CITY OF BALLARAT

DISABILITY ACCESS AND INCLUSION PLAN 2026–2030

Proudly working with and for our community



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The City of Ballarat acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land we live and work on, the Wadawurrung and Dja Dja Wurrung Peoples, and recognises their continuing connection to the land and waterways.

We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and extend this to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

—

A Message from the Mayor and CEO

The City of Ballarat is committed to fostering a community that is accessible, inclusive and welcoming for everyone.

Our city is proudly diverse, and it is fundamental that we recognise and celebrate this strength by ensuring Ballarat is a place where everyone can participate in community life.

This plan represents an important step forward in creating sustained action to removing barriers to access and inclusion. We will continue to champion the voices of people with disability, carers and advocates to deepen our understanding of lived experience and ensure these perspectives guide our decisions to help shape a stronger, more connected Ballarat.

We will also advocate for our community at all levels of government and strengthen our role in influencing more accessible environments, programs and opportunities here in Ballarat.

When our policies, services and spaces are designed with inclusion in mind, the entire community benefits. Together, we can continue building a city where people of all abilities feel valued, supported and empowered to thrive.



Cr Tracey Hargreaves
Mayor, City of Ballarat



Evan King
CEO, City of Ballarat

Purpose and Scope of this Plan

The City of Ballarat has a longstanding commitment to building a community where people living with disability can live, work, learn, thrive and participate fully, with dignity, safety, enjoyment and equal opportunity. The Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (DAIP) provides a clear, long-term framework to embed disability access and inclusion across City of Ballarat decision-making, planning, service delivery and community life.

In the City of Ballarat (the City), our community of people living with disability is increasing and includes a higher proportion of people living with profound disability than the Greater Victorian average. The City of Ballarat, and the broader Grampians region, recognises systems and attitudes have contributed to ongoing barriers for people living with disability. Deliberate and sustained action is required to break down such barriers, and ensure people living with disability are not only included, but are active and autonomous participants in community life, decision making and leadership.

Purpose

This Plan adopts a whole-of-City approach to identifying and removing barriers that limit participation and equity for people living with disability and carers., This is the City's fifth DAIP since 2008. This Plan influences functions across the City, including governance, planning, infrastructure, service delivery, employment and community engagement.

People living with disability, including those with visible and invisible disability, and those who acquire disability at different stages of the life cycle, are more likely to experience discrimination, exclusion and barriers in everyday life. These experiences can contribute to poorer wellbeing and social and economic outcomes. Barriers are often systemic and may include, but are not limited to:

- Physical access to buildings, public spaces and transport
- Access to information, communication and services
- Employment and education opportunities
- Access to services and support systems
- Attitudinal barriers, including stigma, assumptions and biases

Many of these barriers are embedded within environments, policies, services and attitudes that have not been designed with people living with disability in mind. Attitudinal barriers, in particular, can be just as limiting as physical barriers, influencing whether people feel accepted, valued and that they belong in their community.

> "It makes you feel visible when accessibility is considered and front of mind... you matter and you belong here"
>
> Community member.

Intersectionality and inclusion

The City recognises that people living with disability can experience overlapping forms of disadvantage and discrimination. For some people, experiences of exclusion may be compounded by gender, First Nations identity, socioeconomic disadvantage, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity, or sexual orientation and gender identity, including people who identify as LGBTIQA+. These experiences may differ and require tailored and responsive approaches to ensure equitable participation in community life.

Inclusion is the ongoing process and outcome of removing barriers that limit participation, ensuring people with disability can engage fully in social, cultural and civic life including public services, decision making, programs and events. This requires transforming culture, policy and practice to accommodate the differing requirements and identities of people with disability.

Our commitment

The Disability Access and Inclusion Plan reflects the City of Ballarat's commitment to global, federal, state and local legislative and policy requirements . While progress has been made, persistent structural, attitudinal and intersectional barriers remain, highlighting the need for continued and coordinated action to advance disability access and inclusion in measurable and meaningful ways.

Through sustained collaboration with people living with disability, the wider community, service sectors and all levels of government, this Plan provides a coordinated framework for driving local change. The City of Ballarat is committed to embedding lived and living experience of people with disability at the centre of decision-making and to continuously improving policies, facilities, programs and services so they are accessible and inclusive for as many people as possible.



Our Approach

About the Disability Advisory Committee

We embed the lived and living experience of people with disability into decision making through our City of Ballarat Disability Advisory Committee (DAC). The DAC was established in 2008 resulting in our first Disability Access and Inclusion Plan. The Committee is comprised of twelve members with lived and living experience of disability, caring for individuals living with disability and/or with expertise in accessibility. The DAC provides informed advice and recommendations on strategic and systemic issues affecting access, inclusion and participation in community life. It plays a key role in shaping disability inclusive policies, plans and services, strengthening disability awareness across the City of Ballarat, and supporting the implementation and monitoring of the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan.

Nothing about us without us

"Nothing About Us Without Us" is a principle of disability rights and inclusion that asserts people with disability must be actively involved in the decisions, policies and actions that affect their lives. It rejects consultation as an afterthought and instead requires meaningful participation, co design and shared decision making.

Universal design

Universal Design is not just for people with disabilities, it benefits everyone. It is a design approach in creating accessible and inclusive environments, services, programs, and products that can be used by all.

Social model of disability

The social model of disability says that people are disabled by barriers in society, such as buildings not having a ramp or accessible toilets, or people's attitudes, like assuming people with disability can't do certain things. By identifying and removing these barriers, the social model promotes equality and enables people with disability to have greater independence, control and choice in their lives.

Principles (HWP)

Our approach to disability access and inclusion is guided by our principles outlined in the City of Ballarat Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2031:



Principles (HWP)

Equity

We recognise that everyone has different needs and experiences. We are committed to removing barriers, and responding to different needs. This means creating fair and equitable access to community life, decision making processes, policy, services information, infrastructure, planning, programs, and communication that support choice, self-determination and participation.

Inclusion

Inclusion is the ongoing process and outcome of removing barriers that limit participation, contribution and leadership. Inclusion ensures people with disability feel valued, respected, supported, safe and can take part in all aspects of social, cultural and economic life with dignity and choice. We recognise that negative attitudes, assumptions and low expectations can create barriers to inclusion and a sense of belonging for people with disability in all aspects of life.

Accessibility

Accessibility is the foundation of an inclusive community. It means designing environments, services, information, communication, infrastructure and programs so people with disability can access and use them safely, independently and with dignity. We recognise that accessibility extends beyond minimum access requirements. Genuine accessibility considers the whole experience, supporting people to not only enter a space, but to fully participate in, enjoy and benefit from it. We are committed to promoting equitable access for people with disability, regardless of ability, age, means, lived experience, gender, language, religion or culture.

Community Participation

Community participation means people with disability have control over their own lives and genuine opportunities to contribute to, lead and take part in society in ways that are meaningful to them. Full, effective and equitable participation requires removing physical, communication, systemic and attitudinal barriers, and providing appropriate supports where needed. When people with disability can actively participate and contribute to community life, greater inclusion, connection and a stronger sense of belonging can be experienced. It also creates opportunities for people with disability to share their skills, perspectives, and leadership, helping to build more accessible and inclusive communities.

Collaboration

Collaboration reflects the City's commitment to listening to, learning from and being informed by people living with disability. By working with people with lived experience of disability, carers, organisations, advocates and advisory groups, City of Ballarat strengthens its understanding of how policies, services, spaces and decisions impact people's everyday lives. This advisory approach ensures lived experience is embedded into City of Ballarat planning, policy development and service design. Collaboration supports better decision making by identifying barriers, testing assumptions and highlighting solutions that promote access, inclusion and participation. Through ongoing relationships and public engagement, this ensures its work is responsive to the need of people living with disability.

Evidence based decision making

We will make informed decisions by valuing the lived experience and expertise of people with disability and meaningfully engaging with people with disability, carers, advocacy organisations, peak bodies and the broader community. We will draw on community engagement, lived experience, data, research and leading practice to understand barriers, identify opportunities and guide our planning, policies, services and programs. Together, these perspectives will inform decision making, drive continuous improvement, and deliver more accessible, inclusive and lasting outcomes.

Our Community Profile

Around 1 in 5

(21.4%) live with disability.
Many disabilities are hidden or not immediately apparent, including autism, ADHD, chronic pain, hearing loss and mental health conditions.*

7.4%

of Ballarat residents (8,382 people) need assistance with core activities due to disability, a long-term health condition or older age.
This measure reflects people with higher support needs and does not represent everyone living with disability.^

Almost 2 in 5

Ballarat residents (39.1%) live with one or more long-term health conditions.
which may or may not result in disability. ~

The number of Ballarat residents needing assistance with core activities increased by

33.8%

between 2016-2021
highlighting growing demand for accessible communities and services.^

Disability affects people of all ages. Of those needing assistance with core activities in Ballarat,

12.1%

are children aged 0-14 years and 48% are aged 65 years and older.^

14.2%

of Ballarat residents are unpaid carers
and almost **one in five carers are young people** aged 12-24 years. ~

10.7%

of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Ballarat
need assistance with core activities and **45.5% live with a long-term health condition.~**

Nationally

39%

of LGBTIQA+ young people aged 14-21 report living with a disability or long term physial or mental health condition.+

7.5%

of Ballarat residents were born overseas
5.1% of people who speak a language other than English at home need assistance with core activities.~

Abuse

People with disability are more likely to experience family and intimate partner violence than people without disability.
(29% compared with 18%)#

Economic disadvantage

Nearly three in ten Ballarat residents needing assistance with core activities (28.7%) live in low-income households, highlighting the relationship between disability and economic disadvantage.~

Disability discrimination

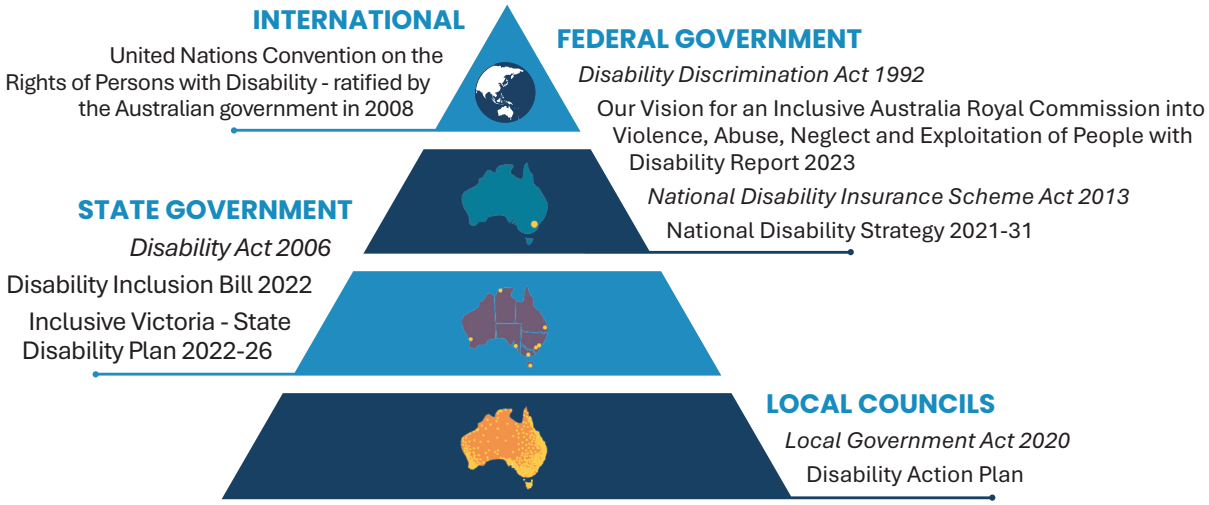
remains the most common type of discrimination reported to the Australian Human Rights Commission, accounting for **46% of complaints in 2022-23.«**

*Sources: *Australian Bureau of Statistics, Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2022. Australian Bureau of Statistics. ^Profile.id, City of Ballarat Community Profile (2021 Census).~ Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 Census, Profile.id – City of Ballarat Community Profile. +Writing Themselves In 4: The Health and Wellbeing of LGBTQA+ Young People in Australia (2021).# Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, People with disability in Australia (Family and domestic violence chapter). «Australian Human Rights Commission, Annual Report 2022–23.*

Note: Local Ballarat data is drawn from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 Census via Profile.id. The Census measure of needing assistance with core activities captures people with more significant daily support needs and does not represent everyone living with disability. National statistics have been included to provide broader context.

Key Policies and Legal Requirements

All levels of government in Australia play a critical role in addressing and promoting the rights of people living with disability through policy, planning and legislation. Local government has a key role in translating national and state government commitments into practical and localised action that is responsive to local community needs.



The City of Ballarat's Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (DAIP) is informed by the *Victorian Disability Act 2006,* which legislates local governments to develop a Disability Action Plan outlining how barriers to access and participation will be reduced. Under Section 38 of the *Victorian Disability Act 2006,* public sector bodies, including local government, must develop a Disability Action Plan that seeks to:

Reduce barriers for people with disability in accessing goods, services and facilities.

Reduce barriers for people with disability in obtaining and maintaining employment.

Promote inclusion and participation in community life for people with disability.

Achieve positive changes in attitudes and practices that may discriminate against people with disability.

The City of Ballarat's DAIP responds directly to these legislative requirements, providing a clear framework for action to embed disability access and inclusion across City of Ballarat decision-making, infrastructure, planning, employment, service delivery and community life. This approach aligns with federal and state policy directions including Australia's Disability Strategy (2021-2031), and the Victorian Disability Strategy.

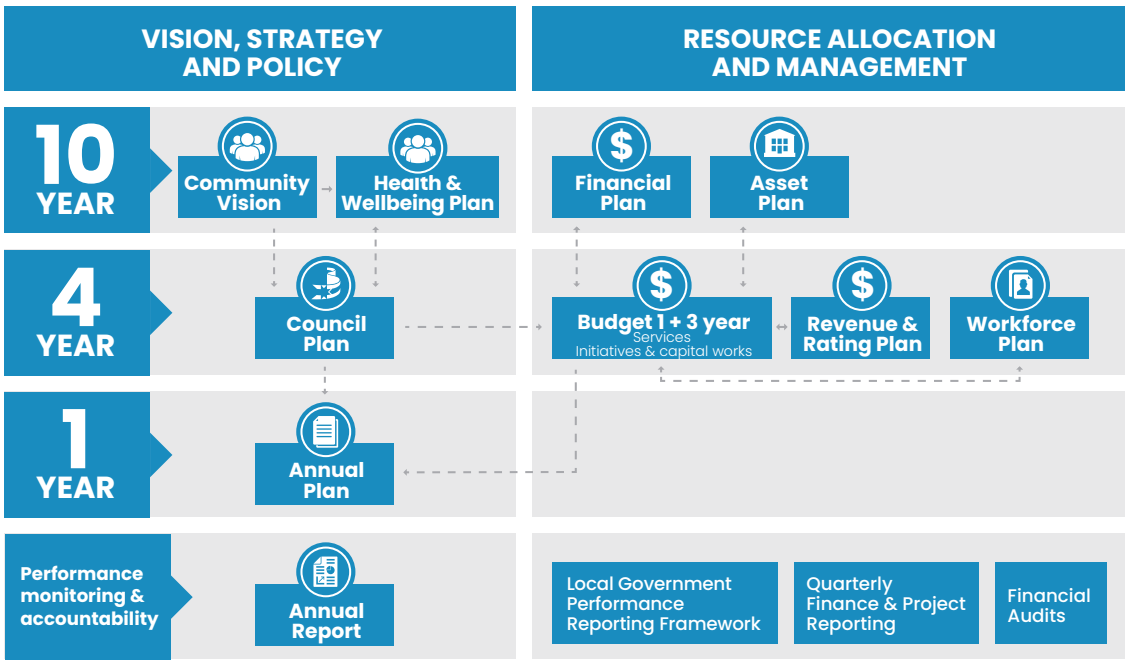
The City of Ballarat's Role in Advancing Access and Inclusion

Local government plays a key role in creating accessible and inclusive communities where everyone can participate and contribute. The City of Ballarat delivers more than 80 services and manages infrastructure, facilities and public spaces that influence how people access, use and participate in community life.

The Disability Access and Inclusion Plan is one of the City of Ballarat's key strategic plans. It supports the Council Plan and Community Vision, Health and Wellbeing Plan, and is embedded within the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework, ensuring disability access and inclusion are considered across planning, policy, projects, service delivery, engagement and decision-making.

The City of Ballarat recognises that disability inclusion is most effective when it is embedded across all City of Ballarat functions. This whole-of-City approach ensures accessibility and inclusion are considered early in planning and decision-making, rather than as separate or retrospective considerations. It also promotes consistency across the City of Ballarat, strengthens accountability and supports inclusive outcomes for the community. In this way, the principles of inclusion extend beyond intent and are reflected in how the City plans, funds, designs, delivers and evaluates its services.

City of Ballarat integrated strategic planning framework



Thematic plans

Reviewed every 2 years

- Reconciliation Action Plan

Reviewed every 4 years

- Ageing Well Plan
- Intercultural Plan
- LGBTIQA+ Inclusion Plan
- Municipal Early Years Plan
- Youth Strategy
- **Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (this plan)**

How We Developed This Plan

The City of Ballarat undertook comprehensive community engagement between 16 February to 22 March 2026 to help shape the 2026-2030 Disability Access and Inclusion Plan. We used a range of engagement methods to ensure that people living with disability, carers, organisations and services could share their experiences, ideas and priorities.



Who we wanted to hear from

We wanted to hear directly from:

- People with disability, accessibility needs and chronic health conditions
- Carers and family members
- Disability service providers and local organisations
- The wider Ballarat community

What we asked

We asked people to share their experiences and ideas by focusing on:

What are your everyday barriers and challenges?

Accessibility of City of Ballarat services, buildings, programs, information, and employment in Ballarat, and how this affects day to day life and participation.

What needs to improve?

Which areas of access and inclusion should be priorities over the next four years, and which groups need better support.

What does an accessible and inclusive Ballarat look like?

What people want an accessible and inclusive Ballarat to feel like in the future, what is already working well, and what actions the City of Ballarat should take to create positive change.

Overall, the engagement helped the City of Ballarat better understand community experiences and priorities so actions can focus on reducing barriers, improving access, and supporting inclusion.

What we heard

Key Messages

Access is inconsistent and exhausting - Community cannot rely on things being accessible as experiences of accessibility vary greatly across infrastructure, footpaths, parking, tourism, public transport, services and more. Physical accessibility of the City is still a significant barrier for community living with disability and carers.

Disability access and inclusion is often an afterthought across planning, infrastructure, transport, events, recreation, service design and delivery, communication, arts and culture, and more. Accessibility as a result can become a check box exercise, whereby minimum access is provided but it is not an end to end or a holistic accessible experience.

Information and communication gaps remain a major barrier - Community cannot find, understand or use information they need due to inaccessible formats, and/or appropriate communication aids not being available to them.

Lack of disability awareness, negative attitudes and discrimination within the community and service systems can be as significant a barrier as inaccessible infrastructure. Direct and indirect forms of exclusion still exist, often because staff and community members are not adequately equipped with the knowledge, procedures and tools required to respond to diverse accessibility needs. This limits access to services and reduces opportunities to participate in social and cultural life.

People want genuine belonging, not just access - Creating inclusive environments goes beyond the ability to physically access a building, event or program. It requires cultural change, supportive policies and inclusive practices that foster genuine belonging for people living with disability and/or access needs. People living with disability should be able to live a full social life, access all public services, events, programs and processes, and actively participate in political, cultural, recreational and social activities of their choice.

Local government plays a big role in disability advocacy and leadership. Whilst state and federal services such as public transport, hospitals, and the NDIS are not run by the City of Ballarat, local government is perceived as a critical advocate and leader in promoting equitable access for people living with disabilities. This role extends to setting the standard for accessible workplaces, tourism and employment.

> "When you make things more accessible, it opens up experience... there's a whole cohort of people who can't follow their dreams."
>
> Community member.

Plan Priority Areas

Data from the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2026-2030 engagement process was analysed and grouped into key themes that informed the priority areas of this Plan:

Built Environment and Accessible Design

Apply universal design across City of Ballarat places and spaces Increase provision of Changing Places facilities Improve accessible footpaths, crossings, curbs and parking. Expand accessible play opportunities for children and families.

Accessible communication, information and engagement

People can find, understand and navigate the information they need without barriers Active participation in decision making, and engagement processes.

Accessible employment, economic and community life

People with disability can participate equitably in economic, cultural and social life.

Community awareness, rights and safety

Ballarat is a community where people experience genuine belonging, going beyond permission to full inclusion and connection.

Accessible leadership and service delivery

Disability access and inclusion becomes business as usual, not a specialist project but standard practice. Our services and buildings set the standard for accessibility.



How this Plan Works

OUR VISION **The City of Ballarat is a community where people with disability can live, work, learn and thrive, participating fully and equally in all aspects of community life**			
Our 5 Priority Areas	**Working Together** (how we will create change)	**Taking Action** (how this plan will be delivered)	**Measuring our Impact**
These are the areas people living with disability, carers and organisations told us we need to focus on over the next four years to improve access and inclusion across the City. • Accessible spaces and places • Accessible communication, engagement and information • Accessible employment, economic and community life • Disability rights, advocacy, safety and community awareness • Accessible leadership and service delivery	• City of Ballarat's Disability Advisory Committee • Work with people living with disability, and carers through ongoing engagement throughout the life of this Plan • Partner and collaborate with organisations, groups, government, businesses and services. • Deliver actions with a whole of Council approach • Embed accessibility into engagement, decision making and planning • Build staff capability and knowledge	• Implement actions in this Plan • Monitor progress quarterly • Report and evaluate progress anually with City of Ballarat's Disability Advisory Committee. • Report annually to Council and community via Annual Disability Access and Inclusion Plan Report Card.	How we will know if we are making a difference: • Percentage of annual actions completed. • Stronger collaboration, partnerships, and information sharing to improve accessibility and inclusion • Accessibility is embedded across City of Ballarat planning, infrastructure, advocacy, service deliverery and governance • Increased participation opportunities for people with disability across sports, arts, culture and community life • Improved accessibility of City of Ballarat communication, information and engagement • Improved disability awareness, knowledge and capability across City of Ballarat business units • Reduced accessibility barriers to employment, work experience, community and economic participation • Greater recognition of the contributions of people with disability throughout

Our Action Plan

The Disability Action and Inclusion Plan is informed by what people living with disability, their families, carers and advocates told the City of Ballarat about the barriers they experience in everyday life. The Plan includes 20 strategic actions across five priority areas that respond directly to these lived experiences, including barriers to accessing buildings and public spaces, finding and understanding information, accessing City of Ballarat services, feeling safe and welcome, and having opportunities for employment and participation.

These strategic actions establish the City's priorities for improving access, inclusion and participation over the next four years. They provide a whole-of-City framework that guides the work of all service areas, from planning and infrastructure to customer service, employment and community programs.

To deliver on these priorities, the City of Ballarat will develop and implement annual action plans containing specific deliverables, projects and initiatives. More than 40 deliverables will be progressed each year, ensuring the strategic actions are translated into practical and measurable outcomes for people with disability, their families and carers.

> "Negative attitudes toward people with disability often stem from biased assumptions and a lack of awareness about the cognitive load and financial burden involved in accessing the support they need"
>
> Community member.

Priority Area	Strategic Actions
Accessible spaces and places	1. Support the activation of places and spaces in Ballarat that champion universal design and disability access. 2. Strengthen Ballarat as an inclusive city and visitor destination through the planning and delivery of new or updated accessible infrastructure and accessible parking provisions. 3. Continue to advocate on behalf of the Ballarat community regarding safe and accessible public transport networks and logistics. 4. Enhance and develop accessible play opportunities for children and families with accessibility needs across the City.
Accessible communication, engagement and information	5. Strengthen accessible communication and engagement practices to ensure people with disability can meaningfully participate in City of Ballarat consultation, decision making and community engagement activities. 6. Continue to improve the accessibility and user experiences of City of Ballarat digital platforms and channels. 7. Develop and promote information about City of Ballarat services, programs and projects on platforms and channels in a range of accessible formats. 8. Showcase local champions and leaders living with disability in City of Ballarat publications, and acknowledgements.

Priority Area	Strategic Actions
Accessible employment, economic and community life	9. Strengthen accessible event planning, decision making and communications to enable greater participation of people with disability at City of Ballarat led events. 10. Showcase City of Ballarat as an employer of choice through inclusive and accessible recruitment and retention practice. 11. Strengthen disability access and inclusive participation across City of Ballarat performing arts venues and facilities, improving experiences for artists, audiences and staff with disability. 12. Strengthen the capacity of the local economy to support inclusive tourism and disability inclusive employment practices. 13. Advance inclusive participation by people with disability in local sport and major sporting events by strengthening accessible sporting opportunities across City of Ballarat owned venues and facilities.
Disability rights, advocacy, safety and community awareness	14. Participate in and contribute to local, state and federal disability advocacy networks and opportunities to advance disability access, inclusion and rights. 15. Increase community awareness of disability rights, inclusion and accessibility through education, campaigns and lived experience leadership. 16. Build the capability, inclusion, safety and wellbeing of people with disability, carers and stakeholders through information, training, networking, leadership opportunities and awareness of gender equity and gender based violence prevention and support pathways. 17. Support and assist local organisations across Ballarat working on disability access and participation.
Accessible leadership and service delivery	18. Strengthen the accessibility and inclusivity of City of Ballarat delivered services through ongoing engagement with people with disability. 19. Embed disability inclusion, accessibility and accountability into City of Ballarat leadership, governance, decision making and continuous improvement processes. 20. Build disability confidence and participation/inclusion capability across the City of Ballarat workforce and stakeholders.

Measuring and Reporting the Success of This Plan

The City of Ballarat will report annually on the implementation of this plan to Council, and to the community through our Annual Report Card which will be published to the City of Ballarat Disability Access and Inclusion website. This reporting will detail progress against actions and key outcomes achieved. We will continue to work with people with disability, the Disability Advisory Committee and our stakeholders to monitor progress, evaluate our impact and identify opportunities to strengthen accessibility and inclusion throughout the life of this Plan.



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CITY OF BALLARAT

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Call via the National Relay Service on 133 677

Translating and Interpreting Services
Call 131 450 for immediate phone interpreting (available 24 hours)
Visit **tisnational.gov.au** for online service

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All information correct at time of publication.
July 2026