MAV Submission to Discussion Paper for the Victorian State Disability Plan 2017 - 2020

July 2016

# Introduction and Summary

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) is the legislated peak body for local government in Victoria, representing all 79 municipalities. In this response to the discussion paper on the Victorian State Disability Plan 2017- 2020 we wish to affirm the role of local government in creating more inclusive communities for people with a disability.

The MAV commissioned work in 2011 to research and articulate what councils were doing to build inclusive communities and this [comprehensive report](http://www.mav.asn.au/policy-services/social-community/disability/relateddocuments/Background%20report%20for%20inclusive%20community%20framework.doc) led to the [Strategic Framework for Local Government in Creating a More Inclusive Community for People with a Disability](http://www.mav.asn.au/policy-services/social-community/disability/relateddocuments/Creating%20a%20more%20inclusive%20community%20for%20people%20with%20a%20disability%20framework.docx).

There are 13 elements to the Framework and these elements align with the National Disability Strategy and the original State Disability Plan as well as being drawn from the practice in councils.

The development of the strategic framework has articulated what many councils are already working on as demonstrated through their disability action plans and councils’ strategic planning documents.

While each council needs to be responsive to its local context, overall councils are bound by similar legislation and regulation and by a number of common community needs and expectations. Thus, in the area of improving access and inclusion councils are addressing many similar issues, even if the detail of individual council responses sometimes varies.

The strategic framework proposes that Victorian councils will work to continue to systematically improve inclusion for people with a disability and their families and progress a whole-of-council approach harnessing council’s community leadership role.

This leadership role and the wide range of roles and responsibilities means that opportunities for improving access and inclusion exist across many areas of a council’s operations including:

* Customer information and services
* Strategic and statutory planning
* Building and engineering
* Economic development
* Human resource management
* Recreation and libraries
* Community development
* Community services

The partnership between the State and local government has been very important in developing a solid foundation across the State and leveraging this whole of council response. No plan can be enacted without resourcing and leadership.

Local government is well placed through the partnership with the Department of Health & Human Services Victoria in the Building Inclusive Communities program (Rural/Metro Access) to be integral to responding to the themes of active citizenship, protecting promoting rights and equal access to opportunities including economic participation and in seamless transition to NDIS and the opportunities for whole communities within this major policy scheme investment.

# Background

Victoria for some time has taken a leading role in inclusion of people with a disability in our communities. As a state we have established expectations for inclusion through legislation and policy initiatives such as the Disability Act 2006, the Victorian State Disability Plan and Council Disability Policy and Action Plans.

All local councils have responsibilities under the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act and are required under State Acts to have both Disability Action and Public Health & Wellbeing Plans. Integrated local area planning is a key role.

*“Under the Victorian Local Government Act 1989 councils have a responsibility to improve the overall quality of life of people in the local community and to ensure that services and facilities provided by the council are accessible and equitable. Addressing issues of discrimination and improving access and inclusion for all community members, including people with a disability, falls within these responsibilities.”*

*(*MAV Creating a more inclusive community for people with a disability 2011)

Councils have many priorities and responsibilities and offer over 130 different services. Councils therefore have myriad relationships within the community as well as strong partnerships with many other service provision organisations. These relationships can be enhanced through dedicated resource to bring focus and priority to the population of people with disabilities and their families.

In Victoria, the partnership with the State and local government has meant that there have been resources directed to ensuring the continuation of the priority of building inclusive communities.

The Building Inclusive Communities Program works 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 Building Inclusive Communities Program including RuralAccess and MetroAccess and, is a state-wide program funded by the Department of Health and Human Services and delivered in partnership predominantly with local government. RuralAccess is delivered through 26 councils and Community Health Services in regional and rural Victoria. Many RuralAccess Officers cover more than one local government area. MetroAccess is delivered through the 31 metropolitan councils.

The following excerpt fromProgress Report to COAG (2014) on the National Disability Strategy summarises what the MAV found in its development of a strategic framework.

*Local government plays an important and unique role in driving the objectives of the strategy. Local councils are responsible for delivering a range of federal, state and territory government policies and programmes. Being so close to the communities they serve, they often engage more comprehensively to identify barriers to access and inclusion and can respond more sensitively to the expressed and specific needs of their communities.*

The Report of the Inquiry into Social Inclusion and Victorians with Disability (September 2014) highlights there is a need build on the existing partnership between State and Local Government, promote the Building Inclusive Communities Program and strengthen the implementation and outcomes of the programs.

“*There is great potential to forge partnerships across non-government organisations, Local Government, the Victorian Government and the National Disability Insurance Agency that could be effective in further social inclusion initiatives:*

* *Local government has a valuable role in implementing the Building Inclusive Communities Program – which is unique to Victoria*
* *Access Officers in the Building Inclusive Communities Program have substantial potential to complement the work of the Local Area Coordinators in the NDIS*
* *Community Participation Teams in the DHS are expected to work closely with local government, Access Officers and non-government organisations.”* (Finding 2.13)

# The Four Themes

## Active Citizenship

The MAV along with the then Department of Human Services and the Victorian Local Government Disability Planners Network developed a [resource](http://www.mav.asn.au/policy-services/social-community/ageing-disability/disability/relateddocuments/Increasing%20civic%20participation%20and%20improving%20consultation%20with%20people%20with%20a%20disability.doc) in supporting civic participation following a successful forum which highlighted key good practice approaches.

This resource acknowledged that many councils already have policies and processes in place to promote and increase civic participation and inclusive consultation. Strategies include inclusive events planning, embedding accessibility into council consultation processes and supporting disability advisory committees and networks to ensure people with a disability meaningfully contribute to council policies and programs. The stages of moving towards more inclusive citizenship are explored with resources that provide for further development and actions relating to the council and community readiness.

### Recreation and Sport

Councils still express concern and disappointment at the removal of the Access for All Abilities Program by the State Government from local government. The program had been operating for ten years and 14 local councils were in receipt of AAA funding which allowed for locally tailored programs in the local community focusing on recreation broadly as well as popular and well - resourced sporting codes. Examples of the local programs which have been foregone include locally designed dance and music programs (disco mania attracting over 100 young people in Hume), recreation activities such as cheer leading, skateboarding and on-line gaming support. These programs were designed with local people and responded to their needs and choices and included support for staff in more traditional sporting and recreational codes.

Victoria has been leading Australia in the requirements for universal design principles to being applied to significant sports and leisure facilities supported by the State Government.

The MAV believes that leadership by the State Government and investment in local government will exponentially increase the adoption of universal design in public places at a local level.

## Having Rights and Being Equal

### Livable Housing

A number of councils have adopted policies to incorporate a percentage of housing construction to meet Livable Housing principles.

The MAV supports the Government’s election commitment to ensuring Victoria’s planning system and building regulations require new construction to incorporate universal design principles that facilitate better access for persons with a disability and older persons.

### Disability Parking

Councils have long been concerned about the lack of consistency with the disability parking scheme application and enforcement. The harmonisation of application of Disabled Persons Parking Scheme with the Australian Disability Parking Scheme appears to have stalled.

A recent MAV State Council motion calls for

State Government to:

* review the efficacy of the current disability parking scheme and its application in terms of addressing need and equity for people with a disability and its application to an ageing population
* Review the criteria for allocation of disability parking permits with relevant authorities, e.g. Australian Medical Association and Vic Roads and in doing so, consider the impact data by gender, age and disability
* Refine the operations of the scheme including the renewal of accessible parking permits
* Lead a community education campaign for all Victorian’s including permit holders and doctors regarding the reasonable and appropriate use of disabled parking bays and permits and
* Work with Councils and VicRoads to review and consider upgrade of parking bay designs and distribution both for on and off street parking.

### Economic Participation

The MAV along with the then Department of Human Services and the Victorian Local Government Disability Planners Network developed a [resource](http://www.mav.asn.au/policy-services/social-community/ageing-disability/disability/relateddocuments/Creating%20employment%20opportunities%20for%20people%20with%20a%20disability.doc) in supporting employment and economic participation following a successful forum which highlighted key good practice approaches.

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Some Victorian councils are developing and reviewing policies and processes to reduce barriers to recruitment, selection and retention. Strategies include targeted training for hiring managers, traineeships, mentoring and work experience and inclusive recruitment practices.

The forum and the resource provides tips and evidence of actions which can be used by local government both for their own organisations as well as with employers in their communities to progress the opportunities for people with disabilities to work.

## Making the Most of the NDIS

MAV is represented on the NDIS Transition Working Groups to do with sector readiness and cross-sector innovation. The MAV convened a senior level forum for all council on the NDIS in November 2015 included the following presentation to support local government to consider roles including service provision, accessing civic engagement and economic opportunities in an NDIS environment.

[NDIS Challenges and Opportunities for Local Government](http://www.mav.asn.au/events/event-presentations/Documents/NDIS%202015%20-%20NDIS%20challenges%20and%20opportunities%20for%20Victoria%20-%20Joseph%20Connellan.docx)

Directing resources towards community building through the partnership between State and Local Government will build upon current leadership, vision and outcomes for all Victorians with a disability and assist in coordination and clarity of outcomes, particularly for the majority of people with disabilities who will not necessarily be eligible for the NDIS.

This approach will allow the introduction of the NDIS to be relatively seamless in this state, building on the scaffolding of strong relationships across the entire state and further leveraging the resources that local government can harness in local communities.

## Driving Outcomes

The MAV supports better integration of disability planning across state and local government.

The MAV background paper referred to previously, highlights that although many councils may be completing their fifth or sixth disability action plans, the capturing of outcomes and trajectory of implementation would be enhanced through a consistent partnership approach, led and resourced by the State Government.

Outlined in the Report of the Inquiry into Social Inclusion and Victorians with Disability (September 2014) is the opportunity to utilise the partnership between State and local governments to explore the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Council Disability Action Plans and their relationship to the State Disability Action Plan. The Report highlighted that the work plans of Access Officers employed through the Building Inclusive Communities program could be strongly linked to Council Disability Action Plans. This opportunity would ensure that the obligations, values and resources of each tier of government can be better understood and utilised.

# Recommendations

**That the Victorian Disability Plan 2017 – 2020 include recognition and continuation of the partnership between state and local government particularly in leading and resourcing a revised building inclusive communities program**

**That the State Government implement policy and legislative changes to ensure incorporation of universal design principles in new housing construction**

**That the State Government review and consult on the disability parking scheme including eligibility and community education**

**That the State Government engage local government in partnership in stronger integration of state and local disability planning**

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