

Snowy Monaro Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2025 – 2029

Text version for screen readers

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Acknowledgement of Country

Snowy Monaro Regional Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the region's land and water, the Ngarigo, Walgalu, Ngunnawal, and Bidjawal Peoples. We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

Message from the Mayor

I am honoured to introduce the plan of Snowy Monaro Regional Council to create a more inclusive, accessible, and connected region for everyone. Our region is already a great place to live, but we aim to make it even better. This plan builds on our current efforts to ensure that our communities are welcoming spaces for all community members, including those with disabilities.

This plan is the result of a collective effort by people across our region. I want to express my gratitude to our community for participating in this important project. We have gathered feedback from people in our region with disabilities, their carers, and organisations that support them. We have used their feedback to identify gaps and determine what actions can be undertaken to reduce or remove them.

Our people are our greatest asset, and it's crucial that we include everyone in our plans when we are planning for our community's future. This makes us a stronger community and highlights the understanding, empathy, and respect that are essential parts of our culture. Moreover, it allows us to tap into everyone's full potential across our region, which benefits everyone.

I encourage you to explore the plan, get involved, and work with us towards implementing improvements to support those with disabilities in our community. By working together to support those with a disability in our community, we will make our region better than ever.

Chris Hanna, Mayor, Snowy Monaro Regional Council

15 August 2024

Introduction

About this Plan

The Snowy Monaro Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2024 – 2028 sets out a four-year roadmap for a more inclusive, accessible and connected Snowy Monaro region for people with disability.

At the time of the 2021 Census, the Snowy Monaro region was home to 1,055 residents with disability, representing 5% of our total population. The number of people with disability increased by 174 people between the 2016 and 2021 Census. People with disability are a diverse group of people, all of whom contribute to our region in various ways – as members of local community groups, volunteers, students, workers, carers, friends, and valued family members.

People with disability, carers and advocates told us they love living in the Snowy Monaro region because of its strong community spirit, beautiful natural environment, and quaint villages and regional centres such as Cooma, Nimmitabel and Bombala. But we also heard that living here can be challenging because our region spans a large geographic area, which can make it difficult to get around and access the services, jobs and connections people need to live a good life.

Through everything we do, Snowy Monaro Regional Council (Council) is committed to achieving the vision set out in our Community Strategic Plan (CSP) for “a welcoming, diverse and inclusive community where everyone can belong, participate, and work together.” We have a proud history of planning, serving, and advocating for our community, including our residents with disability.

The Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2024 – 2028 (the Plan) outlines how Council, our community and partners will work together over the next four years to create a more accessible and inclusive region. This is Council’s second Plan and aims to deliver practical and meaningful actions that will support people with disability to enjoy the same opportunities and choices as everyone else in the Snowy Monaro region. The Plan will build on some of our ongoing initiatives, such as the Celebrate Ability Festival.

We recognise that this Plan will benefit not only people with disability, but residents with limited mobility or temporary illness or injury, older people, and parents or carers of young children, particularly those with strollers or prams.

How we developed this plan

Council would like to thank our community and local organisations for providing valuable insights, stories and ideas to support the development of this Plan. The process included:

Research

We looked at Census data to understand what our community looks like now and how it will change in the future. We also reviewed planning policies and directions related to disability inclusion at the national, state and local level.

Engagement

We spoke to more than 70 local people with disability, carers and services via interviews, surveys and a workshop. The community told us what's working well and what could be improved to make the Snowy Monaro region more inclusive and accessible.

Collaboration

We surveyed Council teams across multiple departments to ensure that all areas of Council are contributing towards making the Snowy Monaro region more accessible and inclusive for people with disability.

Our focus areas

This Plan sets out actions for positively shaping Council's practices over the next four years to improve access and inclusion outcomes for our community. It covers four key focus areas:

1. Promoting positive attitudes and behaviours
2. Creating liveable communities
3. Supporting access to meaningful employment
4. Improving access to mainstream services through systems and processes

The case for access and inclusion

Access and inclusion benefits everyone in our community and is important because:

- We embrace a wide range of perspectives, skills and experiences, making our community stronger and more resilient.
- It fosters understanding, empathy, and respect for individuals from different backgrounds, reducing discrimination and stigma.
- When people feel included and empowered, they are more likely to engage in community life and take an active role in shaping our region's future.
- Access to inclusive services, facilities, and opportunities enhances the quality of life for all residents.
- It taps into the full potential of our residents, enabling everyone to work, contribute to and participate in our local economy and community life.
- It promotes independence, positive self-worth and improves mental health

Defining disability

Disability impacts a significant proportion of the population. The Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (DIA) defines disability as:

“The long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which in interaction with various barriers may hinder the full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”

It's important to remember that having a disability is just one part of a person's identity – it does not define them.

This Plan focuses on removing the barriers that make it harder for individuals to equitably participate in society, whether this be due to the built environment, community attitudes or communication. Removing barriers and promoting access and inclusion will benefit not only people with disability, but everyone in our community.

There are many types of disability

There are many types of disabilities, and they can affect people in different ways every day. Disabilities can be visible or, in the cases of anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, diabetes or dyslexia, invisible.

Different types of disability include:

Physical

Affects a person's ability to perform physical activities, such as mobility or dexterity e.g. quadriplegia, amputee and cerebral palsy.

Intellectual

Affects a person's ability to learn and perform certain daily life skills (e.g. Down syndrome, tuberous sclerosis, foetal alcohol spectrum disorder).

Sensory

Affects a person's ability to hear and/or see (e.g. hearing impairment, vision impairment).

Development and learning

Affects a person's physical, emotional, social, communication and thinking skills (e.g. autism and dyslexia).

Neurological

Affects a person's nervous system that impacts their mental or bodily functions (e.g. acquired brain injury, epilepsy, dementia and multiple sclerosis).

Mental illness

Affects a person's thinking processes (e.g. anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder).

Council's roles

Council has many roles to play in strengthening inclusion and access in our region. At the same time, we know that we are all stronger when we work together. This Plan will guide how Council, our partners and our community can each play a role in making our region an inclusive and accessible place for everyone to live, work, play and visit.

Lead and advocate

- Promote positive attitudes and behaviours in the community
- Listen to people with diverse abilities to understand their needs
- Advocate to other agencies and levels of government

Plan and regulate

- Develop policies that respond to the needs of our community, including people with disability
- Align decision-making and planning to the diverse needs and aspirations of our entire community

Build partnerships and capacity

- Unlock capacity within our community by sharing information and resources
- Partner with organisations and our community to achieve shared goals (e.g. access to meaningful employment)

Deliver infrastructure and services

- Plan and deliver public facilities, public spaces, and services that are accessible for all
- Ensure Council services and programs are inclusive of people with disability

The Plan in context

Under the NSW Disability Inclusion Act 2014, every local council in NSW is required to have a Disability Inclusion Action Plan.

We developed this Plan in accordance with the NSW Disability Inclusion Act 2014. Our Plan is underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability, and takes into consideration a range of relevant legislation, standards and strategies across International, National, State and local levels.

People living with disability in the Snowy Monaro region

At the time of the 2021 Census, the Snowy Monaro region was home to around 21,670 people. Over half of our population live in the centres of Cooma, Jindabyne, Berridale and Bombala, with others spread across our rural areas and villages.

While on average our rural communities are relatively older compared to the average across NSW, some areas such as Jindabyne have younger populations attracted by lifestyle and employment opportunities.

Disability Snapshot (2021 Census)

- 1,500 people living in the Snowy Monaro region reported needing support in their day to day life due to disability. At 5% of our total population, this is relatively lower compared to regional NSW at 6.8%.
- The number of people with disability increased by 174 people between the 2016 and 2021 Census.
- 2,012 people living in the Snowy Monaro region provide unpaid care to a person with a disability, long term illness or old age. This represents 11% of our total population.
- Some areas have a higher proportion of residents with disability, including Cooma (7.1%), Bombala (6.9%) and Rural East (5.3%).
- The older you are, the more likely you are to have a disability. More than 90% of people with disability in the Snowy Monaro region are aged over 65 years old.

Disability snapshot (2018 ABS Data by Region)

Additional ABS data is available which indicates via modelled estimates that the region is home to a higher number of people living with disability who do not require assistance with activities of daily living.

- 4,670 is the number of people with disability in the Snowy Monaro LGA (23% of the population).
- 2,198 is the number of people who are carers (12.6% of the population).

What our community told us

How we engaged

Between October and November 2023, we heard from people with disability, paid and unpaid carers, family members, disability service providers, and Council staff. We provided a range of different consultation methods, so people could engage with the Plan's development in a way that best suited them. These included:

- community survey (available online and printed)
- easy read survey (available online and printed)
- phone interviews with community
- service providers workshop
- online service providers survey, and
- online Council staff survey.

What we heard

Attitudes and behaviours

We heard that the Snowy Monaro region has a strong community spirit, and mostly positive attitudes and behaviours towards people with disability.

At the same time, we heard there is room to improve community attitudes and behaviours towards people with disability to break down barriers, strengthen inclusion and increase community connections.

You told us you would like Council to:

- Raise awareness within the community about different types of disabilities, including those that are invisible, to increase understanding and empathy.
- Promote inclusive attitudes and practices to the local business community to improve access to local businesses and shops.
- Increase representation of people with disability in Council media publications.
- Continue to deliver inclusive events such as the Celebrate Ability Festival for the International Day for People with Disabilities.

Quotes:

Local disability service provider: "Council has always been passionate about celebrating people with disability. Every year they celebrate and acknowledge International Day of People with Disability."

Local disability service provider: "Carers always need more support and information that would help them, they can be invisible within the community. People with disabilities still face a lot of stigma and ignorance from the rest of community."

Liveable communities

We heard a major barrier for people with disability is liveability across the region including access to footpaths and crossings, transport options, access to shops, restaurants and local services, as well as inclusive events and programs. We also heard that because the Snowy Monaro region is a large geographic area, residents struggle to get around the region to access shops, services, events and activities.

You told us you would like Council to:

- Improve the width and quality of pathways and improve connections, especially in areas with high foot traffic
- Increase and improve disability parking spots to ensure people have easy and direct access to services and shops.
- Advocate for improved public transport options to get around the region, including more frequent and reliable bus services.
- Improve the accessibility of events through better promotion, portable matting, accessible toilets, parking, and sensory spaces.
- Facilitate more social and recreational activities for people with disability and carers to combat social isolation and increase connection and wellbeing.
- Ensure all Council facilities are accessible and include features such as ramps, wide doorways and quiet spaces.
- Advocate for improved physical access into shops and other non-Council services and buildings.
- Improve accessibility and maintenance of public toilets.
- Work to improve access to local disability and other health services so people don't have to travel out of the region.

Quotes:

Community member with disability: "Near the library there are crossings but not everyone in their car stops, they don't bother. I am vision impaired, I can't see people indicating especially at roundabouts and that makes it difficult."

Community member with disability: "We need more seats in Cooma because I can only walk so far. I can't walk from Sharp Street to Massie Street – I'm trying to find places to sit down."

Community member with disability: "We need more things to do in Cooma such as social activities, workshops, interesting things to do for socialising – that are close by so no need to travel to Canberra."

Meaningful employment

We heard that people with disability have many skills and assets that local businesses can benefit from, however there is a general lack of understanding of different types of disabilities and resources to support employers in the region.

You told us you would like Council to:

- Raise awareness within local businesses about the various resources, funding and support that are available to employers when employing people with disability.
- Encourage local businesses to increase employment of people with disability, including more inclusive job descriptions that don't exclude people with disability from applying.
- Increase collaboration across interagencies and committees, including employment services committee,
- Improve inclusion and access to meaningful employment.
- Encourage employment of people with disability at Council.
- Advocate for more employment services in the area to support people with disability finding meaningful jobs.

Quotes:

Community member with disability: "I am qualified chef, and I can't get work. It's been 12 months since I last had a job. I've got skills and I am capable, but I do take my time. I am hearing all the time there is lack of skilled people out there and I will be 63 years old this year, and when you get to a certain age, they don't want to employ you. Insurance is what is holding people back from employing people with a disability, instead of giving someone a fair chance."

Community member with disability: "Give people with disability a fair go with employment. We need to educate businesses to be able to provide more employment opportunities for people with disability."

Systems and processes

We heard that providing easy access to up-to-date information and resources is important for people with disability to stay connected, communicate and interact with Council and services.

You told us you would like Council to:

- Consult more with people with lived experience and carers, ensuring there is adequate promotion and ways for people to have their say and be listened to.
- Improve Council's website navigation and provide more information and resources for people with disability, such as an accessible toilet map and accessible event information.
- Find alternative ways to communicate with residents, noting that access to the internet is a challenge in the region, particularly for people with disability and seniors.

Quotes:

Local disability service provider: "Our clients might not have a phone or are unable to access the internet to get information, especially in areas without service. We also have many ageing clients who don't have the skills to use the internet. We need to come back to basics and have more easy-to-read formats for participants to access information on services so they know this information exists."

Our action plan

Focus area 1: Promote positive attitudes and behaviours

Snowy Monaro Regional Council encourages and promotes positive and inclusive behaviours in our organisation, as well as our community's attitude to people with a disability. We champion behaviour that respects and embraces diversity within our community, and increases understanding and empathy.

Actions

Goal: Increase community awareness about disability and the importance of inclusion

- 1.1 Share positive images and stories of people with diverse types of disability in the Snowy Monaro Region via Council publications, social media and marketing materials.
- 1.2 Continue to deliver the Celebrate Ability Festival for the International Day of People with Disabilities and investigate opportunities to grow this initiative (e.g. partnerships, promotions, extended opening hours).
- 1.3 Work with community organisations and schools to promote events, activities and organisations that celebrate the contributions of people with disability and provide opportunities for social connection, including around International Day of People with Disabilities and Carers Week.
- 1.4 Actively promote public awareness campaigns related to disability inclusion to our community via Council channels. This could include re-sharing campaigns from the Disability Council of NSW, the Local Government Association of NSW, the Australian Human Rights Commission and other major disability services.
- 1.5 Encourage positive behaviours and attitudes towards people with disability among local businesses by promoting awareness of the importance of access and inclusion. Investigate opportunities to deliver the 'Zero barriers' initiative in the Snowy Monaro region.
- 1.6 Provide disability awareness training and information for all Council staff and Councillors. Investigate opportunities for this to be delivered by people with lived experience of disability.
- 1.7 Investigate opportunities for public-facing Council staff to receive targeted training on disability inclusive practices and communication, including opportunities for training in sign language.
- 1.8 Deliver public safety session of Stepping On in partnership with NSW Health
- 1.9 Establish an Access and Inclusion Committee

Focus area 2: Create liveable communities

Snowy Monaro Regional Council is committed to creating a liveable and welcoming region. We will plan, deliver and advocate for public facilities, buildings, infrastructure, open spaces, programs, events and services that promote social connection, inclusion, wellbeing, and contribute to a sense of belonging and pride for people of all abilities.

Actions

Goal: Improve accessible transport and connections around the region

- 2.1 Conduct an audit of accessible pathways, kerbs and crossings in town centres and key destinations across the region and implement pathway improvements to make it easier for people with disability to get around.
- 2.2 Advocate to the State Government to improve accessibility of road crossings on key State roads to support people with disability to get around (e.g. Sharp Street in Cooma).
- 2.3 Audit bus stops to ensure accessibility and compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- 2.4 Review and investigate opportunities to improve the user experience of Council's community transport service (e.g. timing, frequency of service, locations).
- 2.5 Increase provision of accessible parking spaces in key areas around the region, including in town centres and close to community facilities, libraries and services. Upgrade existing spaces that are not meeting accessibility requirements.

Goal: Ensure new and upgraded public facilities and open spaces are accessible to all people

- 2.6 Develop a prioritised list of existing Council buildings and facilities requiring access upgrades. This should include Council building and chambers, swimming pools, community halls, visitor centres, libraries etc. Incorporate priority projects in Council's Capital Work Program, Asset Management Policy and Financial Plans.
- 2.7 Investigate opportunities to deliver accessible play and recreation infrastructure across the region (e.g. all-abilities playgrounds, sensory play, wheelchair basketball facilities at Cooma Regional Sports Centre).
- 2.8 Trial sensory hours and activities at libraries.
- 2.9 Provide Universal Design Principles training for staff involved in planning, design, development, and delivery of Council assets.
- 2.10 Consult with the Access and Inclusion Committee through the design and planning stages of public facilities upgrades and infrastructure projects.
- 2.11 Increase the provision of accessible bathrooms in key destinations across the region, and improve maintenance of existing facilities. Advocate for funding to provide a Changing Places facility in the region, particularly at key destinations to unlock accessible tourism opportunities.
- 2.12 Advocate on behalf of the community to address access issues in private and non-Council premises, including as a priority health services, shops, Post Offices, and cinemas.

Goal: increase accessible and inclusive community programs and events

- 2.13 Investigate opportunities to make Council's ongoing program of community events and programs more accessible and inclusive for people with disability. Develop an inclusive events and programs checklist.
- 2.14 Continue to deliver Tech Savvy Seniors program at council libraries and explore other programs and activities to engage people with disability.
- 2.15 Investigate opportunities to deliver or facilitate targeted programs for people with disability and carers, with an expressed need for social groups and activities.
- 2.16 Advocate for funding to increase accessibility of the showgrounds to support people with disability to participate in community events.
- 2.17 Include information about accessibility at Council community events and activities in our marketing and promotional material.

Goal: Increase access and support for local services

- 2.18 Advocate for a higher presence of disability service providers and advocacy services in the Snowy Monaro region. Consider providing in-kind space to community services supporting people with disability within Council facilities.
- 2.19 Continue to convene the Monaro Regional Interagency.
- 2.20 Coordinate a workshop with Monaro Regional Interagency and services interagency to collaborate on issues related to encouraging sector collaboration.
- 2.21 Increase opportunities to grow inclusive and accessible tourism.
- 2.22 Advocate for Snowy Hydro Legacy Funding for priority projects relating to disability inclusion and access.

Focus area 3: Support access to meaningful employment

Snowy Monaro Regional Council is committed to advocating for and reducing barriers to meaningful employment and workplace opportunities across our region within local businesses and our organisation.

Actions

Goal: Increase employment of people with disability in local businesses

- 3.1 Collaborate with disability employment services to identify and implement initiatives supporting employment for people with disability in the Snowy Monaro region.
- 3.2 Share information and resources with local businesses about inclusive employment and workplace practices.

Goal: Snowy Monaro Regional Council is an inclusive and accessible organisation for employees, volunteers, and Councillors

- 3.3 Investigate opportunities to provide volunteer, traineeship, and work placement opportunities for people with disability at Council.

- 3.4 Review flexibility of recruitment and hiring process to encourage and remove any barriers for people with disability seeking employment within Council.
- 3.5 Provide a range of flexible and contemporary working arrangements that support the needs of staff members with disability. These could include:
- Work arrangements being negotiated based on employee and organisation requirements.
 - Reduced and flexible work hours, through part-time or job-sharing arrangements.
 - Working from remote locations.
 - Providing technology that supports working from remote locations.

Focus area 4: Providing accessible systems and processes

Snowy Monaro Regional Council is committed to providing easy access to Council information, services and facilities. We provide opportunities for our community to actively participate and contribute to local decision making in an accessible and inclusive way.

Actions

Goal: Increase access to information and Council services

- 4.1 Promote and share information to connect residents to local community services (e.g. via community directories, social media and Council's noticeboard).
- 4.2 Council's website provides up to date information about access and inclusion in the LGA, including accessible toilet maps and events with accessible features.
- 4.3 Provide information to people with disability via a range of formats and channels, including easy read, in print, and distributed via service providers etc. This should include analogue formats for people without access to the internet.
- 4.4 Investigate opportunities to promote and/or develop emergency preparedness resources and/or support for people with disability, and other high-risk groups such as seniors.
- 4.5 Continue to work towards website Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0

Goal: Embed inclusive practices in Council's planning

- 4.6 Ensure all new and updated strategic plans and policies, including master plans and local planning agreements, include consideration of disability access and inclusion issues and principles.

Goal: monitor and report on this Disability Inclusion Action Plan

- 4.7 Utilise the newly established Access and Inclusion Committee to help oversee, evaluate and report on the implementation of this Disability Inclusion Action Plan.
- 4.8 Raise awareness of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan internally including through sharing achievements via regular updates to Council staff and Executive.
- 4.9 Formally report on the implementation of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan through IPR processes (Annual Report), and to the Disability Council of NSW.