



Rural City of
Wangaratta

Access For Everyone Plan

2026 - 2031

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Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

The Rural City of Wangaratta acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands, on which the Rural City of Wangaratta communities reside. We pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging, and celebrate and respect their continuing cultures. We are committed to walking beside all traditional owners as we move toward reconciliation.

Purpose

The Access for Everyone Plan outlines the Rural City of Wangaratta's commitment to creating an inclusive, accessible, and welcoming community where all people can participate fully in community life.

Background and Context

Council plays a key role as an employer, service provider, community connector and leader. We are committed to ensuring our services, facilities and decision-making processes are accessible, inclusive and responsive to the varied needs of our community.

This Plan builds on the *Community Access and Inclusion Plan 2019–2022* and broadens its focus to reflect the wide range of people who may experience barriers to participation.

What this means in practice

- **As an employer**, Council is one of the largest in the municipality, with over 520 staff. We have a responsibility to promote an inclusive workplace culture and provide leadership for other employers.
- **As a service provider**, Council supports residents across all life stages—from early childhood services through to support for older residents. We are committed to ensuring that all services recognise and respond to the diverse needs of our community.
- **As a community connector**, Council creates welcoming spaces and opportunities for people to come together—whether through library programs, social activities, or shared community experiences. Through partnerships with local organisations and businesses, and initiatives such as the Grit and Resilience Program and Council-led events, we support connection, wellbeing and a strong sense of community.
- **As a community leader**, Council work closely with individuals, businesses and organisations as the level of government closest to the community. Through policy development, strategic planning and advocacy at local, regional, state and federal levels, we help create opportunities for everyone in Wangaratta to participate fully in community life.

Council has a long-standing commitment to inclusion, demonstrated through previous plans and initiatives. This Plan continues that work, strengthening Council's approach and extending its reach.

Legislative and Policy Context

Council is required to promote equity and inclusion under a range of legislation. The *Access for Everyone Plan* supports these obligations, including:

- **Local Government Act 2020** – requires councils to deliver equitable services, engage communities in decision-making, and support long-term wellbeing.
- **Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008** – supports actions that improve health and strengthen community capacity.
- **Gender Equality Act 2020** – requires gender ~~equity~~equality planning and gender impact assessments.
- **Disability Act 2006** – requires the development and reporting of a Disability Action Plan.

This Plan incorporates and aligns with these frameworks, ensuring a coordinated and compliant approach.

Communities in Wangaratta

Wangaratta is home to a diverse population with varying life stages, cultural backgrounds, abilities and circumstances. Census data identifies several population groups who may face barriers to equal participation. While legislative categories remain where required, this plan focuses broadly on supporting people who may experience structural, environmental, or social barriers.

Community insight shows that some community members may experience barriers to participation due to:

- Long-term health conditions or disability
- Need for assistance with daily activities
- Cultural, language or faith diversity
- Socioeconomic disadvantage
- Diverse household structures

This Plan adopts a broad, inclusive approach, recognising that barriers can be structural, environmental or social.

Building on previous plans, Council has expanded its focus beyond disability to include:

- Age-friendly communities
- Gender equity
- Broader inclusion across diverse population groups

In previous plans, Councils primary focus was improving access for people with disability. Since then, we have broadened our work to include Age Friendly Communities and the development of a Gender ~~Equity~~Equality Action Plan. Consultation with the Inclusive Wangaratta Working Group

highlighted that the community wants a plan that moves beyond a single-issue focus to consider the wide range of people and groups who experience barriers to equal participation.

Development Process

The Plan was informed by consultation, research and review of key documents, including:

- Community Access and Inclusion Plan 2019–2022
- Council Plan 2025–2029
- Community Vision 2045
- Draft Age Friendly Strategy
- Access and inclusion plans from other councils

These inputs ensured alignment with Council's strategic priorities and community aspirations.

Implementation and Review

The Plan will be delivered over five years (2026–2031).

- Progress will be reviewed annually and reported to Council.
- Delivery will be supported through existing resources where possible.
- New initiatives requiring funding will be considered through Council processes.
- Reporting will align with Council's integrated planning framework and legislative requirements.

Ongoing community engagement will inform implementation and continuous improvement.

Action Plan

The Action Plan is structured around three themes:

1. Access and Participation

Focuses on improving physical access, infrastructure and inclusive service delivery.

2. Understanding and Celebrating Diversity

Promotes awareness, respect and recognition of diversity across the community.

3. Engaging Community

Strengthens community voice, participation and collaboration in decision-making.

Across all themes, Council will act in its roles as an employer, service provider, community connector and leader.

Access and Participation

	Action
1.1	Accessibility Information* Improve how accessibility information is provided across Council facilities and platforms by: 1.1.1 Standardise how accessibility features are identified, described, and communicated across all Council halls, facilities, and assets 1.1.2 Expand accessibility mapping across the municipality, including the CBD 1.1.3 Providing information in plain language and accessible formats across websites and systems 1.1.4 Promote locations of Changing Places facilities, accessible, and all-gender toilets 1.1.5 Apply a consistent approach to accessibility information across urban and rural facilities 1.1.6 Promote inclusive signage to support navigation for people of all abilities
1.2	Reducing Barriers* Reduce barriers to accessing Council facilities and services by: 1.2.1 Monitoring accessibility of Council facilities and prioritising improvements 1.2.2 Building staff capability through training on accessibility and inclusion 1.2.3 Supporting accessible community feedback and engagement opportunities
1.3	Accessible Amenities* Improve access to inclusive bathroom facilities by: 1.3.1 Supporting installation of Changing Places facilities 1.3.2 Upgrading existing accessible toilets 1.3.3 Increasing availability of single-stall unisex toilets
1.4	Transport Advocacy* Advocate for improved transport access by: 1.4.1 Supporting increased train and coach services 1.4.2 Advocating for expanded weekend bus services, particularly during events 1.4.3 Promoting existing transport options in partnership with relevant organisations
1.5	Inclusive Place Naming 1.5.1 Encourage recognition of underrepresented groups in naming streets, facilities and public spaces, in line with Victorian Government guidelines
1.6	Inclusive Events* 1.6.1 Incorporate accessibility features such as transport access, AUSLAN, translation, inclusive language and sensory considerations where possible

	1.6.2 Provide opportunities for community members to communicate accessibility needs
1.7	Inclusive Sport and Recreation* 1.7.1 Promote accessible sport and recreation opportunities 1.7.2 Support community organisations to reduce participation barriers
1.8	Inclusive Employment 1.8.1 Review recruitment processes and position descriptions to remove barriers 1.8.2 Strengthen inclusive employment practices, including workplace adjustments 1.8.3 Build staff capability and partner with disability employment services

Understanding and Celebrating Diversity

	Action
2.1	Equitable Funding* 2.1.1 Review grants and funding programs to ensure equitable access 2.1.2 Strengthen partnerships with community organisations 2.1.3 Support initiatives that celebrate and recognise diversity
2.2	Evidence-Based Practice* 2.2.1 Apply inclusion frameworks and best practice approaches 2.2.2 Support community organisations to improve accessibility using sector resources
2.3	Community Recognition* 2.3.1 Maintain and promote a coordinated calendar of events 2.3.2 Support cultural celebrations, awareness campaigns and days of significance
2.4	Sector Engagement* 2.4.1 Engage with peak bodies and sector leaders to inform Council practices
2.5	Inclusive Catering* 2.5.1 Promote diversity through food by encouraging options from multiple cultures and cuisines when catering Council meetings and events
2.6	Organisational Inclusion 2.6.1 Build organisational capability through training for staff and Councillors 2.6.2 Improve feedback channels for people with disability 2.6.3 Regularly review policies, communications and service delivery

Engaging Community

	Action
3.1	Community and Staff Input Strengthening participation, representation and community voice by: 3.1.1 Provide opportunities for community members and staff to contribute to planning, policy and decision-making
3.2	Supporting Community Groups* 3.2.1 Support the development of community groups addressing emerging needs 3.2.2 Provide promotion, training and governance support
3.3	Inclusive Engagement* 3.3.1 Apply impact assessments, including Gender Impact Assessments where required 3.3.2 Design engagement activities that reflect diverse community needs 3.3.3 Embed inclusive engagement practices into Council procedures
3.4	Accessible Council Processes Improve transparency and accessibility of Council decision-making by: 3.4.1 Providing clear, plain language information on how to participate in meetings 3.4.2 Explaining roles of Councillors, the Mayor and Council officers 3.4.3 Supporting transparent pathways for responding to community questions, including: • questions responded to by the mayor on behalf of Council where appropriate, and • questions taken on notice and referred to the Chief Executive Officer or Council officers for an organisational response. 3.4.4 Offering multiple participation options (in-person, written, online) 3.4.5 Promoting these processes across Council communication channels

Definitions

Term	Definition
Access	Making sure information, spaces, services and programs are easy to find, understand and use by everyone.
Bias	Attitudes or assumptions that affect how we see and treat others. These can be conscious (intentional) or unconscious (automatic).
Changing Places	Specialised bathroom facilities that are larger than standard accessible toilets and include additional equipment and space to support people with high support needs and their carers
Disability	A condition of the body or mind that can make it harder for a person to take part in everyday activities or interact with the world around them.
Diversity	The range of differences between people, including backgrounds, identities, abilities and experiences.
Equality	Treating everyone the same by giving equal access to opportunities and resources.
Equity	Providing people with what they need to participate fully, recognising that everyone has different circumstances and may require different support.
Inclusion	Creating environments where all people feel welcomed, respected and valued, and can participate fully in community life.
Peak bodies	Organisations that represent and support a particular sector or group of organisations, often providing leadership, advocacy and guidance.
Priority Communities	Groups of people who may face greater barriers to participation or disadvantage, and who may need targeted support to achieve equitable outcomes.
What do we mean by barriers?	Things that make it harder for people to participate fully in community life. Examples of barriers include: • Physical: buildings without ramps or accessible toilets • Social or attitudinal: discrimination, stigma or assumptions about people • Communication: information that is hard to read, understand, access or translate • Economic: costs that limit participation in activities or services

References

- (1) Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (2024) *Social Model of Disability*. <https://www.afdo.org.au/social-model-of-disability/>
- (2) Department of Health (2023) *Designing for Diversity*, Victorian Government. <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/populations/designing-for-diversity>
- (3) Faulkner N, Zhao K, Borg K and Smith L (2022) *The Inclusive Australia Social Inclusion Index: 2022 Report*, Monash University. <<https://www.inclusiveaustralia.com.au/resources/the-inclusive-australia-social-inclusion-index-2021-22-report>>.
- (4) Department of Social Services (2024) *Changing Places*, Australian Government. <<https://www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers-programs-services/changing-places>>.
- (5) Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, June 2022. *Diversity and Inclusion Framework 2022-2027*, State of Victoria, Australia. <<https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/diversity-and-inclusion-framework-2022-2027>>.
- (6) South Australian Council of Social Service (2018) *Fact Sheet: Community Sector Peak Bodies*. <<https://www.sacoss.org.au/fact-sheet-community-sector-peak-bodies>>
- (7) Victorian Government (2023) *Rainbow Ready Roadmap* <<https://www.vic.gov.au/rainbow-ready-roadmap>>.

Related documents

Internal:

- Council Plan 2025-2029 inc Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan
- Community Vision 2045
- Gender Equality Action Plan
- Fair Access Policy

External:

- Local Government Act 2020
- Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008
- Gender ~~Equity~~ Equality Act 2020



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