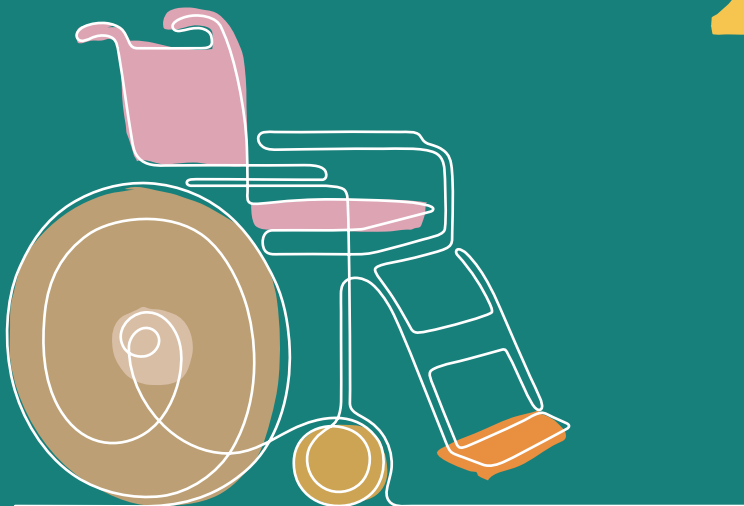




DISABILITY ACCESS AND INCLUSION PLAN

2023-2026

MARCH 2023





We acknowledge the five traditional owner groups of this land; the Wotjobaluk, Wergaia, Jupagulk, Jaadwa and the Jadawadjali people.

We recognise the important and ongoing place that all Indigenous people hold in our community.

We pay our respects to elders, both past and present, and commit to working together in the spirit of mutual understanding and respect for the benefit of the broader community and future generations.

**Horsham Rural City Council,
Disability Access and Inclusion Plan**

Prepared for Horsham Rural City Council

Date March 2023

Version Final

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Projectura

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (the Plan) has been developed to reduce barriers and increase inclusion and participation for people with disability in the local community.

Introduction

People with disability represent at least 6.3 percent of the Horsham Rural City population and have the right to equal access to services, infrastructure, and support. Informed by community feedback, this Plan identifies key actions that will enable improved participation and inclusion for people living with disability.

Developing the Plan

The Plan was developed between July 2022 and March 2023. Horsham Rural City Council engaged Projectura to work with the broad community and develop the Plan.

During the development, 112 people contributed to the Plan through an online survey, focus groups, workshops, and interviews. This engagement identified barriers to access and inclusion for people with disability, as well as key opportunities for improvement.

The Plan was released for public review and comment in February 2023. Five written submissions were received during the consultation process. This feedback has been considered in the development of this final Plan.

Opportunities

Key opportunities to improve access and inclusion for people living with disability include improving or increasing:

- attitudes and reducing stereotypes around people with disability.
- tailored support and the accessibility of information.
- accessibility of infrastructure, particularly paths, crossings, and buildings.
- accessibility of events.
- accessible and inclusive employment.

The Plan

Vision

The Horsham Rural City community is inclusive, accessible, and values the diversity of its people.

Goals

The Plan has four broad goals with specific actions identified for each. The goals are:

- Goal 1:** To improve understanding of the barriers faced by people with disability and the value they bring to the community.
 - Goal 2:** To provide tailored support and information to improve access to Council services for people with disability.
 - Goal 3:** To continually improve access and inclusion in the man-made environment and at events for people with disability.
 - Goal 4:** To provide meaningful opportunities for people with disability to take part in the workforce.
-

MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR



I am delighted to present the Horsham Rural City Council Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2023-2026. This Plan demonstrates the Council's commitment to building a community where the diversity of our people is valued, and everyone can participate and be included.

This Plan is aligned with Horsham Rural City Council's vision for the community to be a vibrant, liveable hub that thrives on strong economic growth and social connectedness.

Council is committed to improving accessibility and inclusion in all its practices. This Plan will enhance our practices by refining our policies, creating a forum for people with lived experience to provide feedback and improving our services, public spaces, events, and employment to be more inclusive and accessible.

The Council Executive has overall responsibility for the delivery of the Plan. However, we see access and inclusion as an area all members of our community can contribute to. We are looking forward to the input and insight the new Disability Advisory Committee will offer us.

Cr Robyn Gulline Mayor
Horsham Rural City Council



I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. About this Plan

The Disability Access and Inclusion Plan aims to reduce barriers and increase inclusion and participation for people with disability in the Horsham Rural City community.

The Plan focusses on how Horsham Rural City Council can help to improve access and inclusion for people with disability through consideration of Council services, events, employment, and facilities.

This Plan also considers Horsham Rural City Council's role as a leader and advocate for reducing barriers to people with disability in the local community.

Rationale

Disability is any impairment of a physical, intellectual, psychiatric, neurological, or sensory nature.¹

6.3 percent (n.1,272) of the Horsham Rural City Council community report needing help with self-care, mobility, or communication due to a long-term health condition, disability, or old age.² This figure does not capture all people living with disability in the Horsham community. It is possible that the actions of the Plan will have a broader impact than the 6.3 percent who report needing assistance through the Census.

This Plan recognises Council's role as a civic leader, service provider, and employer and their ability to drive improvements in access and inclusion for people living with disability.

The Plan is also a requirement of the *Victorian Disability Act 2006*. Further information on the legislative context of this plan is provided in APPENDIX 1.

Plan development

This Plan was developed between July 2022 and March 2023. Horsham Rural City Council engaged Projectura to work with the community and develop the Plan.

The development of the Plan has been informed by a desktop literature review, and engagement with residents, stakeholders, and Horsham Rural City Council staff.

This Plan provides a summary of the Horsham Rural City population including people living with disability, the relevant policy and legislative context, an overview of stakeholder and community engagement, and articulates a three-year strategy to achieve the purpose of the Plan.

¹ Disability Discrimination Act 1992

² 2022, ABS Census 2021, General Community Profile Horsham LGA23190

1.2. Engagement to inform the Plan

Community conversations took place between 3 August and 14 September 2022.

Engagement objectives

The engagement explored:

1. The accessibility of Horsham Rural City Council's services, events, facilities and employment and opportunities for improvement.
2. Barriers to access and inclusion within the community and within Council.
3. Opportunities to improve access, participation, and inclusion across the Horsham Rural City community.

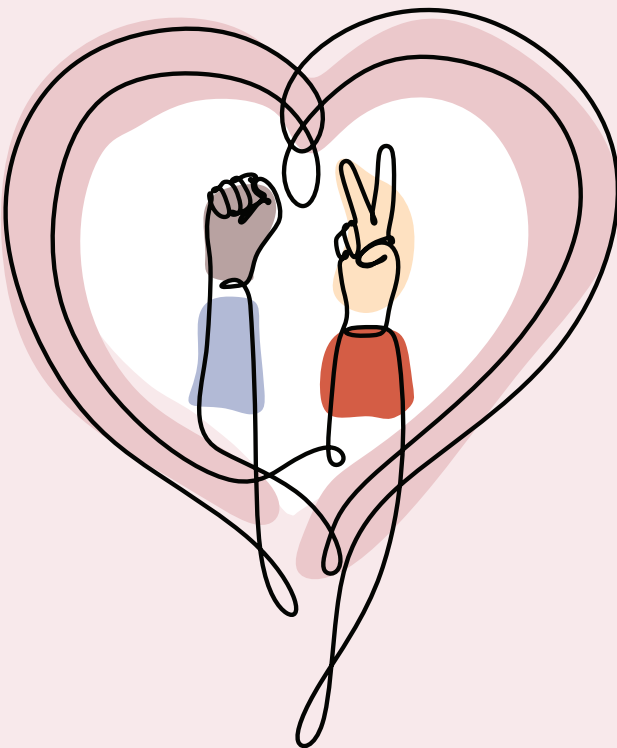
Participation

Various methods were used to provide people with a diversity of options to have their say. A summary of the methods and participation is provided in Table 1.

Input from over 110 people from the community informed the development of this Plan.

Of the participants:

- 69 percent (n.77) were community members.
- 20 percent (n.34) were Horsham Rural City Council staff.
- 21 percent (n.23) had lived experience of disability.
- 20 percent (n.23) were carers, family members or friends of people with disability or worked for disability support organisations.
- 24 percent (n.27) were male.
- 67 percent (n.75) were female.
- 0.9 percent (n.1) identified as non-binary.
- An additional five people from the Horsham Rural City community provided written feedback on the draft Plan during the public consultation period.



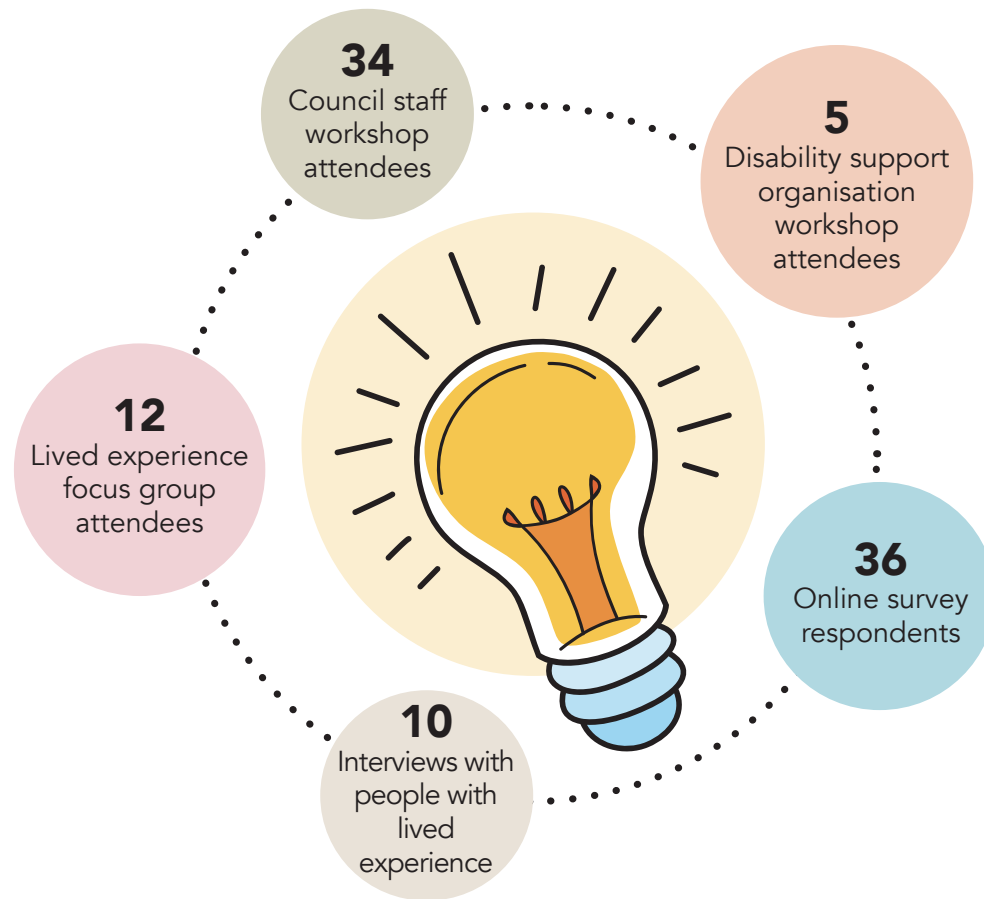


Table 1. Engagement summary

Date & time	Method	Detail	Location	Respondents
3 -23 August 2022	Interviews	Interviews of people with lived experience of disability and family/carers	Telephone and in-person	10 people
11 August - 9 September 2022	Online survey	Online survey of people with lived experience of disability, their families, carers and support organisations	Online	36 people
25 August 2022	Workshop	Workshop with disability support organisations	Online	5 organisations
25 August and 14 September 2022	Workshops	Two workshops with Council staff	Online	34 people
29 August 2022	Focus group	Focus group for people with lived experience	Centre for Participation	12 people
1-3 September 2022	Interviews and focus group	Focus groups and in-person discussions with people at the Horsham Talks Expo	Horsham Town Hall	15 people
6 February - 6 March 2023	Public consultation	Draft strategy released to public for comment	Council website and social media	5 people

2. CURRENT SNAPSHOT

2.1. Inclusion in our community

Horsham Rural City Council is located in the Wimmera region of Victoria, 300 kilometres north-west of Melbourne.

The municipality covers an area of 4,267 square kilometres and includes major centres of Horsham and Natimuk, as well as many other smaller localities.

With an economy largely driven by agriculture, manufacturing, construction, public sector industries, retail and services, the area supports 9,361 jobs and has an annual economic output of \$2.865 billion.³

Population facts

According to the 2021 ABS Census, the Horsham Rural City community has:

- A population of 20,429 people.
- 1.8 percent of the population (n.361) who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
- 21 percent of the population (n.4,347) who are over 65 years.
- 33 percent of the population (n.6,765) who report having long term health conditions, with the most common conditions being arthritis and mental health conditions.
- Lower median weekly incomes (\$1,381) compared to the Victorian average of (\$1,759).

Disability

Disability is any impairment of a physical, intellectual, psychiatric, neurological or sensory nature.⁴

In 2021, 6.3 percent (n.1,272) of the Horsham Rural City community reported needing help with self care, mobility or communication due to a long term health condition, disability or old age.

A greater number of females (n.709) reported needing help than males (n.570).

The number of people needing help increases with age, with 65 percent of people who reported needing help aged over 55 years (n.834).

Whilst 2,291 people (13.7 percent) within the community reported providing unpaid help to a person with a disability, health condition, or old age.⁵

³ 2022, REMPLAN Economy, Jobs and Business Insights - Horsham

⁴ Disability Discrimination Act 1992

⁵ 2022, ABS Census 2021, General Community Profile Horsham LGA23190

2. CURRENT SNAPSHOT

2.2. Engagement findings

This section summarises the findings from the online survey, along with opportunities for improvement identified by Council staff.

Buildings, facilities, and infrastructure

Online survey respondents were asked to rate how well Council buildings, facilities and infrastructure meet the needs of people with disability.

The highest rating facilities included the Aquatic Centre, the Town Hall and Horsham Library, with 52 percent, 45 percent and 41 percent of survey respondents respectively rating them as meeting the needs of people with disability well or very well.

Footpaths and roads and the Horsham Cinema were the lowest rating facilities, and infrastructure. 62 percent of respondents rated footpaths and roads as meeting the needs of people with disability poorly or very poorly. Whilst, 37 percent of respondents rated the Horsham Cinema as meeting the needs of people with disability poorly or very poorly.

Engagement participants were asked to list opportunities to improve the accessibility of buildings, facilities, and infrastructure. The top six themes were:

- Safe paths and crossings for people with disability.
- Building accessibility improvements.
- Accessible parking.
- Creating quiet and sensory-sensitive spaces.
- Improving the accessibility of signage.
- Public toilets and information on availability.

Council staff considered the community engagement findings and identified opportunities for internal systems and process changes to support the delivery of the improvements. Key systems and process opportunities included working with people with lived experience of disability to support planning, audits, and decision making; prioritising people and movement over cars and trade; wholistic planning of crossing and path improvements.

Events

When asked how well council-run events met the needs of people with disability, 52 percent rated this as average, whilst 24 percent rated this as well or very well.

Engagement participants were asked to list opportunities to improve accessibility. The top six themes were:

- Holistic event planning to encourage participation and inclusion.
- Availability of accessible car parking.
- Promotion and event information.
- Creating quiet and sensory-sensitive spaces.
- Public toilets and information on availability.
- Safe paths and crossings for people with disability.

The community engagement findings were considered by Council staff, and they identified internal opportunities for systems and process changes to support the delivery of improvements. Key systems and process opportunities included early planning to enable access and inclusion at events; working with people with lived experience to plan events and staff training around the needs of people with disability.

Services

When asked how well Council services cater for people with disability, Customer Service was the highest rating service with 35 percent of respondents rating this as well or very well, whilst Building and Planning Approvals rated lowest with 19 percent of respondents rating this service as poorly meeting the needs of people with disability.

Engagement participants were asked to list opportunities to improve the accessibility of Council services. The top two themes were:

- Provision of accessible information and communication.
- Additional support for people with disability when accessing council services such as building/planning approvals and customer service.

Council staff were presented with the community engagement findings and identified opportunities for internal systems and process changes to support the delivery of the improvements. Key systems and process opportunities included staff training on how to prepare accessible documents; the creation of Easy English resources and providing documents in a range of different formats for accessibility.

Employment

Concerns were raised during the engagement that as an employer Horsham Rural City is not making adequate adjustments to provide access and inclusion for current or potential employees.

Key improvements for increased access and inclusion during recruitment and employment at the Horsham Rural City included:

- Improved understanding of the value of employing people with disability and their needs.
- Support and adjustments to provide meaningful, accessible, and inclusive employment.
- Inclusive communication and advertising during recruitment.

Council staff considered the community engagement findings and identified opportunities for internal systems and process changes to support the delivery of the improvements. Key systems and process opportunities included offering support to candidates during application processes; development of a workplace adjustment policy; training for staff on inclusive recruitment and employment and improving the accessibility of recruitment advertisements.

Cultural and attitudinal change

Opportunities for Horsham Rural City to influence internal and community attitudes and stereotypes about people with disability were raised during the engagement. Opportunities included increasing the visibility of people with disability, challenging hidden biases, and improving internal policies and systems to place greater value on listening to people with disability and on the rights of people with disability in the community.

2. CURRENT SNAPSHOT

2.3. Opportunities

When considering access and inclusion for people living with disability in Horsham Rural City, the engagement with the community, Council staff and stakeholders identified several key themes and opportunities for improvement, which are summarised below.

Cultural and attitudinal change

There are opportunities for Horsham Rural City to influence internal and community attitudes and stereotypes about people living with disability. Opportunities include increasing the visibility of people with disability, challenging hidden biases, and improving internal policies and systems to involve people with disability in decision making.

Tailored support and information

Improved accessibility of Horsham Rural City documents and information was identified as a key opportunity. Tailored support for people with disability to access Council services was also raised, examples included one-on-one support to navigate council planning and building applications or other services.

Accessible infrastructure and events

The need to improve the accessibility of paths, crossings, parking, building access, and public toilets were raised consistently throughout the engagement. Working with people with lived experience of disability to support planning and audits of infrastructure was a key opportunity raised, along with improved use of relevant infrastructure standards.

Early planning for people with disability during event coordination to ensure events had adequate access, quiet spaces, and accessible toilets was raised. The development of a venue audit checklist and working with people with lived experience of disability to support event planning were also raised as opportunities.

Inclusive and accessible employment

Opportunities identified to make employment more inclusive and accessible included inclusive advertising, offering support to candidates during the application process, developing a workforce adjustment policy, and making physical changes to the workplace to accommodate people with disability. Internal attitudinal and cultural changes were also raised to ensure unbiased recruitment and the success of employment for people with disability.



3. DISABILITY ACCESS AND INCLUSION PLAN

3.1. Vision

The Horsham Rural City community is inclusive, accessible, and values the diversity of its people.



3. DISABILITY ACCESS AND INCLUSION PLAN

3.2. Guiding principles

Principles that guide the implementation of the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan include:

Participation: People with disability not encountering barriers to their participation in community activities.

Contribution: People with disability can build their capacity, skills and expertise, engage in meaningful roles and contribute to their community.

Access: People with disability having equal access to community and mainstream services and supports.

Inclusion: People with disability are included in leading, shaping and participating in decision making about their community.

Connection: People with disability are connected and have the information they need to make decisions and choices.



3.3. Goals

Four overarching goals have been identified for the Plan.

Each of the goals have a series of actions which are detailed in the Action Plan.

Goal 1: To improve understanding of the barriers faced by people with disability and the value they bring to the community.

Goal 2: To provide tailored support and information to improve access to Council services for people with disability.

Goal 3: To continually improve access and inclusion in the man-made environment and at events for people with disability.

Goal 4: To provide meaningful opportunities for people with disability to take part in the workforce.



3. DISABILITY ACCESS AND INCLUSION PLAN

3.4. Action Plan

This Plan documents the goals and actions prioritised by the community during engagement activities. These actions align with the guiding principles of participation, contribution, access, inclusion and connection and further the vision of this Plan to ensure Horsham Rural City Council and the community embraces access, inclusion and participation for everyone.

Table 2. **Action Plan**

Actions		HRCC lead	Timeline
Goal 1: To improve understanding of the barriers faced by people with disability and the value they bring to the community.			
1.1	Establish a Disability Advisory Committee to provide feedback on key Council projects, policies, and processes.	Communities and Place	2023-2026
1.2	Staff working on community-facing projects are required to engage with people with lived experience of disability on a regular basis through the Disability Advisory Committee or other external advocacy groups.	Communities and Place	2023-2026
1.3	Fifty percent of Council staff, including Managers and Directors, to undertake disability awareness training, involving people with lived experience of disability.	Corporate Services	2023-2026
1.4	New and existing staff to undertake online disability and cultural training.	People, Performance and Culture	2023-2026
1.5	Use media opportunities and events to highlight the talents and creativity of people with disability and to reduce stereotypes.	Corporate Services	2023-2026
1.6	Recognise and celebrate International Day of People with Disability and Carers Week.	Communities and Place	2023-2026
1.7	Increase the use of images of people with disability in all council publications.	Corporate Services	2023-2026
1.8	Develop an internal Access and Inclusion Statement of Intent, that highlights the Councils commitment to an accessible and inclusive community where the rights of people with disability are recognised and valued.	Communities and Place	2023-2024



Actions	HRCC lead	Timeline	
Goal 2: To provide tailored support and information to improve access to Council services for people with disability.			
2.1	Identify key Council documents that require digitisation and translation into Easy English and arrange for production.	Communities and Place	2023-2026
2.2	Improve the accessibility of Council’s website and content, complying with accessibility standards.	Corporate Services	2023-2024
2.3	Work with disability services to create and make accessible a centralised collection of information about services, accessible infrastructure, and support for people with disability within the local area.	Communities and Place	2024
2.4	Review application processes for council services e.g., building and planning approvals, and animal registration, to ensure that adequate support is available for people with disability.	Communities and Place	2023
2.5	Coordinate staff and deliver staff training on producing easy and use plain English in Council publications.	Corporate Services	2023-2024
2.6	Coordinate and deliver staff training on providing inclusive and accessible customer support.	Corporate Services	2023-2024
2.7	Review the Council’s style guide to ensure guidelines are accessible and inclusive.	Corporate Services	2024-2025
2.8	Develop guidelines for accessible signage and wayfinding in public places.	Infrastructure Services	2024-2025

3. DISABILITY ACCESS AND INCLUSION PLAN

3.4. Action Plan

Actions	HRCC lead	Timeline
Goal 3: To continually improve access and inclusion in the man-made environment and at events for people with disability.		
3.1 Organise Universal Design Training for appropriate Council staff to participate in.	Infrastructure Services	2023
3.2 Continue the development of design specifications for amenities to ensure best practice accessibility.	Communities and Place	2023
3.3 Include design specification requirements for accessibility in tenders relating to capital works.	Infrastructure Services	2023-2026
3.4 Involve people with lived experience of disability in audits and planning for new capital works.	Infrastructure Services	2023-2026
3.5 Address Building Code and Australian Standards access requirements in all Council building works and upgrades.	Infrastructure Services	2023-2026
3.6 Continue to upgrade and maintain public infrastructure, spaces, and equipment to improve safety and access for people with disability.	Infrastructure Services	2023-2026
3.7 Develop and implement a crossings and paths upgrade plan improving prioritisation, connectivity, and accessibility across the community.	Infrastructure Services	2023-2026
3.8 Update the Accessible Events Guide to ensure planning, communication and venues meet the needs of people with disability.	Communities and Place	2023-2024
3.9 Cater for quiet spaces or sensory rooms in new buildings, retrofits and at events.	Infrastructure Services Communities and Place	2023-2026
3.10 Promote relevant local laws and physical access needs to residents and businesses to improve accessibility for people with disability.	Communities and Place	2024

Actions	HRCC lead	Timeline
Goal 4: To provide meaningful opportunities for people with disability to participate in the workforce.		
4.1 Develop and implement a workforce adjustment policy to ensure employees with disability are supported in the workplace.	Corporate Services	2023
4.2 Review recruitment processes to ensure job advertisements and application processes are inclusive and support participation.	Corporate Services	2023-2024
4.3 Work with local disability employment providers to identify opportunities to increase the employment of people with disability at the Council.	Corporate Services	2023-2026
4.4 Provide annual training for staff involved in recruitment and employment, including managers, to develop 'disability confidence' and ensure processes are inclusive and unbiased.	Corporate Services	2023-2026
4.5 Support local businesses to become more inclusive by considering physical access, communication, disability awareness and inclusive employment.	Investment and Business Development	2023-2024



ACCESS AND INCLUSION PLAN

3.5. Implementation

This Plan will be implemented and evaluated over four years.

The successful implementation and evaluation of this Plan relies on:

- Appropriate levels of resourcing.
- Ongoing commitment from Council to work in partnership to advance the vision for inclusion.

Governance

For the implementation of the Plan to be successful, clear governance and executive oversight is required. Individual roles across the Council will be assigned responsibility for the leading the implementation of specific actions, this accountability will be documented in workplans.

Council's Communities and Place Directorate is the lead for this strategy and will facilitate, track, and report on its implementation.

Council, service providers, and the broader community will need to join forces in various capacities to achieve the vision in this Plan.

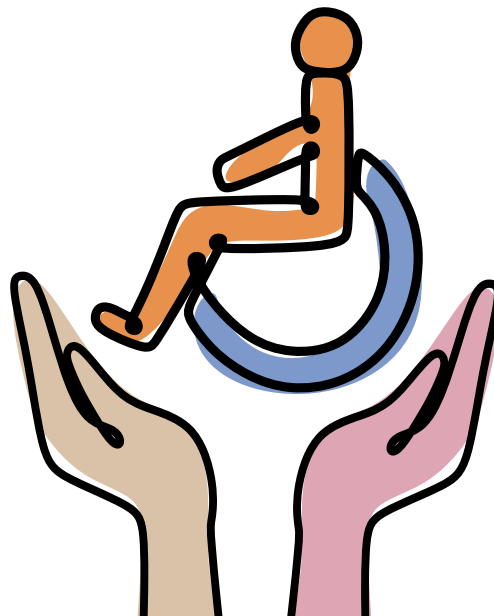
Implementation

The Communities and Place Directorate will develop an annual delivery plan for implementing the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan. The annual delivery plan will set out the projects and activities for implementation, the timelines for the actions to be conducted, and any budgetary considerations for these actions.

Measuring success

The implementation of actions will be reviewed annually to determine the status of progress. Progress will be reported to Council through annual internal progress reports to assist in future community and corporate planning needs assessments and budget development. Progress will also be reported to the new Disability Community Advisory Group.

A formal review and evaluation of the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan will be undertaken every four years, in line with the Council term.



APPENDIX I: POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

Federal context

The *UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disability (2006)* recognises the rights of people with disability to take part in social, economic and political spheres of their life through access to education, healthcare, information, justice, public transport and the built environment.⁶

The *Disability Discrimination Act (Cth) 1992* prohibits the discrimination of people with disability in areas including employment, access and education.

The *National Disability Strategy 2021-2031* is a high level policy framework which focuses improving the lives of people with disability in Australia.

The *National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)* seeks to increase the quality of life for people with disability whilst increasing their social and economic participation.⁷ The NDIS funds supports for people with permanent and significant disability that impacts your ability to manage everyday activities.

The *My Aged Care Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP)* supports people who are struggling with everyday tasks aged over 65 years, or aged 50 years and over for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. The program aims to keep people well and independent, and in their home longer.

State context

The *Victorian Disability Act (Vic) 2006* provides requires Councils to prepare a Disability Action Plan. The plan must focus on reducing barriers which discriminate against persons with a disability.

The *Equal Opportunity Act (Vic) 2010* prohibits the discrimination of people based on a personal characteristic – including disability.

The *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities (Vic) 2006* formalises the rights of all Victorians, including those with disability.

The *Inclusive Victoria – State Disability Plan 2022-2026* is Victoria's plan for making things fairer for people with disability. The Plan focusses on systematic reforms across the Victorian government.

Local context

Horsham Rural City Council Plan 2021-2026 sets a vision for 'a vibrant, liveable hub that thrives on strong economic growth and social connectedness.' The Plan includes strategies for 'an inclusive, accessible, connected and safe community' and prioritises 'enhancing the inclusivity, accessibility and safety of our places and spaces.'

⁶2006, United Nations, The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD)

⁷ 2011, Productivity Commission, Disability Care and Support Inquiry



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