

**Moreland Disability Access and Inclusion Plan**

**2016-2020**

**Summary of Consultation Findings**

Council conducted a review of the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2016-2020 (DAIP) between March and November 2021. This report outlines a summary of the findings from consultations undertaken as part of the review.

The DAIP states Council’s commitment and planned responses to the current and future challenges faced by people with disability in Moreland. It is a four-year whole-of-Council plan, with the aim of eliminating discrimination and inequity faced by people with disability

Priorities and actions of the DAIP must therefore be informed by the experiences of people with disability and carers for whom it is created. For this reason, Council conducted a review of the DAIP, led by the Community Development and Social Policy (CDSP) team. This involved extensive consultation with community members and staff over a period of six months in 2021. Consultations focussed on identifying the achievements and areas for improvement by Council with regards to the needs of people with disability.

A reference group of 3 community members (people with disability and carers) provided expert guidance to the review process.

Findings from consultations are documented in this report, and directly inform the key action areas of the new DAIP for the period 2022 to 2025. A draft of the new DAIP will be shared with the public to provide feedback in December 2021.

Council extends it gratitude to community members, organisations and Council staff who participated in the consultations during the challenging time of the pandemic. Particular note is given to members of the reference group for their commitment and expertise in guiding the review process.

**The Consultation Process**

Individuals, community groups, organisations and Council staff were invited share their experiences, views and recommendations with Council in a number of ways. These included online and paper surveys, open submissions (written and by phone), individual interviews and group consultations facilitated by the CDSP team. Council promoted these opportunities via its website, social media and targeted promotion to key community groups and organisations. Council staff from all departments were invited to participate in surveys, with key staff interviewed individually. Analysis of consultation data was conducted by an external consultant.

The following responses were received and informed this report:

* 101 community survey responses (including 33 people with disability, 31 carers)
* 2 community responses on Conversations Moreland on the impact of Covid-19
* 1 submission from a community group
* 18 consultations with individuals and groups including people with disability, carers, and organisations
* Individual and group consultations with Council staff from 26 Council programs
* 24 staff survey responses.

## Limitations

Due to strict restrictions during the pandemic lockdowns, in-person consultations were not possible. Consultations were therefore conducted by teleconference, video or survey methods. Consultation attendance was impacted by the disruptions caused by the pandemic to community groups and programs.

**Consultation findings**

This section outlines common themes described by participants across all of the consultation data.

## What is Council doing well for people with disability?

Key strengths reported by participants were:

• Council commitment to access and inclusion, and inclusive Moreland Community

• Council services and programs

• Some improvements to public places and spaces.

In relation to Council’s commitment, a number of people acknowledged that having a Disability Access and Inclusion Plan and Working Group was positive, as was the presence of staff at Council who care about inclusion. Some participants also reported feeling that Moreland is an inclusive community, that staff have inclusive attitudes and that Council is endeavouring to improve inclusion within the community.

*“Moreland is an inclusive community and the Council endeavours to maintain and improve this inclusivity” (Person with disability)*

Specifically, the Disability Working Group, comprising community members with lived experience of disability, was viewed by staff and community members as a key strength of the current DAIP. This working group has assisted Council in an advisory capacity to respond to the needs of people with disability in Moreland. Council staff frequently seek advice and expertise from working group members on the how to improve Council processes and policies for people with disability. Working group members share their expertise. Some members report positive personal outcomes resulting from the opportunity to advise Council on the issues which affect their lives.

*“The DWG was the first environment where I felt taken seriously and respected as a person with lived experience, and worthy of a voice. The confidence and experience I gained from being on the working group was invaluable.” (Community member)*

A number of participants reported positive experiences with Council services and programs, particularly library services, respite care and in-home care, and that these services are particularly important for people not eligible for the NDIS

*“The Moreland council home care services are fantastic, since moving here my quality of life has improved dramatically thanks to being able to access such services at a price I can afford” (Person with disability)*

There were a large number of comments about access barriers and issues with public places and spaces, however there were some positive comments about recent improvements to infrastructure. Examples included:

• Access to public transport has been improved in some areas with the new stations along Upfield line, and some tram stops have the elevated stops

• Disabled toilet access at our new Coburg Cycling Club room

• Local parks are more accessible. The new park at Bulleke-Bek Park does not use Lilydale topping, making it easier for wheelchair users to use this space.

One participant also noted that overall Moreland is doing a good job in regard to accessibility for wheelchair users: *“I use a wheelchair, so for me, accessibility is primarily about wheelchair-friendly facilities. Overall, I think Moreland Council is pretty good in this respect” (Person with disability)*

## Areas for Council to strengthen and prioritise

## Physical Access Barriers

*“Many older buildings across Council are not accessible. While I realise that renovating buildings is a lengthy and expensive affair and cannot be done overnight, it would be great to aim for it. (Person with disability)*

*"Make sure that wherever there are stairs, there is a nearby safe alternative for people with mobility issues” (Staff member)*

Physical access barriers were the most commonly reported issues by participants in the consultations, particularly by people with disability and carers. Physical access barriers were reported across all areas of the current DAIP, indicating that they are not only a barrier to accessing places and spaces, but also prevented people from being able to access services and programs and fully participate in employment and civic life.

Importantly, there was a perception within the community that Council could do more to address physical access barriers, particularly in relation to improving city infrastructure and Council owned buildings and facilities. There was also a view that commercial developments and the financial interests of developers were being prioritised over accessibility and the rights of people with disability.

The following key issues were frequently reported by participants:

* Footpaths not safe/accessible
* Roads and crossings not safe/accessible
* Not enough accessible car parking and possible widespread abuse of accessible parking permit scheme
* A need for more signage about accessibility of buildings and spaces
* Parks and playgrounds not accessible
* Public buildings, facilities and venues not accessible
* Commercial buildings and businesses not accessible
* Lack of accessible public transport options
* Planning processes and new developments: non-compliance with DDA standards, statutory/regulatory role to mandate inclusion not being utilised

Inclusive programs and services

*“Council is not spending enough money on supporting people with disabilities to access community programs to achieve better mental health outcomes. Not everyone has NDIS, but they often might still be on a health care card and not be able to work because of their disability” (Service provider)*

Participants reported insufficient programs and services for people with disability and long waitlists for existing services. This has been exacerbated by the introduction of the NDIS, which resulted in programs being defunded, leaving critical gaps for people who are ineligible for NDIS funding and supports.

Other key issues identified included:

* Lack of awareness of NDIS and its impact on access to services
* Increasing need for in-home support from younger people (under 65)
* Lack of awareness of programs and opportunities provided by Council
* A need to provide information in a range of accessible formats, not only digital
* Challenges navigating the service system
* Lack of community transport
* Lack of staff awareness, understanding and inclusive practice
* Lack of community awareness about disability, stigma and discrimination including invisible disabilities.
* Limited staff awareness about deafness as well as lack of Auslan support and functional issues with hearing loops.

## Employment and economic participation

*“I actually got work through a council program that was not-specific for people with a disability. The program gave me the training for a job, which allowed me to overcome a patchy work history… I've not held that job for nearly three years. I think this kind of program that gives people skills that are practical and job-relevant is really valuable.” (Person with disability)*

## *“If you (are) hiring us- you need make it (a) safe space and no ableism or audism. Make sure it’s normal for us to come to work and feel comfortable and support(ed).” (Person with disability)*

There was wide acknowledgement that Council should be leading by example when it comes to providing employment opportunities for people with disability.

Participants suggested that Council should:

* Employ more people with disability
* Implement inclusive workplace policies, quotas/targets and create identified positions
* Address barriers to inclusive employment such as physical access barriers
* Promote employment opportunities through channels that reach people with disability
* Provide more training programs that support employment and career pathways
* Partner with local businesses and organisations to create and facilitate employment opportunities for people with disability
* Providing more flexibility in the workplace through reasonable adjustments and allocating more resources to support disabled employees
* Create a safe and inclusive culture that celebrates people with disability and positions Council as an employer of choice

## Advocacy role

*“(Council should) promote awareness and inclusiveness in the community about respectful attitudes towards people living with disabilities”*

*(Person with disability)*

The consultations identified a number of ways in which Council could improve access and inclusion for people with disability by increasing its advocacy role to state and federal governments, as well as local stakeholders.

Suggestions from participants included:

* Advocating for state government legislation and guidelines on building standards to increase accessibility of residential and commercial developments
* Advocating to state government on public transport including more accessible trams routes in Moreland and accessible train stations
* Advocating to federal government to maintain Medicare items for people with disability to have ongoing access to telehealth
* Support local organisations and businesses to improve access and inclusion

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## Leadership and civic participation

*“Listen to disabled people within the community as well as more professional advocates. There are no perfect solutions. Improving accessibility usually benefits more than just the target population. Simple, practical things that can be incorporated and perpetuated via organisational infrastructure are usually the most effective over time.” (Person with disability)*

*“Always be open to the possibility that people with disabilities will want to participate in any event and ensure that diverse needs are catered for.”*

*(Person with disability)*

There were a number of key barriers and issues identified in relation to this theme, which broadly included:

* Lack of opportunities for people with disability to be involved in various aspects of civic life
* Poor communication/promotion about opportunities to be involved in civic life
* Lack of community awareness and understanding about disability (including invisible disabilities) and how people can contribute to making community life more inclusive and accessible
* Physical barriers to accessing events, community groups, clubs and activities, including an unwillingness for organisations to accommodate adjustments and provide adapted programs
* People with disability not feeling valued or respected and, being treated as though they are a burden on society
* Lack of opportunities to participate in community consultation activities and decision-making processes

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# Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic, public health measures and lockdowns had a number of adverse impacts on people with disability. Various services and programs had to be closed or reduced during lockdowns, and that access to group homes and Supported Residential Services was restricted. This resulted in people with disability not being able to access critical health services or community-based programs. This subsequently reduced opportunities for social connection, increased social isolation and exacerbated mental health issues.

Many health services transitioned to online/telehealth delivery, and some participants reported that telehealth had improved their ability to access services. However, service providers reported that many of their services and programs were not well attended online, and that telehealth is not accessible for many people with disability. In addition, telehealth may not be a safe option for people experiencing family violence.

Some participants in the consultation also reported that the introduction of outdoor dining options in Moreland as part of phased reopening and recovery efforts has created additional barriers to accessing public places and spaces, as additional seating has obstructed footpaths and walkways. They also noted that the lack of time for consultation on this meant that people with disability have not had an opportunity to inform these planning decisions.

**Conclusion**

The experiences and recommendations shared by consultation participants of the DAIP review have informed the objectives of the 2022-2025 Disability Access and Inclusion Plan. The findings described in this report also form the basis of the DAIP Implementation Plan, an internal planning document outlining the goals, actions and responsible departments for each action area.