

Draft Disability Inclusion Action Plan

2021-2025

bega valley shire council

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Message from the Mayor and General Manager

Disability inclusion is achieved by working together with a shared commitment to improving the lives of people with disability and our community more broadly.

While Bega Valley Shire Council considers inclusion in all its operations, our Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2021-2025 provides an additional opportunity to sharpen our focus on particular priorities that will enhance the work we do and boost our efforts in this area. It builds on the strong foundations of our 2017-2020 plan and continues our commitment to supporting a more inclusive community across the Shire.

The plan enables us to review our progress and continue to expand our expectations in terms of community acceptance, accessibility, jobs and continuous improvement right across our region.

While the past year has tested our resilience as we recover from the Black Summer bushfires and a global pandemic, it has also provided an opportunity for thinking differently and to further incorporate inclusion in our rebuilding efforts.

We would like to thank the members of Council's Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee who have worked hard to champion the rights of people with disability when reviewing Council's work and raising opportunities for improvement with us. Your contributions over the years have been critical in the development of this plan and the identification of key priorities.

Thank you also to the community members who have provided thoughts and ideas about this plan. Your ideas are welcome and important to us.

We look forward to working with people across the Bega Valley Shire to capitalise on our progress to date and push boundaries as we strive towards an even more inclusive community over the coming years.



Cr Russell Fitzpatrick
Mayor



Leanne Barnes OAM
General Manager

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Introduction

This second Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) outlines Bega Valley Shire Council's continuing commitment to considering the needs of people with disability in our planning and operations. Our goal is to assist people with disability to live full, meaningful lives and to participate fully in our community.

The first DIAP 2017-2020 provided a focus for inclusive activity and laid the groundwork for Council to consciously respond to the inclusion of people with disability and consider the many opportunities for that to occur.

Through the Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee (AIAC), the DIAP and Council's planned approach to disability inclusion, we have seen many improvements over the last four years. As part of the first DIAP, Council strengthened:

- its commitment to advocacy for people with disability
- the importance of the Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee and its role in providing input on Council's projects and planning
- efforts to design inclusive playgrounds using the Everyone Can Play Guidelines at multiple sites across the Shire
- the availability and growth of accessible resources at our libraries including an updated website, large format books, audio books, webchat and expanded home library services to better reach those isolated by age and disability, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic
- opportunities to improve accessibility as part of Council's asset renewal and maintenance projects.

Over the course of the past four years, there were significant major projects that boosted public access across the Shire such as the $2 million investment in accessible coastal infrastructure through the 'Destination for All' program, Tathra Headland Walk and improved disability access and car parking at Bermagui.

The first plan also coincided with Council's decision to become a registered National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provider to support continuity of services for people with disability in our Shire during the introduction of this major reform. As an NDIS provider, Council has supported a growing number of community members with an NDIS plan through the delivery of Support Coordination (assisting people to operationalise their NDIS plans) and Plan Management (undertaking the payment processing and financial oversight on behalf of clients). Since 2017, there has been a growth in the number of NDIS service providers in the Bega Valley Shire, with many sole contractors now in operation, providing choice for NDIS participants and driving growth in the local economy. Council's support coordination and plan management services directly enable this increased level of service provision and local employment.

The results of the first DIAP, complemented by inclusive changes across Council's core work, the introduction and delivery of NDIS services, and the operation of the Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee, provided practical insights into the development of this second plan. This DIAP is for the 2021-2025 period and aims to provide realistic but challenging goals that Council can lead, influence or deliver as part of our core business.

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Context to deliver the plan

Under the New South Wales (NSW) *Disability Inclusion Act 2014* all public authorities, including local government, are required to have DIAPs that set out measures to enable people with disability to access general support and services and fully participate in the community.

Council must align with the four themes in the *NSW Disability Inclusion Plan* which are:

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

Local councils are also required to include disability inclusion action planning using these four themes in the development of their Integrated Planning and Reporting documents, specifically in their Delivery Program and associated Operational Plans. Together, the plans of NSW Government departments, public authorities and councils support the overall vision and objectives of the *NSW Disability Inclusion Plan* and play a vital role in addressing barriers within government departments and local communities.

Relevant legislation, policies and conventions

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015, all United Nations Member States adopted the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* which calls for urgent action against 17 Sustainable Development Goals to end poverty and other deprivations with strategies to improve health and education, reduce inequality, spur economic growth, tackle climate change and work to preserve our oceans and forests. Of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the following four goals are particularly pertinent to improving inclusion in our society:

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages

Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

United Nations Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The social model of disability, outlined in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD) states people with disability are not disabled by their impairment but by the barriers in the community that prevent them gaining equal access to information, services, transport, housing, education, training, employment, and social opportunities.

The General Principles of the UNCRPD were ratified by Australia in 2008 and are reflected in the intent of the DIAP. They include:

a) Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons
b) Non-discrimination

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c) Full and effective participation and inclusion in society
d) Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity
e) Equality of opportunity
f) Accessibility
g) Equality between men and women.

Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.

National Disability Strategy 2010-2020

Developed in partnership by Commonwealth, states, territory and local governments, the *National Disability Strategy 2010-2020* sets out a national plan for improving the lives of Australians with disability and their families and carers. This strategy further supports a commitment to the UNCRPD. A new National Strategy is planned for 2021.

National Disability Insurance Scheme

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is a major reform that is delivering a national system of disability support focused on the individual needs and choices of people with disability. The NDIS gives participants more choice and control over how, when and where supports are provided. Funding is allocated to each eligible individual, rather than block funding being allocated to service providers. The NDIS provides an important opportunity for inclusion as its key goal is to enable people with disability to participate in their community to the best of their ability as customers, students, employees, employers, business owners and citizens.

Related legislation and links

- Disability Inclusion Act 2014
- Disability Inclusion Regulation 2014
- Government Sector Employment Act
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- NSW Anti-Discrimination Act 1977
- NSW Disability Inclusion Plan
- National Disability Strategy 2010 - 2020
- National Disability Insurance Scheme Website
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)

Inclusion

An inclusive community benefits us all. A diverse, inclusive community means there are more opportunities for all of us to contribute productively and build our combined economic wealth. Inclusion drives better health outcomes, better community connections and enriches our lives. Improvements for people with disability have the added benefit of improving the amenity for the broader community right across the Shire.

People with disability are consumers, business people, students, customers, parents, grandparents, sports people and much more. Beyond the social drivers to include people with disability in our community, there are strong economic reasons to do so. If more people are

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working in a community it reduces inequality, improves the local economy, and provides purpose and income for the individual worker. When compared to employees without disabilities, people with disability who are in employment take fewer sick days, make fewer workplace health and safety claims and are more loyal to their workplaces.[1] A business that does not consider the needs of people with disability is missing a potential income stream and workforce.

Establishing a DIAP helps increase understanding of people with disability and reduces discrimination, but also unlocks a wider potential employee and customer base.

Disability

Disability is part of human diversity. Over four million people—almost one in five people in Australia—have a disability, and this proportion is increasing with an ageing population. People with disability purchase consumer goods, have jobs, go on holidays, access information and contribute to society in the same way as those without disability. The difference is that people with disability often come up against significant barriers while trying to do the things that many of us take for granted. Every person with disability is unique and will experience their disability in their own way.

Disability is any circumstance that substantially limits a person's physical or mental functions. It can be acquired through accident or disease, or a person can be born with a genetic disorder. A disability may affect mobility, the ability to learn things, or the ability to communicate easily. Some people may have more than one disability. A disability may be visible or hidden, permanent or temporary, or have a minimal or substantial impact on a person's abilities. A disability is a condition that affects a person's ability to undertake daily activities and will have lasted or is likely to last at least six months.

There is a strong relationship between age and disability; as people grow older, there is a greater tendency to develop conditions that cause disability. In the Australian population, 3.7% of people four years and under are affected by disability but more than half of the population over 75 is affected by disability.

Disability and the Bega Valley Shire

Based on the 2016 census, the Bega Valley Shire has a population of more than 34,000 with around 2,000 of those (6%) needing assistance with daily activities. This percentage is much higher in older population groups, with almost 40% of people over 85 needing assistance.

The Shire has a highly dispersed population spread across many small villages with a population density of 0.5 people per hectare. This provides challenges for accessibility, transport, housing and service provision.

In 2019-2020, the Shire was heavily impacted by the Black Summer bushfires causing major damage to infrastructure including roads and local halls, destroying nearly 500 houses plus other structures, and causing the deaths of several people. This plan needs to be considered in the context of the significant and long-term recovery process to rebuild the community. This

[1] Banks, L. M., & Polack, S. (2013). The economic costs of exclusion and gains of inclusion of people with disabilities. London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine: London, UK. Australian Safety and Compensation Council. (2007). Are people with disability at risk at work? A review of the evidence. Canberra. Included in CSIA Limited report *Becoming Inclusion Ready,* 2018 https://csialtd.com.au/.

rebuilding process also creates an opportunity to consider improved inclusion and accessibility where possible.

Consultation

A range of internal and external stakeholders across the Shire were consulted on the key priorities identified in this DIAP (see the consultation addendum for more information ***– NB to be amended following public exhibition***).

The issues raised through consultation have undergone a ranking process based on the frequency and importance of the issue, followed by a prioritising process based on how the issue links with other commitments and investments by Council and the community.

A key mechanism for Council to seek the views of our community, including people with a disability, is the Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee. The Committee was established almost 20 years ago and has proven to be a voice for responding to inclusion of people with disability, providing advice on accessibility, and advising on the direction of the DIAP.

"People with disabilities should be treated equally in all facets of life."

"It is preferable to explore people's abilities rather than focusing on what they can't do."

"The abilities of an individual to do the job may not be measured fairly during an application process, and both the person and the business will miss out on the opportunity."

"I think that using principles of organisational change and community development, could be a positive way to address a cultural shift around inclusion and valuing diversity."

"[Inclusion for people with disability means] being accepted into the community and not made to feel like they are different."

"We need to make everybody feel important and heard. We need to make everything accessible, including online and physical facilities. All-inclusive means everyone."

Measuring progress and outcomes

A key challenge of the DIAP is to ensure that actions provide meaningful and measurable progress towards inclusion. Specific measures and related outcomes have been identified so the success of strategies can be properly understood and reported on. Further, the DIAP will be embedded within the organisation through its connection to the newly implemented Integrated Planning and Reporting framework.

The DIAP recognises that Council plays an important role as an employer, regulator, investor, policy maker and leader in the Bega Valley community.

To keep the DIAP as an active, working document its actions will be integrated into Council's Operational Plan, and progress will be measured and reported annually.

Disability Inclusion Actions

1. Developing positive community attitudes and behaviours			
ACTION	**MEASURE**	**OUTCOME**	**TIMEFRAME**
1a. Deliver inclusion awareness training to all Council staff annually	Inclusion concepts included and expanded in the staff induction. Council staff report an increase in understanding of inclusion concepts and awareness of the DIAP.	Increased awareness and understanding by all staff when undertaking their roles.	Annually
1b. Development Hub to provide advice on accessible alternatives including Liveable Housing Design Guidelines	Council will provide two accredited staff to assist with Liveable Housing development queries and assessments.	Increased number of accommodation and housing options for people with disability and for older people to age in place.	From 2021
1c. Review templates and procedures to ensure that Council acknowledges and includes disability when developing communication and engagement strategies and plans	Update relevant templates to include accessibility considerations.	Consideration of the needs of people with disability when designing communication and engagement strategies and plans.	By 2022
1d. Review and update Council's writing style guide with examples of appropriate language for working with diverse groups including people with disability	Completed review of style guide with examples for staff use.	Improved resources for inclusive communication.	By 2022
1e. An annual all Council staff development day to focus on inclusion and diversity stories in our community	Number of Council staff reporting an increase in understanding of inclusion concepts for people with disability, from other cultures, LGBTIQ identifying and aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.	Increased awareness and understanding by all staff when undertaking their roles.	By 2022

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1. Developing positive community attitudes and behaviours			
ACTION	**MEASURE**	**OUTCOME**	**TIMEFRAME**
1f. Inclusion to be incorporated into Council's communication strategy and action in this area to be promoted	Inclusion as a priority for the community as identified in Council planning and engagement surveys. Positive stories, images and content featuring people with disability used across a variety of Council communications channels throughout the year.	Increased understanding by the community of inclusion and its benefits.	By 2022

2. Creating liveable communities			
ACTION	**MEASURE**	**OUTCOME**	**TIMEFRAME**
2a. Advocate for increased accessible public housing and home modifications in our Shire	Positive feedback from the NSW Government and other providers.	Plans for increasing the accessibility of public housing including to comply with the Living Housing Design Guidelines (LHDG). This will substantially lower reduce the costs of future modifications.	Ongoing
2b. Review land use plans and policies to support improvements to accessible and inclusive infrastructure, telecommunications and interactive technologies	Updated land use plans and policies.	Incremental/gradual improvement to inclusive infrastructure, telecommunications and interactive technologies.	As opportunities arise over the life of this DIAP

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2. Creating liveable communities			
ACTION	**MEASURE**	**OUTCOME**	**TIMEFRAME**
2c. Work with Transport for NSW to implement the NSW 'Movement and Place' Framework in towns and villages and to develop and implement a Transport Strategy for Bega Valley	Increased opportunities for and investment in foot and bike path connections, wider footpaths, kerb ramps, pedestrian crossings, disabled parking and mobility-scooter parking spaces. Completed Merimbula Transport Study to inform a place-based area plan and to ensure all transport modes are considered. Prioritised development of the shared path and cycle network to support expansion of walking, cycling tourism and accessible tourism.	Improved options across a range of different transport modes in the Bega Valley Shire.	Ongoing 2021 Ongoing
2d. Advocate for delivery of accessible and affordable transport equity and other services in the Bega Valley Shire	Number of advocacy submissions to external authorities.	Improved options across a range of different transport modes in the Bega Valley Shire.	Ongoing
2e. Review Council's provision of NDIS Support Coordination and Plan Management services and adjust service delivery in response to demonstrated needs	Adequate NDIS Support Coordination and Plan Management is available to residents in the Bega Valley Shire.	Improved service system for people with disability in the Bega Valley Shire.	Ongoing

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2. Creating liveable communities			
ACTION	**MEASURE**	**OUTCOME**	**TIMEFRAME**
2f. Council's Children's Services to continue to seek funding for inclusion support at its mainstream centres	Children's Services delivering inclusion support.	Children with disabilities included in mainstream service delivery.	Annually
2g. Consult with Council's Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee (AIAC) on matters affecting people living with disability	Number of meetings to consult with AIAC. Number of projects reviewed and actions completed.	Increasing insights for Council into issues relevant to the community and people with disability.	Ongoing
2h. Review the issues for people with disability during disaster events	Reviewed and updated disaster recovery mobilisation approaches.	Improved preparedness for all Bega Valley Shire residents during future disaster events.	After each major disaster event
2i. Develop and implement a car parking action plan	An action plan that provides a prioritised list of works and activities within budget to improve parking accessibility. An annual percentage increase in parking accessibility.	A greater number of accessible parking options across the shire.	From 2021
2j. Continue to improve the accessibility of Council managed public open space and venues and identify opportunities to undertake accessibility and amenity upgrades in major town centres.	Number of Council managed public locations and venues with improved public accessibility. Number of opportunities identified to upgrade town centres.	Overall increase in public accessibility across the shire.	Ongoing

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2. Creating liveable communities			
ACTION	**MEASURE**	**OUTCOME**	**TIMEFRAME**
2k. Advocate for resources to assist the Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee (AIAC) members to develop a Tourism Access Sapphire Coast Strategy	Resources to support the delivery of a comprehensive Tourism Access Sapphire Coast Strategy. Increase in number of businesses who consider and respond to customers with disability.	More local businesses understand and cater for the needs of visitors with disability and their carers, to better meet the needs of people with disability and to drive business growth.	From 2021
2l. Deliver at least one specialised change facility for people with disability as part of a toilet facility upgrade	Council to undertake project development to identify funding and other opportunities. At least one specialised change facility for people with disability incorporated into an existing facility upgrade.	Increased change facility options for adults with disabilities in the Bega Valley Shire.	From 2022 for completion by 2025

3. Supporting access to meaningful employment			
ACTION	**MEASURE**	**OUTCOME**	**TIMEFRAME**
3a. Review Council's recruitment process to identify barriers to employing people with disability, and from diverse backgrounds.	Reviewed recruitment processes. Number of diverse people applying for Council positions.	An increase in Council staff from a range of diverse backgrounds and disabilities.	Annually
3b. Develop a step in Council's recruitment process to provide an opportunity to reflect on the inclusiveness of the process	New step developed and included as mandatory in all recruitment processes. Review of process benefits.	A growing understanding of how to support people with different abilities and from different backgrounds through the Council recruitment process.	By 2022

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3. Supporting access to meaningful employment			
ACTION	**MEASURE**	**OUTCOME**	**TIMEFRAME**
3c. Council consider collaborating with recruitment specialists to employ people with disability	Number of candidates with disability referred by recruitment specialists.	Increased overall effort to target people with disability for Council positions.	By 2025
3d. Progressively review physical layouts of Council workspaces and flexible work practices to reduce barriers to employment	Increase in accessibility across Council work sites. Number of flexible working arrangements in place.	Overall improvement in workspaces and working arrangements for all staff plus an increase in workplace diversity.	Ongoing in line with capital works planning
3e. Council work with local schools and service providers to improve work opportunities for people with disability	Increase in the number of Council work placements offered to people with disability. Increase in the number of jobs for people with disability.	Increased overall effort to target people with disability for Council positions.	From 2024

4. Improving access to mainstream services through better systems and processes			
ACTION	**MEASURE**	**OUTCOME**	**TIMEFRAME**
4a. Continue to include representatives of AIAC on Council project stakeholder groups	AIAC representation on project groups especially when inclusive design outcomes are a key objective.	Early input and consideration and project awareness of the AIAC.	Ongoing
4b. Provide a range of options for people with a disability to engage with Council libraries and Bega Valley Regional Gallery programs, exhibitions and resources.	Number of services and exhibitions that are accessible by people with disability.	Increased reach of library and regional art gallery activities to members of the community with disability.	Ongoing

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4. Improving access to mainstream services through better systems and processes			
ACTION	**MEASURE**	**OUTCOME**	**TIMEFRAME**
4c. As part of asset renewal, continue to identify Council sites and projects that will deliver improvements to inclusive facilities and provide a range of experiences	Number of projects developed with inclusive design principles as a key objective.	Continue to develop awareness and delivery of on ground results through early consideration of inclusive design.	Annually
4d. Incorporate a standard events pre-arrival 'what to expect' document into the Council Events Guide for attendees but particularly for people with disability	Number of events that provide the pre-arrival document to attendees.	This will bring another level of care to attendees and will help to continuously improve event management for a range of diverse groups, particularly for people with disability.	From 2022
4e. Identify and develop key public Council documents in accessible formats	Number of documents available in accessible formats.	Increased access to key Council documents by a range of stakeholders with different abilities.	From 2021
4f. Provide the option of allocated Council customer service times to meet the needs of people with disability including sensory issues	Number of customer service times for specific groups provided to the community over the year.	Improved customer service support and Council able to report on and to influence other businesses to adopt similar.	From 2022
4g. Develop a system of audit/assessment of the practical use and functionality of completed Council projects with inclusive design elements	Electronic/online forms developed and in use. Number of audits/ assessments completed	Continuous learning to achieve useful and functional improvements.	By 2022

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4. Improving access to mainstream services through better systems and processes			
ACTION	**MEASURE**	**OUTCOME**	**TIMEFRAME**
4h. Council investigate ways to support the availability of an accessible portable toilet for events in the Shire	Number of events that include accessible portable toilets.	Improved event compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act.	From 2022

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Case study: Tourism Access – Sapphire Coast

The Sapphire Coast has a strong, vibrant community in a spectacular location with many natural advantages and an outstanding unspoilt environment. The 'Tourism Access – Sapphire Coast' project will seek resources to increase awareness of the economic benefit to businesses if they are both accessible and pro-active in providing information about their accessibility. People who are welcomed and have their needs met are more likely to become loyal return customers who regularly plan to visit the Sapphire Coast and contribute to its economic wellbeing.

The accessible tourism market in Australia is worth in excess of $4.8 billion to the Australian economy each year. Around 11% of the total number of tourists have a disability or long-term health condition. This market is set to grow as the National Disability Insurance Scheme continues to increase the ability of people to travel for their holidays. This growth in local tourism will further accelerate due to impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international travel.

The Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee will seek to collaborate with Sapphire Coast Destination Marketing to identify and profile local businesses that are accessible. These businesses can then be promoted through improved and accurate online information. Specific information, such as site plans, are a huge asset for people with disability or mobility requirements when planning a holiday.

Once sufficient businesses are on board, the second stage of this project would be to develop an online marketing campaign that connects with social media networks accessed by people with mobility requirements and other needs. This would make it easier for everyone to find suitable accommodation.

Conclusion

The *Bega Valley Shire's Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2021-2025* will provide a refreshed and pro-active approach to considering people with disability across Council's operations. This DIAP recognises that Council plays an important role as an employer, regulator, investor, policy maker and leader in the Bega Valley community.

To keep the DIAP as an active, working document its actions will be integrated into Council's Operational Plan with actions across program areas, and progress will be measured and reported on annually.

Our goal is to assist people with disability to live full, meaningful lives and to participate fully in our community and this DIAP is an important mechanism to achieving this goal.

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