

2017

DISABILITY INCLUSION ACTION PLAN MAKING COWRA FOR ALL

This plan seeks to foster and advocate for a community and environment that supports people with disability of all ages so that they can be included in social and economic life to the extent of their ability; to be able to contribute as valued members of their community; and to achieve good life outcomes.



Council Development Environmental Services
Contact Officer Director – Environmental Services

Revision History

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0.2

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1.0

Message from the Mayor

This is Cowra Council's first-ever Disability Inclusion Action Plan; a fact of which we're very proud. A society is judged by how it treats all its citizens and the ambition of this plan is to ensure that every resident and ratepayer in the Cowra Shire has the opportunity to enjoy, contribute, and feel part of our great community.

Cowra Shire has long celebrated its diversity through events like our World Peace Day and Festival of International Understanding and our hosting of Australia's World Peace Bell, Japanese Garden, and the Japanese and Australian War Cemetery. It is therefore critical that we spend time on valuing, promoting and supporting the diversity within our own community — including those with disability.

One of the respondents to the survey (which informed this Plan) in describing what the term 'Inclusion' means said: *"ensuring that every member of the community can contribute, participate and feel a part of something bigger than their disability."*

In that spirit, the 'actions' included in the Plan will help to support people with disability to be fully-included and represented in our community life. Business should also benefit from this plan through the increased economic participation by people with disability and the largely-untapped market for accessible tourism.

The Plan will foster and advocate for a community and environment that supports people with disability of all ages so that they can be included in social and economic life to the extent of their ability; to be able to

contribute as valued members of their community; and to achieve good life outcomes.

And that can only make us as a community, a stronger, more caring place to live.

Cowra Mayor, Councillor Bill West



2.0

Introduction

Cowra and its villages offer the best of country living: small town hospitality; the tranquil Lachlan River and valleys, beautiful parks, gardens and tree lined streets, history and tradition, boutique food and wine experiences, and a range of supporting services and amenities. There is a strong sense of town pride and belongingness. It is a town that celebrates diversity.

The Cowra Council's vision for the Shire is for a leading, innovative and creative community, proud of its place in history, offering opportunity with the best of country living. The challenge in this Disability Inclusion Action Plan ('The Plan') is to extend the things that make Cowra great to all in the community and to build its reputation as an accessible home and destination of choice.

conditions. Some disabilities, such as Crohne's Disease may not be visible.

Making things inclusive for people with disability has advantages for most people across diverse abilities and ages, including; good seating and a place to rest along the way is important to many older people; ramps may be better than stairs if you have a young family; subtitles on visual media are great in noisy places; and a place that fosters welcoming and a rich social interdependent community, strength and economic advantage.

Cowra Council has been working over the years to improve accessibility. But there is still more to do. We need to find ways to change sentiments such as:

"Inclusion for me means ensuring that every member of the community can contribute, participate and feel a part of something bigger than their disability."

Survey respondent

"Inclusion for me is having a true sense of acceptance and belonging in the greater community with the same opportunities as all other members."

Survey respondent

"Cowra is in the middle (of other towns) but we are the most inaccessible. People with disability aren't being seen in town because we go out of town where things are more accessible."

Focus Group participant

This Plan seeks to make things fairer, easier and more spontaneous for all people with disability regardless of how significant the disability. This includes people with autism; neurological, intellectual, sensory and physical disability; and mental health and chronic health

The Plan will foster and advocate for a community and built environment that supports people with disability of all ages to be included in social and economic life to the extent of their ability, to contribute as valued

members of their community, and to achieve good life outcomes.

Cowra Council is committed to promoting a community where people can feel welcome and included, with dignified and equal access to places, events, information and opportunities. A Shire that builds confidence, resilience, optimises independence and strengthens people's engagement in community life.



3.0

Legislation & Policy

The most important reason for improving access for people with disability is because it is the right thing to do. Most of us want to live in a fair and inclusive community.

Australia has joined other countries to promote equal and active participation of people with disability and protect their human rights by ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD). The National Disability Strategy describes some of the things that Australia will do to progress a society that is inclusive, enabling and seeks equality.

The Commonwealth Government's National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) funds reasonable and necessary supports for people with significant and permanent disability. It emphasises the rights of people with a disability to exercise choice and control over their lives, access mainstream services and participate and contribute to social and economic life. The NDIS will fully replace the support administered by the NSW Government by July 2018.

The aged care system is also undergoing reform in Australia, with consumer directed care similar to the NDIS.

Legislation provides the minimum about what is needed to be fair and protect the rights of people. This includes:

The NSW Disability Inclusion Act (2014) reinforces that people with disability have the same human rights as other people, including a right to be respected and to participate in and contribute to the social and

economic life of their communities. It also requires plans from the State Government and its departments, and local governments, to improve the inclusion of people with disability. The NSW Disability Inclusion Plan provides four focus areas for government and community action:

- Developing positive community attitudes and behaviours.
- Creating liveable communities.
- Supporting access to meaningful employment.
- Improving access to mainstream services.

The Disability Discrimination Act (1992) (DDA) views less favourable treatment or provision of opportunities because of someone's disability as discrimination. The Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards, Disability Standards for Education and the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport help define requirements for the DDA. Disability discrimination accounts for the highest volume of complaints across the board to the Australian Human Rights Commission.

The NSW Local Government Act 1993 also upholds the principles of social justice equity, access, participation and rights. It requires that each council have a Community Strategic Plan, supported by a resourcing strategy, delivery program and operational plan. Their Disability Inclusion Plans can be stand-alone, or delivered through the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework.

4.0

Facts at a Glance

24.3 MIL

The total population of Australia (24,391,773).

1 IN 5

The number of people who have a disability in Australia.

1 IN 3

The number of households which include someone with a disability.

7.2%

The proportion of Australians with a disability that were children aged between 0-14 years (in 2009).

1 IN 6

The number of people in Australia that have hearing loss. By 2050, it is estimated to be 1 in 4.

357,000

The number of people that are blind or have low vision. By 2030, it is estimated to be 564,000.

3 MIL

The number of people in Australia that live with depression or anxiety.

45%

The proportion of the population that will experience a mental health condition during their lifetime.

668,100

The number of people (in 2012) that had an intellectual disability.

2.7 MIL

The number of people (12% of population) that provide informal care to an older person or someone with a disability or a long-term health condition.

1 IN 3

The number of primary care givers to people with a disability, that are living with a disability themselves.

3%

The number of Australians who identify as Indigenous. There are twice as many Indigenous people who need help with core activities as non-Indigenous Australians.

3.5 MIL

The number of older people (+65 years) in the Australian population (15.1%).

2 IN 5

The number of people with a disability that are over 65 years of age.

50.7%

The proportion of people over 65 years of age that have a disability.

12.5%

The proportion of people under 65 years of age that have a disability.

> 65 +

The number and percentage of people aged 65 years and over is increasing.

1 MIL

The number of people in Australia that receive aged care services.

3.5 MIL

The number of people in Australia that are expected to receive aged care services by 2050.

2.1 MIL

The number of people in Australia that are of working age and have a disability. Only 1 million of this number work, and only 34% are managers or professionals.

53%

The workforce participation rate of people with a disability aged between 15 & 64 years, compared with 83% of people in the same age bracket without a disability.

9.4%

The unemployment rate of people with a disability aged between 15 & 64 years, compared with 4.9% for people in the same age bracket without a disability.

56.2%

The length of time longer than it takes for graduates with a disability to find full-time employment.

45%

The proportion of people with a disability that are living in poverty.

\$5.4M

The combined annual income of people with disability.

1 IN 3

The number of people that have ceased a transaction because they were not treated respectfully or fairly.

12,476

The total population of the Cowra Shire in 2011.

6.6%

The proportion of Cowra's population that reported needing help in their day to day lives due to a disability.

9.7%

The proportion of Cowra's population (1,214 people) that provided unpaid assistance to a person with a disability or long term illness or old age.

2,000

The number of people in Cowra's population that are aged 70 years or older (16%).

6.5%

The proportion of Cowra's population that identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

5.0

Governance & Reporting

The Cowra Council's Community Strategic Plan is the overall planning document for Cowra. The Cowra Council Disability Inclusion Action Plan (the 'Plan') is a planning document that provides increased detail about how some of the intents of the Strategic Plan will be progressed. It will inform the Cowra Council's Delivery Programs and Operational Plans.

The Plan will be available and accessible on the Cowra Council website. It will be provided to the Disability Council NSW and lodged with the Human Rights Commission.

The Plan will be overseen by senior management at Cowra Council in consultation with the Cowra Council Access Advisory Committee. A progress report will be provided to the Cowra Council's General Manager and Council at least each six months.

A report on implementation of the Plan will be included in the Cowra Council Annual Report and a progress Report will be tabled for Parliament each year.

Cowra Council will review this Plan with the Access Advisory Committee for currency over time and at least each four years.



6.0

Development of this Plan

The development of this plan was strongly driven by input from people with disability. It also provided an opportunity for people to sit together and work through key issues, priorities and how they may be addressed.

The development of this Plan took place in the first half of 2017, with adoption by Council on the 26 June 2017. It was informed through the following consultation:

- Focus group with the Cowra Special Needs Services' Disability Advisory Committee.
- Focus group with Cowra Special Needs Services' Aboriginal staff.
- Focus group with Cowra Council's Access Advisory Committee and elected members and staff; and seven service providers across disability, aged care and health. The Mayor and General Manager also participated and showed significant leadership in the process.
- Individual interviews with staff from two disability employment agencies, four businesses, a parent and carer of young people with mental health concerns, a parent of a young child with disability and a person with vision impairment.



- A survey was conducted. 37 people responded to the standard version, and 11 to an easier and shorted version.
- Of the respondents to the standard survey: 17% had a permanent disability; 22% had a mental health condition; 3% experienced disability related to their ageing; 17% had a chronic health condition that affects how they could get around and participate; 14% were family members of a child with disability; 25% had a family member who was a young person or adult with disability; and 11% were paid carers.
- Of the respondents to the short survey: 18% had a disability and/or experienced mental health or other health condition; 27% were family members of someone with disability; and 36% worked for a disability service.
- A walk around was conducted of Cowra township to identify some of the physical barriers and opportunities.
- A Validation Workshop with Council and staff, the Access Advisory Committee and service providers to refine the draft Plan.

Shared discussions in the consultation provided new insights and understanding and provided opportunity to network for improved responses. Key stakeholders, particularly people with disability, will be involved in implementing and monitoring the actions in this Plan.

Actions in this Plan are subject to available resources and budget allocations.



7.0

The Plan

What we will do

Sections 7.1 through to 7.4 of this Plan describe focus areas and associated key actions that Cowra Council will commit to over the period 2017-2021.

Focus Area 1

Developing Positive Community Attitudes & 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. This can make it difficult for people to feel a sense of belonging to the community.

Often people aren't aware that the ways they interact are affecting other people's lives. Sometimes people don't know what to do to make things easier for others, nor appreciate what people with disability can do. Our society has often over protected and underestimated, and considered that 'special' and segregated activities and living were sufficient. 80% of the standard survey respondents felt that they had experienced discrimination in the last year.

The Plan seeks to shift public perception of people with a disability, raise awareness of what they contribute and help make Cowra Shire for all.

Action 1.1

Continue to support and improve representation by people with a disability on the Cowra Council Access Advisory Committee.

The Access Advisory Committee provides advice to the Cowra Council on barriers experienced by people with disability. Current members of this Committee are mostly service providers. This Committee is valued by the Council.

This action will continue this Committee, but will review its Terms of Reference, extend membership to

include more people with disability and strengthen input from the community on inclusion and access issues.

Action 1.2

Continue to support and improve representation by people with a disability with ongoing support for the Access Incentive fund.

The consultation for this Plan included significant feedback that doors, car parks, shop layouts, steps and sidewalk billboards and seating create significant barriers to people accessing services. There was feedback that increased awareness of the contribution and needs of people with disability as customers was needed.

This action will continue the Council's Access Incentive Fund to provide financial incentives for business owners to provide improved access. This is a rolling grant and applications can be accepted any time.

In 2016/17 grants included funding for the Coles Plaza door to Macquarie St and the new Oxley Wine Bar premises on Kendal St.

In addition, the Council will provide awareness training to help businesses understand the importance of providing good access and making sure there are no physical or social barriers that would stop people accessing services, goods or information. This will develop the disability confidence and action that will contribute to their business goals and optimise service

engagement and employment for people with disability and older people.

Action 1.3

Increase the visibility of people with disability in Cowra Council publications, communications, websites and social media

Despite high representation in the community, people with disability are often absent from publications and advertising. When they are included, it is often to highlight an inspirational story and get an emotional response. This influences what is acceptable about how someone looks, who might be the 'customer' and what role models it is acceptable to admire, associate with, and value.

This action will ensure that Cowra Council publications, advertising and online avenues are representative of their community and include people with disability.

WHAT WE HEARD

"(We need) more flat parking for people with a disability, store(s) need wider doors and ramps for wheel chair access, hand rails as well for people who are unsteady."

Survey respondent

"Some shops in town are not accessible at all for a power wheel chair or the shops do not have enough room in the aisles as they have displays in them. Some pubs, cafes and restaurants are not accessible or are too squashy for a power wheel chair."

Survey respondent

"I saw a blind bloke the other day who ran into a billboard on the street. Going into the arcade near Coles there are lots of billboards in the way."

Interviewee with local resident

"A lot of people with disabilities spend their money outside of Cowra because other towns are more accommodating and understanding."

Survey respondent

"Our business, the Rouge Carriage Café has ramps at the front and back, accessible toilets and parking. The area is shaded and has a single gate entry, so is pretty safe. We often have customers who use wheelchairs and motorized scooters. I have spoken to a few mothers that have children with disability that are interested in getting together weekly at our café. This would be great for my business."

Business owner

Focus Area 2

Creating Liveable Communities

Liveable communities provide meaning to people's lives. People usually like to live in places that have a general sense of connectedness and acceptance of others. They like to have good transport, job opportunities, access to education, arts, the outdoors and recreation activities. They need to be able to access services and the necessities of daily living. They are drawn to places where homes are affordable and suit their needs. Just over 50% of survey respondents felt they socialised and participated as much as they wanted in the community. Removing barriers that people experience makes a huge difference for individuals, the economy and the broader community.

Universal design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.

The actions in this Plan will consider how to make things more universally accessible to as many people as possible – not just people with disability.

Cowra Council will subscribe to the Centre for Universal Design which provides resources, education and training, policy and practice, research and a community of practice.

Action 2.1

Continue to improve physical access to all Cowra Council buildings and facilities.

While any major renovations or buildings are bound by the Premises Standards that describe access

requirements, Cowra Council also takes a proactive approach to improving access to its buildings and venues. This includes the 2017 installation of a stage lift in the Civic Centre so that performers and employees with disability can access the stage. Improvements such as this will be ongoing.

This action will also explore if a withdrawal room can be identified in the Civic Centre for people with autism who may be experiencing sensory overload.

Action 2.2

Audit accessible toilet facilities to ensure they meet community needs and expectations and are easily located.

Hygienic public toilets are one of the vital requirements of a healthy population. Yet many people with disability are not able to access existing toilets – even those labelled as 'accessible' because of their design, location, signage or way they are being used. Visitors to the region may not be able to access locked accessible toilets.

Many people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, as well as other disabilities that severely limit mobility, cannot use standard accessible toilets.

Some people avoid going out or restrict where they go because they cannot be assured of an appropriate toilet facility. Only 18% of survey respondents found it easy to access public toilets in the Cowra Shire. Improving this situation will support social inclusion and participation.

This action will audit existing toilets and their features and plan improvements, including the centrally located Squire Park and the tourist information centre. The audit will include an assessment of signage and directional information.

Action 2.3

Improve seating in public spaces.

People being able to move about their neighbourhood is a marker of a healthy, vibrant community. But people may need a rest along the way. This includes some people with disability, older people and those experiencing chronic health conditions, such as arthritis, back problems or heart disease. Only 28% of survey respondents found public seating in the Shire easy to use.

This action will improve public seating so that it is safe, well designed and located for sun and shade. This action has been considered in the Council's CBD Footpath Reconstruction Project where additional sheltered seating is planned for Kendal Street.

Action 2.4

Improve inclusion and access to recreational activities.

Sport, recreation and leisure activities provide opportunity for people to develop friendships and improve physical and emotional health. This is particularly important for people with disability who may also use the pool and other activities as therapy. The Cowra Shire offers an abundance of activities including fishing, swimming, bowling, cinema, croquet, golf, picnic areas and bike riding. These activities are also important to tourism.

This action will improve and promote access and information for recreational options and will consider:

- Improvements and extensions to cycling paths and signage (See the Cowra Council Pedestrian and Cycling Plan)
- A ramp into the public pool to be researched when the pool is audited in April 2017.
- Research how to increase accessible and continuous paths of travel from car parks to recreation activities.

- Investigate resurfacing the Cowra Basketball Courts for safer use by the community and the grant funding opportunities to create an all weather facility (roof).

This action will identify how to make these activities more inclusive so that people with disability feel welcomed and confident about participating.

Action 2.5

Improve playgrounds so that they can be safely accessed and used by all children.

As at March 2017, the Cowra Early Childhood Intervention was providing a service to 55 children with disability or developmental delay and their families.

Public playgrounds are important for all children to have fun. They also offer opportunities for learning, problem solving, motor skills and socialising. Playgrounds that consider all abilities look like ordinary playgrounds, but are designed so that everyone can join in the activities and play.

Following an audit on existing public playgrounds, consideration will be given to actions that will promote an all-abilities approach to play in any playground redevelopment or upgrade.

Action 2.6

A project to increase the use of the bus service by people with disability will be facilitated by Council in partnership with Cowra Bus Service, Community Transport and disability service providers.

Transport disadvantage is experienced by specific groups in the population, including those with disability and in rural areas. 75% of people in Australia with profound disability don't use public transport in their local area.

While some people need a more tailored approach to travel, others either avoid public transport or experience challenges in doing so. Barriers experienced by people with disability include lack of accessible information and signage; not knowing if there will be someone to help; knowing when to get on and off; getting on and off; being too far from the kerb; reliability of the service; and confidence. Some people are also inhibited by distance to transport stops, rough or non-existent paths and lack of shelter and seating.

The Cowra Bus Service is identified as accessible on the bus and the online timetable; but the company has not had one notification that accessibility is required on a journey over the past four years.

Cowra Council will facilitate a project with others in the community to identify key barriers and develop a strategy to increase transport options and the numbers of people travelling by public transport.

Action 2.7

Develop a safety strategy for users of mobility scooters.

Mobility scooters provide freedom and mobility to some people who would otherwise have trouble getting around or travelling a distance.

From July 2006 to June 2008 there were about 700 hospitalisations in Australia because of a motorised mobility scooter fall injury, with an overall estimated increase over the past 10 years of 255%. A significant proportion of these people have persisting health problems as a result. There were 62 identified fatalities related to mobility scooters from July 2000 to August 2010, with a further 14 likely cases.

Training and education of users contributes strongly to their safety in using these aids. This action, facilitated by the Access Advisory Committee, will identify strategies that will improve the safety of people using mobility aids, and provide practical information on maintenance.

Action 2.8

Identify and review important routes or continuous paths of travel used by people with disability and plan improvements for accessibility.

This action is about how people get from one place to another, so that the things that make this difficult or unsafe and the energy required to navigate are minimised. This may include signage, footpaths, kerb ramps, steps, ramps, doors and things that may present a hazard for people with vision impairment, such as low hanging foliage. Just over 40% of the standard survey respondents, and 27% of the short survey respondents indicated that parking was easy; and 50% indicated that street crossings and kerb ramps were easy.

While the hills and valleys and country lanes contribute to the Cowra Shire charm, they create challenges for some people with disability. They take effort to climb and descend, and the rough roads – often without footpaths or easy kerb ramps – can make things difficult.

This action will identify priority locations and implement planned improvements in line with the Council's adopted Pedestrian Access and Mobility Plan.

Action 2.9

Encourage an increase in the level of accessible housing stock in Cowra Shire.

Most people with disability access the mainstream housing market by either renting or buying. People who are ageing are also often seeking accommodation that has accessible features such as wide doors, big bathrooms and easy paths and ramps. Increasingly, people have expectations of living in their home for as long as they can. For disability, there is a move away from congregate living where everyone you live with also has a disability.

There is a significant lack of accessible housing stock. In Australia, there is an estimated unmet need in affordable housing for between 83,000 to 122,000 NDIS participants in 2019. It is estimated that in NSW there will be a supply gap for about 2,000 people who require funded specialist disability accommodation. Some people with disability are interested in moving to Cowra Shire because it is more affordable. Accessible housing is also needed if people are to move around the community and visit each other.

During the review of the Cowra Development Control Plan consideration will be given to multi premise developments being able to meet the Silver level standards in the Livable Housing Design Guidelines, and encourage making these developments more versatile for current and future generations.

Action 2.10

Promote the Companion Card.

The NSW Government Companion Card program enables people with permanent disability, who need significant assistance, to attend a venue or activity

without paying for the person who is there to help them.

At the time of preparing this Plan the following were Companion Card members: Sakura Matsuri Cherry Blossom Festival (Japanese Gardens), libraries, PCYC and the Morongla Show Society. 58% of survey respondents did not know about Companion Cards.

This action will promote the Companion Card to eligible people with disability and to other venues and events. The Cowra Council will ensure that its venues and activities participate in this scheme.

Action 2.11

Promote Cowra as an accessible tourist destination.

One in five people have a disability and 8 billion dollars per year is spent on Australian tourism by travellers with disability. In addition, older people, parents with prams and overseas travellers can all benefit from improved information, more accessible buildings, a flexible approach to providing customer service and experiences.

This action will provide support to Cowra Tourism to promote features in the Cowra Shire that are important to visitors with disability, and embrace accessible tourism as a product. All aspects of the visitor journey will be considered, including promotion, information and customer service.



WHAT WE HEARD

"We bought this Newsagency business about six years ago. Last year I decided to redesign and that included removing the big step at the entrance and putting in a ramp. I've found that this has been great for business. People with disability, prams and older people now find it a lot easier to come into my shop."

Owner Kendal Street Newsagency

"I have MS and use a wheelchair. When the newsagency put in the ramp, it was the first time that I have been able to go into a newsagency for sixteen years".

Person with disability

"Having a playground area with actual equipment (the dog park does not count) that is fenced and gated for families with a child or children who need a secure area to play. Wider, maintained paths for wheelchair use. Playground equipment that can be used by said wheelchair users (a swing could be added for inclusion)."

Survey recipient.

"Its not just my son who has Autism that would benefit from a fence around the playground. It would also be much safer for my younger son who doesn't have a disability."

Interviewed parent.

"I have a vision impairment, and those motor scooters are very silent. I've had some near misses".

Interviewee with vision impairment

Focus Area 3

Creating job opportunities for people with a disability

The 2016 Willing to Work National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination against Older Australians and Australians with Disability found that too many people are shut out of work because of underlying assumptions, stereotypes or myths associated with their disability. These beliefs lead to discriminatory behaviours during recruitment, in the workplace and in decisions about training, promotion and retirement, voluntary and involuntary. The cost and impact of this is high, both for individuals and for the economy.

Action 3.1

Subscribe to the Australian Network on Disability.

The Australian Network on Disability is a national, membership based, for-purpose organisation that makes it easier for organisations to welcome people with disability in all aspects of business.

This action will consider Cowra Council membership to the Australian Network on Disability.

Action 3.2

Create pathways for people with disability to undertake work experience and apply for jobs at the Cowra Council.

The Cowra Council employs over 170 people, but there are very few who have identified as having a disability.

Cowra Council is committed to providing equal opportunity and wants to be known as an inclusive employer of choice, attracting and retaining employees

from a diverse population, including people with disability. It will lead by example as an employer that focuses on equal access and opportunity for everyone.

Survey respondents generally found most aspects of job seeking and employment difficult.

This action will identify career pathways, recruitment processes, staff awareness, flexible working options and support for people with disability to engage in the Council's workforce. This will also consider young people in their final year of school and those supported by employment agencies.



Focus Area 4

Improving access to services through better systems and processes

A common issue for people with disability is the difficulty in getting information and navigating systems and processes to access the services and supports they need in the community. Business and service environments are dynamic and require vigilance and adjustment to make sure they are meeting the needs of all their customers or clients. Businesses are constantly adjusting to take advantage of opportunities afforded by technology. Things move fast and it is hard to remain relevant and competitive.

Action 4.1

Implement a workplace wellbeing program for staff.

Studies show that Australian people in rural areas are happier than those living in the city and the prevalence of people experiencing mental illness is similar (about 20%). Despite this, the incidence of suicide in rural areas is nearly twice as high. Many people don't seek professional help, and available mental health services are stretched and not always able to respond in a timely manner.

Cowra Council has promoted the wellbeing of its staff and the broader community for some years. In 2016, it partnered with local well-being services to host a Health and Safety Day at Cowra Saleyards, offering checks for physical and mental health.

This action will implement an ongoing wellbeing program for Cowra Council that will offer its staff a range of lifestyle and health supports in and outside the office. It will also help staff to identify signs that

someone may be experiencing a mental health issue, and how they may support.

This will complement the existing Employee Assistance Program that offers confidential professional counselling for Council employees.

Action 4.2

Provide information on accessibility and disability, mental health and aged services on the Cowra Council website.

Good web design always caters to the needs of the user. The NSW Department of Family and Community Services has developed a Digital Accessibility Standard that guides how to make digital products accessible.

This action will:

- Review the Cowra Council website against this Standard.
- Ensure Council contact details include contact details for teletypewriter (TTY), the National Relay Service and the Telephone Interpreting Service.
- Include accessibility information on the website about Cowra Council services, facilities and the community that will be useful for residents, visitors and those thinking about moving to Cowra Shire.
- Include a directory of disability, mental health and aged service providers on the website.

- Develop a strategy to keep the accessibility information on the website up to date.

Action 4.3

Ensure that all venues for voting are accessible.

Voting in federal, state and local elections is how people can have their views heard and provides opportunity to choose who represents community in the parliament. Polling stations where you vote have not always been accessible in the Cowra Shire.

This action will ensure that all polling stations are accessible for people with disability.

8.0

Measuring Success

The following is an accountability framework that the Council and the Access Advisory Group will use to monitor progress against this Plan.

No.	Action	Indicators	Timeframe	Accountability
1.1	Review the Terms of Reference of the Access Advisory Committee.	Completion of the review.	6 months	DES
1.2	Attempt to extend membership of the Access Advisory Committee to include more people with disability and strengthen input from the community on inclusion and access issues.	Once the above review has been completed, advertise changes to encourage more membership by people with disability.	6 months	DES
1.3	Continue with the Access Incentive Fund.	Continue to have an open rolling grant process to encourage disabled access to businesses.	On going	DES
1.3	Ensure that Cowra Council publications, advertising and online avenues are representative of the community and include people with disability.	Where access is provided to people with disabilities, ensure a symbol or advice is placed on the advertisement or flyer.	On going	All staff

No.	Action	Indicators	Timeframe	Accountability
2.1	Continue to improve physical access to all Cowra Council buildings and facilities.	As required by the Premises Standards and to take a proactive approach to improving access to buildings and venues. Explore a withdrawal room in the Civic Centre for people with autism who may be experiencing sensory overload and the installation of a hearing loop in the Civic Centre.	On going	DES + DIO
2.2	Audit accessible toilet facilities to ensure they meet community needs and expectations.	Audit the disabled toilets in Squire Park and at the Rose Gardens. Program maintenance and/or refurbishment as required.	12 months for the audit. Apply for grant funding for retrofit as required	DES + DIO
2.3	Improve public seating in public spaces.	Improve public seating so that it is safe, well designed and located for sun and shade.	CBD redevelopment	DES
2.4	Improved inclusion and access to recreational activities.	Extensions to cycling and signage (Pedestrian & Cycling Plan) Investigate the possibility of a ramp into the Cowra Swimming Pool. Research how to increase accessible and continuous paths of travel from car parks to recreation activities. Investigate resurfacing of the Cowra Basketball courts for safer use by the community and grant funding opportunities to create an all weather facility (roof).	On going Completed Ongoing 12 months	DIO
2.5	Improve playgrounds so that they can be safely accessed and used by all children.	As playgrounds get redeveloped or upgraded, consider all users and all abilities including fencing.	On going	DIO
2.6	Investigate the use of the Cowra bus service by people with disability facilitated by Council in partnership with Cowra Bus Service, Community Transport and disability service providers.	Council's facilitation of a workshop between Cowra Bus Service, Community Transport and disability service providers.	6 months	DES + GM

No.	Action	Indicators	Timeframe	Accountability
2.7	Develop a safety strategy for users of mobility scooters.	The Access Advisory Committee to identify strategies that will improve the safety of people using mobility aids and provide practical information on maintenance.	12 months	DES
2.8	Identify and review important routes or continuous paths of travel used by people with disability and plan improvements for accessibility.	Identify priority locations and implement planned improvements in line with Council's adopted Pedestrian & Cycling Plan.	On going	DIO
2.9	Encourage an increase in the level of accessible housing stock in the Cowra Shire.	In the upcoming review of the Cowra Development Control Plan, consider to be given to multi-premise developments being able to meet the Silver level standards in the Livable Housing Design Guidelines. Encourage making these developments more versatile for current and future generations.	In the DCP review	DES
2.10	Promote the Companion Card.	Promote the Companion Card for eligible people with disability and to their venues and events. The Cowra Council will ensure that its venues and activities participate in this scheme.	6 months	DES + all staff
3.1	Subscribe to the Australian Network on Disability	Consider Cowra Council membership to the Australian Network on Disability.	6 months	DES
3.2	Create pathways for people with disability to undertake work experience and apply for jobs at the Cowra Council.	Identify career pathways, recruitment processes, staff awareness, flexible working options and support for people with disabilities to engage in the Council's workforce.	On going	HR
4.1	Implement a workplace wellbeing program for staff	Continue the existing Employee Assistance Program.	On going	HR
4.2	Provide information on accessibility and disability, mental health and aged services on the Cowra Council website.	Review the Cowra Council website against the guidelines set by NSW Department of Family and Community Services. Ensure Council contact details include contact details for teletypewritten (TTY), the National Relay service and the	12 months	IT

No.	Action	Indicators	Timeframe	Accountability
		<p>Telephone Interpreting Service.</p> <p>Include assessibility information on the website about Cowra Council services, facilities and the community that will be useful for residents, visitors and those thinking about moving to the Cowra Shire.</p> <p>Include a directory of disabilty, mental health and aged service providers on the website.</p>		
4.3	Ensure that all venues for voting are accessible.	Ensure that all polling stations are accessible for people with disabilty.		GM

9.0

References

The following sources were referenced in the production of the Cowra Council Disability Inclusion Action Plan:

- Australian Network on Disability, www.and.org.au
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, www.abs.gov.au
- Australian Government Department of Social Services, www.agedcare.health.gov.au
- 'Aged Care changes – the journey so far', Department of Social Services. www.agedcare.health.gov.au.
- Cowra.localstats.com.au
- Universal Design, www.universaldesign.i.e
- National Disability Services, www.nds.org.au
- 'Targeted Study of Injury Data Involving Motorised Mobility Scooters', Australian Competition and Consumer Commission.
- Tourism Australia, www.tourism.australia.com
- 'Mental Health in Rural and Remote Australia', National Rural Health Alliance inc.