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Rural City of Wangaratta

Community Access and Inclusion Action Plan 2015 - 2017



*This document is available in electronic format (email, website, CD)
and large print upon request*

Background

The Rural City of Wangaratta Council recognises the importance of accessible services, facilities and communities. This includes the capacity for everyone to participate in the social, cultural and political life of the community. Access is fundamental to creating healthy and cohesive communities.

The number of people with a disability is far higher than many assume. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2013), an estimated 1 in 5 people in Victoria identify themselves as having some form of disability with the prevalence higher in regional areas.

For people with disabilities, access and inclusion can mean different things depending on the type of disability and what is necessary to participate in their community. Strategies to remove potential barriers to access and inclusion for people with a disability will inevitably improve access for everyone in the community.

Purpose and Scope

The Rural City of Wangaratta **Community Access and Inclusion Action Plan** is one of a suite of three Council documents that outline Council's commitment to meet its legislative and ethical obligations under Federal and State legislation, standards and guidelines.

- 1. Policy for Equity and Access for People with Disabilities**
- 2. Community Access and Inclusion Charter**
- 3. Community Access and Inclusion Action Plan**

The **Community Access and Inclusion Action Plan** aims to assist Council to work with the community and business sectors to identify and implement strategies that ensure residents and visitors are not restricted from accessing services and facilities or participating in community and civic events.

The Action Plan has adopted the *social model of disability*. The social model identifies that many of the difficulties that occur for people living with a disability are the direct result of barriers imposed by the environment and not the disability itself.

Opportunities identified within the Action Plan were informed by community consultation conducted during March 2015. Community engagement elicited input from more than 450 participants through small group discussions with disability support and advocacy groups, a survey and individual interviews. Opportunities included in this Action Plan respond to the most important concerns raised and have been organised into the following four key themes:

Theme 1: An Active and Engaged Community

Theme 2: Communication for All

Theme 3: Accessible Buildings and Infrastructure

Theme 4: Civic Leadership

Theme 1: An Active and Engaged Community

The Council is committed to increasing the participation of people of all abilities in local government planning. Council values the lived experience of people with a disability, their carers and families and the role they can play in identifying needs and as proactive partners in responding to those needs.

In many cases it is society's attitudes towards people with disabilities that leads to direct or indirect discrimination. Council is committed to bringing about tangible changes in attitudes and practices that discriminate.

Community Expectations	Opportunities for Council
<p>People with disability, their families and carers can participate in an inclusive democracy and have their say on issues that affect them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Review how Council engages with individuals and groups and develop guidelines to ensure that we consult effectively and inclusively with all diverse groups that make up the community in our decision making. ◆ Establish an Accessibility Reference Group with a diverse representation of people with lived experience of disability who will act as ambassadors for various groups within the community and work collaboratively with Council to achieve access and inclusion outcomes.
<p>People of all abilities experience the Rural City of Wangaratta as a socially cohesive and connected community which supports their right to play an active part in the life of the municipality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Celebration of Abilities – create ongoing opportunities to raise awareness of and celebrate the valuable contribution people with a disability make to our community culminating with annual events for International Day for People with Disability (3rd December). ◆ Arts Access for Everyone – plan and deliver a diverse range of performing and arts projects that link people with a disability to mainstream activities. ◆ Inclusive Events – develop an <i>Inclusive Events Guide</i> and make available assistive equipment via the community resource kit.
<p>Affordable and flexible transport options.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Collaborate with local commercial and volunteer transport services to map and promote accessible transport options.

Theme 2: Communication for All

The Council recognises that information it distributes must be available in a form appropriate to the needs of people who cannot use standard means of communication. This includes people who have impaired hearing or vision, who use communication devices or translation services, as well as those who need help in using the information provided.

Community Expectations	Opportunities for Council
People with disability can easily communicate and do business with Council and have confidence in their dealings with Council staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Through staff training, resource development and assessment, work towards <i>Communication Access</i> accreditation for all Council customer service points.◆ Develop NERDS based training to increase disability awareness and communication skills for all staff.◆ Review the Council's Corporate Style Guide to incorporate best practice guidelines for creating accessible documents in a range of formats to address accessibility requirements.◆ Undertake an audit of the Council's website in line with the World Wide Web Access Consortium (W3C) guidelines for web content accessibility and plan for incremental upgrades to the website.

Theme 3: Accessible Buildings and Infrastructure

The Council recognises that physical access is a critical issue for people experiencing disabilities (temporary or long term), age related conditions or parents with children in prams and aims to incorporate the *principles of universal design* across all planning for infrastructure, facilities and major projects.

Community Expectations	Opportunities for Council
<p>People will experience Council's public buildings, venues and outdoor spaces as accessible, people friendly and welcoming spaces.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Progressively undertake an audit of accessible parking in public areas and identify and report on improvements required to ensure parking bays meet the current Australian Standards and consider parking to multi-purpose vehicles that transport people with a disability. ◆ Progressively undertake an audit of pathways and access ways to ensure continuous and accessible travel to meet AS1428 standards and Universal Design Principles. ◆ Progressively undertake an audit of existing Council buildings and facilities to prioritise and plan for improvements to comply with the AS1428 Standards and meet Universal Design Principles. ◆ Planning for new and redeveloped community facilities will incorporate Universal Design Principles including guidelines to ensure agents and contractors comply with AS1428 requirements. ◆ Embed access audit training and skills within the organisation.
<p>People with disability will have the opportunity to participate in planning an accessible and growing municipality and can enjoy a well designed built environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Include community consultation in all audit processes. ◆ Communicate plans and achievements around access and inclusion to the community ◆ Include input from the Accessibility Reference Group as part of the sign off on projects.

Theme 4: Civic Leadership

The Council continues to play a leadership role to improve access and inclusion for people of all abilities through its various roles: advocacy, partnerships, planning, service provision, employer and regulator.

The implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is an important initiative that will have wide ranging impacts on the way services are delivered at a national, state and local level. The adoption of principles outlined in this policy will help Council prepare for change and respond with innovation and flexibility.

Community Expectations	Opportunities for Council
NDIS ready community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Work in collaboration with disability agencies and support groups to facilitate information sessions and training in preparation for the roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).
Wangaratta Rural City Council offers a range of employment, traineeship and volunteering opportunities and for people of all abilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Undertake an Employability Access Audit of Council processes, policies and the environment through the Commonwealth Government's Job Access Program. ◆ Partner with employment and training agencies to actively promote and support work experience, school to work transitions, apprenticeships and mentoring opportunities for people with disabilities.
The Council will work in partnership with the business and tourism sector to assist organisations to meet their legal and community expectations that all people have fair access to goods and services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Participate in a regional strategy to promote the message that good access is good business. ◆ Support and encourage an inclusive tourism sector with products, services and experiences that are accessible to people with a wide range of abilities. ◆ Create an accessible tourism information guide that highlights accessible features of attractions, events and accommodation. ◆ Update the Wangaratta CBD Mobility Map to incorporate a broad range of accessibility features.