

Access for all strategy 2011



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1. Introduction

Wodonga Council is committed to creating a safe, accessible and inclusive community, to ensure that all citizens have the opportunity to participate in all aspects of community life. The *Access for All Wodonga* strategy documents council's strategic direction for enhancing accessibility and inclusiveness for residents, including those with a disability, across the municipality through leadership, advocacy, services and programs.

Council has a history of valuing community members who experience disability. The city has received achievement awards in this area from the Municipal Association of Victoria and the Department of Human Services. A range of council units partner with disability organisations to provide employment and volunteering opportunities such as teams to support outdoors works and teams that provide administrative support to community development programs.

Together, the *Access for All Wodonga* strategy and the *Disability Action Plan* reflect council's ongoing commitment to promoting an inclusive community and recognising that all people within the municipality, including those with a disability, should be supported and encouraged to participate in all spheres of community life. All individuals are important members of the community and the strategy and plan aim to reduce, and where practicable eliminate, unintended barriers that prevent everyone's contribution towards the community's social capital.

In the strategy and plan, inclusion refers to being involved and being a valued member of the community – being included and being heard. Social exclusion involves the lack of or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities available to the majority of people in society. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.

Access refers to the opportunity for all people to participate fully in and engage independently with the environment and community. The basic requirement for good access is that communities and environments are barrier free.

Good access is beneficial not only to people with a disability but a significant proportion of other people in our community including:

- Parents with prams
- Elderly people with walking frames or sticks
- People using wheelchairs or motor scooters
- People with temporary disabilities, injuries or medical conditions
- People using wheelchairs or motorized scooters
- People with trolleys
- Family and friends of the above.

The strategy and plan have been developed through a consultative process. Consultation with the community was based on interviews and forums conducted with local disability service providers and surveys conducted with service provider clients as well as information and advice provided by the Rural Access worker. Internal council units were consulted through the integrated planning process, as well as individual interviews with key managers and team leaders.

1.1 Social inclusion and human rights based approach to access

The *Access for All in Wodonga* strategy is underpinned by a social inclusion framework. The concept of social inclusion can be understood as the opposite of social exclusion. It has been developed in response to the identification of key barriers that prevent individuals or groups from taking a full role in society. The exclusion/inclusion approach highlights the importance of optimising opportunities for people to have meaningful relationships and roles within their community and the wider society.

As well as increasing physical accessibility (i.e. elimination of physical barriers or obstacles), the improvement of other types of 'accessibility' are also important to improve social engagement. These include:

- Information accessibility, i.e. awareness of facility/service
- Environmental accessibility, i.e. availability of facility/service
- Financial accessibility, i.e. affordability
- Temporal accessibility, i.e. services that fit the life pattern of the user.

These factors together shape the ability, willingness and confidence of people to participate in social activities and to access services, and hence to reduce social isolation and be included within the everyday life of community.

1.2 Purpose

The *Access for All in Wodonga* strategy sets out strategies to improve access and social inclusion over the next three years to 2014. The plan articulates council's commitment to:

- Act in accordance with the *Disability Act 2006* to ensure that there is no discrimination based on disability in any of its functions, services and programs or by any of the organisations to which it provides facilities or funding
- Direct resources, within budget capacity, to enhance accessibility and inclusiveness of council facilities, services and programs
- Be sensitive and responsive to the needs of people with disabilities as it enacts all its responsibilities
- Provide a leadership role in the community in relation to enhancing access and inclusion of people with disabilities
- Work with partner organisations to ensure that functions, services and programs associated with council are not discriminatory based on disability
- Recognise that the keys to inclusion of people with disabilities in the community are the provision of an appropriate physical and social environment
- Strive towards the complete and systematic consideration of the needs

of people with disabilities in all planning, service systems and infrastructure of the council as part of everyday practice across the organisation

- Support organisations to advocate for services and policy changes to enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities.

2. Disability in profile

The term “disability” includes an impairment of a physical, intellectual or sensory nature (i.e. vision and hearing). Impairment can be life-long, acquired by accident or as part of the aging process. The *Disability Discrimination Act* also defines disability as a chronic medical condition, psychiatric, neurological disability, learning disability, physical disfigurement, the presence in the body of disease causing organisms (like HIV/AIDS) and short-term or temporary disability.

There are four broad categories of impairment:

- Physical impairment
- Sensory impairment
- Intellectual and cognitive impairment
- Psychiatric impairment.

The *Disability Discrimination Act* describes the term discrimination as:

“Treating people with a disability less favorably than people without that disability would be treated under the same circumstance.” Discrimination also exists where a condition or requirement is imposed equally for everyone, but which unfairly excludes or disadvantages people with a disability.

2.1 Disability across Australia

Disability affects about one in five Australians to varying degrees and in various ways. This can range from someone who has a mild hearing impairment that is overcome by the use of a hearing aid, to a person who cannot wash or dress without help.

In late 2008, the Australian Government released a discussion paper asking the community to respond to a series of questions about their experience of disability. The consultations informed the development of the *National Disability Strategy*. A key message from the consultation process was that people with disabilities do not enjoy full participation in our communities. Discrimination and exclusion are still commonly experienced. A lack of social inclusion and the multiple barriers to meaningful participation in the community faced by people with disabilities were the most frequently raised issues in the submissions and consultations. More than half the submissions received (56 per cent) identified exclusion and negative social attitudes as critical issues.

In 2006, the Census of Population and Housing included questions for the first time on people with disabilities at the more severe end of the disability spectrum - that is those who need assistance with self-care, communication or mobility activities. The survey found that there is a strong relationship between age and disability. In general, as a person ages, they are more likely to need assistance with daily activities. This likelihood increases significantly for ages over 70 years. The 2006 Census data shows that this

relationship is very similar for males and females, with the proportion who needed assistance increasing from 1.2 per cent of boys and 0.7 per cent of girls aged 0-4 up to 55 per cent of men and 69 per cent of women aged 90-94 years

2.2 Profiling disability in Wodonga

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census, 16,220 people in Wodonga experience disability. Of these 51 per cent are male and 49 per cent female.

Of those with a disability, 359 (2.5 per cent) are women who experience severe or profound disability, and 415 (3 per cent) are males who experience severe or profound disability that require assistance and/or support in self care, mobility and communication¹.

People with a disability live in our community in a number of ways:

- Community residential units (CRU's) , fully supported by paid staff
- Live independently, with support from community based organisations
- Live with family members with some support from outside agencies.

Research underpinning the *Wodonga Youth Strategy* identified that in 2008 there were 281 young people between 10 – 14 in Wodonga who experience a disability and 245 between 15 – 19 years. The most important issues for these young people were social inclusion and access to age appropriate services and activities.

¹ "Sharing the experience" living and working with a disability in Wodonga.

The Rural Access program conducted a survey of people with disabilities through local services providers. There were 20 respondents to the survey. Although the results are not statistically robust, outcomes support the results of other consultations undertaken. The survey identified issues around:

"Better thought out disabled toilets. Unisex toilets are better and make sure they are big enough to actually get an electric chair in and shut the door!"

"More public phones around isolated streets. "

"Stop people parking over footpaths."

"More undercover parking for people with a disability."

"Respite for different ages, so young people can be with people of their own age."

"Footpaths, better and more lighting, more police protection for elderly/people with a disability."

"More transport options, no courtesy buses for people with a disability."

"Unit doesn't suit me, because I have had a stroke and my needs have changed."

"Have a place for people with acquired brain injury to come together once a month for a coffee."

"No large bus parking bays for disabled."

Access to council services and facilities

100 per cent of respondents can access the council building, parks and open spaces and footpaths.

50 per cent can access the website for information and consider there are adequate disabled parking bays.

90 per cent believe that council does not always listen and respond to the issues people with a disability raise about their community.

Activities people with a disability enjoy participating in

Respondents participated in a wide range of activities including, bowling, festivals, including Lounging on High, barbecues, watching sports, swimming and basketball.

Some of the barriers they identified that prevented participation in activities were: lack of accessible toilets at some parks, cost, transport, requiring support to participate, unsure what available and physical access to venues.

Access to information and support from community services

90 per cent of respondents had either direct or supported access to information about support /medical services in the community.

10 per cent identified several barriers in terms of accessing information including: “My disability”, “Haven’t been really told or had my illness explained to me”, “Transport”, “No internet access”.

In response to the question, “Please tell us one or two important things you would change to make living in Wodonga better for you or the person you are care for”:

The majority of access issues raised relating to transport within our retail areas continue to cause concern.

Key disability service providers were consulted in terms of identifying further issues for people with a disability living in Wodonga. Two key areas were discussed:

1. What is it really like to live and work in Wodonga, if you have a disability?
2. Identifying ways to create a more inclusive community in Wodonga.

The following feedback was received:

Transport around the CBD has improved, however accessible transport to and from the CBD to outlying areas is still an issue for people with limited mobility.

The area around Stanley St is still an issue for people who are sight impaired. There needs to be stronger colour contrasts between the pavement and the art work on the footpaths.

People with a disability don’t have a strong voice in terms of engaging with council to discuss disability issues. Wodonga Council was previously involved with the Albury /Wodonga Access Committee but no longer attends the meetings. It would be valuable for a council officer or councillor to attend meetings to participate in discussions regarding issues being raised by community members with a disability, disability service providers and carers.

3. Policy context and framework

The *Access for All in Wodonga* strategy falls under a broader legislative and policy framework as detailed below.

3.1 International

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The principles of the present Convention:

1. Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons
2. Non-discrimination
3. Full and effective participation and inclusion in society
4. Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity
5. Equality of opportunity
6. Accessibility
7. Equality between men and women
8. Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.

Australia is a signatory to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* which is a legally binding standard recognising people with a disability as equal and active citizens

3.2 Federal

Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992

Building Code of Australia

Australian Standards for Access and Mobility 1428 Suite of Standards

Draft Disability Access to Premises and Standards (Buildings)

The Disability Action Plan 2006

The National Disability Strategy (in draft at the time of writing)

The Social Inclusion Agenda

Council of Australian Governments *National Disability Agreement*

3.3 State

The Victorian Charter of Human Rights Act 2006

The Victorian Equal Opportunities Act 1995

The Victorian State Disability Plan 2002-2012

3.4 Local government context

The Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* makes provision for local government authorities to prepare access action plans, which are intended to achieve the underlying principles of the Act: that people with a disability have the same fundamental rights as people without disabilities in the community.

Wodonga Council, like all local government authorities, also has a requirement to develop a council plan, which is specified under the *Local Government Act 1989*. The council plan, which is normally developed on a four year cycle, outlines the council's strategic objectives.

The *Wodonga Council Plan* is a shared vision of the Wodonga community and a statement about the kind of community, economy and environment our community wishes to have in the future. Since the development of the *Council Plan*, council has aligned its strategic objectives and activities to reflect five themes or pillars. These pillars are reflected in the *Disability Action Plan* and are:

Pillar One - Healthy, safe and inclusive community

Pillar Two - Dynamic, resilient local economies

Pillar Three - Sustainable built and natural environment

Pillar Four - Culturally rich and vibrant communities

Pillar Five - Democratic and engaged communities.

Pillar Four – culturally rich and vibrant communities includes the strategic objective: An inclusive city that provides opportunities for all to participate in Wodonga’s activities, and the strategic priority to develop and commence implementation of a disability action plan.

3.4 Rural Access

The *Access for All in Wodonga* strategy is closely linked to the Department of Human Services Community Building Initiative Rural Access program. Rural Access is based on the principles of community development and community capacity building to actively address issues of systemic and structural disadvantage experienced by people with disabilities. The approach is designed to increase community membership, participation, inclusion and quality of life outcomes for people with disabilities.

Each Rural Access service has the responsibility to plan, develop, facilitate and implement initiatives and strategies across the full range of community infrastructure. This includes education and training, transport, health, accommodation

and housing, physical access planning, communication, information, arts and culture, and sport and recreation.

The Upper Hume Rural Access program is a partnership between Wodonga Council, Towong Shire Council and Indigo Shire Council, with Indigo Shire Council taking the role of lead partner.

4. Disability access and inclusion

4.1 History of disability access and inclusion planning in Wodonga

In 1997, Wodonga Council conducted a study producing a report entitled *Healthy Lifestyles for a Healthy Community*. The report which considered the World Health Organisation Healthy Cities project definition of a healthy community looked at creating a healthy community in Wodonga. The report listed several specific health issues for the Wodonga community, two of these being safety and access.

Following the adoption of the report, council formed a partnership between the Disabled Persons Regional Council and Upper Hume Community Health Service to begin the process of responding to the issues identified. The first response was to conduct an extensive audit of public facilities in Wodonga. The audit resulted in the development of a *Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)* policy to draft stage, including recommendations or an action plan necessary to comply with DDA legislation. This plan was adopted by council in 1998, becoming council’s first disability action plan.

Since that time, key achievements include:

- Two MAV/DHS, Arthritis Australia awards for achievement
- Development and distribution of an “Access for All” brochure for planning and building applicants
- Development and distribution of a Wodonga mobility map
- Upgraded or relocate in excess of 25 parking bays for disabled people
- Purchased of an aid to assist pool access at the Wodonga Sports and Leisure Centre
- Provision of a telephone typewriter to enable access to council services for people with a hearing impairment
- Training provided to customer service staff on the use of TTY
- Developed an internet website to provide information on council services and receive correspondence from customers
- Development of systems where customers can pay accounts through BPay, telephone and Australia Post
- Access improvements to council owned public facilities and buildings
- Adoption of a footpath trading bylaw
- Implementation of a program for kerb ramps and tactile ground surface indicators
- Regular monitoring, review and redevelopment of disability action plans.

4.2 Planning framework

The *Disability Act 2006*, which came into effect on July 1, 2007, requires all local government authorities to produce a disability action plan for the following purposes:

To reduce barriers to persons with a disability accessing goods, services, facilities, and employment

To promote inclusion and participation in the community of persons with a disability with a view to achieving tangible changes in attitudes and practices which discriminate against persons with a disability.

Other legislated documents that council is required to produce include the *Wodonga Council Plan*, *Municipal Public Health Plan* and the *Municipal Strategic Statement*. The *Council Plan* and the *Municipal Public Health Plan* provide the strategic framework to improve the health and wellbeing outcomes for the whole community, including people with a disability.

4.3 Council Plan

Access for All Wodonga relates to a number of council’s key strategic priorities documented in the *Council Plan*. The following strategic objectives are especially relevant to the *Access for All Wodonga* strategy.

Strategic Objective
A city built around vibrant community places
A city that recognises the valuable contribution our older residents make to our community
The council's open spaces and recreational facilities managed, developed and improved for long-term sustainability and public safety
Strong, resilient, safe and livable communities
Positive health, wellbeing and independence for the residents of the city
A city with high quality communication technology
Wodonga businesses operating in a socially and environmentally sensitive manner
A city where planning is based on sound research and demographic trends
Effective, considered and efficient responses to community needs regarding parking, traffic and transport issues
An inclusive city that provides opportunities for all to participate in Wodonga's activities
A strong, vibrant and family-friendly CBD with signature buildings offering a range of retail, commercial and social networking opportunities
A diverse range of celebrations and events bringing our community together that are inclusive and encourage a range of diverse art and cultural experiences
A community that has many avenues for expression, dialogue and interaction with its council
Adherence to all legislative requirements and

4.4 Community Wellbeing Plan

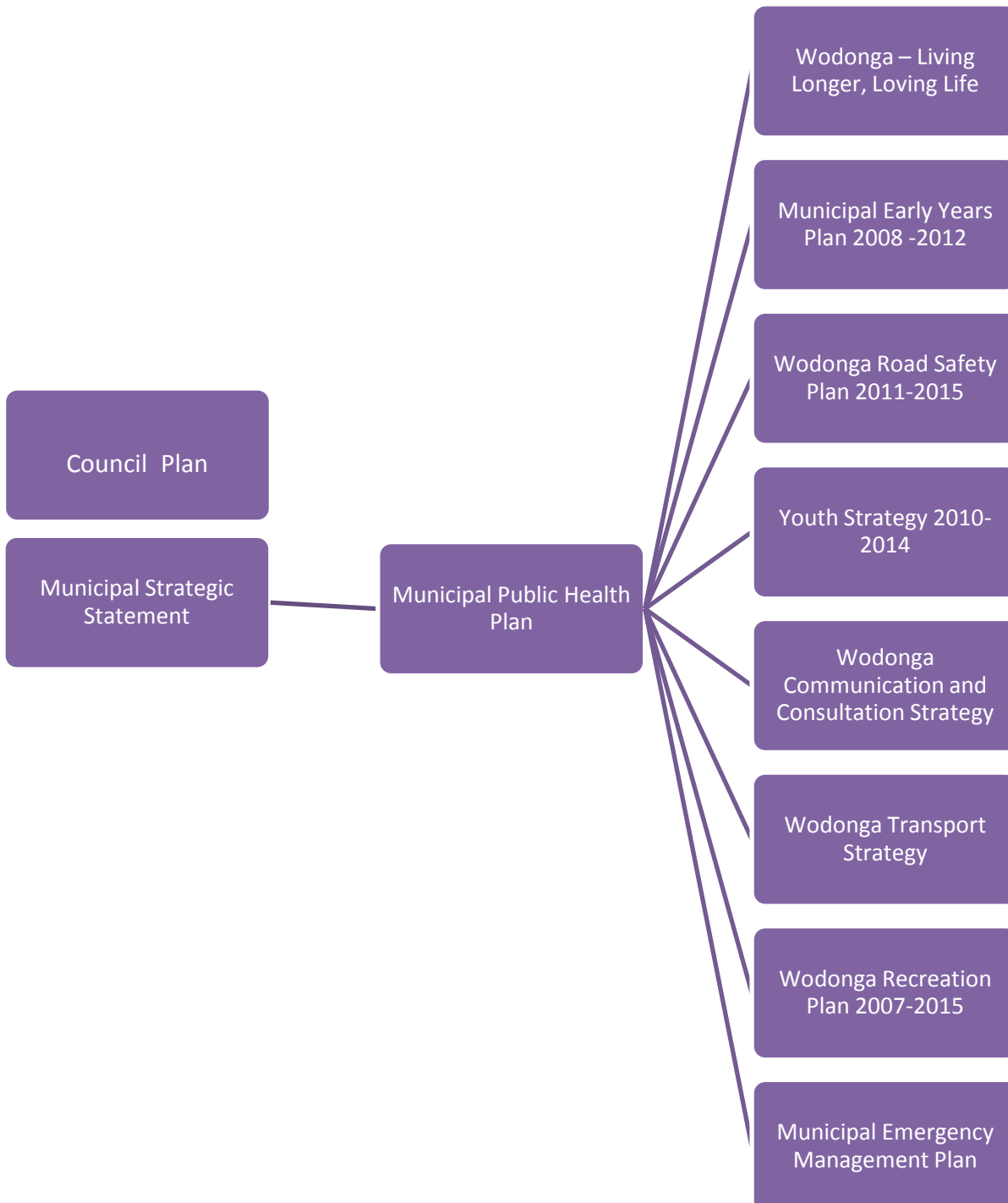
The *Access for All in Wodonga* strategy is also closely linked with council's *Community Wellbeing Plan 2010-2014*. The *Community Wellbeing Plan*, in draft at the time of writing, provides a broad framework and vision for identifying and addressing the key health and wellbeing concerns in Wodonga over the coming years. The key priorities for the *Community Health and Wellbeing Plan 2010-2014* are:

1. Promoting mental health and wellbeing
2. Promoting physical, active and healthy living
3. Promoting a sustainable community

Other key principles that influences council's planning activities include human rights, diversity, social inclusion and life long learning.

4.5 Other related council plans, policies and strategies

The council also has in place a range of key strategic planning documents that support the *Access for All* strategy including:



5. Wodonga Council disability access and inclusion statement

Wodonga Council recognises and supports the rights of people with all abilities to equitable access to buildings, facilities, services and employment. Wodonga Council will comply with the requirements of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and other relevant standards, regulations and legislation to ensure provision of access by people with disabilities to council operations, services and facilities.

5.1 Roles and positions related to disability access planning in Wodonga

Responsibility for the implementation of the *Access for All in Wodonga* policy and strategy sits within the Community services and aged care team, within the Community development directorate.

5.2 Wodonga Access Group (WAG)

The Wodonga Access Group was formed in 1999. The groups aimed to act as 'the ears, eyes and voice for equitable access for all in the community through education and action' (Wodonga Access Group 2004) and had been meeting monthly until 2009.

Issues that have been of interest to the group include public toilets, uneven and obstructed footpaths, provision of disabled parking, and accessing service in local fast food outlets.

In 2009, the Wodonga Access Group merged with the Albury Access Group creating the Albury Wodonga Access Group (AWAG). Although this group continues to meet, representation from Wodonga has been minimal.

There is current interest in re-establishing a Wodonga Access Group to ensure that local people with a disability have a voice to lobby and advocate in regard to issues specific to their local needs. This issue is addressed in the *Disability Action Plan*.

5.3 Wodonga Access and Inclusion Strategy Group (WAISG)

This internal working group, with representatives from a broad range of council departments, will oversee the implementation of the strategy and report on progress from all sectors across council. The group will include representation from, but not limited to: Community services and aged care, Recreation and early years, Assets, Civic compliance and Youth services.

6. Performance monitoring and evaluation

An action plan has been developed to guide the implementation of this strategy. The action plan will detail specific initiatives to meet the objectives and strategic directions listed under each of the key priority areas. Actions will also be integrated into council's business planning system which will ensure annual reporting takes place as part of the existing council business planning cycle.

Access for All in Wodonga 2011-2014 will be reviewed annually to identify progress and a report prepared for council and stakeholders. The action plan will be reviewed accordingly, with consideration given to the current needs of the community and any emerging identified to ensure the plan remains relevant.

The development and review of the strategy will be the responsibility of council's Community development unit, with implementation and reporting the responsibility of all sectors across council as well as relevant community partnership agencies.

Access for All in Wodonga - Key strategic priorities

The key strategic priorities have been identified through research and consultation and formed within the international, federal and state

strategic framework and guiding principles. They reflect council's key strategic priorities in the *Council Plan* as follows:

Key Strategic Priority	Objectives
Healthy, safe and inclusive community	<p>Ensure that all council members have sufficient knowledge, awareness and capacity in relation to social inclusion and disability issues and legislative responsibilities to implement council's <i>Access and Inclusion Policy</i> and avoid discrimination based on disability.</p> <p>To increase community awareness and understanding about inclusion issues and the needs of people with a disability in order to achieve a more inclusive and safe community for all people.</p>
Dynamic, resilient local economies	<p>Promote and support accessible businesses throughout the city.</p> <p>Ensure inclusive internal employment practices at Wodonga Council.</p>
Sustainable built and natural environment	<p>Ensure that council will consider access for all abilities in the <i>Asset Management Strategy</i> while also focusing on best value concerning building acquisition and disposals.</p> <p>Ensure that council incorporates the physical mobility and access needs of people with disabilities in the design, construction and maintenance programs for roads, footpaths, drains, and other infrastructure.</p>
Culturally rich and vibrant communities	<p>To include people with disabilities in all opportunities provided for the community to access and participate in arts and cultural activities by providing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusive communication Accessible events and activities <p>The artistic aspirations and achievements of people with a disability are an important and valued part of our local culture.</p>
Democratic and engaged communities	<p>Increased involvement of people with disabilities in community decision making processes.</p>