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Councillor Message

Community access is unique because it covers all aspects of Council’s operations, from physical assets to the delivery of information to the community and all the other services in between.

Council endeavours to ensure that all of our residents have equal access to public facilities, services and information about those services, employment opportunities, attendance and participation in community events and all the other activities that many of us tend to take for granted.

This strategy aims to respond to the particular needs of all those with specific and long-term disabilities, but it is not restricted to this group. It is also concerned about access for every member of the community. There are many people whose mobility or sensory capacities are affected through injury, family circumstances or advancing age, but who would not identify themselves as having a disability.

While adopting the goal that all members of our community should have equal access to public facilities, events, activities etc, we should also acknowledge that not every obstacle is able to be removed overnight. This is particularly true in the case of buildings and infrastructure where significant financial implications are involved.

Council is pleased to present the Community Access Strategy, which builds on the strengths of previous plans. It aims to ensure people in Ararat Rural City have universal access to the built and outdoor environment, and supports choices for inclusion in the life of the community. It also supports the local community in including people with a disability in a dignified manner, and allows Council to actively build a culture where the community experience is one of inclusion.

The plan aligns to the 2014-2017 Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, which has goals and strategies to maximize health and wellbeing.
Introduction

Ararat Rural City is located 200 km west of Melbourne on the Western Highway. Population growth from 2000-2010 was modest and smaller than average growth is forecast for 2022. The population is older than average with around 19% aged 65 or older. Ararat Rural City Council rates higher than the Victorian average for several disability indicators, including the need for assistance with core activities, percentage of persons with sever or profound disabilities and HACC clients aged 0-68.

Under the Victorian Local Government Act 1989, councils have a responsibility to improve the overall quality of life of people in the local community and to ensure that services and facilities provided by the Council are accessible and equitable. Addressing issues of discrimination and improving access and inclusion for all community members falls within these responsibilities.

This is a time of significant change with the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) along with the Victorian State Disability Plan 2013-2016. These two important initiatives will have wide ranging impacts on the way services are delivered both at a state and national level. The Ararat Rural City Council Community Access Strategy 2014- 2017 will complement this, helping us to prepare for change and respond with innovation and flexibility.

Council’s Aged and Disability Services department is committed to partnering with the NDIA to ensure that the service system is seamless and that the launch and ongoing NDIA program will deliver great benefits to people with disabilities and enable their increased choice and control over the services they utilise.

Councils Community Vision 2030 document states that the Ararat Rural City community in 2030 will be safe, supportive and full of opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to learn, grow and contribute.

The corporate plan is based on five pillars which are acknowledged in this strategy. These pillars are Our Community, Our Lifestyle, Our Economy, Our Environment and Our Organisation.

This strategy links intrinsically with councils Corporate Plan 2013-2017, the Municipal Public Health & Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017 and the operational Diversity Plan within Council’s Home and Community Care Services.

In meeting its commitment through this access and inclusion strategy council will;
• Undertake a whole of council approach to access
• Incorporate access and inclusion objectives in key strategic documents
• Facilitate civic participation and inclusive consultation
• Systematically improve the accessibility of council buildings and infrastructure
• Have inclusive communication and information approaches
• Maintain accessible and inclusive services, programs and events
• Strategically use statutory and regulatory bodies
• Improve employment opportunities
• Influence community attitudes and perceptions
• Exercise leadership in advocating to other organisations
• Foster partnership and collaboration
• Maintain effective accountability practices
• Review and evaluate our progress

Priority areas for this strategy include: Activities & Events; Advocacy & Lobbying; Building, Infrastructure and Planning; Governance; Health, Safety & Wellbeing; Information & Communication; Services; Workforce Development.
What does Access & Inclusion Mean?

Access and inclusion mean different things to different people. Processes and outcomes for access and inclusion take into account the diverse needs of individuals and the nature, strengths, priorities and resources of a community. The common elements of access and inclusion are the removal or reduction of barriers to participation in the activities and functions of a community, by ensuring that information, services and facilities are accessible to people with various abilities.

Access is about more than just ramps. It means taking part in community life in a dignified and equitable way and can involve:

Physical Access – ramps, gradients, curbs, doors, circulation space, toilets, parking, handrails, street crossings, footpaths, path of travel, reception areas including desk heights etc.

Visual Access – Tactile tiles, luminance factors, colours, lighting, fonts and text sizes, alternate formats (i.e. large print, audio tapes), signage etc.

Audio Access – hearing loops, methods of communicating with people who have hearing impairments, print copies of presentations and events running sheets.

Cultural Access – ensuring that differing needs can be met with plain English text and speech, universal icon signage, welcoming environments, provision of information in languages other than English, avoiding confusion.

Good physical access not only helps people with a disability, but many other people including:

- Parents with prams
- Elderly people with walking frames
- People with sports or other injuries
- People with temporary disabilities or medical conditions
- Delivery people with trolleys or the local postman
- People with language and cultural barriers

In addition to the physical aspects of access, change can occur by thinking differently about how people can be included in all aspects of community life.
The Ararat Rural City Council Community Access Strategy is situated within a broader legislative and policy context as detailed below.

Federal Government Legislation and Standards
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- Building Code of Australia
- Australian Standards for Access and Mobility 1428 Suite of Standards
- Draft Disability Access to Premises Standards (Buildings)
- The Disability Act 2006
- The National Disability Strategy
- The Social Inclusion Agenda

State Government Legislation and Standards
- The Victorian Charter of Human Rights Act 2006
- The Victorian Equal Opportunities Act 1995
- The Victorian State Disability Plan 2013-2016

Four priority areas have been identified by the Victorian Disability Act 2006. Themes from the research undertaken in the development of this plan are grouped within the four priority areas as follows:

- Improved access to goods, services and facilities
  - Facilities
  - Events
  - Services
- Better access to employment
  - Employment
  - Volunteering
- Promoting an inclusive and participatory community
  - Community Inclusion
  - Accessible communication
- Improved attitudes and practices
  - Disability awareness

Victorian Disability Act (2006)
The Victorian Disability Act (2006) requires all public sector bodies to develop and implement an Access and Inclusion Plan.

The plan sets out strategies and actions to improve access for all and involves changes to regular practice as well as longer-term strategy to address physical access barriers.

The framework of the Victorian State Disability Plan 2013-2016 aims to:
- Uphold the rights of people with a disability
- Remove and prevent structural, systemic and attitudinal barriers to participation
- Build a welcoming community
- Give the individual choice and control over their supports and services
- Enable people with a disability, their families and carers to get the right mix of services and supports
Local Governments Role

Local Government plays a vital role in the lives of people because of their broad mandate. Unlike most State Government authorities, Local Governments are multi-functional, with extensive responsibilities and activities across property, community and human service areas and, in addition, have the capacity to make policy choices at the local level.

All of these Local Government functions and capabilities directly or indirectly have an impact on the quality of life of the people who live, work and socialise in their local communities. Good access for people with disabilities means good access for everyone.

Council initiatives can include, ensuring physical access to council facilities and amenities, and developing specific services to assist in overcoming some of the barriers to community participation for people with access difficulties.

A key responsibility of Local Government is that of ensuring that developers meet the mandatory access requirements of the Building Code of Australia. In addition Local Governments can play a crucial role in improving access for people with disabilities in their communities by liaising with developers to increase their awareness of access needs.

Access and inclusion strategies provide the framework through which Local Governments can move into the next phase of creating accessible and inclusive communities.

Ararat Rural City Council has achieved a number of priority areas from the previous plan. Many of these actions are ongoing and require consideration annually.

These include:
- Inspections of Buildings, public toilets and reserves carried out annually
- Review of the Community Bus Policy
- Upgrades to Sport & Recreation facilities
- Review of disabled parking spaces
- Update of Councils Employer Equal Opportunity Policy
- Increased maintenance of clear pathways

But there is still more that can be done.

Through this Plan, Council will work in partnership towards ensuring that all people:
- Feel supported and have access to the things they need to reach their goals and aspirations
- Are valued members of the community who can easily move around and enjoy the company of their friends and family
- Actively contribute to their community, have a voice that is heard and positively influences the future of the City
- Have equal opportunities
Policy Intent
Council’s primary responsibility under the Victorian Disability Act 2006 is to ensure that there is no discrimination based on disability in any of its own functions, services and programs or by any of the organisations to which it provides facilities or funding. To support this, Council aims to work towards improving access to its facilities and services paying particular attention to the needs of residents with a disability.

The intent of this policy is to ensure Council services and facilities are accessible to people with disabilities, and to comply with the requirements of the Victorian Disability Act 2006.

Policy Principles
This policy ensures Council’s services and facilities are universally accessible. In achieving these outcomes, Council commits to the following principles:

• Developing a culture of inclusion
• Ensuring an accessible environment
• Acting in accordance with the requirements of the Victorian Disability Act 2006, ensuring that its functions, programs and services will not discriminate against any person on the basis of disability
• Leadership with regard to the development of an accessible and inclusive community
• Continuously improving access and participation in all areas of community life for people with disabilities, their families and their carer’s
• Develop and Implement a Disability Action and Inclusion Plan

Statistical Review
The Overall population of the Ararat Rural City Council is 11,183.

The ABS has defined disability as “self-reported need for assistance with core activities due to disability”.

ABS (2011) data identified that in the Ararat Rural City, people who have self-reported disability make up 6.6% of the population, which is greater than the state average of 5.7%. (percentage of self reported need for assistance with core activities by age, ARCC & VIC)

98% of residents feel safe or very safe walking alone in the local area during the day and 80.7% of the population feel safe on the street alone after dark (VicHealth, 2012). This is above state averages.

The top 3 Industries in Ararat Rural City are:
Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing; Health Care & Social Assistance; Manufacturing.

The top 3 areas of employment are:
Managers; Community & personal service workers; labourers

82.1% of residents believe their area has good facilities and services, which is slightly less than the state average.

31.6% of residents have experienced transport limitations, compared to 24.6 % State Average.
Community Access Strategies

These strategies are based on the following key themes which align with councils plan:

**Our Community**
Health, Safety & Wellbeing, Services

**Our Lifestyle**
Activities & Events

**Our Environment**
Building, Infrastructure & Planning

**Our Organisation**
Workforce Development, Advocacy & Lobbying, Information & Communication, Governance

**Activities and Events**
Council hosts a number of community events and activities annually. This priority area refers to the rights of people to actively participate in all aspects of Council planning, and hosting of community events.

**Strategies**
1. Provide, and support the community to provide, a range of accessible arts and cultural activities and events.
2. Provide, and support the community to provide, a range of accessible sport and recreational activities and events.
3. Enhance existing mechanisms to increase participation of people with a disability in both Council and community based activities and events.

**Relevance of key priority area to broader planning framework**
- Council Plan – Our Community
- Health and Wellbeing Plan – Increasing Physical Activity, Improving mental health & increasing social connectedness
- Victoria Disability Plan – Upholding rights and promoting participation
Community Access Strategies continued

**Advocacy and lobbying**
Advocacy and lobbying refers to Council’s support of people with a disability through influencing people who make decisions on disability issues at higher levels of government. It also refers to Council’s role in empowering people with a disability to have a stronger voice.

**Strategies**
1. Advocate for the rights of people with a disability both internally within Council and the broader community.
2. Lobby other levels of Government to influence key policy decision making processes.
3. Share our learnt knowledge and experience of disability access and planning with other community and Government agencies with a view to working collaboratively.
4. Advocate for the specific needs of people with a disability from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds and people who are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.

**Building, Infrastructure and Planning**
This key priority area refers to planning for, and improving access in the built environment in Ararat Rural City. The built environment includes Council parks, signage, roads, footpaths, buildings and facilities such as libraries and leisure centres. The objective of this key priority area is to protect the rights of people to move around freely in the built environment.

**Strategies**
1. Influence and develop Council policies that enhance access to the built environment.
2. Continue to improve access to existing Council infrastructure including buildings, facilities, open space and streetscapes.
3. Ensure all new Council signage adheres to Accessible Signage Guidelines.
4. Support and encourage the community and the private sector to enhance access in the built environment.

**Relevance of key priority area to broader planning framework**
- Council Plan – Our Environment
- Health and Wellbeing Plan – Increasing Physical Activity, Improving mental health & increasing social connectedness
- Victoria Disability Plan – Accessing information, transport, buildings and places
### Community Access Strategies continued

**Governance**

Governance refers to the structures and processes that enable the community to engage with Council, and play a part in decision making. This key priority area is concerned with protecting the rights of people with a disability to play an active role in public affairs, and in particular, decisions that will impact their wellbeing.

**Strategies**

1. Build upon existing mechanisms which serve to increase participation of people in Council decision making processes.
2. Empower and support people to engage with Council.
3. Further integrate a human rights based model of access planning into Council’s corporate planning processes.

**Relevance of key priority area to broader planning framework**

- Council Plan – Our Organisation
- Health and Wellbeing Plan – Improving mental health & increasing social connectedness
- Victoria Disability Plan – Upholding rights and promoting participation

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**Health, Safety and Wellbeing**

This key priority area refers to the wellbeing, safety and perceptions of safety amongst people in Ararat Rural City. This priority is concerned with identifying risks and barriers to community safety and wellbeing, and protecting the rights of people to enjoy living in a safe environment that is conducive to good health.

**Strategies**

1. Undertake activities and projects that aim to address the community safety issues of people with a disability.
2. Ensure that the health and wellbeing needs of people are considered in Council policy and planning processes, in particular older residents and residents from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities.

**Relevance of key priority area to broader planning framework**

- Council Plan – Our Community
- Health and Wellbeing Plan – Improving Healthy Eating and Oral Health, Increasing Physical Activity, Improving mental health & increasing social connectedness
- Victoria Disability Plan – A strong foundation in life
Community Access
Strategies continued

Information and Communication
This theme is concerned with how Council can communicate more effectively with its community, and how people in the community can effectively engage Council. The objective of this key priority area is to protect the rights of people to access information and communicate ideas, in particular older residents and residents from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Strategies
1. Increase the number of Council publications available in accessible formats and alternative languages.
2. Enhance mechanisms for people to be able to communicate with Council.
3. Continue to provide timely, useful and easy to read access related information to the community.
4. Support our local community to provide alternative and accessible methods of communication to engage Ararat Rural City’s diverse community.

Relevance of key priority area to broader planning framework
- Council Plan – Our Organisation
- Health and Wellbeing Plan – Improving mental health & increasing social connectedness
- Victoria Disability Plan – Accessing information, transport, building and places.

Services
This key priority area is concerned with enhancing the accessibility of services that are delivered by Council to the community each year. This priority area seeks to protect the rights of people with a disability to equitable and dignified access to all Council services and programs including homecare, meals on wheels, library programs and waste removal services.

Strategies
1. Improve partnerships and collaborative planning within Council in the delivery of accessible services.
2. Enhance support to external organisations in the provision of accessible services.
3. Enhance and promote mechanisms for people with a disability or Deaf or Hard of Hearing to access Council services.
4. Continue to promote the availability of Council and Community Services to disability service providers, residents with a disability and carers.

Relevance of key priority area to broader planning framework
- Council Plan – Our Organisation
- Health and Wellbeing Plan – Increasing Physical Activity, Improving mental health & increasing social connectedness
- Victoria Disability Plan – A contemporary approach through disability system reform
Community Access Strategies continued

Workforce development
This key priority area is concerned with developing employment pathways for people with a disability at Council and in the broader community. This priority area seeks to enhance accessibility throughout workplaces in Ararat Rural City to protect the rights of people with a disability to participate equally in the labour force.

Strategies
1. Enhance existing partnerships and explore new opportunities to improve employment pathways for people with a disability both within Council and the broader community.
2. Increase staff participation in training and awareness raising activities which support the rights of people with a disability in the workplace.
3. Explore new technologies and enhance current technologies which aim to support the rights of people with a disability in the workplace.
4. Increase supports and information on available government funding to facilitate employment opportunities for people with a disability both within Council and the broader community.

Relevance of key priority area to broader planning framework
• Council Plan – Our Organisation
• Health and Wellbeing Plan – Increasing Physical Activity, Improving mental health & increasing social connectedness
• Victoria Disability Plan – A contemporary approach through disability system reform
Monitoring & Evaluation

Monitoring of the Community Access Strategy will be ongoing. Monitoring will be carried out by The Ararat Rural City Council by:

- Monitoring the outcome areas within the access and inclusion action plan on an ongoing basis to ensure ongoing improvement in universal access and inclusion;
- Encouraging ongoing policy development and consultation that fosters universal access and inclusion;
- Continuing to engage in processes that foster continuous service improvement and staff awareness;
- Encouraging community feedback; e.g. complaints, consultation comments and general feedback;
- Conducting a survey regarding staff attitudes to disability, analyse results and develop strategies for improvement.

Evaluation

Evaluation will be gathered on a 12 monthly basis, and will inform Council in the annual Access & Inclusion Action Plan report.

Review

A full review of this Plan will be carried out in 2017, encapsulating recommendations from the 12 month evaluations. The conclusions from the evaluations will guide the Action Areas in the annual Access & Inclusion Plan and the new Community Access Plan in 2017.
Related Documents
Ararat Rural City Council Access & Inclusion Action Plan 2014/15
Ararat Rural City Council Disability Access & Inclusion Policy C.1.14
Ararat Rural City Council Home & Community Care Diversity Plan 2012-2015

Council commits to adhering to the principles of universal design in all new projects

Principles of Universal Design

Equitable Use
- Provide the same means of use for all users: identical whenever possible; equivalent when not.
- Avoid segregating or stigmatizing any users.
- Provision for privacy, security, and safety should be equally available to all users.
- Make the design appealing to all users.

Flexibility in Use
- Provide choice in methods of use.
- Accommodate right- or left-handed access and use.
- Facilitate the user’s accuracy and precision.
- Provide adaptability to the user’s pace.

Simple and Intuitive Use
- Eliminate unnecessary complexity.
- Be consistent with user expectations and intuition.
- Accommodate a wide range of literacy and language skills.
- Arrange information consistent with its importance.
- Provide effective prompting and feedback during and after task completion.

Perceptible Information
- Use different modes for presentation of essential information.
- Provide adequate contrast between essential information and its surroundings.
- Maximize "legibility" of essential information.
- Differentiate elements in ways that can be described (i.e., make it easy to give instructions or directions).
- Provide compatibility with a variety of techniques or devices used by people with sensory limitations.

Tolerance for Error
- Arrange elements to minimise hazards and errors: hazardous elements eliminated, isolated, or shielded.
- Provide warnings of hazards and errors.
- Provide fail safe features.
- Discourage unconscious action in tasks that require vigilance.

Low Physical Effort
- Allow user to maintain a neutral body position.
- Use reasonable operating forces.
- Minimize repetitive actions.
- Minimize sustained physical effort.

Size and Space for Approach and Use
- Provide a clear line of sight to important elements for any seated or standing user.
- Make reach to all components comfortable for any seated or standing user.
- Accommodate variations in hand and grip size.
- Provide adequate space for the use of assistive devices or personal assistance.

For more information on the NDIS, please refer to http://www.ndis.gov.au

Please contact Ararat Rural City Council if you require this information in another format 5355 0200