

# OUR WOLLONGONG

## JOIN THE CONVERSATION



**Engagement Report August 2020**

**Draft Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2020-2025**

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## Executive Summary



Wollongong Council's first Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) 2016-2020 is coming to the end of its life cycle.

Following Council's decision of 29 June 2020, the new draft DIAP 2020-2025 (the Plan) was placed on public exhibition for comment from 1 July to 5 August 2020. The Plan was informed by extensive community engagement in 2019

with people with disability and their carers.

The community was asked through an online survey whether they supported the Plan; agreed with the nine priority areas for improvement; whether we missed anything; and, welcomed comments.

A variety of methods were used to promote the engagement and invite the community to comment. The Plan's exhibition coincided with the exhibition of Council's Draft Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Policy and was jointly promoted. A project page on Council's engagement website included the Plan, Community Engagement Summary for the Plan, Frequently Asked Questions, an online survey tool, Q&A tool and links to further information. The engagement was promoted via e-newsletter to Engagement HQ's registered participants; a notice in the Illawarra Mercury; social media posts; a media release; the Council's Community Newsletter July 2020 edition and a poster was displayed at all Council libraries. Emails were sent to over 200 key stakeholders including Neighbourhood Forums, schools, previous DIAP

engagement participants and other individuals and organisations within the local disability network. An electronic copy of the poster was included in the email to schools with the request for it to be shared with their networks including in school newsletters.

The community was invited to provide feedback via the online survey, email or phone. The online Q&A tool was also used. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, no face-to-face engagement activities were held.

14 submissions were received from people with disability, their carers and community organisations. 10 were submitted via the online survey tool and four via email. Many emailed submissions included detailed questions about the Plan which were answered during the engagement period. One question was received via the online Q&A tool. A request was made for a text only hard copy version of the Plan, which was provided as well as being posted to the online platform during the engagement period. The project page received 228 unique visits; documents were viewed 104 times; with 10 online surveys and one Q&A submitted.

The Plan received significant support from survey respondents. Of the 10 who undertook the online survey, nine supported the Plan and one said they somewhat supported it. All those surveyed agreed with the nine priority areas: Parking; Footpaths, Shared pathways and crossings; Toilets; Events and activities; Parks and playgrounds; Pools and beaches; Community attitudes and behaviours; Information and communication; Employment.

The two open ended questions we asked: Did we miss anything? Do you have any other comments? received a range of responses. Comments acknowledging our commitment to access and inclusion, as well as suggesting further improvements to infrastructure and services were made. Requests included having access to supported, meaningful employment; more support

services for carers; safe and well-maintained footpaths; more accessible playground equipment; and, fenced playgrounds. Ensuring people with disability and their carers are meaningfully and consistently included in planning and design through co-design methods was submitted as key to improving the Plan and its implementation. Concerns around the accessibility of the Plan and some of the terminology used were raised in several submissions and were addressed by the project team during the engagement. Feedback themes to emerge included: Footpaths, shared pathways and crossings; Parks and playgrounds; Consultation and codesign; Employment; Carers; Events and activities; Toilets; Information, communication & wayfinding; Parking; Pools and beaches; DIAP formats, terminology, errors & omissions; Inclusivity and Testimony. We also received comment that was outside the scope of the Plan.

## Background

In Wollongong, an estimated 13,090 people live with a profound or severe disability. Overall, 6% of the population of Wollongong require support with their day to day lives due to disability, compared with 5% for Australia.

In 2014 the NSW Government introduced the NSW Disability Inclusion Act 2014. The introduction of this Act requires Council to have a Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) that shows what we are doing to enable people with disability to participate equally in their communities. The Act requires the DIAP to have 4 focus areas;

- Create liveable communities;
- Improve access to systems and processes;
- Promote positive community attitude and behaviours;
- Support access to meaningful employment.

Wollongong Council endorsed its first DIAP under the new Act in 2016. It has guided Council in making services, facilities, activities and information more inclusive and accessible but is now at the end of its life cycle. The draft DIAP 2020 – 2025 (the Plan) is Council's second plan under the Act.

Throughout July – October 2019, Council facilitated community engagement activities to capture the experiences, priorities, thoughts and ideas of people with disability and their carers. The information collected from these engagement activities helped Council identify and better understand the challenges people with disability experience and has been used to set the priorities for the 2020-2025 version of the Plan.

We asked the community whether they supported the Plan and our priority areas for improvement, whether we missed anything and whether they had any other comments.

## Stakeholders

Stakeholders identified prior to the commencement of the engagement period included:

- People with disability and their carers
- Previous DIAP engagement participants and those on Engagement HQ's Register of Interests for Disability and Access issues
- Disability Council of NSW
- Disability organisations
- Schools
- Neighbourhood Forums.

## Methodology

The engagement ran from 1 July to 5 August 2020 and was designed to gather comment through an online survey, the engagement email or phone. A variety of communication methods were used to ensure the community were aware of the engagement. This included:

- A media release issued on 1 July 2020
- A notice placed in the Illawarra Mercury on 8 July 2020
- Social media postings on 1 and 24 July 2020
- Emails promoting the public exhibition sent to key stakeholders, with the invitation to share through their networks
- An e-newsletter sent to Engagement HQ's registered participants
- Posters displayed at all branch libraries and an electronic copy of the poster emailed to all schools for inclusion in their newsletters
- Wollongong Community Newsletter July 2020 issue.

## Results

This section of the report provides details on the engagement activities (Table 1), the on-line participation summary (Table 2), the level of support received for the Plan (Table 3) and for the Plan's nine priority areas (Table 4) via the online survey. Further feedback from both the online survey and emailed submissions is themed.

## Engagement Participation Results

Details of the number of participants for each engagement activity are presented in Table 1.



**Table 1: Engagement participation results**

Engagement activity	Participation
Q&A Tool (not a submission)	1
Survey Tool submission	10
Email submission	4
Submissions received during the engagement period	14

## Online Engagement Results

A total of 10 submissions were received online. Table 2 presents the usage statistics for the project page on Council’s website.

**Table 2: Summary of online participation**

Measure and Explanation	Usage
Aware – Total number of users who viewed the project page	230
Informed – Total number of users who opened a hyperlink or read a document	106
Engaged – Total number of users who have actively contributed to the project via the project page (10 submissions and one Q&A)	11

## Online survey results

Nine survey respondents supported the Plan with one expressing qualified support.

**Table 3: Results Question 1: Do you support the Draft Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2020-2025?**

Options	Responses
Yes	9
Somewhat	1



No	0
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All survey respondents agreed with the Plan’s nine priority areas: Parking; Footpaths, Shared pathways and crossings; Toilets; Events and activities; Parks and playgrounds; Pools and beaches; Community attitudes and behaviours; Information and communication; Employment.

**Table 4: Results question 2 Do you agree with the priority areas for improvement?**

Options	Responses
No	0
Yes	10
Somewhat	0

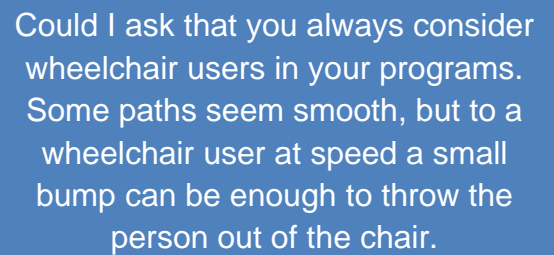
### Themed feedback

We also asked the community two open ended questions: Did we miss anything? Do you have any other comments? Feedback to these questions was provided via the online survey as well as via emailed submissions.

Feedback themes to emerge included: Footpaths, shared pathways and crossings; Parks and playgrounds; Consultation and codesign; Employment; Carers; Events and activities; Toilets; Information, communication & wayfinding; Parking; Pools and beaches; DIAP formats, terminology, errors & omissions; Inclusivity and Testimony. We also received comment that was outside the scope of the Plan.

## **Theme: Footpaths, shared pathways, and crossings**

The importance of having safe, unobstructed, and even footpaths which can accommodate gophers, Zimmer frames and wheelchairs was raised.



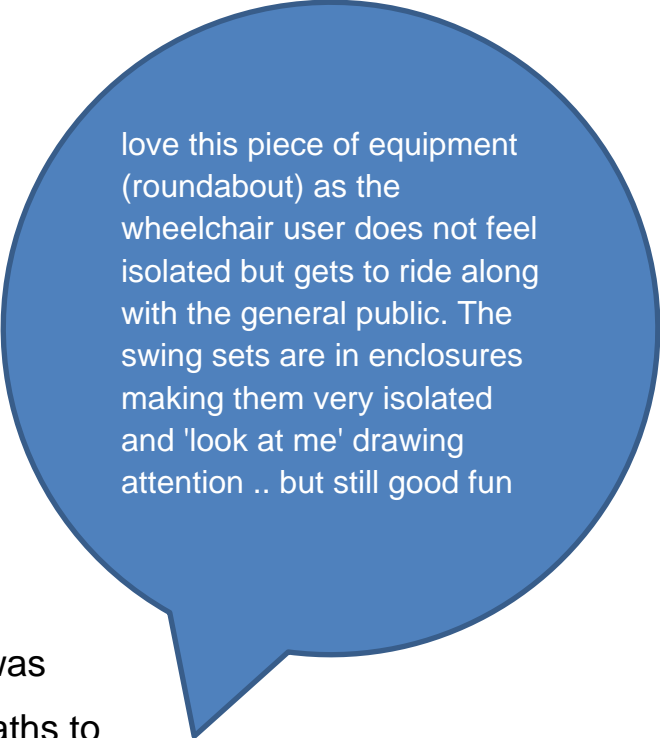
Could I ask that you always consider wheelchair users in your programs. Some paths seem smooth, but to a wheelchair user at speed a small bump can be enough to throw the person out of the chair.

Suggestions included installing traffic barriers to separate footpaths and bicycle paths from busy roads; creating clearer paths of travel by relocating footpath furniture, bus shelters and electrical boxes and pruning trees; replacing single steps with ramps; removal of roots that damage footpaths; and, having more footpaths across the Local Government Area (LGA). Some suburbs have footpaths, gutters and kerbs that are inaccessible which results in wheelchair users having no other option but to use the road to move around.

## **Theme: Parks and playgrounds**

Requests were made for additional fenced playgrounds, particularly in the southern suburbs; wheelchair accessible play equipment; visuals in every park with braille available; and, sensory areas in playgrounds. Secure playgrounds were also identified as places of temporary respite, a “sacred place”, for carers.

Limited wheelchair access and connectivity was raised as a concern with the comment that paths to parks and playgrounds need to be wide enough for



love this piece of equipment (roundabout) as the wheelchair user does not feel isolated but gets to ride along with the general public. The swing sets are in enclosures making them very isolated and 'look at me' drawing attention .. but still good fun

wheelchairs and not have trip hazards or wheel barriers.

A suggestion was made to extend concrete slabs for picnic tables to allow room for wheelchairs to fit on the pad and at the table.

One respondent reflected they preferred accessible play equipment that was open to everybody, rather than isolated play equipment set apart.

### **Theme: Consultation & codesign**

It was requested that meaningful and consistent engagement with people with disability and their parents and carers occur through co-design from planning through to delivery. It was proposed that talking and listening through traditional community engagement methods suggests tokenism and that Council has a responsibility to meaningfully include people with disability through co-design methods. The request was made that co-design methods be implemented in governance, continuous improvement and all committees and groups.

Building relationships with a wide range of individuals and organisations was suggested to develop a deeper understanding of the daily lives of people with disability and their carers as well as key to improving Council's implementation of the Plan.

One respondent shared their positive experience working with Council on the Plan and noted that the Plan is a true reflection of the information provided.

Keeping the community updated annually with the progress of the Plan was identified to support the participation of people with disability and their families in community life.

## **Theme: Employment**

Employment of people with disability was raised as a key issue. It was raised that Council's workforce should reflect the diversity of our community, in terms of representation of people with disability. Also, that targeted positions should be valued and the work meaningful. While work experience was praised, it was questioned whether this led to meaningful employment. One respondent was unsure how staff training improved access for community members. It was suggested that Council should also support businesses to employ people with disability.

The way that disability statistics were reported in the Plan was questioned, with the request to include the effect of Covid 19 on unemployment rates for people with disability who will likely be disproportionately affected.

## **Theme: Carers**

Understanding the challenges for people caring for a person with disability was raised as an area not addressed in the Plan. The request was made for Council to support carers to connect, have opportunities to share their experiences of daily life, and to be meaningfully involved in Council planning.

## **Theme: Events and activities**

Positive feedback was received for larger Council events being more accessible and catering for physical and sensory needs, noting the "outdoor cinema, Australia Day, Eat Street (having quiet area)". Another noted that supports offered at annual events must be offered at all events to be truly inclusive. It was suggested that libraries use Key Word Sign for all children's programs and events and to have 'loud rooms' for people who may need to make noise in the library.

**Theme: Toilets**

Increasing the number of safe and well-maintained toileting amenities that include adequate lighting and adult lift and change facilities was identified.

One respondent shared they were pleased with the upgrade to the Austinmer Bathers Pavilion accessible bathroom and changing facilities as the start of real improvement in access and inclusion.

**Theme: Information, communication & wayfinding**

Requests were made to have accessible and inclusive signage. It was requested these should be throughout the LGA. Ideas included having communication boards for all sporting events and activities; 'visuals' in every park with braille available; and, having a communication board on the free shuttle bus.

**Theme: Parking**

One respondent noted current accessible parking dimensions don't cater for rear loading vehicles. They suggested that the current standards need to be reviewed to ensure safety for all vehicle types.

**Theme: Pools and beaches**

Respondents had questions about the access of beaches; the location of beach matting trials and what we are doing to assist hearing or vision impaired people.

**Theme: DIAP Formats, terminology, errors & omissions**

Concerns were raised about the accessibility of the Plan in terms of the format it was available in as well as the language used. One response questioned the title of the Plan and suggested a different one. The use of the terms 'Plain

English' and 'Easy Read' was questioned in one submission with the recommendation to make the distinction between the two formats and to make the Plan available in both.


A request was made for a text only version of the Plan, which was provided to the community member and uploaded to the engagement website. Another submitted that while the content of the Plan was "really good" it was not completely accessible, querying font size, colour and contrast. These queries were also addressed by the project team during the engagement period. It was noted that a wheelchair image was out of date and would be noticed by people with disability and that several arrows were missing in a pictogram.

### **Theme: Inclusion**

Inclusivity was raised as a key issue across a range of themes including that of carers, parks and playgrounds, employment, events and consultations.

### **Theme: Testimony**

While some offered praise for the Plan others cautioned that highlighting achievements may send the wrong message.



*People with disability require accessibility and inclusion, and should expect it, rather than be delighted when it is considered.*

### **Theme: Outside scope**

A request was made for more drive through businesses as they are a great support to people with disability and their carers.