

Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2022-2026

An integrated approach to creating and maintain a livable, safe and inclusive community.

Adopted by Council
Date: 19 December 2023
Minute No. 239

*Muswellbrook Shire Council respectfully
acknowledges the Local Aboriginal People who are
the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land*

Message from the Mayor

I am pleased to present the Muswellbrook Shire Council Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2022-2026.

The Disability Inclusion Action Plan demonstrates Council's commitment to ensuring people of all abilities can access services, activities, facilities and information to create a sense of place and belonging in the community.

Council has consulted the community about needs and issues that impact on their lives. This has been achieved through listening posts, meetings, an online survey, one to one meetings, consultation with key stakeholders, and review of other council consultation surveys such as the community survey and the active transport review.

The Disability Inclusion Action Plan brings together these needs and issues and develops positive actions that will improve access to public spaces and council services. These improvements will provide increased participation and opportunities for people of all abilities.

Thank you to everyone involved in the development of the plan.

Cr Steven Renyolds

MAYOR

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Council Vision

Muswellbrook Shire Council will continue to encourage positive actions and behaviours in our communities to create inclusive spaces that ensure participation and inclusive opportunities for people of all abilities. Our vision is:

“Engaging with our community to achieve an inclusive, vibrant and sustainable future”

Introduction

This document has been written to demonstrate the delivery goals that Muswellbrook Shire Council will achieve in the next four years in the areas of social equality and inclusion for all people, including those with disabilities.

The Disability Inclusion Action Plan strategies, plans and actions in Muswellbrook 2022-2026 are represented in the Delivery Program and through the ongoing commitment to provide accessibility and inclusion across Muswellbrook Shire.

Legislation, policy context and framework

NSW Disability Inclusion Act 2014

The Disability Inclusion Act 2014 provides the legislative framework to guide state and local government disability inclusion and access planning.

The Act defines disability as: *“The long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which in interaction with various barriers may hinder the full and effective participation in society, on an equal basis with others”*

The Disability Inclusion Act 2014 requires all Councils to have a Disability Action Plan (DIAP). This Action Plan outlines the actions that Council will take to improve access for people with a disability.

Disability Inclusion Action Plan

The DIAP 2022-2026 is representative of Muswellbrook Shire Council's four-year Delivery Program and was endorsed by Council in June, 2022. This is Council's plan for the delivery of achievable, equitable and inclusive community services and infrastructure over the coming four years and is in line with the Disability Inclusion Act 2014 key areas:

- Developing positive community attitudes and behaviours
- Creating liveable communities
- Supporting access to meaningful employment
- Improving access to services through better systems and processes

Muswellbrook Shire Council recognises that much of this work will be delivered through partnerships with other organisations that are also working towards key focus areas of the Disability Inclusion Act 2014. This legislation requires Councils to:

- Have a Disability Inclusion Action Plan
- Consult with people with a disability as a part of the planning process
- Provide a copy of this document to the Disability Council of NSW
- Report on the implementation of our plans in Council's Annual Report
- Review this plan every four years

Other laws and policies that support the inclusion of people with disabilities includes:

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2007
- Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- National Disability Strategy 2021-2031
- The National Disability Insurance Scheme 2013

Community Profile

Muswellbrook Shire covers 3,402km², and is centrally located in the Upper Hunter Valley approximately 130km north-west of Newcastle.

Muswellbrook Shire consists of 2 larger towns, Muswellbrook and Denman, as well as a number of outlying rural communities, including Sandy Hollow, Wybong, Baerami, Martindale, McCullys Gap, Widden, and Muscle Creek.¹



Estimated Population
16,212

Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander People
11.7%

Demographic Data and Trends

Social – Economic Indexes of Areas (SEIFA)

The SEIFA score for Muswellbrook in 2021 was 937 which ranks Muswellbrook 122 out of 547 local government areas with SEIFA scores in Australia.

Across Australia's local government areas SEIFA scores range from 188 (most disadvantaged) to 1186 (least disadvantaged).

Muswellbrook:

There are 425 local government areas which are less disadvantaged, and

There are 121 local government areas that are more disadvantaged.

¹ <https://app.remplan.com.au/muswellbrook/community/summary?state=pxoBFAk2RTL1je2ta6qnN4ipt8t4kn>

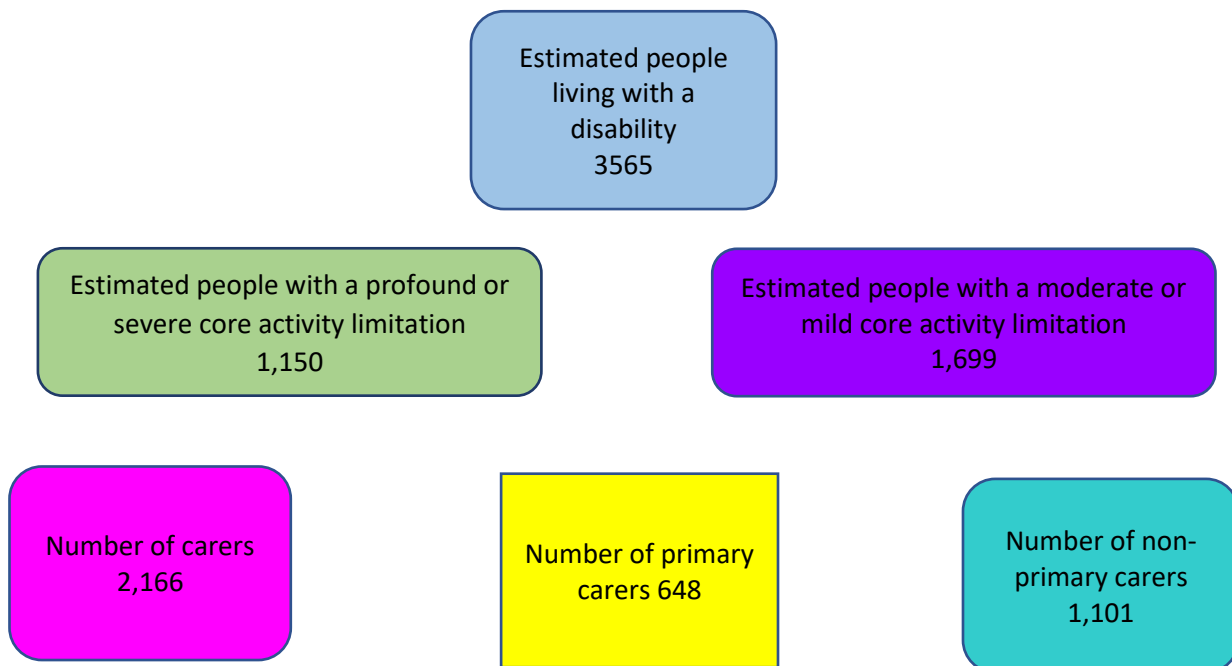
2021 Census Data

Provided unpaid assistance to a person with a disability, health condition or due to old age (during two weeks before Census Night) 1,438 (11.2%), NSW 759,383 (11.5%), Australia 2,476,681 (11.9%)

Over 75,000 (6.6%) people in the HNECC region have a severe or profound disability. This is a higher proportion compared to the state. There are also over 125,000 (12.6%) people aged 15 years and over providing unpaid assistance to persons with a disability, which is higher than the state proportion. This was highest in the rural LGAs of Uralla, Mid-Coast, Lake Macquarie and Dungog. Home and Community Care representatives identified a lack of carer recognition, a lack of respite services and a decrease in the number of volunteers in the sector as challenges. They also identified a need for additional programs for active individuals with mild cognitive impairment. There are capacity issues in smaller rural communities, limited residential facilities and an ageing workforce/carers. Service providers, consumers and carers reported concerns about the potential impact on accessibility of services for people living with a disability with the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) including: need that is currently not visible (e.g. elderly parents that have always cared for their child without seeking help) placing demands on the system; lack of capacity and skilled workforce in the NGO sector to take on this type of work; change for service providers from a focus on service delivery to brokering and negotiating with clients and families; and loss of a skilled Allied Health workforce in the NDIS transition.

Disability

According to the ABS data 2018 for Muswellbrook:



Carers

There are over 125,115 (12.6%) people aged 15 years and over providing unpaid assistance to persons with a disability in the HNECC region (NSW 11.6%). As shown in the heat map and table to the right, the highest proportions of unpaid carers are in Uralla (13.9%), Mid-Coast (13.8%), Lake Macquarie (13.6%) and Dungog (13.5%) LGAs.

A lack of carer recognition, a lack of respite services and a decrease in the number of volunteers, have been identified as challenges in the disability sector in our region.

There are 75,884 people with a profound or severe disability in our region (6.6% of the population)

Disability

The proportion of people with a profound or severe disability across our region (6.6%) is higher than the NSW average of 5.6%. As presented in the heat map and table to the right, 16 of our 23 LGAs have greater proportions of people with a profound or severe disability than the NSW average, with the highest proportions being in Mid-Coast (8.7%), Cessnock (7.6%), Gwydir (7.5%) and Glen Innes Severn (7.3%) LGAs.

Profound or severe disability is more common amongst people aged 65 years and older (NSW, 19.1%). The prevalence of profound or severe disability amongst this cohort in our region (17.2%) ranges from 9.6% in Walcha LGA, to 20.8% in Cessnock LGA.



Demographics

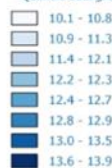


People aged 15 years+ providing unpaid assistance to people with a disability (%), 2016

LGA	%
Armidale Regional	11.3
Central Coast (NSW)	12.6
Cessnock	12.3
Dungog	13.5
Glen Innes Severn	12.7
Gunnedah	11.4
Gwydir	12.5
Inverell	13
Lake Macquarie	13.6
Liverpool Plains	12.3
Maitland	12.9
Mid-Coast	13.8
Moree Plains	10.07
Muswellbrook	10.7
Narrabri	10.8
Newcastle	12.1
Port Stephens	12.8
Singleton	11.3
Tamworth Regional	12.2
Tenterfield	12.8
Upper Hunter Shire	10.5
Uralla	13.9
Walcha	10.8

Percent (%) of population

* Quantile data grouping (equal counts of LGAs)



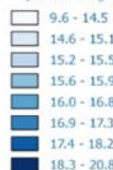
PHIDU 2017

People with profound or severe disability (%), 2016

LGA	(%)
Armidale Regional	17.2
Central Coast (NSW)	17.4
Cessnock	20.8
Dungog	14.7
Glen Innes Severn	15.007
Gunnedah	17.2
Gwydir	16.4
Inverell	16.9
Lake Macquarie	18.04
Liverpool Plains	14.6
Maitland	17.6
Mid-Coast	15.9
Moree Plains	15.1
Muswellbrook	15.4
Narrabri	14.03
Newcastle	18.7
Port Stephens	15.6
Singleton	18.6
Tamworth Regional	16.4
Tenterfield	10.4
Upper Hunter Shire	15.8
Uralla	15.3
Walcha	9.6

Percent (%) of population

* Quantile data grouping (equal counts of LGAs)



PHIDU 2017

Strategic Objectives, Priorities and Plans

Muswellbrook Shire Council has a number of existing strategic objectives that consider social equity and inclusion. These objectives, priorities, and plans describe work for the next four years between 2022 and 2026. The following plans are already driving organisational change in the area of disability and inclusion, or have been identified as planning that requires review to achieve improved social inclusion:

- Development control Plans
- Muswellbrook Shire Recreation Plan
- Muswellbrook Shire Property Access Audit
- Council's Policies and Guidelines (including EEO & recruitment)

Integrated Planning Documents

Local Government organisations utilise the Integrated Planning and Reporting framework to ensure that community consultation results in the expected outcomes that our community need. This includes a ten year Community Strategic Plan (CSP), a four year Delivery Program (DP) and annual operational plans that derive from the CSP and DP.

The Muswellbrook Shire Council's four year Delivery Program 2022-2026 was endorsed by Council in June, 2022. This is Council's plan for the delivery of achievable, equitable and inclusive community services and infrastructure over the coming four years. The plan considers the achievement of Community Wellbeing through six priority delivery areas including:

1. Economic Prosperity
2. Social Equity
3. Environmental Sustainability
4. Cultural Vitality
5. Community Infrastructure
6. Community Leadership



Economic Prosperity

CSP Goal 1: A dynamic local economy with full employment for current and future residents in a diverse range of high value industries.

CSP Strategy	Delivery Program Activity	Responsibility	Measure and Source
1.4 Develop Muswellbrook as a regional centre	1.4.2 Advocate for increased medical services in the Shire	General Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medical services included as a priority in the Shire's Advocacy Agenda Shire Advocacy Agenda

Social Equality

CPS Goal 2: An inclusive and interconnected community, where everyone enjoys full participation.

CSP Strategy	Delivery Program Activity	Responsibility	Measure and Source
2.1 Improve the affordability, liveability and amenity of Shire communities	2.1.1 Implement the funded outcomes of the Recreation Needs Study	Director Property and Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recreation Needs Study recommendations are implemented Council minutes
	2.1.2 Promote and facilitate increased participation in active and passive recreation activities	Director Property and Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Olympic Park Precinct Masterplan is implemented Council minutes
	2.1.3 Consider and deliver social inclusion principles across Council functions	General Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People with all abilities are engaged to improve the provision of accessible options across the Shire Community Engagement Strategy/ Annual Reports
2.4 Facilitate opportunities to expand seniors living	2.4.1 Advocate to enhance the delivery of services to support older people to live in Muswellbrook Shire	General Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved community satisfaction for services to support older Shire residents Muswellbrook Shire Community Satisfaction Survey

Cultural Vitality

CSP Goal 4: A culturally rich and diverse Community with strong identities, history, and sense of belonging.

CSP Strategy	Delivery Program Activity	Responsibility	Measure and Source
4.3 Host and support a diverse range of cultural activities and events which create a sense of identity and belonging, engage the local community and attract visitors	4.3.1 Develop and implement a program of Shire events to engage more locals and attract more visitors	General Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase number of events across the Shire Council Calendar of Events

Community Infrastructure

CPS Goal 5: Effective and efficient infrastructure that is appropriate to the needs of our community.

CSP Strategy	Delivery Program Activity	Responsibility	Measure and Source
5.1 Construct and maintain well-planned community infrastructure that is safe, reliable, and provides agreed levels of service	5.1.1 Review, develop and maintain liveable town and village precincts	Director Property and Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funded projects delivered Major projects progress reports to Council
	5.1.4 Maintain and continually improve community infrastructure across the Shire	General Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council's approved program of works is delivered Council minutes
5.2 Improve all abilities access to Council facilities	5.2.1 Facilitate and implement improved all abilities access and inclusion across the Shire	Director Property and Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of Council facilities with all abilities access is increasing Internal measure with quarterly progress report to Council
5.4 Ensure road, footpath and cycleway networks are integrated and allow for the safe movement of residents and visitors	5.4.1 Maintain and continually improve the Shire's shared pathway networks to increase connectivity	Chief Engineer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funded components of the Active Transport Plan delivered Council minutes – major projects progress reports

Community Leadership

CSP Goal 6: Collaborative and responsive community leadership that meets the expectations and anticipates the needs of our community.

CSP Strategy	Delivery Program Activity	Responsibility	Measure and Source
6.1 Enable genuine and well-informed community participation in decision making	6.1.1 Engage with the community and other stakeholders to determine service level expectations and appropriate measures	Manager Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service Level Agreements determined and recorded Internal measure reported to Council and the community
	6.1.2 Utilise best practice models of community engagement to ensure decision making is meeting the expectations of the community	Manager Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased participation of residents and other key stakeholders in engagement programs and activities Muswellbrook Shire Council Community Satisfaction Survey
	6.1.3 Enhance Council's communication with the community to build awareness and understanding of Council's activities and Community needs	General Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing satisfaction with the way Council communicates with the Community Muswellbrook Shire Council Community Satisfaction Survey
6.2 Ensure Council is well managed, appropriately resourced, effective, efficient, accountable and responsive to its communities and stakeholders	6.2.4 Regulatory activities undertaken to maintain public safety and companion animal wellbeing	Director Environment and Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legislative and regulatory requirements met Monthly report to Council

Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2017-2021

Success Stories

Council has been working to improve inclusion and access to facilities and services through the DIAP 2017-2021. Some of our significant achievements include:

Building positive attitudes and behaviours

- Inclusion and Acceptance Community Education partnership activity with Ability Links. This included an Inclusion Sports Day at Karoola Park, Muswellbrook.
- An improved understanding in assistive technologies. An Audit of the Council Administration Centre meeting spaces was carried out to identify assistive technology improvements for the hearing impaired.
- Wider Promotion of existing Art Exhibitions for adults and children with disability. A Muswellbrook Regional Arts Centre exhibition tour and workshop was provided for young people and adults who are hearing impaired.
- Accessible events such as, Australia Day Ceremony, Australia Day Awards Ceremony, Easter Family Fun Day, Exhibition Openings, Aboriginal Flag Raising Ceremonies, Blue Heeler Film Festival, etc.

Creating liveable communities

- Regular Inclusive Events, Australia Day Ceremony, Australia Day Awards Ceremony, Easter Family Fun Day, Exhibition Openings, Aboriginal Flag Raising Ceremonies, Blue Heeler Film Festival, etc.
- Muswellbrook Library has created a sensory garden for children with mobile and sensory disabilities.
- Improved and/or new accessible public toilets in parks and playgrounds. The Denman Memorial Park Playground Design includes fully accessible toilets and adult change table facilities.
- Footpath renewal program design and delivery has a focus on accessible footpaths and the provision of pram ramps.
- Partnership project with key disability support providers to promote inclusive sporting events.

Supporting access to meaningful employment

- Muswellbrook Shire Council has implemented new technology for people with a disability, including Hearing Aid Compatible Headsets, supporting people while they worked from home during the Covid-19 lockdown.
- Venue accessibility, including ramps and elevators at Council work sites.

Accessible systems, information or processes

- Council Administration Centre audit of existing facilities with the view to provide assistive technologies for people who are hearing impaired.
- Supported exhibition for hearing impaired young people at the Muswellbrook Regional Art Centre.

Community Consultation 2022-2023

There were two main avenues of consultation conducted during 10 May to 3 June 2022. The first was an online survey containing 26 questions, and the second was 3 face to face Listening Posts held in Muswellbrook and Denman. Council departments and disability service providers were consulted. Due to the Omicron COVID19 variant, focus groups were not held.

Of the 21 people who participated in the survey:

- 31% worked in the disability or health sector
- 29% had a disability
- 29% were a community member
- 10% were either a carer or family member of a person with a disability
- 71% were aged between 40 and 89
- 29% were Aboriginal
- 90% lived in the Muswellbrook Shire

Muswellbrook Shire Council would like to acknowledge and thank the community members, and the community and government organisations who participated with our consultations. The information has been extremely valuable in assisting Council to improve inclusion and access for people with a disability.

Survey and Consultation findings

Summarised below are the survey findings which have been used to inform the actions of the Plan.

Developing positive community attitudes and behaviours.

What you told us.

- Majority of people felt welcome in the Muswellbrook community especially if people spoke directly to them and when they were treated like everyone else.
- It is important for events to be accessible, welcoming, and inclusive.
- Reduce stigma and raise awareness through the implementation of positive images and stories about people with a disability throughout the community.
- Raising awareness about disability needs through workforce training and an inclusion award for businesses or workplaces.

Creating liveable communities.

What you told us.

- On the whole Council has good accessibility, however more needs to be done.
- There are not enough well-designed footpaths allowing for safety and navigability around town.
- Accessible entrances to buildings, public toilets, additional disability parking spaces and road crossings would not only assist people with disability but also their carers who accompany them, especially in the centre of town.
- A mobility map would be useful showing accessible building, toilets, accommodation etc.
- More transport options.

- Businesses need to be more accessible for disabilities of all kinds.
- Council needs to follow Australian and international standards, disability policies, and human rights related to people with a disability and make businesses accountable.
- Better consultation by Council when developing and planning.
- More accessible recreational activities needed e.g., sport, cinema, the arts, events, clubs, restaurants, cafes, and clubs.

Increasing access to meaningful employment.

What you told us.

- People with disabilities are all different and capable of working in different fields.
- Employment opportunities should be as varied for people with disabilities as for those who do not have a disability.
- Lack of transport options was the main issue around gaining employment.
- There is a lack of available and suitable jobs for people with disabilities.
- There is a difficulty accessing flexible work arrangements, skills training, and education.
- People with disabilities can experience discrimination in the workplace.
- Small businesses have limited resources and employers lack the knowledge and confidence regarding what is needed to support workers with a disability, legal obligations, and compliance.
- Fear of losing part or all of the Disability Support Pension.
- Ongoing health issues.

Improving access to mainstream services through improved systems and processes.

What you told us.

- It is difficult to access businesses in the main street and shopping centres due to uneven surfaces, steep gradients, etc.
- Move the dog statue at Campbells Corner as it restricts access.
- Would like to see clear signage about accessible routes and services.
- Would like to be able to access the Hunter River to go fishing.
- Would like to see more walkways or cycleways to get from South Muswellbrook to town.
- It is difficult to access all types of services, especially doctors and medical services.
- Lack of disability parking near places like Centrelink.
- There is a lack of transport to be able to access services out of town.
- There is a need for more accessible toilets with sliding doors so there is no need for the help of a carer.
- Would like to see assistive technology available to hire or loaned to community groups for events, e.g., hearing loops, video link for interpreters, etc.
- Council needs to advocate more for people with a disability with State and Commonwealth governments.

Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2022-2026

Community Strategic Plan Goal 2: An inclusive and interconnected community, where everyone enjoys full participation.

CSP Strategy 2.1: Improve the affordability, liveability and amenity of Shire communities.

Operational Plan Strategy 2.1.3 Consider and deliver social inclusion principles across Council functions.

Operational Delivery Program Activity 2.1.3.1 Review the Muswellbrook Shire Council Disability Inclusion Action Plan

Strategy	Action	Responsibility	Measure	Timeframe
Developing positive community attitudes and behaviours.	Promote public awareness campaigns that celebrate and recognise the achievements, contribution, and abilities of people with disability e.g., International Day of People with a Disability, Carers Day	Community Services Communications	Number of public awareness campaigns promoted.	Annually
	Include images and stories of people with disability in Council publications and communications	Communications	Number of documents and Facebook posts produced that include images of people with disability.	Ongoing
Creating liveable communities.	Promote initiatives to local businesses that support inclusion e.g., Zero Barriers	Community Services	Number of businesses adopt initiatives.	Ongoing
	Create an accessibility map promoting accessible facilities, accommodation, recreation, and social opportunities	Economy & Community Events & Tourism/ Communication	Document developed.	Short-term 1-2 years
	Community events and activities to include disability inclusion options e.g., seating, hearing loops	Economy & Community Events & Tourism	Number of events held with disability inclusion and accessibility.	Ongoing
			Check list developed for events procedures.	Short term 12 months
	Council to implement its Active Transport initiatives for footpaths	Community Infrastructure	Number of footpaths improved and location.	Ongoing
	Investigate opportunities to improve accessible parking	Community Infrastructure	Number of new accessible parking stops.	Ongoing
	Investigate opportunities to improve accessible toilets with automatic sliding doors	Community Infrastructure & Property & Place	Number of disability toilets with automatic sliding doors.	Ongoing
	Investigate relocation of dog statue at Campbells Corner	Economy & Community Services and Property and Place	Statue relocated	Short term 1-2 years
Increasing access to meaningful employment	Advocate for improved/alternative transport options	Community Services	Transport options are increased	Ongoing
	Promote business relationships with local disability employment services to	Economy & Community	Provision of information and awareness information provided	Ongoing

Strategy	Action	Responsibility	Measure	Timeframe
	better understand employment pathways for people with disability.			
	Promote volunteering opportunities with community services and sporting groups.	Community Services	Number of volunteering opportunities identified.	Ongoing
Improving access to mainstream services through improved systems and processes.	Advocate for people with a disability with State and Commonwealth governments.	Senior Management Team General Manager	Number of advocacy submissions made.	Ongoing
	Encourage and engage people with disability to participate in consultation processes and planning activities in Council.	Manager Governance	Number of consultations held with identified stakeholders and groups.	Annually
	Include Accessibility Map on Council's webpage	Communications	Information included on Council's webpage	Short term 1-2 years
	Review Council's public documents, information and feedback mechanisms to ensure they are available in accessible formats such as large print, electronic, radio etc.	Communications Customer Relations	Number of documents made available.	Ongoing
			Types of formats used.	Ongoing

Monitoring, Review and Reporting

The DIAP will be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis and will be reported on annually, with a copy being submitted to the Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services. The outcomes and progress of the Council's Delivery Program and Operational Plan will be reported to the community in the Council's Annual Report.

There will be key points throughout each calendar year where consultation opportunities will continue to identify areas of improvement or celebrations of success.

Further Information

If you need more information about the Disability Inclusion Action Plan or require another format, please contact Council's Community Services Team.

Council welcomes any feedback on the plan and any suggestions related to the improvement of inclusion and access for people with a disability.

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