



Disability Inclusion Action Plan

2022 - 2026



Acknowledgment of Country

**Ngayan marrungku paran
wiyen Wanaruah, mirumalikan
para ani parraykupa, ngatan
ngayan marrung wiyen
Ngarrakay paranpa yurakaykal
ngatan pangaykal.**

**We acknowledge the Wanaruah
people, traditional keepers
of this land, and we pay our
respects to their Elders, past
and present.**

Translation by
Aunty Sharon Edgar-Jones

**Access, Equity and
Inclusion Statement**

The Upper Hunter Shire community and Upper Hunter Shire Council are committed to welcoming all people who choose to live, work or visit our region.

We welcome and celebrate diversity and believe it fosters growth. Community connections are integral to everything we do.

We commit to build a sense of place and belonging in our community. We will work collaboratively with the whole of the community to achieve the collective vision for the future.

We will acknowledge and address inequity, work to reduce and remove barriers and champion belonging in our community.

We understand inclusion and participation are key to building a strong community. Access and inclusion make communities liveable for everyone.

We are committed to preserving the dignity of all people and to ensure services, facilities and public spaces are openly inviting and fully accessible.

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Mayoral Message

I am pleased to present the Upper Hunter Shire Council's Disability Inclusion Action Plan for 2022-26. The plan demonstrates the Council's commitment to improving inclusion and access in our community, outlining actions planned over the next four years.

We believe everyone has the basic right to achieve their full potential. People of all abilities should have access to facilities and services that enable them to fully participate in their local community.

We know that by creating an accessible, equitable and inclusive community, we can create lasting change for people with disability.

It is important to ensure barriers to access and inclusion are addressed and facilities and services are well planned for. As we move into the future, the Shire is committed to meeting the objectives outlined in the DIAP. This plan will provide a basis on which we help to build and support people with disability.

During the last year, Council has consulted with community members through public meetings, small group meetings and one on one interviews, as well as conducted a community survey, consulted with some key stakeholders, and provided opportunities for Council staff to reflect on disability issues in our workplace.

I would like to extend Council's sincere appreciation to everyone involved in the development of this very important Plan.



Cr Maurice Collison
Mayor

Community Vision

A quality rural lifestyle in a vibrant, caring and sustainable community.

Community Strategic Plan

Upper Hunter Shire has identified five community priorities;



A Connected Community

Developing and deepening connections of people to other in their community.



Protected Environment

Ensuring the ongoing protection of our environment and natural resources.



Thriving Economy

Strengthening our vibrant industries and economy while seizing emerging opportunities.



Quality Infrastructure

Maintaining and developing our infrastructure network to meet the ongoing needs of our population.



Responsible Governance

Providing efficient and responsible governance in order to effectively serve the community.

Legislation and Policy

The Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (DIA 2014) requires all Councils to have a Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP). The DIAP outlines the actions that Council will take to improve the life of people with disability and make this community more accessible.

The plan will address four key areas with strategies and actions:

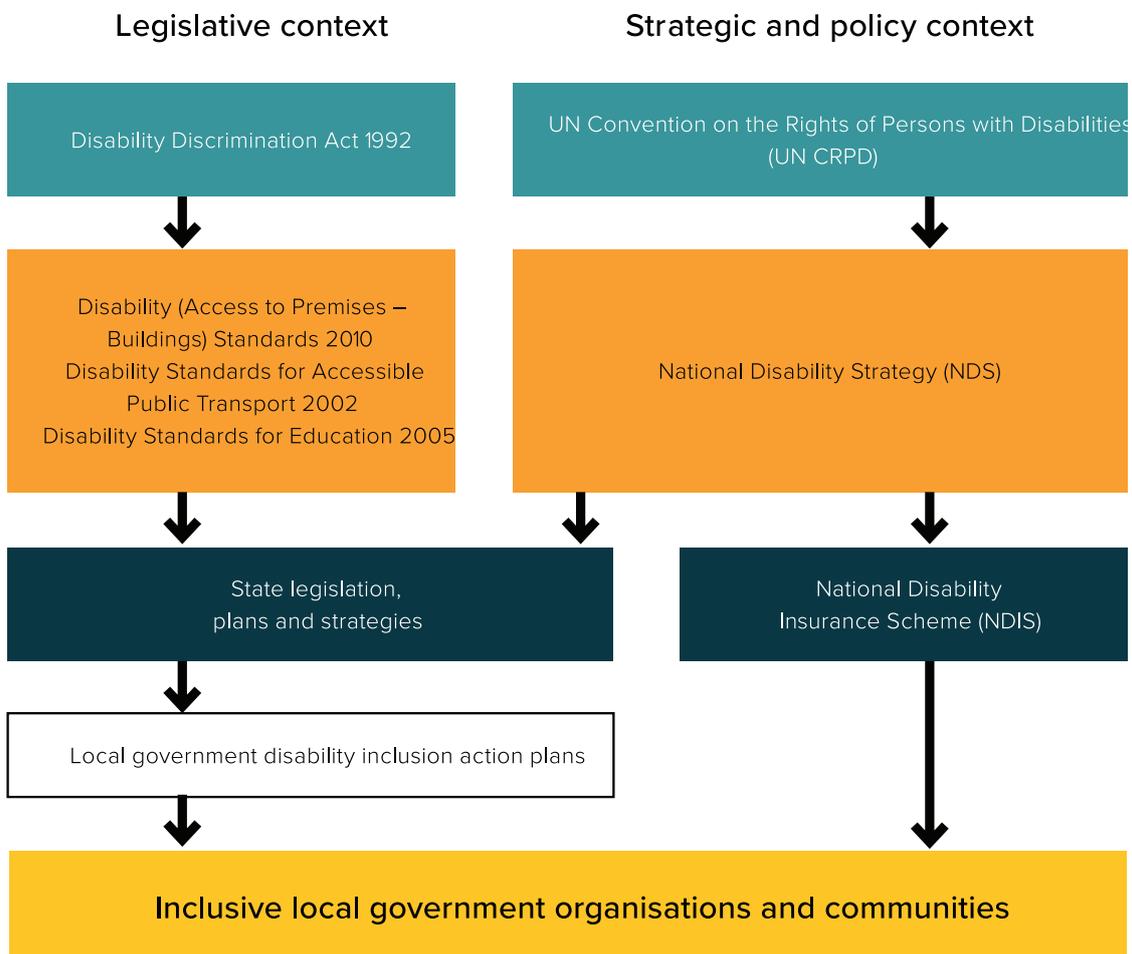
- Developing positive community attitudes and behaviours
- Creating Liveable communities
- Supporting access to meaningful employment
- Improving access to services through better systems and processes

Other laws and policies that support inclusion for people with disability include;

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2007

- Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA)
- National Disability Strategy 2021-2031
- Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards 2010
- The National Disability Insurance Scheme 2013

The figure below indicates the relationship between each of these policies and how they work together to improve inclusion for people with a disability.



The Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (DIA) 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”

Inclusion and Access

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.

Inclusion means you feel part of the community and are treated with dignity and respect as a valued and equal member of society. To be inclusive is to take steps so that a person can meaningfully contribute in their workplace and community, with a sense of belonging.

Access means you can go where you want to in the community including into building, outdoor places, on transport and to events. It can mean something different depending on the type of disability a person has and the type of activities they want to do;

- For a person using a wheelchair, access is important in regards to things like steps, slopes, narrow or hard to open car doors, car parking and toilets that are large enough to accommodate them.
- For a person with vision impairment, access is important in things like lighting, signs that are large enough to read, hazard warnings, safe paths and information being available in a variety of formats as well as pathways that are free of hazards like low tree branches.
- A person who has an intellectual disability may think of access as the use of language that is easy to understand and the use of symbols on signs to reduce reliance on written language.
- A person with a mental health disorder may think of access in terms of people’s attitudes and behaviour towards them. Feeling included is very important.
- A person who is hearing impaired may consider access in terms of communication, particularly having information in visual forms, the use of sign interpreters and telephone access via telephone typewriters (TTYs).

About the Upper Hunter Shire

Upper Hunter Shire is located in the Hunter Region of NSW, approximately 250km north of Sydney. The Shire is predominantly rural, encompassing over 8 000 square kilometers of agriculture land which is used for grazing, horse studs and mixed farming. The main town is Scone, with smaller townships at Aberdeen, Merriwa and Murrurundi and smaller villages spread throughout the Shire.

14 350

Estimated Population

5.1%

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

3,000

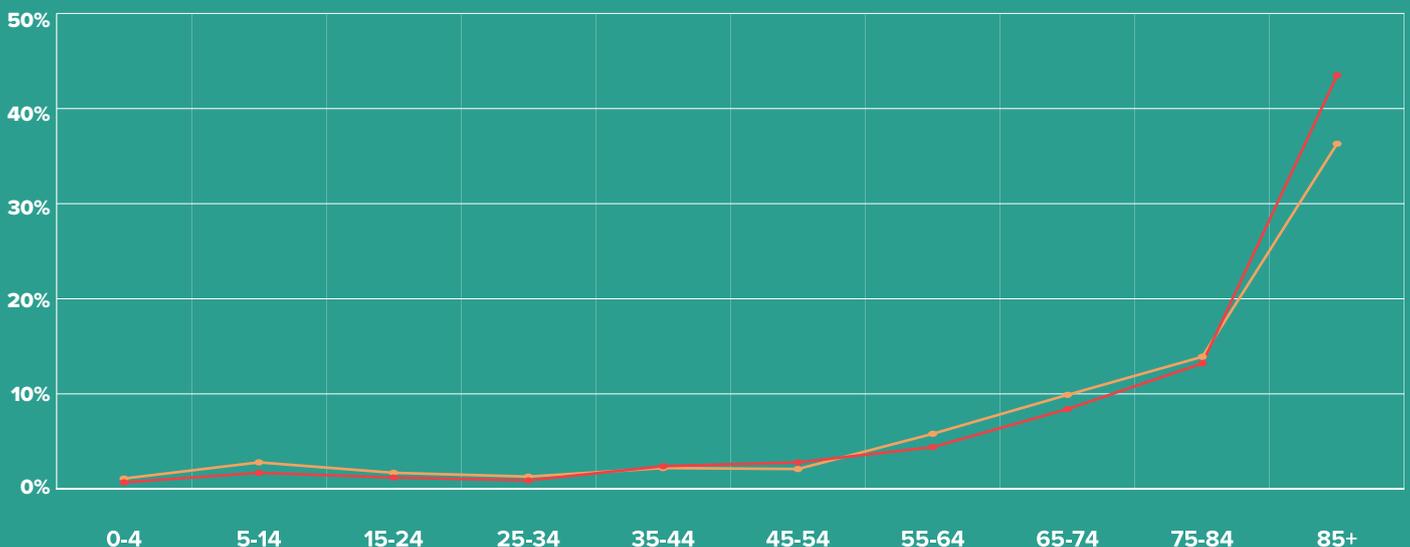
Estimated people living with a disability

700

Estimated people needing assistance in core activities in daily living.

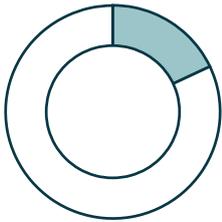
8.5%

Estimated local residents caring for others in an unpaid capacity



Age distribution of a persons need for help or assistance in the core activity area of self-care, mobility and communication because of a long term health condition or old age.

Disability in Australia



18% of all Australians were people with disability



1 in 3 people with disability have a profound or severe disability which impacts their mobility, ability to communicate or self-care



Almost **90%** of disabilities are 'invisible' disabilities such as chronic pain disorders, diabetes or depression



People with disability are more likely to be underemployed with nearly **one-third** of people with disability working part-time wanting to work more hours

People with disability have a lower labour force participation rate



53% People with disability are employed or seeking employment



compared to **83%** of people without disability

65+



51% of Australians aged 65 and over live with disability



35% of women and **28%** of men aged 15 years and over with disability have avoided situations because of their disability

11, 12, 13

11 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015a)

12 (Leedon, n.d.)

13 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015b)

Success Stories

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

- Council infrastructure projects include consideration and provision for accessibility and inclusion issues eg. purpose build unit ILU for people with disability in Murrurundi.
- Council has been involved in a range of partnership projects to raise awareness of inclusiveness and access for people with disability including a footpath audit in Murrurundi, expos and forums.
- Council staff participated in training sessions on disability awareness, mental health first aid and other cultural and disability sensitivity workshops.
- An Access and Inclusion working party was established to focus on community concerns, achievements and support awareness raising partnerships eg consultation on the new library design and Scone CBD revitalisation.
- A partnership with Scone Neighbourhood Resource Centre to install an all ability inclusive playground at the Bill Rose Sports Complex.
- Increasing the number of accessible toilets in key areas across the Shire was a priority action including Murrurundi Library and the Old Court Theatre in Scone.
- Council hosted a range of inclusive well-being activities across the Shire eg. Ukulele Learning Circle, craft workshops, Computer classes, seniors festival and tai chi.



Services in our Shire

Scone Neighbourhood Resource Centre

Provides resources, information, advocacy and referral for health, government, local and regional services. ☎ 6545 2562

Challenge Community Services

Provides Challenge Day Choices which are designed to offer independence, develop life skills, build friendships and promote community access.

☎ 1800 679 129

Showstoppers Performing Arts Company

Provides opportunities for artists/performers to work with staff and mentors in a range of activities.

☎ 6545 1516

Integrated Living

Provides health services, residential services, recreational/social activities, in-home support and respite services.

☎ 1300 782 896

Disability Advocacy NSW

The service is funded to provide independent advocacy.

☎ 0460 315 717

NDIS Uniting

Provides support to apply for the NDIS and use your plan.

☎ (02) 8833 0564

Transcare

Services include community transport, Meals on Wheels, social support, In-home assistance, Home Maintenance and social events for aged people.

☎ 6545 3113

Hammond Care (Scone)

Accommodation options and a range of other services to support aged people. ☎ 6545 1255

Murravale (Murrurundi)

25-bed aged care facility also provides respite.

☎ 6546 6668

Merriwa Multipurpose Service

Hospital which also provides residential aged care and respite for 65+ or anyone with a disability.

☎ 6532 5000

Merriwa Non Emergency Medical Transport Service(Merriwa District Health Association Inc)

Low or no cost transport to medical appointments including Sydney and Newcastle. ☎ 6548 2653

Merriwa Family Support Network

A support network for Merriwa individuals and families.

☎ 6521 7000

Hunter New England Community Health Services

provide a range of health services across the Shire. ☎ 6542 2050

Provide a range of services such as mental health services, family support services, Out of School hours care, Toybox Mobile Outreach and Aboriginal support services.

☎ 6542 3555

Where there's a Will Foundation

Not for profit charity that provides shire wide mental health initiatives by raising community awareness and skills in the education sector.

☎ 0438 130 872

One Door Mental Health

Delivering information, support, advocacy and education to families and carers in partnership with NSW Family and Carer Mental Health Program. ☎ 0466 453 078

Hunter Prelude

Work with families and young children from birth to 12 years of age with a disability or developmental delay to promote development, wellbeing and greater inclusion in their community. Outreach from Singleton.

☎ 6571 4384

Early Links

Early childhood intervention support to families and their children birth – 8 years who are experiencing significant difficulties in two or more developmental areas. ☎ 4934-3773

Benevolent Society Brighter Futures Program

Provides support to families who have a child under 9 years or are expecting a child and are vulnerable due to a range of personal issues, e.g. mental health, drug/alcohol use, lack of parenting skills, domestic violence. Outreach from Muswellbrook.

☎ 1800 236 762

Hunter Primary Care

Provides NDIS support coordination and NDIS Allied Health services for individuals and carers.

☎ 02 4925 2259

Murrurundi Meals on Wheels

Helping people to remain independent in their own homes by providing a hot meal service on weekdays. ☎ 65466200

Quality Care

Provides home care and a wide range of NDIS services in the local community. ☎ 1300 534 431

Upper Hunter Shire Council

☎ 6540 1100

Directly provides a number of services that support inclusion:

- Early Childhood Care and Education services
- Accessible Library services
- Accommodation Services :
 - Gummun Hostel Merriwa ☎ 6521 7010
 - Murrurundi Independent Living Units ☎ 6540 1350
 - Merriwa Independent Living Units ☎ 6521 7000
 - Low Income and Emergency House ☎ 65425051
- Youth Centres in 3 main towns
- Scone Seniors Centre, and local Halls & Community Centres

Developing the plan

We asked the community to help us develop this plan. We invited people with disability, their carers, family members, friends, people working in the disability sector and interested community members to get involved through surveys, consultations and focus groups. This feedback has informed the actions in this plan.

It is important for all areas of Council to involve and consider people with disability when making decisions, planning and providing programs, services and facilities.

In developing the DIAP, the Community services team actively engaged with Upper Hunter Shire residents including;

6



Focus Groups

4



one-on-one discussions with workers in the disability sector

38



Online survey submissions

Top 3 things that are working well for people with disability and their carers - what you told us;

- People are generally accepting of people with disability.
- Public spaces are generally accessible.
- People with disability can join in community activities if they want to.

Top 3 things that people with disability find most challenging at Council – you told us;

- Improved infrastructure including footpaths, accessible toilets and accessible parking.
- Council events and activities need to be more inclusive and accessible.
- It is hard to obtain information about services.

What makes our community more inclusive and accessible – you told us;

- Listening to people with disability talk about their needs.
- Information that is up to date and uses inclusive images.
- Accessible entrances to buildings.
- Accessible public toilets and adult change tables.
- Accessible pathways, kerb ramps and parking.

Focus Area 1

Promoting positive attitudes and behaviours



The attitudes and behaviours of the general community towards people with disability have been described as the single greatest barrier to full access and inclusion. Attitudes and behaviour permeate all aspects of life. Developing positive attitudes involves increasing awareness and changing negative perceptions over time.

Key Findings – What you told us

- Council should lead by example and be more proactive to ensure all community activities are accessible.
- Everyone needs a fair go and all activities need to be accessible. Council could help improve community attitude by facilitating the integration of people with disability more widely in our community. There are links to be made with businesses and local school.
- Ensure that Council staff are inclusive in all their services and activities.
- Implement methods to improve inclusion and accessibility and mention this in promotional materials, newsletters and other reporting. This demonstrates and models behaviours and acts as an educational tool.
- Mental health should be considered. Not everything is visible.
- People with disability are sometimes treated like they don't have anything to contribute.

Promoting positive attitudes and behaviours

Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Action	CSP 2033 Ref
STRATEGY - Promote understanding and positive attitudes among Council staff				
Provide disability awareness training to staff and Councillors as part of induction programs and ongoing professional development to encourage inclusive practice to improve service delivery and complaints handling for people with disability.	Human Resources Community Services	Ongoing	All new Council staff and Councillors receive disability awareness training at induction. Knowledge and skills enhanced and staff feel more confident communicating with people with disability.	G1 CS1.1 G1 CS1.4 G1 CS1.5
STRATEGY - Promote access and inclusion in the community				
Planning of Council activities and events to consider aspects of inclusion and access.	Community Services Business Services Tourism and Events	Short term 1 - 2 years	Checklist / tool developed to support planning of accessible activities and events	G1 CS1.2 G1 CS1.7
Include images of people with disability in Council publications and promotion of mainstream activities and events.	Communications section	Ongoing	Inclusive images included in Council documents and promotional material.	G5 CS5.2 G5 CS5.4
Update Council website directory and relevant resources with information about disability services, accessible facilities, social and recreational opportunities etc	Community Services Communications section	Ongoing	Information is current.	G1 CS1.2 G5 CS5.4
Seek partnerships with a broad range of community groups, services and clubs to undertake projects to educate the community on the complex and often hidden elements of disability.	Community Services	Ongoing	Partnerships developed.	G1 CS1.2 G1 CS1.5
STRATEGY - Raise community awareness of the contribution people with disability make to our community				
Support International Day of People with Disability to recognise the contribution of people with disability.	Community Services Communications section	Annually	Material that brings focus on the achievements of people with disability.	G1 CS1.8
Encourage representation of people with disability at meetings, consultations and planning of activities and events.	Community Services Senior Management Team	Ongoing	People with disability engaged in consultation processes and planning activities in Council.	G1 CS1.8 G5 CS5.5
Promote positive stories of inclusion and access through Council media.	Communications Team	Ongoing	Positive stories are promoted and in media and on Council website.	G5 CS5.2 G5 CS5.4

Focus Area 2

Creating liveable communities



Creating liveable communities will focus attention and resources on the elements of community life that most people desire. Creating liveable communities for people with disability is more than modifying the physical environment, it covers areas such as accessible housing, access to transport, community recreation, social engagement and universal design. This means we design places, information, communication and policies with everyone in mind.

Key Findings – What you told us

- Designing wider footpaths will increase access and benefit everyone. Footpaths are needed for safety and encourage people to walk locally.
- Accessible entrances to buildings, space for walkers in public toilets and adult changing facilities are important in making places more accessible in our community.
- Businesses and Council facilities need to be more accessible. This includes improvements to parking, footpaths and signage.
- We need rails beside sloping footpaths and handrails in public toilets.
- There is not enough accessible parking, poor footpaths and poor signage applicable for people with disability.
- Promote accessible business and safe access to main street.

Creating liveable communities

Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Action	CSP 2033 Ref
STRATEGY – Improve access in the community and to Council facilities				
Ensure Council information and processes are inclusive and accessible for members of the public to encourage reporting of physical access barriers around footpaths and Council facilities.	Infrastructure Services Community Services	Medium term 2 – 3 years	Reviewed forms and processes for reporting and actioning CRMs	
Investigate an audit tool to support staff to identify access issues at Council key facilities and prioritise improvements and upgrades.	Community Services Environmental Services	Long term 3 – 4 years	Identified and implemented a suitable audit tool for assessing priority Council facilities	
Develop Council staff knowledge and skills in the principles of universal design to assist in planning and delivering projects and activities that are inclusive of all community members.	Community Services Environmental Services	Long term 3 – 4 years	Knowledge and skills enhanced and staff feel more confident in universal design.	
Ensure Council events and activities are accessible with consideration of suitable venues, transport options, toilets and parking.	Community Services Business services Tourism and Events	Medium term 2 – 3 years	Events and activities are accessible with relevant information included in promotional material.	
STRATEGY – Council communications promote and showcase accessible features in the community				
Improve provision of information, maps and signage to promote accessible toilets, parking and accessible features in the community.	Community Services Communication section	Long term 3 – 4 years	Maps and signage include information on location of accessible facilities in the community.	G1 CS1.4 G4 CS 4.2
Maintain information on the National Public Toilet Map.	Community Services Infrastructure Services	Annually	Information reviewed and updates provided.	
STRATEGY – Work collaboratively with local business to improve access				
Liaise with local business to raise awareness about the economic benefits of inclusion and accessible design.	Business Services	Long term 3 – 4 years	Opportunities taken to discuss and educate local business on inclusion and access.	G3 CS 3.1 G3 CS3.4

Focus Area 3



Supporting access to meaningful employment

The Government Sector Employment Act 2013 (GSE Act) requires the integration of workforce diversity, including the employment of people with disability, into workforce planning. This legislation supports workforce diversity obligations and processes across the government sector.

Employment and economic security, for most people, are closely related. Employment contributes to feelings of self-worth, social interaction and mental health and increases opportunities to support individual choice and control. Employment rates for people with disability are significantly lower than those without disability across all sectors.

People with disability experience multiple barriers at all stages of the employment process, ranging from inaccessible interview venues, lack of reasonable adjustments to the work environment, poor career planning opportunities, rigid role descriptions and online testing that may place applicants at a disadvantage. These factors reduce their opportunities to gain and retain employment.

While there are many aspects to consider in executing a diversity and inclusion employment agenda, most benefit will come from taking an 'inclusion by design' approach. That is, employers and managers will maximize their ability to employ and retain a diverse workforce if they build inclusion into work design, workforce strategy and system-level decision-making (as opposed to simply making reasonable adjustments to accommodate persons with disability on a case by case basis).

Key Findings – What you told us

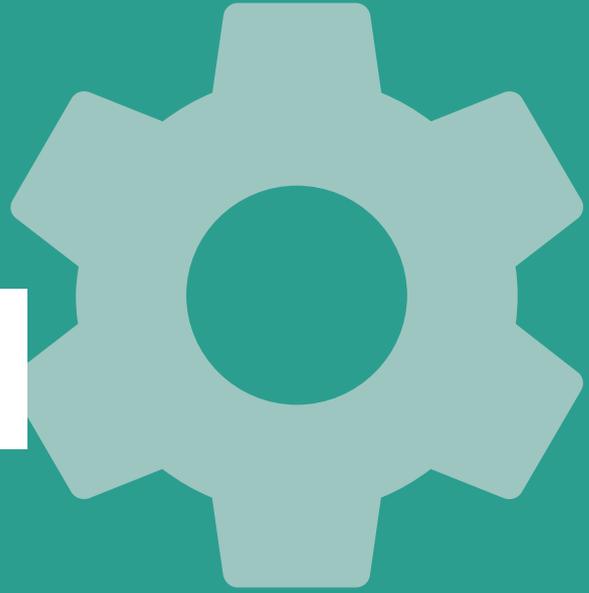
- Employ people with disability and provide opportunities for work experience. Use images in media advertising campaigns.
- More workplaces around town advertising and employing people with disability.
- Establish a supported workplace to give people with disability opportunities to have purpose, contribute to their community, earn a wage and maintain their dignity.
- Education for workplaces to understand the advantages of employing people with disability.
- Willingness to see what people with disability can offer to their business.
- Make connections with local schools to assist students in forming relationships with potential post-school employers.

Promoting positive attitudes and behaviours

Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Action	CSP 2033 Ref
STRATEGY – Council employment processes and workplace are inclusive and accessible				
Promote Council as an inclusive employer to encourage people with disability to apply for jobs including a statement of Council as an Equal Opportunity employer and availability of reasonable adjustment to workplace.	Human Resource Section	Short term 1 – 2 years	People who identify as having disability have considered and / or applied for employment with Council.	G5 CS5.2 G5 CS5.9
Review recruitment processes to support meaningful employment of people with disability through its policy of diversity and inclusion workforce planning.	Human Resource Section	Medium term 2 – 3 years	Recruitment and on-boarding processes reviewed.	G5 CS5.9
STRATEGY Opportunities for people with disability to gain work experience in Council				
Investigate opportunities to develop traineeships, volunteer and work experience for people with disability within Council.	Human Resource Section Community Services	Long term 3 – 4 years	Initiatives identified and considered for implementation.	G5 CS5.9
STRATEGY – Access to employment for people with disability				
Advocate for training and employment opportunities in local business for people with disability.	Business Services	Medium term 2 – 3 years	Opportunities for advocacy identified and implemented.	G3 CS3.2 G5 CS5.12
Strengthen relationships with local disability employment services to better understand employment pathways for people with disability.	Community Services	Medium term 2 – 3 years	Interagency networks and forums attended and relationships developed.	G5 CS5.8

Focus Area 4

Systems and processes



A common issue for people with disability is the difficulty in navigating systems and processes to access the services and supports they need in the community. Some of these difficulties stem from the quality of service and training of front line personnel, the systems and processes required to access services and the lack of accessible options for communicating, accessing information or providing input or feedback. There is often confusion about what services are provided across the three levels of government and there is frequent repetition of information to be provided to public authorities and services.

Key Findings – What you told us

- It is hard to access to services, including medical and specialist services.
- Council forms are not user friendly.
- Need trained and empathetic Council staff and more on-line facilities.
- Listen, take time to understand and explain. Better communication and patience to deal with enquiries.
- There is inadequate advance notice of events and evening events are usually not accessible for people with disability.

Promoting positive attitudes and behaviours

Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Action	CSP 2033 Ref
STRATEGY – Council communications systems are accessible for people with disability				
Review Council's public documents, information and feedback mechanisms to ensure they are available in accessible formats such as large print, electronic, radio etc.	Community Services Communication Section	Medium term 2 – 3 years	Documents and systems reviewed.	G1 CS1.2 G5 CS5.4
Review website design to ensure it is compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0.	Communication Section	Medium term 2 – 3 years	Website reviewed and compliance issues adjusted.	G5 CS5.4
Explore opportunities for additional Council resources to assist with communications for people with disability e.g. hearing augmentation, touch screens and translation services.	Community Services Communication Section	Long term 3 – 4 years	Opportunities identified and considered for budgets and implementation.	G1 CS1.2 IG1 CS1.5 G5 CS5.4
STRATEGY – Community engagement and internal processes are accessible				
Engage people with disability in Council consultation processes and include their ideas and comments in plans for Council services, facilities and activities.	Community Services All sections	Ongoing	People with disability engaged in consultation processes and planning activities in Council.	G1 CS1.8 G5 CS5.5
STRATEGY – Council is a source of information for people with disability				
Participate in local networks and forums to obtain information on innovative and successful inclusive practices for local government and community services and groups.	Community Services	Ongoing	Networks and forums participated in.	G1 CS1.2 G1 CS1.4 G1 CS1.5
Support local services and groups to improve information distribution for people with disability.	Community Services	Ongoing	Number of services and groups supported with distribution of resources.	G1 CS1.2 G1 CS1.4

Monitoring, Review and Reporting

To enable reporting on the success of implementation of the Action Plan, a monitoring and reporting strategy outlining the specific and measurable actions will be developed and implemented to track progress. The Director of Environment and Community Services will monitor the overall plan and its implementation. It will be aligned with Council's Integrated Planning and Reporting framework, including the Community Strategic Plan, The Delivery Program and Operational Plans.

Annual reporting will be undertaken to document outcomes and achievements. This will be made available on the Council's website. A copy will be provided to the Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services.

Implementation will be evaluated towards the completion of the Plan to inform the next plan. The Disability Inclusion Action Plan will be reviewed and update every four years in consultation with and collaboration with the community.

Acknowledgement

Council would like to thank the community members and organisations who took part in documenting the needs of Upper Hunter Shire area and shared their personal stories. This information was integral to improving inclusion and access for people with disability in our community.

We welcome any feedback on the plan and suggestions related to inclusion and access. Please direct any enquiries to;

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