportunity for DAC representatives to present at a Council Forum.

A detailed report and review of the implementation of the Equity, Access and Inclusion Strategy will be conducted in 2018 and at the end of the term of the Strategy in 2022.

