

**DISABILITY  
INCLUSION  
ACTION  
PLAN**

**2022-2026**



**murray river  
council**

## ABOUT THIS PLAN

Murray River Council's Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) 2022-2026 builds on the outcomes achieved from our previous plan which was adopted in 2017. Both DIAPs support the NSW Disability Inclusion Act 2014 which mandates the development of Disability Inclusion Action Plans (DIAP) by individual State Government agencies and by Local Government.

It builds on existing social equity requirements within the Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) framework to strengthen Local Government commitment to inclusion, consultation and rights for people with disability. The DIAP is a way for Council to work towards a fully inclusive community that can benefit from the services and facilities Council provides.

The Disability Inclusion Action Plan (the Plan) for Murray River Council includes background information, the legislation that underpins it, the principles that guide it and the Action Plan for implementation.

Council's role in development of the Plan and responsibility for its implementation is clearly outlined. The Plan builds upon current functions and projects that support inclusion. Council staff and the Mayor participated in the initial meeting to identify key functions and areas for improvement. This process assisted in assigning internal responsibility and endorsed integration with existing operations. The Plan is aligned with the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework, so that the expressed goals and actions will fit within the Community Strategic Plan, the four (4) year Delivery Program and each Annual Operational Plan.

The consultation process including individual interviews, workshops and a survey, involving people with disability, their carers and families, specialist and mainstream service providers and the wider community, was undertaken to identify and prioritise local needs and potential solutions in the four focus areas of the Plan, which are:

1. Positive community attitudes and behaviours
2. Liveable communities
3. Supporting access to meaningful employment
4. Accessible systems and processes

Solutions to identified needs are not solely the responsibility of Council and involve community organisations, specialist and mainstream providers, local businesses, people with disability themselves, and the wider community. The roles of Council in implementation of the actions range from leader, advocate, custodian, facilitator, educator, regulator through to service provider.

## BACKGROUND

The Murray River Council (MRC) covers an areas of 11,865 km<sup>2</sup> and comprises the wards of Moama, Greater Murray and Greater Wakool and has population of 12,571 who primarily reside in the towns of Moama, Mathoura, Barham and Moulamein.

Murray River Council's southern border is the Murray River, which also acts as the state border with Victoria. MRC townships located along the river are very closely connected to their Victorian neighbours, and essentially live as one community. These communities are are governed by two local government authorities and two state government authorities, which can cause some challenges.

The DIAP which has been developed by Murray River Council, defines strategies and provides a planning framework to promote inclusion and equity for people with disability, so they may fully participate in, and contribute to, social, business and community life. The DIAP will enhance and complement the existing service provision within the area.

## OUR COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

We value diversity and inclusion across our community and appreciate the variety of perspectives that this brings to our community. We know that if our residents are supported and included in our community, they are more engaged and productive.

Our DIAP 2022-2026 actions aim to build on this commitment. We will continue to be guided by our staff, community and the broader policy and legislative framework as we deliver our actions.

Council's role in implementation of the DIAP will include:

- ▶ **As a Service Provider:** Council has a strong commitment to delivering the services needed by its communities, and ensuring that Council resources are responsibly managed. Council's role as a service provider aims to assist in building the long term health of the area.
- ▶ **As a Leader:** Council acts as a role model for others, through its own actions, strategic organisational responses and way of doing things. In its dialogue with the community and other stakeholders, Council can act to draw together diverse interests and strive towards attaining greater consensus on sustainable outcomes.
- ▶ **As an Advocate:** Council seeks to improve services, facilities and opportunities for our community by lobbying agencies and other levels of government. In discussions with others, there are opportunities to reinforce the local sense of identity and self reliance, and collaborate on achieving sustainability.
- ▶ **As a Facilitator:** Council assists interaction amongst stakeholders, and forms strategic alliances aimed at promoting sustainability initiatives focussing on elements including social, economic, environmental, cultural and governance, which demonstrate positive ways of moving forward.

## SUPPORTING AUSTRALIA'S DISABILITY STRATEGY 2021-2031

Australia's Disability Strategy (ADS) 2021-2031 is a national ten-year plan that provides a framework for governments and stakeholders to improve the lives of people with disability, their families and carers. The ADS continues to progress the outcomes of the National Disability Strategy (NDS) which commenced in 2010. Both strategies seek to foster an inclusive society that enables people with disability to fulfil their potential as equal citizens. The ADS recognises the importance of people with disability being able to access mainstream services and opportunities. Our DIAP supports these fundamental rights of people with disability and the aim of the ADS. The actions across the four inclusion outcomes of systems and processes, liveable communities, community attitudes and employment will ensure that our workplace, future infrastructure, programs and services continue to be accessible and inclusive for people with disability, their families and carers living across our LGA.

## ABOUT DISABILITY

The Disability Discrimination Act (1992) defines disability as 'any impairment, abnormality, or loss of function, of any part of the body or mind'.

This includes physical, intellectual, psychiatric, sensory, neurological, learning disability, physical disfigurement, immunological (the presence of organisms causing disease in the body).

### **Demographics**

- ▶ More than 4 million Australians have a disability.
- ▶ About 1 million are from a non-English speaking background.
- ▶ 37% of the national Indigenous population 15 years and older have a reported physical disability or a long-term health condition (102,900).
- ▶ At least 80% of disabilities are not visible.
- ▶ 15% or 2.1 million Australians of working age (15-64 years) have a disability.

- › Mental health problems and mental illness are among the greatest causes of disability.
- › The likelihood of living with disability increases with age.
- › 40% of people with disability are 65 years or older.
- › 2.1 million Australians of working age (15-64 years) have disability.
- › 35.9% of Australia's 8.9 million households include a person with disability.

## **Types Of Disability**

- › Only 4.4% of people with disability in Australia are wheelchair users.
- › 1 in 6 Australians are affected by hearing loss. There are about 30,000 Deaf AUSLAN users with total hearing loss.
- › Vision Australia estimates 357,000 Australians are blind or have low vision, and that this will increase to 564,000 by 2030. (Refractive error not included.)
- › 45% of Australians aged 16-85 years, experience a mental health condition in their lifetime.

## **SUPPORTING THE SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY**

The Disability Inclusion Act 2014 defines disability as including a long-term physical, psychiatric, intellectual or sensory disability that, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder the person's full and effective participation in the community on an equal basis with others.

We support this definition and its connection to the social model of disability which advocates that a person's disability is not the barrier to their participation, but rather it is the external physical and attitudinal barriers that prevent full inclusion and participation. If the physical and attitudinal barriers are removed, people with disability will have the capability to contribute and participate with equity and dignity as full members of our community.

In the context of attitudinal barriers, this encompasses the language and terms we use to describe disability, our conscious and unconscious bias towards disability and our presumptions towards people with disability. It is much easier to remove the physical barriers to inclusion than the attitudinal barriers. Regardless, across our organisation we will continue to be supportive and accepting of each other. Murray River Council intends to lead by example through endorsing the rights of people with disability.

## **POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT**

Our Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2022–2026 aligns with the principles in the following state and national legislation, agreements and standards.

### **States and Territories**

Our States and Territories have committed through several legislative and policy commitments to removing barriers to participation for people with disability.

People with disability face many barriers to civic, social and economic participation. The various State and Territory Disability Inclusion Acts provides a clear legislative framework to removing such barriers.

### **Commonwealth**

The Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1993 (DDA) recognises the rights of people with disability to equality before the law and makes discrimination based on disability unlawful. DDA sections 60 and 61 set out the provisions for the completion of Action Plans that fulfill the intent of the DDA and sets measurable and accountable goals.

Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards 2010, which came into effect on 1 May 2011, aim to provide people with disability with dignified and equitable access to buildings, and provide certainty to industry that they are complying with the DDA.

The National Disability Strategy (NDS) 2010-2020 was the commitment of all governments to a unified, national approach to building inclusion for people with disability. The NDS was about creating a more inclusive society that enabled Australians with disability to fulfil their potential as equal citizens. It was the main way that Australia implemented the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Australia's Disability Strategy (ADS) 2021 TO 2031 will continue the legacy of the NDS and build on its purpose of continuing to meet our commitments under the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The ADS was launched in December 2022.

## RESOURCES

The relevant laws, standards and guidelines considered in the development of our Disability Inclusion Action Plan include:

- › United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)
- › Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)
- › Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (NSW)
- › National Disability Strategy 2010-2020
- › Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031
- › Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) 2010

## KEY OUTCOME AREAS OF OUR DIAP – THE FOUR PILLARS OF INCLUSION

The four pillars of inclusion represent and identify a number of barriers that impact on a person with disability's right to choice and control. Only by removing these barriers can we then provide outcomes that are inclusive, dignified and equitable and in doing so, we create better inclusion outcomes that benefit everyone.

Through the consultation process with Council staff and community we identified several actions that will support the four pillars of inclusion.

The 4 pillars of inclusion are:

1. Positive community attitudes and behaviours
2. Liveable communities
3. Supporting access to meaningful employment
4. Accessible systems and processes

## CONSULTATION

Murray River Council DIAP 2022-2026 reflects the Disability Principles set out in the Disability Inclusion Act. The Plan was developed in consultation with our community, with an emphasis on engaging with people with disability. The actions will help guide our decisions and inform our processes to ensure the services and facilities Council provides are as accessible to and appropriate for all people, including those with a disability, as can reasonably be achieved.

In May 2022 we hosted a community consultation session and invited people with disability, and organisations that represent people with disability, across our communities. These consultations co-led

with Get Skilled Access provided us with a great opportunity to hear directly from people with disability, their family and carers on their day-to-day experiences of living in our community. Feedback from these sessions on how Council can improve its service delivery and remove barriers to participation now inform the actions within this DIAP. We look forward to continuing to consult people with disability as the plan progresses.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the staff, community members with disability, their families and carers and disability service organisations who provided feedback as part of the consultation. Your passion, commitment and openness to share your experiences will make Murray River Council an even better place to work, live and visit, providing greater dignity and inclusion for all.

### **Overview of the consultation process:**

- › Desktop review May 2022
- › Staff consultation May 2022
- › Community consultation, including disability service providers, people with disability and carers – May 2022
- › Community feedback received via online survey during May 2022

### **Snapshot of consultation feedback:**

Across both the staff and community consultations, key themes emerged throughout the discussions. Aligned to the four pillars of inclusion, feedback included:

### **Positive attitudes and behaviours:**

- › Attitudinal barriers were viewed by participants as one of the major issues that exist within the community, and believe Council could take a lead role in breaking down these barriers.
- › Participants expressed strong interest in the development of a Murray River Council Disability Advisory Committee (DAC). This would assist MRC to engage community members with disability who could share lived experience to improve disability inclusion and access across a number of projects and priorities within MRC.
- › The importance of inclusive language within Council communications and content was identified, as well as feeling represented within Council marketing material through authentic images.
- › The importance of disability education for Council staff was identified to ensure an inclusive experience for people with disability both employed with and receiving service from the Council.
- › Participants voiced that Council supporting further opportunities to increase the visibility of the disability community, and providing opportunity for community members to interact with people with disability, would help shift attitudes and reduce stigma.
- › A program that provides free business access assessments was suggested to help raise awareness and educate the wider community about improved access to businesses.

### **Liveable Communities:**

- › Participants voiced much needed improvements to infrastructure to some of the key tourism attractions for the region including the paddle boats and access to fishing along the Murray River.
- › Opportunity for Council to improve public toilet facilities by the addition of a changing rooms, and ensuring other council facilities consider better access when upgrading
- › People with disability identified that having access to information on the accessibility of Council facilities and spaces would help make informed decisions about where to go and enable dignified access.

- ▶ Promote MRC region as a place to live to attract more healthcare and allied health professionals to meet the growing needs of the community. Many mental health services are under resourced as the need for services continues to grow.
- ▶ Some great work on improving accessibility within MRC main buildings and the participants would like to see this work rolled out in other service buildings across MRC.
- ▶ Infrastructure such as accessible footpaths and town connection was raised as a barrier. Potential to improve current footpaths and create more footpath links to allow better access throughout the town.
- ▶ Participants identified access to public transport is a key issue for the region. The need to travel long distances to town centres, funding cuts and lack of understanding of NDIS transport support has resulted in a previous transport services being cut.
- ▶ Opportunity for the Council to be a leader in accessible open spaces and leisure and recreation facilities was identified, ensuring playgrounds, leisure centres, parklands and sporting facilities are built or upgraded with leading accessibility features.
- ▶ Visible celebration by Council of International Day of People with Disability, as well as supporting disability related events and initiatives through sponsorships or partnerships was seen as an effective way of improving visibility of the disability community and providing opportunity for interaction with people with disability to reduce stigma and improve awareness.
- ▶ Understand ways that Council could promote local artists, sporting clubs, and performers with disability.
- ▶ Improving the emergency management planning by understanding ways to support people with disability in an emergency response situation. Look at opportunities to make community information more accessible in an emergency management response.
- ▶ Council to look for opportunities to support and promote local disability enterprises, business that support people with disability and disability service providers.
- ▶ Ongoing challenges exist for accessible transport, especially for the more remote communities within Murray River Council.

### **Supporting access to meaningful employment:**

- ▶ It was identified that the Council has an opportunity and obligation to be leaders in disability employment and to provide an example to local businesses.
- ▶ Physical barriers exist within Council office spaces making it difficult for people with physical disability to navigate independently.
- ▶ Workplace adjustment process is not well communicated and often reactive. There is no formal process or education provided to staff on the provision of adjustments.
- ▶ Council staff identified the need for Disability Inclusion Training across the organisation to help understand how to better engage people with disability in the workforce and in the communities. Targeted training opportunities for HR staff to understand recruitment for people with disability.
- ▶ Opportunity exists for Council to enhance the support and promotion of local businesses who employ people with disability and the services of disability enterprises to encourage more businesses to look at their own disability employment practices.

### **Accessible systems and processes:**

- ▶ It was identified that the Council would benefit from having a workplace adjustment policy and process, which will benefit the inclusion experience for people with disability who are seeking employment with the Council.

- ▶ Council staff would like access to advice on building works and planning from people with disability or organisations from the sector as well as access to consultation on accessible design requirements and best practice.
- ▶ Procurement processes could be reviewed to seek opportunity to support disability employments or businesses that employ people with disability.
- ▶ Opportunity to improve the accessibility of existing policies and IT systems including the Council's internet and intranet, and future procured services was identified.
- ▶ Participants identified there would be benefit for improving the current website, the content and usability.

## ONGOING CONSULTATION, REVIEW AND MONITORING

Key internal and external stakeholder consultations have informed the actions identified within our DIAP. The consultation identified day-to-day attitudinal barriers, various physical barriers across our communities and those across the various systems and processes within the organisation. We also explored current trends and best practice outcomes in the areas of access and inclusion to benchmark our Plan.

We sincerely thank our colleagues for their participation in the consultation process and their ongoing support to improving accessibility and inclusion outcomes across council. The Council will continue to work with the relevant staff to ensure that the actions are delivered within the timeframes committed.

Ongoing feedback from our staff, clients and community will be sought throughout the life of the plan, and will help determine the success of the plan's current and future actions.

### Measurement of Progress

Our DIAPs success will be assessed against qualitative and quantitative measures, including:

- ▶ Actions successfully implemented over the life of the Plan – outputs and outcomes will be identified for each initiative to allow progress to be clearly measured.
- ▶ Progress measured against government, legislative, regulatory and compliance reporting requirements.
- ▶ Regularly engaging with the staff that have been consulted and contributed to the development of the plan to seek their feedback and inform the ongoing direction.

The Plan will be provided to the Disability Council NSW for endorsement and once endorsed, forwarded to the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Achievements will be noted annually in the Murray River Council Annual Report.

Availability of our Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2022 - 2026

The Plan will be available on Council's website, and a hard copy can be requested by contacting any of Council's service centres (in person, via phone, or email).

## WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED SO FAR

- ▶ Community Services engaged with agency networks with a focus to improve physical, cultural, and equitable access to vulnerable persons living in MRC LGA.
- ▶ Community services established the Vulnerable Persons Service Provider Network which aims to connect agencies and individuals that support vulnerable persons residing in MRC.
- ▶ Three accessible community transport buses purchased.
- ▶ Sub-Regional Community Transport Network established to maximise use of adjoining Council vehicles and common routes.



- › Establishment of new Council office in Moama that improves the use and access for people with disability.
- › Community Services Hub at Barham built and available for use.
- › Influenced Stronger Countries Community projects.
- › Supported access to meaningful employment.
- › Improved access to main Community Service Hubs in Barham and Moama.
- › Provided 1:1 support for the public to access Boarder Region Permits during COVID.

## DIAP ACTIONS

### POSITIVE ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS:

Removing barriers through encouraging inclusive attitudes and behaviours towards people with a disability.

Build community awareness of the rights and abilities of people with disability.

Our Actions
1. Establish Disability Advisory Committee (DAC) to assist council to engage with people with disability within the LGA. This will help to provide and assist council with lived experience advice on projects and future planning works.
2. Develop and incorporate disability-specific awareness content that will assist Council to build knowledge of different disability types and disability inclusion practices. And incorporate into the staff training program to upskills leaders and support staff with disability.
3. Create opportunities to promote Disability, Accessibility and Inclusion initiatives across Council communications channels.
4. Ensure new policies and procedures are accessible and inclusive for people with disability.
5. Establish partnerships with local businesses to deliver programs and other initiatives that support growing employment opportunities for people with disability.
6. Raise awareness at various community events and celebrations across the LGA to, educate and share stories related to disability.

### LIVEABLE COMMUNITIES:

Liveable communities are places where all people can participate in community life.

Increase participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of community life.

Our Actions
1. Support events and initiatives that increase community participation of people with disability.
2. Develop Accessible Events Guide that allows local event organisers can use to better understand how to improve accessibility and inclusion.
3. Include the provision of an accessible fishing platform in future council plans, to increase the opportunities for accessible tourism and allow people with disability living within Murray River Council access to community participation.
4. Provide easy to read access and inclusion information for council owned facilities, buildings and open spaces and to facilitate dignified access and experience for staff and community members with disability.

5. Support artists, performers and athletes with disability.
6. Investigate opportunities that increase participation for people with disability to access sport.
7. Identify and prioritise upgrades to footpaths and parking infrastructure to improve accessibility in established areas.
8. Engage with the DAC and community members when planning and building major infrastructure projects, including new developments or upgrades to existing community sporting and recreational facilities to enhance accessibility.

### **SUPPORTING ACCESS TO MEANINGFUL EMPLOYMENT:**

Supporting and increasing workplace diversity through employment, training, volunteering and work experience

Increase the number of people with disability in meaningful employment as an enabler to improve self-sustainability and quality of life.

<b>Our Actions</b>
1. Create meaningful pathways for people with disability to gain employment within Council
2. Work with local schools to develop meaningful pathways for employment for young people with disability.
3. Undertake a review of council recruitment processes to remove unintentional barriers for people with disability and increase opportunities for all roles to be inclusive.
4. Promote Council's inclusive practices and initiatives on public facing careers pages and external communication channels to encourage people with disability to apply for roles.
5. Conduct an annual whole of staff survey to understand the current level of understanding for inclusion for people with disability. What is understood about flexible work practices, workplace adjustments, level of participation for people with disability, and inclusion at events and other community initiatives.
6. Develop a workplace adjustment policy and process

### **ACCESSIBLE SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES:**

Communicating and accessing information, providing feedback, improving quality of service and staff training. To ensure people with disability are able to make informed choices about available services and to easily access these opportunities.

<b>Our Actions</b>
1. Design and implement access and inclusion design guidelines to for use in future council owned premises, facilities and open spaces.
2. Create a guide for accessible communications and marketing and provide training to key communication staff.
3. Review Council's online content to ensure they are Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) compliant to the latest standard.
4. Ensure Council's procurement standards and guidelines include accessibility and disability considerations.
5. Review and investigate an inclusive approach to accessing and distributing information e.g. GIPA request

**DOCUMENT CONTROL**

Version No.	Details	Dates	CM9 Reference	Resolution No.
1	2017-2022	27 Oct 2017 to 13 Dec 2022	VF/17/230355	N/A
2	2022-2026	13 Dec 2022 to	VF/17/230355	N/A

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