

MAV Sector Submission: Victoria's State Disability Plan and Autism Plan 2027- 2031

July 2026



Climate volatility, social fragmentation, digital disruption and rising costs are reshaping the way we live, work, and connect. Local government is where these global challenges turn into local responses – strengthening trust and resilience through the places, services and experiences people rely on every day.

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) is the legislated peak body for local government in Victoria, advocating for all 79 councils across the state.

MAV works closely with councils, state and federal governments and global experts across industry and academia to deliver services and solutions grounded in local knowledge and community needs across metropolitan, rural and regional Victoria.

MAV offers sector-specific, not-for-profit procurement and insurance services, a local government innovation lab and statewide annual learning, convening programs designed to support Victorian local government to meet the challenges of a fast-changing future.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we live. We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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Executive Summary

Victorian local government plays a critical role in creating inclusive communities and delivering many of the outcomes sought through Victoria's State Disability Plan. As planners, employers, service providers, community leaders and stewards of public spaces, councils shape the environments, services and opportunities that enable people with disability to participate fully in community life.

The next State Disability Plan provides an opportunity to lead both statewide and place-based initiatives by recognising local government as a key delivery partner and investing in the local capacity required to achieve meaningful outcomes.

The next plan must respond to a changing service landscape by strengthening the mainstream and community settings where people with disability live, learn, work and participate.

Without dedicated investment in local disability inclusion capacity, Victoria risks deepening geographic inequities and placing greater pressure on councils and community services that are already operating within constrained resources. MAV urges the Victorian Government to embed local government as a formal partner in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the next plan, supported by sustainable funding and clear mechanisms for coordination and accountability.

This submission focuses on broad principles applicable to both the next State Disability Plan and the next Victorian Autism Plan.

Recommendations

MAV recommends that the Victorian Government:

1. **Strengthen local disability inclusion capacity:** Reinstate and fully fund a statewide place-based disability inclusion program to restore dedicated local government disability inclusion capacity.
2. **Recognise local government as a delivery partner:** Explicitly recognise local government as a key implementation partner within the State Disability Plan.
3. **Inclusive and accessible community infrastructure:** Introduce dedicated, ongoing State funding for accessible and inclusive community infrastructure, including through universal design and local government infrastructure programs.
4. **Reflect and plan for changes to the NDIS:** Include a clear framework for responding to ongoing changes to the National Disability Insurance Scheme, including actions for coordination and sector capacity building.
5. **Increase access to mainstream services:** Pilot an outreach program to support children and families with disability to navigate, access and participate in early childhood education.

Introduction

The Municipal Association of Victoria welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of Victoria's next State Disability Plan. As the legislated peak body for local government in Victoria, MAV represents all 79 councils and works with the sector to strengthen access, inclusion and participation in communities across the state.

Victorian councils are central to the everyday experiences of people with disability. Through their roles in planning, community infrastructure, early years services, libraries, recreation, emergency management, local laws, community development and civic engagement, councils shape the places, services and opportunities that support people with disability to participate fully in community life.

The next plan comes at a critical time. Councils continue to demonstrate leadership and innovation in disability inclusion, but many are doing so without dedicated disability inclusion funding and within an increasingly constrained financial environment.

At the same time, reforms to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) are expected to increase reliance on mainstream services and community-based participation opportunities. Without stronger investment in local inclusion capacity, these reforms risk widening existing gaps in access and participation.

MAV's submission is grounded in a simple proposition: disability inclusion happens locally. Meaningful progress requires a shared commitment among the Victorian Government, local government, people with disability, families, carers, and communities, supported by clear roles, sustainable funding, and practical mechanisms for coordination and accountability.

This submission identifies five priorities for the next State Disability Plan applicable across all proposed pillars of the plan. The priorities are informed by a recent MAV State Council Resolution, supported by a majority of Victorian councils, where the issues are directly relevant to the Victorian Government.

Resolution: That the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) write to and meet with the Victorian Minister for Disability to advocate for:

- 1. Recognition and support of councils' role in meeting disability legislative requirements and delivering the Victorian State Disability Action Plan.*
- 2. Reinstatement of the former "Metro Access" positions to restore dedicated local disability inclusion capacity.*
- 3. Dedicated, ongoing State funding for accessible and inclusive community infrastructure, including through Universal Design and Local Government infrastructure programs.*
- 4. Investment to ensure local government assets meet contemporary accessibility standards and deliver equitable access across communities.*
- 5. A comprehensive review of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) to strengthen accessibility requirements and clarify council obligations.*
- 6. Fulfilment of the State's legislated obligations to deliver fully accessible public transport under the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002.*

Figure 1 Successful resolution on disability inclusion, passed at May 2026 State Council

The Case for Action

For many Victorians with disability, the most important interactions with government occur through local services, facilities, public spaces and community programs. Councils influence accessibility and inclusion through their roles as planners, employers, service providers, infrastructure managers and civic leaders.

Councils also support participation through maternal and child health services, early years programs, recreation, arts and culture initiatives, volunteering opportunities and community development and emergency management activities. Some councils continue to provide Home and Community Care Program for Young People (HACC PYP) services, supporting people with disability who are not NDIS participants.

Despite this significant role, local government's contribution has not been adequately recognised within previous State Disability Plans.

1.1 Existing capacity is insufficient

While councils are committed to advancing inclusion, the cessation of the Building Inclusive Communities (BIC) Program significantly reduced local disability inclusion capacity across Victoria. The loss of MetroAccess and RuralAccess roles removed a statewide network of specialist practitioners who supported community inclusion, partnership development and local disability advocacy.

As a result, disability inclusion outcomes increasingly depend on local resources and competing priorities, creating inequities across the state.

1.2 Innovation is happening locally – it's time to scale it

Despite these challenges, councils are working with the disability community to keep progress moving forward. From inclusive play spaces and beaches to events, there is a growing list of innovative council projects co-designed with the disability community that are demonstrating impact and creating new ways to deliver inclusion.

The next plan must introduce a framework to capture, understand and expand the innovation happening in councils across Victoria so that more Victorians can benefit from this nation-leading work.

1.3 NDIS reforms increase urgency

Changes to the NDIS are expected to place greater emphasis on mainstream and community-based supports. This creates both a challenge and an opportunity for Victoria.

Without investment in local inclusion initiatives and community participation programs, there is a risk that people with disability experience reduced opportunities for social connection and participation. Local government will be a critical partner in responding to this changing environment.

With these realities in mind, the MAV highlights the following evidence-based priorities to deliver better outcomes across all pillars of the next State Disability Plan.

Priority One: Strengthen Local Disability Inclusion Capacity

Recommendation

Reinstate and fully fund a statewide place-based disability inclusion program to restore dedicated local government disability inclusion capacity.

Councils are uniquely positioned to identify local barriers, respond to community priorities and build relationships with people with disability, community organisations and businesses. Place-based approaches consistently deliver stronger inclusion outcomes because they are grounded in local knowledge and local partnerships.

The former Building Inclusive Communities Program demonstrated the value of dedicated inclusion workers embedded in local communities. Reinstating a modernised version of this program would strengthen local leadership, increase expertise in inclusion, and create greater consistency across Victoria.

The reinvigoration of a statewide, place-based inclusive communities program should centre the voices of Victorians with disability through co-design and a comprehensive evaluation process to measure its impact. Funding should be long-term to attract and maintain the appropriate workforce and ensure longevity of initiatives.

About Building Inclusive Communities

The BIC program, funded by the Victorian Government, worked in partnership with local organisations, businesses, and the broader community to develop new ways of including people with a disability in the life of their communities.

The BIC Program, which included RuralAccess and MetroAccess, was a state-wide program funded by the then Department of Health and Human Services and delivered in partnership predominantly with local government. RuralAccess was delivered through 26 councils and Community Health Services in regional and rural Victoria. Many RuralAccess Officers covered more than one local government area. MetroAccess was delivered through the 31 metropolitan councils.

The Building Inclusive Communities (BIC) Program ceased in late 2019, significantly reducing the number of councils with special disability inclusion roles.

Expected Outcomes

Local governments' capacity to spearhead inclusion locally will be restored, and the Victorian Government will have renewed linkages to locally responsive and innovative inclusion work. Impacts of service system reforms will be quickly identified and understood, enabling better, evidence-based policy design.

Priority Two: Recognise Local Government as a Delivery Partner

Recommendation

Explicitly recognise local government as a key implementation partner in the next State Disability Plan.

The success of the State Disability Plan relies on coordinated action across all levels of government. As the level of government closest to the community, councils should be

recognised for their role; failing to do so risks limiting the plan's impact and strategic relevance. Local government already delivers many of the activities that contribute to disability inclusion outcomes but is rarely identified as a formal delivery partner.

Beyond service delivery and community infrastructure, councils have numerous avenues to influence and educate the broader community on matters of disability access and inclusion. Across these domains, councils act as leaders, connectors, and information providers. Achieving meaningful progress requires a collaborative effort among all levels of government along with the allocation of adequate resources. Investing in local social inclusion initiatives bolsters community awareness of the rights of individuals with disabilities, illustrating how each person can play a role in fostering improved inclusion.

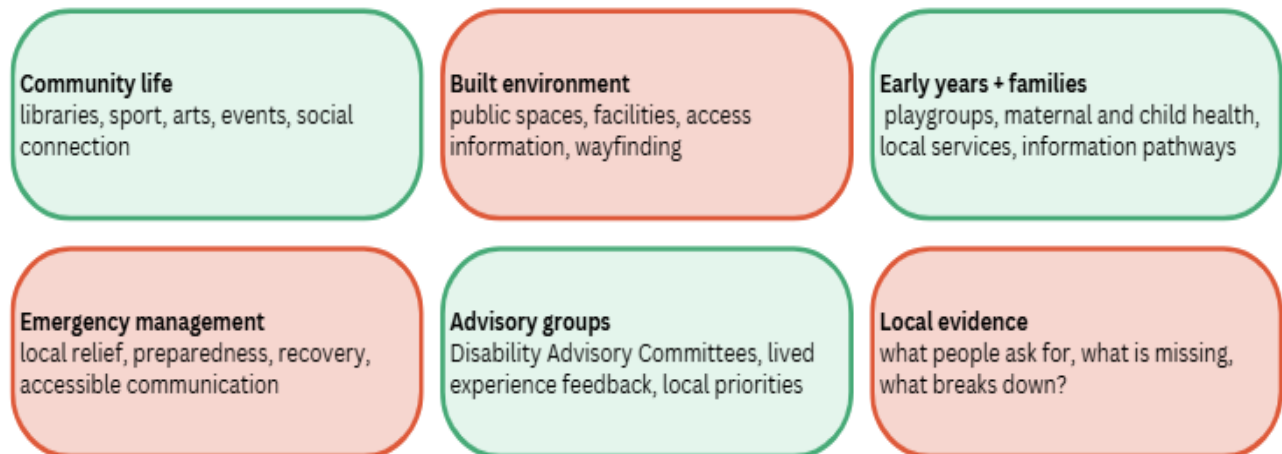


Figure 2 Local government spheres of influence: Adapted from Victorian Local Government Disability Planners Network 2026

Through the development of council disability inclusion and access plans, councils actively engage with people with disability, their families and carers to understand and address the barriers and support their aspirations. They do so with a deep understanding of local context and a focus on intersecting identities and experiences.

The next plan should include commitments to:

- Support council Disability Action Plans development and implementation.
- Develop practical guidance for councils.
- Establish consistent measures and indicators.
- Create mechanisms for ongoing local government engagement.
- Align implementation with Australia's Disability Strategy and local government priorities.

Expected Outcomes

By including local government as a key partner, the new plan will improve policy alignment and create a stronger authorising environment for local governments to pursue inclusion work and better reflect the voices of all Victorians with disabilities and their diverse experiences.

The plan and progress reports will also capture the totality of inclusion work underway in Victoria, increasing accountability and measuring impact.

Priority Three: Inclusive and accessible community infrastructure

Recommendation

Introduce dedicated, ongoing State funding for accessible and inclusive community infrastructure, including through universal design and local government infrastructure programs.

Universal design delivers more than just greater access; it drives and enables inclusion and creates belonging.

Ensuring that local government facilities, community infrastructure, and communications are accessible and inclusive is an important lever for creating more inclusive communities, but it requires significant investment. Victorian Government investment is needed to support councils to deliver more accessible infrastructure.

As documented across several parliamentary inquiries and sector reports, local government's financial position is constrained. The effect of 10 years of rate capping has forced many councils to make tough decisions about where and how to direct investment. State government leadership spearheading the uptake of universal design would ensure equity of access to inclusive infrastructure is achieved across 79 municipalities.

Community infrastructure is social infrastructure that, when designed well, enables whole-of-community participation in everything from volunteering and employment to physical activity and emergency preparedness and response.

Expected Outcomes

With increased investment and incentives to deliver more accessible infrastructure, the whole community will benefit. Universal design will shift from a specialist accessibility consideration to a central deliverable across upgrades and new infrastructure. Centralised funding will enable the Victorian Government and councils to track progress, identify gaps and evaluate impact.

Priority Four: Reflect and plan for changes to the NDIS

Recommendation

Include a clear framework for responding to ongoing changes to the National Disability Insurance Scheme including actions for coordination and sector capacity building.

Changes to NDIS funding arrangements are likely to increase reliance on mainstream services and community participation opportunities. Local government services, facilities and programs will become increasingly important in supporting inclusion.

Reductions in participants' social participation funding are premised on a transition away from individualised services towards mainstream services and community inclusion supports.

The development of the next plan is a critical opportunity to outline how the government will meaningfully engage with people with disabilities, their families and carers in response to changes to the NDIS. Actions should outline how Victoria's response to these changes will maintain and enhance inclusion and access.

The plan should include actions and commitments to work with the disability community to mitigate risks and address gaps in areas such as social participation, where significant reductions in individuals' funding are proposed.

The Australian Government has announced that NDIS participants will experience up to 50% reductions in social participation funding. This is in addition to a retraction of the NDIS's scope of eligibility, which is expected to increase demand on community and mainstream inclusion and access supports.

We know that access to mainstream and foundational supports is not consistent across the state, and the new plan must include actions and measures to ensure that locally responsive and innovative programs can be established while in communities respond to NDIS changes.

Expected Outcomes

Incoming changes to the NDIS will be far reaching and result in substantial changes to the way all people with disability access support and engage in their communities. Disability, education, community services and other universal services, including some delivered by local government will be well positioned to respond to NDIS changes ensuring no Victorian goes without the support they need.

Priority Five: Increase access to mainstream services

Recommendation

Pilot an outreach program to support children and families with disability to navigate, access and participate in early childhood education.

Increasing access to Victoria's world-class early childhood education system is both a priority of the Victorian Government and a necessity for children and families preparing for changes to the NDIS.

Australian children with a disability are enrolled in early childhood education care and support at lower rates than their prevalence in the community. Participating in early childhood education (ECE) has many long-term positive impacts, including for children with disability or developmental delay, but children and families with disability face barriers to accessing and participating in care.

The MAV, in partnership with the Victorian Department of Education, has responded directly to barriers experienced by culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families in accessing kindergarten and school through the development of the CALD Outreach Initiative (the Initiative).

The CALD Initiative is delivered in 26 Victorian councils, employing 30 outreach workers, to support access and drive inclusion. The program harnesses councils' unique position in Victoria's ECE position as service providers and system stewards with deep local connections and networks. Further, the Initiative focuses on interventions across three domains:

- **Children and families:** Direct supports (e.g. outreach support) for children / families to access and participate in kindergarten
- **Services and workforce:** Advice and outreach support to staff, capacity building of services
- **Community and system:** Establish or support partnerships involving councils, kindergarten, community services, establishing referral pathways – including the Central Registration and Enrolment System (CRES)

We see significant opportunities to develop a complementary program for children and families with disability or developmental delay. Positioned within councils, new disability-specific roles would work across and within local service systems to connect families and build service capacity for inclusive practice. They would connect with maternal and child health services and work with CRES teams to support families and children in engaging with kindergarten.

Outreach workers are empowered to address barriers, working across systems and in partnership. With appropriate funding, children and families with disability or developmental delay could benefit from the same place-based support.

Expected Outcomes

The CALD Outreach Initiative has already demonstrated the impact of outreach workers embedded in local government. It has supported thousands of Victorian children in accessing and participating in ECE services. Children with disabilities and their families would benefit from the place-based, person-centred support delivered through the Outreach Initiative, connecting them with specialist support and strengthening engagement with more inclusive mainstream services.

Appendix – Spotlight on local government inclusion innovation

ALGA Disability Inclusion Guide

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) has launched the [Disability Inclusion Guide for Local Government](#). The Guide captures local government disability inclusion work and demonstrates the potential impact that sustained funding to deliver place-based inclusion activities could have across the new plan's lifecycle.

The Guide was developed through ALGA's partnership with the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing and informed by a national Community of Practice comprising council practitioners from across Australia, alongside broader local government sector input.

MAV would be pleased to provide clarification on any information in this submission.
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