

Institute for
Public Policy
and Governance



How local governments can increase the social and economic participation of people with disability

Advocate within and
outside the sector



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Overview

Local governments cannot increase social and economic participation on their own. They need to advocate for greater awareness and consideration of the needs of people with disability; and they need to promote the economic and social case for greater access and inclusion with other levels of government, developers and local businesses.

Most local governments advocate on behalf of their communities to a range of different government and non-government organisations. They also advocate at different scales, for example, working with local business to improve accessibility into premises or with state governments for resources to establish services and infrastructure. Advocacy is often most powerful where local governments collaborate with each other at a sub-regional or regional basis via existing arrangements or new partnerships for a specific purpose.

This section provides information about how local governments advocate within and outside the local government sector.

Advocate in planning and development

In many local government areas there are plans for significant road and public transport infrastructure and residential and retail centre development or redevelopment. Many local governments use these opportunities to increase social and economic inclusion via access improvements. Although developers comply with the Building Code of Australia and Disability Discrimination Act Standards, local governments are aware that the standards do not always meet the needs of all people with disability. As such and as the national survey showed, many local governments often try to influence a higher standard for inclusion as part of local government planning and development processes. Furthermore, the survey showed that over half advocate on behalf of people with disability for greater accessibility in the design of public and private infrastructure and more accessible public transport.

Local governments influence different stakeholders differently. With state and territory governments, many local governments make formal submissions, especially regarding large infrastructure projects, to try to influence both the outcomes and the design process.



CITY OF WHITTLESEA, VICTORIA – ADVOCATING TO STATE GOVERNMENT (Urban Fringe)

The City is experiencing rapid growth with significant rail infrastructure development. The Mernda Rail Extension is the next phase of this expansion. Council worked with the State government to ensure that the extension integrates with Council's land use planning and considers access issues for people with disability, including the provision of information about the project in accessible formats.

Council employs a full-time officer to work on the project with the State government and supports the community to advocate for access provisions for people with disability via the Whittlesea Disability Network. This involved a meeting at Council, facilitated by Council to review the State government's plans. Based on the discussions, Council drafted a formal submission which highlighted access concerns and suggested opportunities for improvement.



CITY OF HOBART, TASMANIA – ADVOCATING FOR ACCESSIBLE PARKING (Capital City)

Council's local government area includes the main business and event precinct in Greater Hobart. The provision of accessible parking is a major challenge because of the topography which makes it difficult to comply with gradient standards in the Disability Discrimination Act. Council receives a large volume of complaints about the lack of accessible parking in key locations around Hobart.

Council identified the current State government Disability Parking Scheme as one of the main barriers to the availability of accessible parking. The scheme has no review period for eligibility and permits remain with families after the holders are deceased. In addition, there is anecdotal evidence from Council parking officers that accessible parking spaces are used by people without disability.

Based on this, Council met with the State government and requested the introduction of an expiry date for disability permits. To date there has been no change in the scheme so, as an interim measure, Council allows double the parking time for disability permit holders in all on-street parking spaces in the CBD. This is not an ideal solution as many of these spaces are not accessible for people with disability, in particular those with low mobility.

Some local governments also build the capacity of people with disability to advocate for issues which are important to them.



MAROONDAH CITY COUNCIL, VICTORIA – BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

(Urban Developed)

Council is undertaking significant redevelopment of its existing infrastructure. Led by the Disability Access Officer, Council formulated an Access Focus Group to work with a private developer in QIC for the redevelopment of Eastland Shopping Centre to enhance its accessibility. The Access Focus Group included local people with disabilities and focused on world's best practice and looked beyond the National Building Standards. The group built the knowledge and understanding of the developer through meetings, videos, a walk in my shoes exercise and examples of where the National Building Standards fall short.

For example, the group highlighted how accessible toilets do not meet the needs of all people with severe or profound disabilities, resulting in parents and carers changing their loved ones on the floor of public toilets. Council was able to provide a solution to the issue highlighting world's best practice in Changing Places from the UK, resulting in the installation of two Changing Places facilities, a first for shopping centres in Australia.

The Access Focus Group also highlighted contrast and luminance issues and the circulated space required for scooters in Accessible toilets. Additionally, Council assisted a local advocacy group in the Eastern Disability Action Group in advocating to Public Transport Victoria for improved access in the local Ringwood Train Station upgrade. Council is now using the station upgrade as an example of the need to strengthen the accessibility requirements under the Building Code of Australia as part of a submission to a Senate enquiry into the delivery of outcomes under the NDS. Council also supported the Eastern Disability Action Group in hosting regular guest speakers on policy and planning matters from all forms of government and non-government departments.

Increase local business capacity

Local governments understand that to increase social and economic participation at a local level requires the engagement of local businesses, in particular around accessibility, but also in terms of how businesses respond to people with disability and how they provide information to them.

As such, many local governments advocate to businesses to raise their understanding

about the needs of people with disability, their families and carers and how to make their businesses accessible and inclusive.



THE FORMER MARRICKVILLE COUNCIL (NOW PART OF INNER WEST COUNCIL), NEW SOUTH WALES – DEVELOPING A MISSED BUSINESS GUIDE (Urban Developed)

Council has a history of strong social advocacy. Following the 1998 ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, Council estimated that 12,290 residents, or 16% of the community, identified as having a disability. Critically, Council also calculated that because people with disability are often accompanied outside the home by a family member, friend or carer, up to 25,000 people consider accessibility for people with disability in their day-to-day activities.

This meant that businesses needed to better respond, and Council partnered with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission to develop a Missed Business guide for small businesses.

The guide provides advice about how to attract more customers by providing better access and identifies steps to make it easier for people with disability to:

- Find businesses on the street
- Enter premises
- Move around premises.

The guide also provides advice on how to communicate and provide good customer service to people with disability.

The guide was distributed to small businesses and is available on the current Inner West Council website in a range of languages.

Other local governments including Toowoomba Regional Council make this guide available on their website. A number of other councils across Australia have produced fact sheets for small business based on this guide.

See: Missed business (www.marrickville.nsw.gov.au/en/community/community-services/accessibility/misled-business/)



CITY OF MELBOURNE, VICTORIA – GOOD ACCESS IS GOOD BUSINESS CAMPAIGN (Capital City)

Melbourne, as a key tourist destination, has a strong economic case for businesses in the CBD to make their businesses accessible, especially as about 20% of Victorians have disabilities. To improve business responses and raise awareness, the City provides free Good Access is Good Business training and resources to the business sector.

Resources include:

- Tips on how different types of businesses can improve their premises for people with disability, including how to provide information, have a welcoming attitude and have an accessible layout
- A variety of customer access checklists for a range of different types of businesses
- Free training seminars.

To support businesses to understand the monetary value of being accessible, the City of Melbourne also commissioned Monash University to investigate the benefit for businesses in dollar terms.

This research found that there was a return of \$13 for every \$1 spent on creating a universally accessible business. In addition, such investment creates up to 25% increase in turnover and \$26 to the community for every \$1 invested by employing a person with disability.

The findings are promoted to businesses.

See: Making business accessible (www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/business/support-resources/toolkits-and-guides/Pages/making-business-accessible.aspx)

Other local governments provide similar information.

See: Good Access is Good Business Guide (www.moreland.vic.gov.au/globalassets/areas/social-policy/good-access-is-good-business-guide-2013.pdf)



CITY OF ADELAIDE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA – ACCESSIBLE DINING CAMPAIGN (Capital City)

The City contains a number of key dining areas, including the popular multicultural Chinatown precinct. However, feedback from the City's Access and Inclusion Panel showed that people with disability had difficulty accessing many of the restaurants in Chinatown.

Council developed a resource, in conjunction with its Access and Inclusion Panel, which provides ideas to improve the accessibility of restaurants including furniture, menus and cutlery and floor layout. It also provides information about the legal rights of Guide Dogs and Assistance Dogs to enter restaurants and is available in English, Vietnamese, Chinese and Japanese.

In addition, Council provides free advice and on-site visits for businesses who would like to make their premises more accessible for people with disability.

See also: Access for all: Improving accessibility for consumers with disability (www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/publications/access-all-improving-accessibility-consumers-disability-2016)

As such, many local governments advocate to businesses to raise their understanding about the needs of people with disability, their families and carers and how to make their businesses accessible and inclusive.



BASS COAST SHIRE COUNCIL, VICTORIA – IMPROVING ACCESS TO PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

(Rural and Remote)

Council received a small, \$5,000 grant from the Victorian Office of Disability to distribute to local businesses to help improve the accessibility of their products and services. Council's Community Development Team allocated ten \$500 grants to small businesses on the basis that they demonstrate improvements to access.

The team worked with successful applicants to develop ideas to make their businesses more accessible and inclusive for people with disability and this led to the installation of hearing loops, handrails, signage and other alterations to improve access.



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