



**Let's
Talk**

Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2026-2030

Phase 1 Engagement Report

November 2025



Wollongong City Council

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The information in this report is based on data collected from community members who chose to be involved in engagement activities and therefore should not be considered representative. This report is intended to provide a high-level analysis of the most prominent themes and issues. While it's not possible to include all the details of feedback we received, feedback that was relevant to the project has been provided to technical experts for review and consideration. The analysis of engagement results was assisted using AI technology using de-identified data. All data had been reviewed and de-identified by staff before being input into AI.

Executive Summary

The Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2026-2030 builds on the foundations of the 2020-2025 plan and is informed by community feedback about what inclusion means in practice. The plan aims to improve access, participation and equity for people with disability across the Wollongong Local Government Area. To inform its development, Council undertook a broad and inclusive engagement process between July and September 2025.

Communication and engagement details

In the months leading up to engagement starting, we held meetings and a pop-up stand. This was to gather input from people with disability and carers about suitable engagement methods and relevant stakeholders. Their feedback shaped the engagement plan.

The engagement was promoted widely through social media, newsletters, school and organisational networks, and direct emails to more than 900 key stakeholders. Information was also shared through internal communication channels, Council libraries, on-hold phone messages, and dedicated webpages. Posters and signage were displayed across the local area and pop-up events were held to help reach a diverse community. Feedback-gathering activities were designed to involve people with lived experience of disability, carers, families, support workers, service providers, and community members. These included surveys, workshops, pop-up events, school outreach, and targeted meetings.

What we heard

We received 240 submissions, including feedback from children, young people, people with non-visible, cognitive, intellectual, physical, sensory and psychosocial disability, and representatives from LGBTQIA+ and culturally diverse communities. They shared feedback relating to:

Access to public spaces and facilities

Participants raised concerns about footpaths, kerb ramps, parking, building access, accessible toilets, public transport and beach access. Many described uneven surfaces, steep kerbs, missing footpaths, limited parking for wheelchair-accessible vans and difficulty entering buildings through main entrances. People said that well-designed paths, ramps, crossings, shade, lighting and clear signage are essential for independence and safety.

Inclusive design and sensory needs

People highlighted the value of quiet spaces, calm lighting, reduced noise and sensory-friendly experiences in libraries, playgrounds, events and public buildings. Families noted that fenced playgrounds, accessible toilets, hoists, soft surfaces and shaded seating make a significant difference to participation. Participants also spoke about

distress caused by loud hand dryers, crowded events and unpredictable sensory environments.

Attitudes, respect and community understanding

Respect, patience and disability awareness were consistently described as central to feeling safe and welcome. People wanted staff across Council and the wider community to be better trained in disability awareness, neurodiversity and communication. Some felt that stigma, poor behaviour, or assumptions about ability continue to limit participation.

Employment and workplace inclusion

Participants described barriers throughout recruitment, onboarding, training and career development. People asked for clearer communication, alternative application pathways, practical assessments, flexible work options and genuine representation of people with disability in Council's workforce. Families expressed concern about unpaid placements and the lack of accessible employment pathways for young people.

Information and communication access

People asked for information to be provided in a range of formats, including Easy Read, Auslan-interpreted videos, captioned content, SMS alerts, plain English summaries and large print. Email remained a common preference, but participants stressed that information must be easy to find and available through multiple channels. An Accessible Wollongong Map was suggested, showing paths, toilets, parking, beach access, and inclusive venues.

Community activities, social connection and participation

People valued inclusive events, affordable activities, accessible sports, social groups and spaces where they can connect with others. Participants said that cost, transport, inaccessible venues and limited program variety prevent many from joining in. They asked for more sensory-friendly programs, intergenerational activities, and events that welcome people with disability, carers and families.

Safety, dignity and independence

Feeling safe in public spaces was linked to lighting, crossing times, clear signage, respectful behaviour and reliable infrastructure. People described challenges with unsafe footpaths, hazards from e-bikes and scooters, crowded pathways and difficulty reporting issues. Many also spoke about the need for privacy and dignity when using accessible toilets, pool hoists and change facilities.

Transport and mobility

Transport was a major theme across workshops, surveys and submissions. People described buses that do not pull close to kerbs, limited services at night, difficulty recognising stops, and hazards created by cluttered footpaths. Some said that costly taxi fares and long waiting times reduce their independence.

Carers, families and support networks

Carers described challenges balancing their own needs with the demands of caring for loved ones. They asked for more support, clearer information, accessible facilities, shaded seating, inclusive programs, and options that reduce stress when navigating events, parking, or drop-off zones.

Representation, trust and inclusion in decision-making

People want to see lived experience represented in Council's planning, communications and workforce. Many asked for genuine co-design processes, respectful engagement, acknowledgement of feedback, and transparency about what can or cannot be actioned. Trust was identified as especially important for communities who have experienced exclusion or difficulty accessing services.

Next steps

The feedback shows a need for continued collaboration, practical improvements, better communication, and design approaches that recognise the diverse experiences of people with disability across Wollongong. These insights will guide the development of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2026-2030.

The information collected from the community is helping identify community priorities and will guide the actions in the Plan. In developing the Plan, we will also consider current research and learnings from other organisations, with Council staff from all areas contributing to its creation.

A draft will be ready by early 2026 and shared with the community for feedback before it is finalised. Everyone who provides input will be notified when the draft is available, and it will also be accessible on Council's website and at libraries.

Background

Council is creating its third Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP), which will run from 2026 to 2030. This plan is required under the New South Wales Disability Inclusion Act 2014 and is designed to make Council services, facilities, and community life more accessible for people with disability.

The DIAP covers the whole Wollongong Local Government Area and aims to support not just people with disability, but also older residents, people with young children, and people with long-term or short-term health conditions.

To develop the new plan, Council is building on what was learned from the 2020-2025 DIAP. It's using updated guidelines and best practices, and working closely with people who have lived experience of disability, carers, and service providers to help shape the plan.

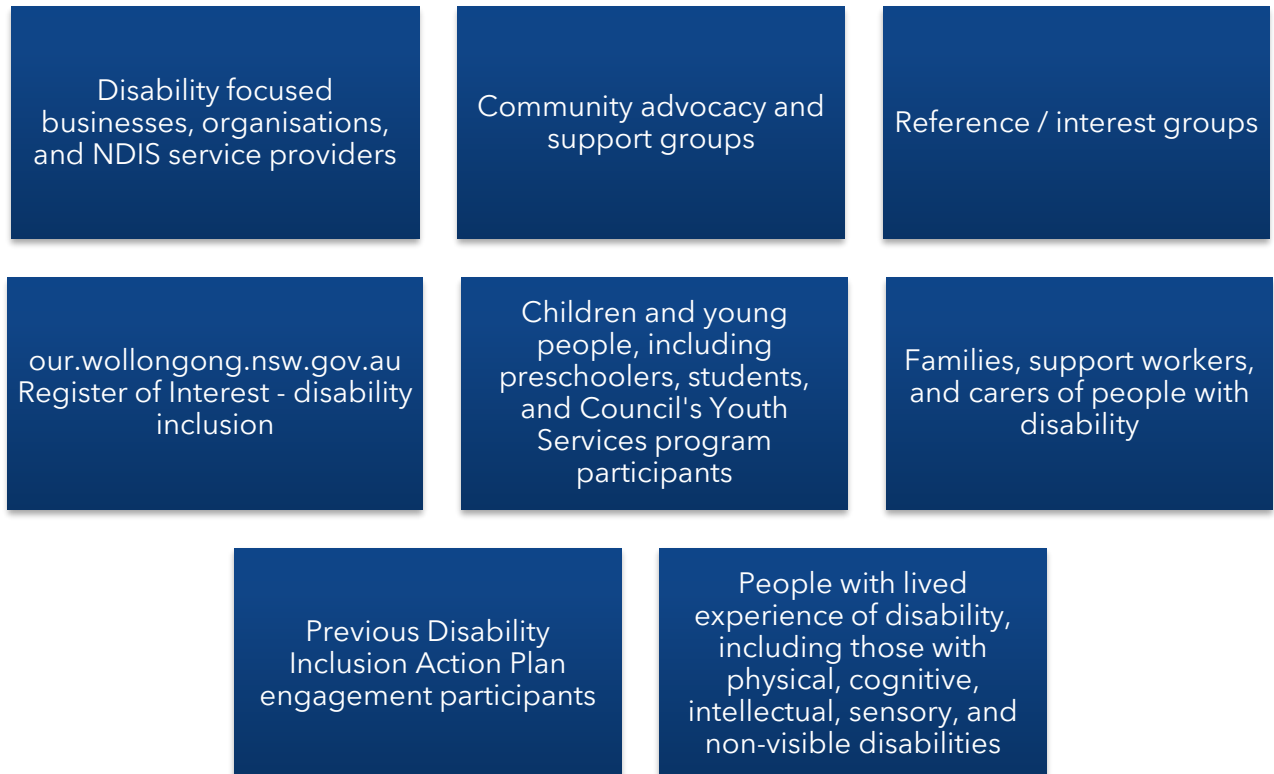
Council's decisions will be guided by:

- Legal requirements under the NSW Disability Inclusion Act 2014.
- Council policies and strategies, including the Our Wollongong Our Future 2035 Community Strategic Plan.
- Expert advice and professional assessments.
- Industry standards, such as the Australian Disability Network's Access and Inclusion Index.
- A balanced approach that considers social, economic, environmental, and governance impacts.

The new DIAP must be completed by 1 July 2026.

Stakeholders

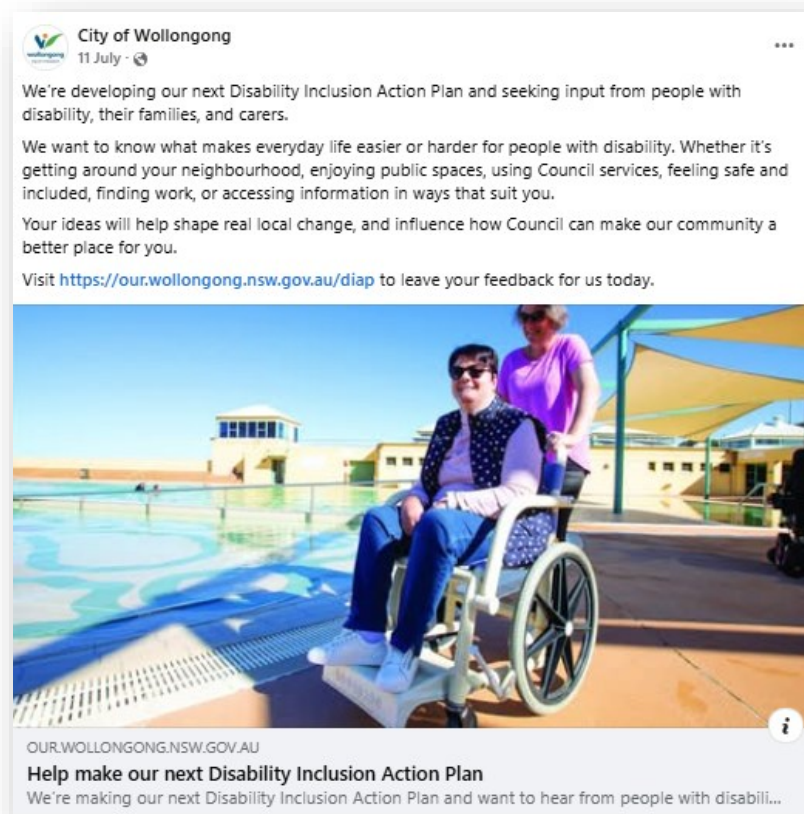
We know that disability intersects with other aspects of identity, such as culture, gender, age, and socio-economic background. As such, we aimed to understand a diverse range of lived experiences of disability inclusion and exclusion. Stakeholders identified prior to the start of the engagement period included:



Communication Methods

Council-led communication

Methods	Details of Methods
Media release	A media release about the engagement was distributed on 11 July 2025. A second media release was issued on 18 July 2025 with a call for Expressions of Interest for the Disability Inclusion Action Plan Community Advisory Group.
Email to key stakeholders	An email was sent to 79 targeted community, business, and Department of Education stakeholders.
Register of Interest	An email was sent to 890 participants registered on the Our Wollongong website with an interest in 'disability inclusion'. A follow up email was sent to the same group towards the close of the engagement period.
Internal communications	• Story published on the internal Hub and Engage. • Promoted via internal digital signage and posters. • Included in the August Team Brief. • Mention in General Manager's message.
Newsletters	• Featured in Council's e-news. • Story in the August community newsletter, delivered to letterboxes across the Local Government Area. • A notice appeared on the Community Update page in the 16 August 2025 edition of The Illawarra Mercury
Digital signs	Promoted on digital signs in Council facilities.
Our Wollongong website	The project webpage hosted background information and supporting documents, and feedback gathering tools: • Key dates • Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) • Survey • Community Circle Kit (Hold your own group conversation using this Kit - it includes instructions. (pdf)) • Expression of Interest (EOI) forms: – Workshops – Community Advisory Group 1, 032 people viewed the page whilst it was open for feedback.
Corflute signs and posters	Corflute signs and posters that included a QR code linking to the project webpage were installed in key locations.
Social media	A Facebook and Instagram post promoting the engagement was published on 11 July 2025.



Another post was published on 18 July 2025 with a call for Expressions of Interest for the Disability Inclusion Action Plan Community Advisory Group.

On-hold messaging	Council's Customer Service phone number featured an on-hold message inviting community input (active 3 July - 15 September 2025).
Library displays	Printed copies of the engagement information, FAQ, survey, and reply-paid envelopes were made available at all seven Council libraries.
Pop-ups and events	We had information stands at: • Disability Options Expo in Fairy Meadow (pre-engagement - asking people how they would like to be engaged) - 3 April 2025 • Let's Talk Berkeley - 24 June 2025 • Let's Talk Bellambi - 4 July 2025 • Warrawong NAIDOC Family Fun Day - 8 July 2025 • Let's Talk Wollongong - 18 July 2025 • Ready-Set-Connect in Kembla Grange (event for service providers, people with disabilities, their families, and support professionals) - 12 August 2025. WIN News did a story on this event which included footage of our stand. • Let's Talk Thirroul - 29 August 2025 • Illawarra Shoalhaven Dementia Forum - 17 September 2025

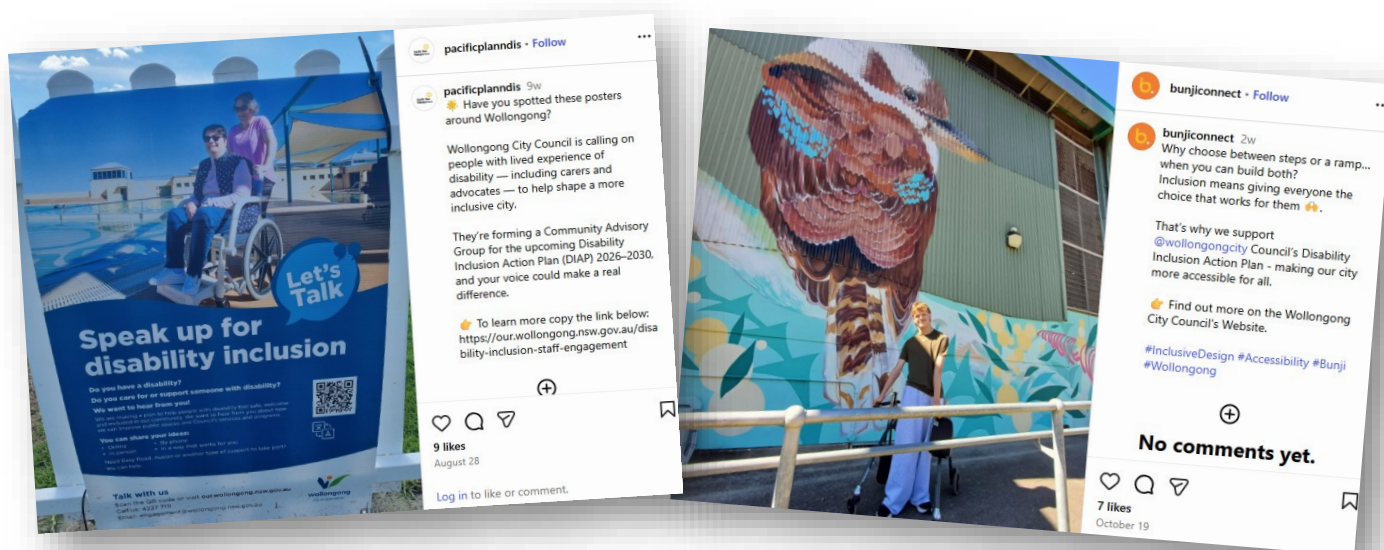
External media

WIN News, Wave FM, The Illawarra Flame, and Region Illawarra published news stories about the engagement and call for Expressions of Interest for the Disability Inclusion Action Plan Community Advisory Group.

Some stakeholders promoted the public exhibition via their social media profiles. Facebook posts were shared by Ryan Park MP and The Flagstaff Group.



Others also posted about the engagement and call for expressions of interest for the Disability Inclusion Action Plan Community Advisory Group on Instagram.

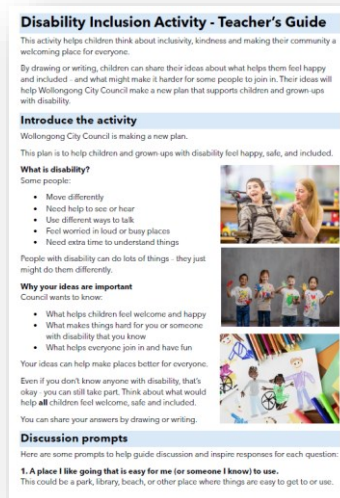


Engagement Methods

We sought feedback for this project in the following ways:

Engagement Methods	
Pre-engagement meetings	We held an in-person community check in at Dapto Ribbonwood Centre on 10 December 2024. We also held an online community check-in on 12 February 2025. These activities invited people with disability and carers to share ideas and suggestions about suitable engagement methods and relevant stakeholders, to help shape the engagement plan.
Pre-engagement information stand	We had an information stand at the Disability Options Expo in Fairy Meadow on 3 April 2025. We invited people with disability and carers to share ideas and suggestions about suitable engagement methods and relevant stakeholders. Their input helped shape the engagement plan.
Our Wollongong website	• An online survey was used to capture participants' comments. • An online stories tool was provided for participants to share stories and ideas about making our community a better place for people with disability. • Expression of Interest (EOI) forms: – Workshops – Community Advisory Group
Phone calls	A summary of open feedback was noted during phone conversations.
Email	People emailed in open written submissions.
Printed survey	People emailed and posted in printed copies of the survey.
Children's drawing sheets	A drawing sheet was created to gather ideas from children for making the community more inclusive and enjoyable for people with disability. Children were invited to draw or write their responses to prompts about accessibility, inclusion, and improvements.
Tailored kits	• Community Circle Kits (pdf) were made available via email and on the website. Printed copies were also available at libraries. This was to enable groups to run their own feedback gathering activities. The kit included simple instructions, questions to ask, an attendance record sheet, and FAQ.

- School packs were created and distributed to local schools. These included a teacher's activity guide, children's drawing sheets, and an article for school newsletters (with images and a QR code for printed newsletters).



Meetings	• Walking Cycling Mobility Reference Group – 5 August 2025 • Carer Gateway Carers Group – 28 August 2025 • d/Deaf community café catch-up – 16 September 2025 • Person with disability and their support worker – 9 October 2025 • Hard-of-hearing community member – 28 October 2025
Workshops	• Families, carers, and support workers – 22 July 2025 • Online – 30 July 2025 • People with autism or neurodivergence – 31 July 2025 • People with non-visible, or cognitive, or intellectual disability – 7 August 2025 • People who are blind or have low vision – 12 August 2025 • People who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing – 20 August 2025 • People with physical disability – 27 August 2025 • The Flagstaff Group (Unanderra office) – 10 September 2025
Youth Services programs and outreach	• Rainbow League and outreach • Teenz Connect
Workshops in schools	• Aspect South Coast School (University of Wollongong campus) • Fairy Meadow Demonstration School

Engagement Results

All stakeholders and the wider community were invited to provide feedback about how Council can make our community a better place for people with disability.

Engagement Participation

This section provides details on the participation in engagement activities and feedback received during the exhibition period.

Engagement Activities	Participation
Pre-engagement – community check-ins	20
Pre-engagement – Disability Options Expo	94
Phone calls	2
Emails	6
Pop-up information stands:	
• Let's Talk Wollongong	40
• Let's Talk Berkeley	9
• Let's Talk Bellambi	34
• Warrawong NAIDOC Family Fun Day	35
• Ready Set Connect	40
• Let's Talk Thirroul	9
• Illawarra Shoalhaven Dementia Forum	29
Meetings:	
• Walking Cycling Mobility Reference Group	10
• Carer Gateway Carers Group	5
• d/Deaf community café catch-up	12
• Person with disability and their support worker	2
• Hard-of-hearing community member	1
Workshops:	
• Families, carers, and support workers	5
• Online workshop	5
• People with autism or neurodivergence	2

• People with non-visible, cognitive, or intellectual disability • People who are blind or have low vision • People who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing • People with physical disability • The Flagstaff Group (Unanderra office) • Aspect South Coast School (University of Wollongong campus) • Fairy Meadow Demonstration School	3 5 2 5 10 20 18
Youth Services programs and outreach	17
Printed surveys	13
Community Circle Kit participants	11
Drawings from preschoolers	10
Online participation	
Engaged – total number of people who actively contributed to the project, e.g., by submitting comments via the survey or posting a story.	56
Total number of participants in engagement activities	530

Submission Results

There were 240 submissions. Feedback themes and individual comments focused on:

- Barriers to accessing public spaces, footpaths, playgrounds, and transport.
- Need for more accessible toilets, parking, and safer crossings.
- Importance of inclusive design for people with physical, sensory, cognitive, intellectual, and non-visible disability.
- Concerns about employment pathways, transition from supported to open employment, and impact of unpaid placements.
- Need for clearer information, accessible communication formats, and easier ways to report issues.
- Families and carers managing safety at unfenced playgrounds, navigating uneven footpaths, and supporting young people with disability to participate in community life
- Value of inclusive programs, community belonging, and consistent design standards that recognise disability as part of everyday life.

Community check-ins and Disability Options Expo (pre-engagement)

To guide the development of our engagement plan, we invited people with disability and carers to share ideas on effective engagement methods and identify relevant stakeholders. This was done through community check-ins and participation at a disability-focused event. These activities also provided opportunities for meaningful input about disability inclusion.



Event and venue access

- Attending events at Illawarra Performing Arts Centre (IPAC) is challenging due to limited accessible parking. The three designated spaces are not always available, and taxi vouchers are too expensive to be a viable alternative.
- Suggestions included converting more spaces in Council's Stewart Street Car Park to accessible ones and increasing accessible on-street parking near IPAC.
- The ground surfaces around IPAC need upgrading from pavers to concrete, as pavers are not suitable for wheelchair users.
- Anita's Theatre was highlighted for having no accessible parking (painted over) and requiring entry through a backstage door.
- Event spaces were highlighted for needing durable matting to prevent muddy conditions, and shade structures should balance temperature control with clear sight lines.

Footpaths and public domain

- Hazardous footpaths were a major concern
- Uneven surfaces, narrow ramps, and tree root damage creating trip hazards

- Slippery pavers near IPAC and the Mall were described as dangerous - rough-textured concrete was preferred for better grip.
- Permanent puddles and flooding on paths add to accessibility challenges
- Steep gradients at Wollongong train station and ramps in Dapto make navigation difficult.
- Many paths lack seamless transitions into shops, requiring steps up or down
- Newer developments were criticised for ramps with high lips
Better paths are needed around Keira Street, Balgownie Road, and between Wollongong Harbour's Breakwater Lighthouse and the Flagstaff Hill Lighthouse.
- Cyclists and e-scooter riders often behaving irresponsibly and leaving bikes scattered on footpaths.
- Conflicts between pedestrians and riders were common along the Blue Mile, and motorbike noise was noted as distressing for people waiting at bus stops.
 - Suggestions included clearer signage, public education, and awareness campaigns to improve etiquette.
- Design and layout concerns included hostile architecture in Wollongong Mall, such as spiky ledges and divided seating, and advertising boards blocking footpaths.
- Poor wayfinding and lack of signage make it hard to identify wheelchair-accessible routes, prompting calls for an online map with gradient information.
- Concerns about safety at crossings, particularly near bus stops and roundabouts
- Absence of accessible paths through car parks leaves wheelchair users vulnerable at car height.
- Calls for more electric doors
- Wanting adequate circulation space in accessible toilets, and better ramp design. Specific locations identified as difficult included Berkeley (no paths, wet and slippery), North Wollongong Beach (narrow paths to toilets), Bulli Lookout (grass causes wheelchairs to sink), and the Blue Mile
- Positive examples included separated seating and planting areas on Corrimal Main Street and connecting paths at Mullet Creek and Stuart Park.
- Value for University of Wollongong wheelchair mapping project

Parking

- Challenges include height restrictions in car parks that prevent access for wheelchair-accessible vans and minibuses.
- Accessible spaces are often located far from entrances or near steps, making them impractical for people with mobility issues.
- Calls for more accessible parking interspersed throughout car parks rather than concentrated at front entries
- Need ample space at the rear and sides of vehicles to allow wheelchair access.
- Parking concerns raised around:
 - Wollongong Hospital was described as "terrible", with similar concerns raised about
 - Council buildings
 - IPAC
 - Town Hall
 - Library

➤ Beaches.

- Free parking in Wollongong and weekend parking in Austinmer was viewed as inadequate, and accessible spaces at Flagstaff Hill Lighthouse ("top deck") are often full on weekends.
- Drop-off zones were described as difficult for solo carers
- Street furniture, poles, and bollards were also noted as obstacles that limit access to parking and pathways.
- Positive feedback highlighted Dapto Mall's accessible parking as a good example.
- Other practical issues included bins left on roads before collection and poor parking behaviour near signposts, which reduce available space.

Public transport

- Bus stop locations were described as unclear and often used by smokers
- Safety concerns were raised about dangerous crossings near bus stops eg. Swan Street, Wollongong
- Lack of accessible buses and taxis for large wheelchairs
- Poor connections from bus stops to homes in some areas, including Berkeley.

Public spaces and facilities

- Access to pools varies, with Towradgi Rock Pool noted for its steep gradient and poor proximity to parking, while Port Kembla Pool was seen as more accessible.
- Pool hoist placement was criticised
- There were calls for hoists at other pools and for better maintenance, as hoists are sometimes not charged daily.
- Calls for fenced playgrounds, integrated play opportunities, and improved visibility of playground surfaces.
- Suggestions included more accessible paths linking facilities such as BBQs and shelters
- Want improved access to dog parks, noting that none exist in northern suburbs.
- Issues with MLAK keys for accessible toilets were reported, with some keys not working at certain facilities
- Suggestions that all accessible toilets should have MLAK key access.
- More accessible toilets with hoists and adult change tables, and better design features such as waste bins with lids and hand hygiene options.
- Ambulant toilets are often placed far from entrances, adding to accessibility challenges.
- Smoking near government offices and in the Mall makes some areas inaccessible.
- Positive feedback was shared about murals and creative art make people feel included, with suggestions to commission art by people with disability.
- Concerns were raised about Wollongong Youth Centre; graffiti, poles, holes in the ground.
- There were questions about plans for MacCabe Park and whether "assisted ramps" could replace "standard ramps".

Awareness and education

- Calls for disability awareness campaigns, particularly around shared pathway etiquette and respectful behaviour towards people using mobility aids.
- Joining the sunflower lanyard scheme to support people with non-visible disabilities, with education for staff and businesses on hidden disabilities through the sunflower campaign.
- Consider potential partnership with Flagstaff's "We Belong" program or for Council staff to experience navigating the city in a wheelchair as part of internal workshops and training.

Suggestions for engagement

- Engagement should involve a broad range of stakeholders, including disability organisations, carers groups, community centres, frontline workers, and local community networks.
- Suggested consulting with church groups, op shops, local businesses, social housing residents, and community services.
- Preferred engagement methods included surveys (with options for anonymous paper versions), online platforms, pop-ups, focus groups, and sessions at community centres.
- Inclusive events such as a Community Fun Day or attending existing activities like Sunset Movie Nights were recommended to gather feedback.
- Consider quarterly catch-ups, webinars, and tailored apps to share information.
- Promote engagement through NDIS local area coordinators and service providers, and attending events like the Wollongong Disability Expo.
- Ideas for accessibility considerations were shared, such as scheduling sessions later in the morning (e.g. 11am), providing courtesy buses, using platforms like Zoom, and ensuring venues are accessible with quiet spaces and dietary options.
- Attendees should be informed of any sensory elements like lighting and noise.
- For culturally and linguistically diverse communities, face-to-face engagement was preferred over surveys.
- Small gestures like providing morning tea were seen as important for inclusion.
- Suggestion for Council to establish a disability committee, similar to Shellharbour.

Conversations at pop-ups and events

Council staff held pop-ups at various locations across the Wollongong Local Government Area and at events to share information and gather feedback. Across the six events, almost 170 people were spoken to. Their feedback included:

Accessible infrastructure and public spaces

- Comments for both positive developments and areas needing improvement in infrastructure.
- Praise for Swan Street construction and example of Mobility scooter parking with charging stations in Iluka (northern New South Wales)
- Concerns were raised about cracked or lack of footpaths



- There was a general call for more accessible design across the city's paths and intersections.

Public amenities and facilities

- Requests for more defibrillator machines in public spaces
- More accessible public bathrooms.
- Braille/tactile map described as helpful, especially when it shows soap dispensers and accessible stalls.
- Larger stalls were noted as beneficial for people with guide dogs.
- Accessible toilets with slow doors seen as undignified and automatic door's reported lack of manual override was seen as a safety risk.
- Fidgets are effective tools for some people.

Playgrounds and parks

- Cringila Playground was noted as having no equipment for children with disability.
 - Smaller playgrounds were described as difficult to access due to limited parking, lack of kerb ramps, and footpaths.
 - Requests for more fenced playgrounds, citing safety concerns for children who are runners or for families with multiple children.
 - Luke's Place was mentioned as a positive example.
 - Appreciation for beach matting and access, but wanted it available at more beaches and clearer information about when and where it is available.
 - More liberty swings and better access to keys.
- Parks were described as vital for helping children with disability connect and socialise.

Transport and parking

- Manual handling was identified as a barrier, with some wheelchairs too heavy to lift into cars.
- Consideration for more time needed in parking spaces for duty of care and accessibility.

Access to buildings and services

- Unanderra Library's door was described as not wide enough.
- Public spaces and shopping centres were said to need more elevators
- Council should become a sunflower organisation to support people with hidden disabilities, saying visible stickers and identifiers on services and facilities would provide immediate relief and reassurance

Illawarra Shoalhaven Dementia Forum

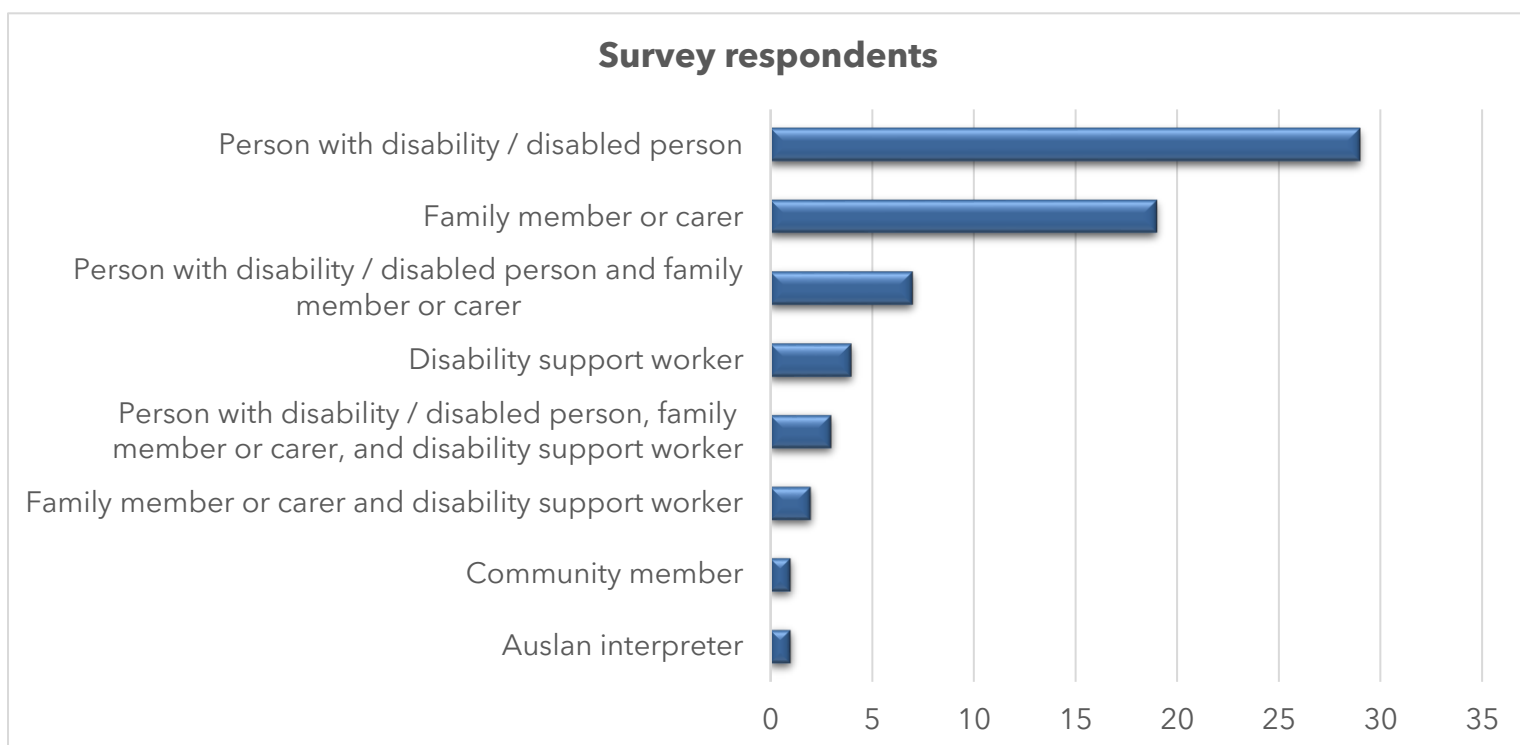
Council had a stand at this event to share information and gather feedback from carers, support workers, and service providers of people with dementia. Some key points from the forum included:

- Attendees expressed interest in dementia-friendly programs at libraries and Wollongong Art Gallery.
- Concern was raised about the lack of engagement in residential aged care.

- Request for Council to create a directory of local dementia services.
- The importance of social connection, counselling, and tailored support was emphasised by the carers panel, along with the emotional toll of progressive loss.
- Calls for greater awareness, improved care, and systemic change, including advocacy with Members of Parliament.
- People with dementia value of routine, creativity, and spiritual wellbeing, and the need to combat loneliness and loss of connection

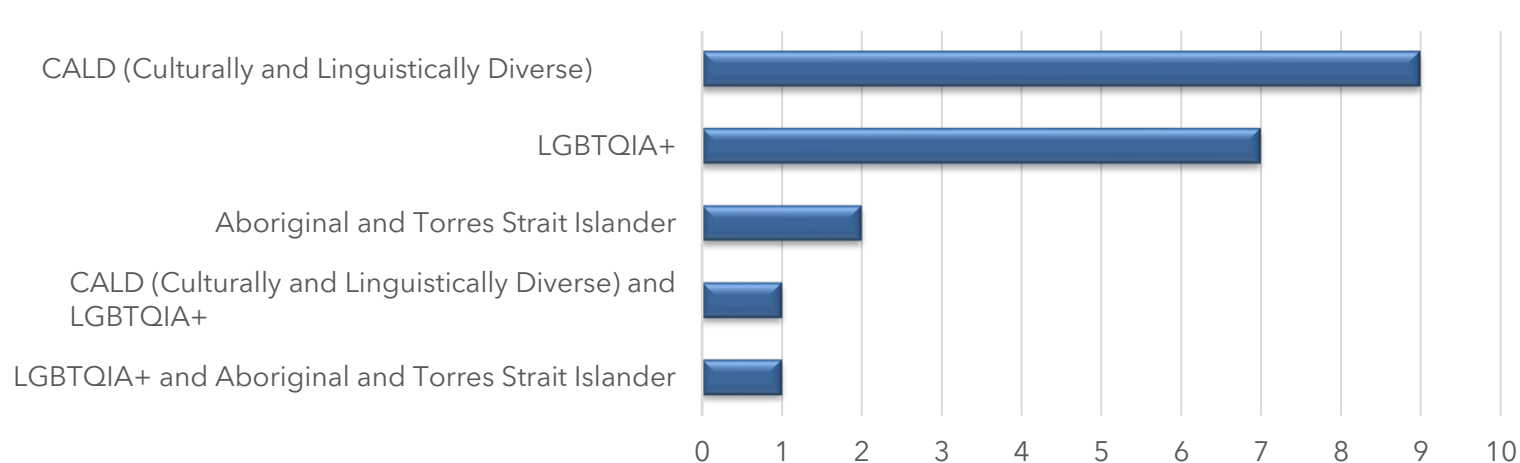
Online and hardcopy survey responses

To help us understand which community members we heard from, we asked respondents to tell us if they are a family member or carer, person with disability / disabled person, disability support worker, or other.

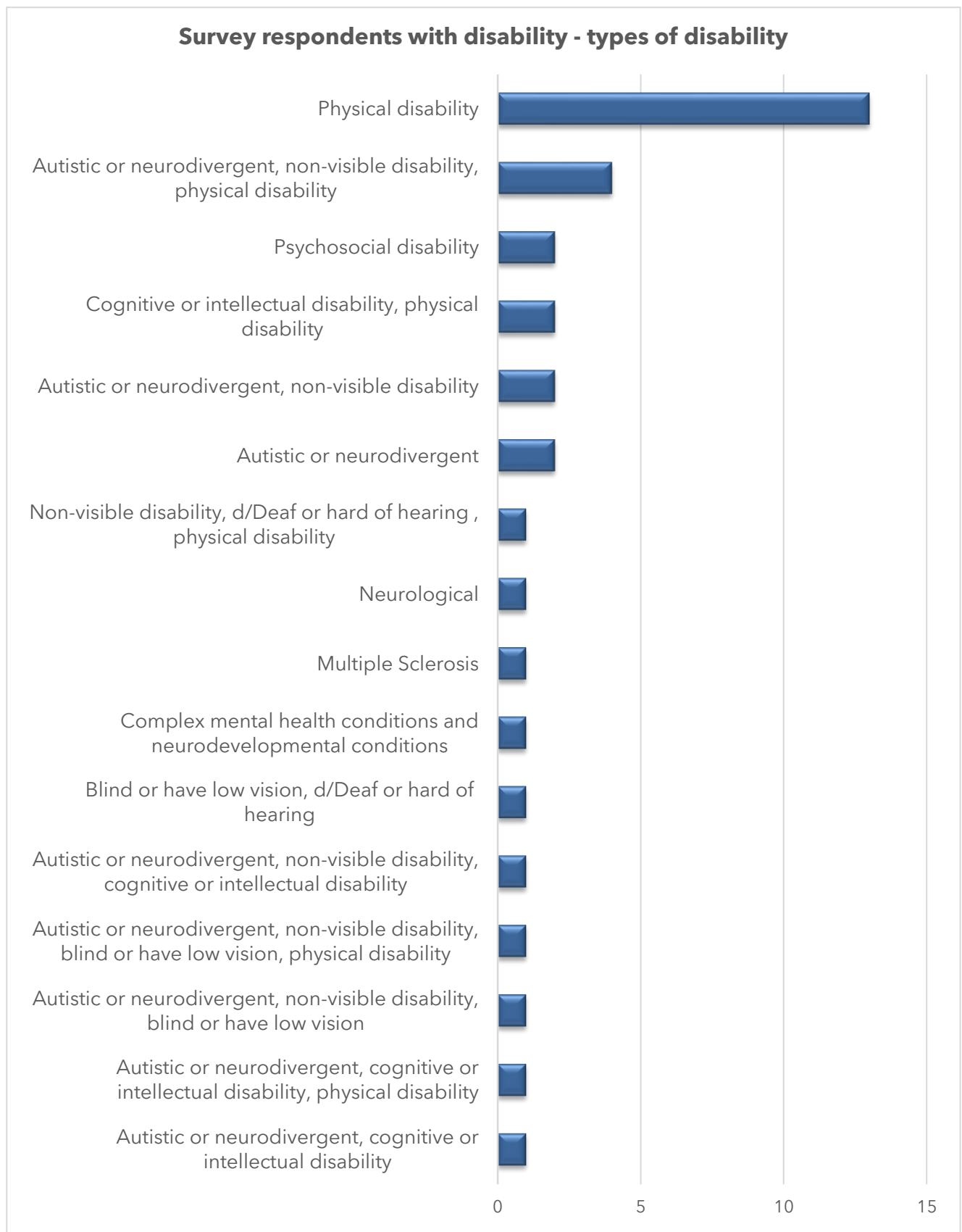


We also asked optional demographic questions, to make sure we heard from a diverse range of voices and perspectives.

Optional question: Do you identify with any of the following communities?



We wanted to hear from people with diverse experiences of disability to understand the different ways they can be supported in our community. For those who identified as a person with disability, we asked them to describe their disability by choosing from a list of options or providing their own description. These are the results.



We asked the following questions:

1. What helps you feel welcome and safe in the community?
2. What would make it easier for you to get around your local area and the places you visit?
3. Tell us about anything that makes public places hard to use or get to. Public places are areas such as parks, playgrounds, pools, and buildings.
4. How would you like to get information from Council, and share information with us?
5. What would make it easier to join in on community activities and events?
6. We want to make Council a better place to work for people with disability. If you have any ideas, please share them with us.
7. What would make the Wollongong Local Government Area a better place for people with disability?

Following is a summary of what people shared through the survey.

Accessibility and infrastructure

- Accessible design and maintenance of public spaces, facilities, and transport are essential.
- Want smooth, well-maintained paths, ramps, step-free entrances, accessible toilets, lifts, lighting, and clear signage.
- Need for more disability parking, better public transport connections, and safer crossings with features such as countdown timers - these concerns appeared in relation to daily mobility, access to services, and participation in community life.

Inclusive design and sensory accessibility

- Calls for sensory-friendly environments, quiet zones, calm lighting, and low-noise areas.
- Stressed importance of fenced parks, shaded areas, and soft playground surfaces.
- Loud hand dryers or crowded areas can cause distress.
- Community events and facilities be designed with sensory needs in mind.

Attitudes, respect, and community understanding

- Respectful attitudes, kindness, and awareness from others are crucial to feeling welcome and safe.
- Education about disability and neurodivergence for Council staff, businesses, and the community would help build understanding and inclusion.

Representation and visibility

- Requests for visible representation of disability in Council workplaces, leadership, and communications.
- Want authentic, not tokenistic, inclusion in marketing and for Council to feature lived experience in staff inductions and decision-making.
- Suggestions for a Disability Staff Network or Disability Rights Committee to embed representation in governance.

Employment and education opportunities

- Desire for accessible employment pathways and inclusive workplaces.

- Support affirmative employment policies, flexible work arrangements, and alternative recruitment processes for neurodivergent applicants.
- Need for transition support from school to work, apprenticeships, and education about disability in schools to improve understanding from a young age.

Inclusive and affordable community activities

- Community events and activities should be inclusive, accessible, and affordable.
- Value for quiet, spacious venues, accessible parking and toilets, and activities scheduled at suitable times.
- Families appreciated sensory-friendly and intergenerational events.
- Suggestions included sunflower lanyards, staff trained in disability awareness, and free or low-cost options for people on limited incomes.

Communication and information access

- Email was the most common way people wanted to receive updates, though others asked for multiple formats, including Easy Read, Auslan videos, captioned content, SMS alerts, and social media updates.
- Want information that is clear, plain, and accessible, and a simple, responsive way to share feedback or report accessibility issues.
- Suggestions to create an Accessible Wollongong Map showing paths, toilets, and inclusive venues.

Safety, comfort in public spaces and connection

- Participants linked safety to both physical and social environments.
- Need for well-lit paths, shaded seating, and barriers between roads and parks.
- Some feel unsafe in crowded or poorly designed areas.
- Wanted enforcement of parking and e-scooter rules.
- Many said feeling safe comes from being in spaces that are welcoming, inclusive, and well maintained.
- People valued friendly, welcoming communities and opportunities to socialise, participate, and feel accepted.
- Some suggested more adult social activities, community greeters, and accessible recreation options like splash parks and water activities.

Disability inclusion feedback - online stories

There were three participants that used the online stories tool.

The positive things that were highlighted included:

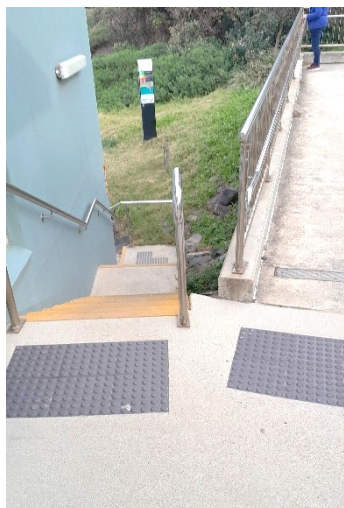
- Ramps and beach mats
- Consultations are a positive step
- Easy Read materials as a good foundation.

Concerns

- Widespread inaccessibility in public buildings, shops, cultural spaces, and transport, consultation can often be tokenistic.
- Port Kembla lacks an accessible public toilet.

Suggestions/requests

- Do a city-wide access audit.
- Set up universal designs for accessibility in new developments.
- Create an Accessible Wollongong Map showing toilets, beaches, pathways, and venues.
- Establish a safeguarding hub and train staff.
- Enact inclusive hiring and employment partnerships.
- Formal partnerships with Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations to embed cultural safety and disability justice.
- Make Wollongong beaches more accessible – Sandon Point currently inaccessible.



Workshops

Online workshop with people with disability, support workers, and carers

Jobs and workplaces

- People with disability face limited job options, often shaped by assumptions from CVs and recruitment processes that become patronising after disclosure.
- Young people with intellectual disabilities lack early support and face barriers in transitioning from school to work.
- Opportunities are often unpaid or confined to large organisations.
- Inclusive workplaces offer varied roles, gradual support, and embedded social enterprises.
- Council could expand role options, offer paid traineeships, build partnerships, share information, and explore job-matching platforms.

Community participation and activities

- Barriers include inaccessible playgrounds, limited disability-friendly sports, and form-filling challenges.
- Helpful supports include communication boards, culturally inclusive social stories, voice-to-text tools, and dedicated sporting groups.
- Council events could be linked with community partners to strengthen inclusion.

Accessibility and safety in public spaces

- Issues include unsafe footpaths, poorly designed crossings, jetties without handrails, and hazards from bins and potholes.
- Sensory overload and poor visibility for drivers also affect safety - attending events often requires extensive planning.
- Suggestions included noise cameras, garage alerts, Easy Read safety info, and more accessible toilets.

Communication

- Effective formats include Easy Read, high contrast visuals, simple symbols, and social stories with sensory details.
- QR codes and accessible videos were valued.
- Council could provide location-specific stories and install digital kiosks and communication boards.

Feeling included

- Inclusion improves when disability is visible and normalised.
- Hidden disability symbols help but lack recognition.
- Council is seen as a role model and connector for inclusive initiatives.
- More accessible toilets and recognition of digital skills in children with autism were also noted.

The Flagstaff Group (Unanderra)

Feeling included

- Workplaces that encourage teamwork and inclusion were important.
- Participants felt included when they could take part in community life, social activities, and workplaces that cultivate belonging.
- The use of sunflower lanyards be expanded and used in clubs, shopping centres, and pubs.
- Having job coaches or mentors help.

Communication and access to information

- Communication with Council could be improved. Suggestions included:
 - Printed newsletter and posters for the workplace but also in public spaces
 - Survey boxes
 - Easy Read format

Employment and workplace inclusion

- Access to Work programme is valued which helps people transition into mainstream employment.
- Wanted more employment opportunities with Council.
- Council's recruitment process difficult, saying there was "a lot of information" and "simpler is easier."
- Want Council to use local providers for disability awareness training.

Getting around safely

- Footpaths and crossings were a major concern with uneven surfaces in Dapto and Crown Street (Wollongong) make getting around difficult.
- New residential roads have no footpaths and are made of gravel.
- Lack of lights and blind corners are issues.
- Concrete the preferred surface for mobility and accessibility.
- Better signage, lighting, and pedestrian crossings were requested, especially for public transport areas.
- Wanting railings and ramps.
- Lights at nighttime" around pools.
- Gong Shuttle buses are appreciated, however some noted long waiting times.
- Want more transport and buses in the CBD and to places like Shellharbour. "
- Stairs at many train stations are a barrier.

Safety, trust, and behaviour

- Some participants expressed fear or trauma about reporting incidents to authorities.
- Respectful behaviour helps people feel safer and more welcome.
- Cyberbullying on Facebook is a concern.
- Talks in libraries were suggested to support people experiencing this.

Social connection and leisure

- Free and local activities, such as "music in summer in the Mall" and "free movie nights," helped people feel connected.
- Library activities, school programs, and cooking groups for young people valued.
- Several participants enjoyed activities outside, including the beach, sports courts and the Botanic Gardens.
- Social groups, Toastmasters, and sensory spaces help build confidence and reduce anxiety.
- People want more opportunities to make friends and join in.
- Shows at the Illawarra Performing Arts Centre (IPAC) are popular.
- Like spaces that support socialising, such as areas for "eating food and drinking, sitting down with friends and family, watching basketball and cricket."
- Public transport can be a barrier.

Inclusion through collaboration

Flagstaff staff expressed willingness to collaborate or partner with Council on inclusion initiatives.

Blind or low-vision community

Participants expressed a strong desire for clearer, safer, and more inclusive public spaces - places designed with empathy and awareness so everyone can move around, connect, and participate independently.

Access and communication

- Accessible information is vital for staying informed and participating in community life.
- Value for large-print materials with pictures, audio recordings, Braille, and phone-based services
- Radio advertising, television advertising, and telephone services are useful for getting information.
- Requests for a register so residents can choose how they receive information, ensuring it's always provided in their preferred format.
- Council websites and forms should be properly labelled and compatible with screen readers - current layouts are a "nuisance" and interfere with assistive technology.
- Vision Australia's audio player machine was said to be useful, and participants suggested Council newsletters could be shared this way.
- Mentioned tools such as Seeing AI, Be My Eyes, and Ray-Ban Meta Glasses to describe objects, read menus, or interpret signs.
- Use ChatGPT when travelling or Copilot for generating word puzzles.

Social and cultural connection

- Social activities were described as crucial for reducing loneliness and creating a sense of belonging.
- Suggestions for events included activities, such as tactile dominoes at Old Boys Social Club, audio walking tours about Wollongong's history and buildings, or guided sessions with their support workers able to attend also.
- Cost and transport were major barriers - particularly at night, limited their participation.
- Suggestions included a bus service to collect people from home, volunteer drivers, and affordable taxi options

Accessible environments and transport

- Consistent, accessible design across public spaces is important.
- Clear visual contrast, reliable tactile cues, and intuitive layout essential for safe navigation.
- Braille signage should be placed at "hip height".
- Good lighting is essential.
- Important that glass doors have better contrast between windows and doors.
- Having clear footpaths should be encouraged.
- Transport information and driver awareness a concern.

Safety, empathy, and financial barriers

- Ramps that don't line up across roads, which is unsafe.
- Lighting was another concern: "The placement is super high up and far apart - it might as well not be there."
- Want "well-lit crossings, transport areas," and "lower down lights that light up footpaths."
- Empathy and customer service were seen as vital for inclusion.

- Financial hardship also emerged as a barrier.

People with autism or neurodivergence

Navigating services and systems

- Often overwhelmed when trying to manage daily life alongside the effort required to navigate public systems, particularly health services.
- Hidden disabilities sunflower symbol was seen as helpful but only if accompanied by proper training and understanding.
 - Suggestions for providing multiple ways to complete forms or give feedback.

Workplaces

- It's difficult to balance self-care and maintain boundaries at work.
- Workplace autism awareness events are often "just performative" – want genuine understanding and conversation about disability.
- Different types of disability are often conflated, leaving people feeling "less than" or "stupid."
- Education and awareness should "start at the top" of organisations, with leaders modelling inclusive behaviour and "calling out what's not on."
- Recruitment and onboarding were identified as major barriers - Formal interviews were described as "a poor set-up – it only adds to the anxiety", processes were too rigid to allow different people to show their capabilities.
- Consider replicating approaches used for targeted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment programs for people with disability.
 - Suggestions to include using practical or scenario-based assessments, offering clear communication, using job descriptions with colours or pictures to break up large text blocks, and advertising roles in multiple formats and channels.

Workplace training and support

- Training should be offered in multiple modes - face-to-face, online, written, or split across several sessions.
- Approachable people in the workplace makes a big difference.

Sensory overwhelm, reducing sensory input

- Often overloaded in noisy or stimulating spaces.
- Sensory hours in shops were seen as helpful but too short and at inconvenient times: "
- Acknowledge there's overlap between neurodivergence and mental health e.g. challenges in leaving the house due to noise, anxiety, and distressing news events etc.
- Crowded events were described as overwhelming.
- Bathrooms, level access, and quiet spaces are essential features for events.
- For libraries, suggested dedicated quiet rooms that could be booked.
- Events are enjoyed when people can plan and anticipate what will happen.
- Consideration for an app to build itinerary for events.

- Clearer easier ways to explore event programs without being overloaded by small text or too much information.
 - Suggestions offering sensory-friendly times at varied hours and for longer periods, with low lighting, no music, and no loud announcements.

Participants said a quiet space should include different textures - like leather lounges, fluffy cushions, and weighted items - and environmental controls, such as fans and adjustable lighting. They thought quiet spaces for staff were a good idea too, provided they are well designed and their purpose clearly explained.

Employment and masking

- People often mask their neurodivergence to make others feel comfortable
- Interview processes that claim to be accommodating were described as still “so formal”
- Consider practical assessments would better demonstrate their skills

People with non-visible or cognitive or intellectual disability

Infrastructure in public spaces

- Access to toilets and buildings remains a challenge in several locations - Council’s Admin building, Youth Centre, Illawarra Performing Arts Centre.
 - Suggestion include introducing a “Gold Pass” system to provide free monthly access to Council spaces for disability groups, creating partnerships to offer free or low-cost accessible venues to disability and intersectional groups, and implementing a sliding scale for venue hire based on whether events are for-profit or not-for-profit.

Accessible footpaths and parking

- Uneven pavements and misaligned kerb ramps cause disorientation.
- Concerns over narrow or bumpy, and cars often block footpaths.
- Not enough disability parking spaces for families with multiple permits.
- Safe and accessible drop-off zones are lacking, particularly near steep areas and during peak traffic.
- No “kiss and drop” areas with flexible time limits or support for drivers who need to assist passengers.
 - Suggestions include mapping and designating accessible “kiss and drop” zones with flexible time limits and using camera technology to identify footpath issues, similar to pothole detection systems.

Inclusive practices and communication

- Council’s bureaucracy and complex booking systems make participation difficult, while overwhelming forms and unclear expectations deter event organisers.
- Council website is hard to navigate.
- Prefer direct links shared via social media.

- Useful communication channels include social stories, verbal communication, and social media platforms - Facebook posts are particularly effective because they use clear visuals and concise messaging.
 - Suggestions include adding accessibility information to pop-up stalls and flyers, creating an interactive space on the Council website for community ideas and feedback, and developing an app similar to "Snap Send Solve" to make issue reporting easier.

Income, accessibility, and mental health

- Financial stress prevents many people from accessing general practitioners and timely medical care.
- Navigating support applications is overwhelming due to complex language, and mental health challenges remain a major barrier to community participation.
 - Suggestions include advocating for or supporting mental health-friendly spaces and services, simplifying access to community support and information, and offering financial literacy sessions tailored to neurodiverse and disabled people.

Employment and wage equity

- Barriers include unequal pay and lack of recognition for work done by people with disability in some supported employment settings.
- Limited support for job applications, resumes, and understanding tax processes.
- Access to roles is restricted by the absence of support workers or perceived qualification gaps, and sole traders face challenges with tax forms and income thresholds.
 - Suggestions include hosting sessions with the Australian Taxation Office to explain tax returns and jargon, providing support for resume writing and job applications, and promoting part-time and flexible roles suited to different support needs.

School experiences and youth support

- School experiences often leave people behind in areas such as resume writing and job readiness.
- Homework clubs and inclusive youth programs could help bridge this gap.
- Youth Centre programs like Rainbow League are vital, but transitioning out of youth services at age 25 creates gaps in support.
 - Suggestions include extending youth support beyond age limits or providing transition pathways, increasing visibility of Council opportunities in schools, and supporting initiatives like Living Books that offer diverse representation.

Safety, visibility, and representation

- Feeling safe and welcome is influenced by factors such as lighting and LGBT welcome signs.
- Pronouns, social stories, and knowing what to expect increase comfort.
- Events like drag queen storytime at Wollongong and Strangeways Theatre is a positive example of neurodivergent and queer representation.

- Emotional labour of advocacy is draining, and non-disabled allies need to step up.
 - Suggestions include increasing community education about disability, including disability in Pride events and offering behind-the-scenes roles, and promoting visibility through podcasts, YouTube, and training such as Sunflower lanyards.

Technology and social connection

- Artificial intelligence apps are used by some for companionship due to a lack of human connection.
- Council has a role to play in fostering real-world relationships and building stronger community connections.

People with physical disability

Footpaths and kerbs

- Footpaths and kerbs are big barrier to getting around safely and independently.
- Sideways-sloping footpaths, tree roots and obstacles could cause wheelchairs to topple.
- Suggestions included:
 - Installing more kerb ramps for wheelchair access, including at driveways and crossings near Wollongong High School.
 - Standardising ramp grades and lowering kerb heights.
 - Repairing or levelling footpaths with rough or uneven surfaces.
 - Installing safety signage near hazard areas such as Victoria Street and the Mall to warn people about slippery or sloped pavers.
 - Levelling sideways slopes to reduce tipping risks.
 - Providing shaded and seated drop-off zones near key locations such as shops and medical centres.
 - Engaging community members with lived experience, such as one participant who offered to show Council officers problem sites firsthand.

Building and facility access

- Participants reported difficulty accessing many public buildings including libraries, leisure centres, and tourist parks.
- Access via driveways or rear entries described as unwelcoming.
- Portable ramps were seen as a short-term fix but unreliable.
- Suggestions included:
 - Installing elevators in multi-storey buildings.
 - Providing portable ramps and handrails for older buildings.
 - Using signage to indicate when buildings are “stairs only”.
 - Including clear visual guides, maps, and photos showing accessible paths and entrances.
 - Producing short videos that demonstrate how to enter buildings safely.

Parking and drop-off areas

- Accessible parking shortages and poor placement cause frustrations.

- Suggestions included:
 - Increasing the number and improving the placement of accessible parking spaces.
 - Enforcing penalties, such as towing, for vehicles parked in disabled bays without permits.
 - Extending parking zones to allow adequate clearance for wheelchair ramps.
 - Providing shaded, seated drop-off points in central areas.

Traffic lights

- Crossing times were said to be too short for people with mobility issues, causing stress and safety concerns.
- Countdown timers were described as useful for knowing how long was left to cross.

Access to information

- Frustration with how difficult it can be to find or understand accessibility information online.
- Council website was repeatedly mentioned as “not easy to read” with “too many clicks.”
- Information about accessible venues, facilities, and events was described as buried or inconsistent.
- Booking venues for events challenging because accessibility information is not always clearly listed.
- Suggestions included:
 - Including summaries at the start of long documents and using clear headings and links.
 - Presenting information in Easy English, using large font (size 18 preferred), and ensuring strong text contrast.
 - Avoiding all capital letters, underlining, or overly long descriptions.
 - Adding AUSLAN picture-in-picture and captions to videos, and slowing them down for readability.
 - Providing navigation links or a “Disabled community” section on the Council website with events, policies, and accessibility details.
 - Creating a Council app that includes events, rules, contact details, and push notifications.
 - Offering multiple formats - text, video, Easy Read - to suit different needs.
 - Training staff in accessible communication and written content design.

Participants also suggested that Council share its accessibility resources and guidance with other organisations to raise awareness and improve standards across the community.

Communication and customer service

- Many participants preferred face-to-face communication.
- Quiet spaces for in-person discussions were described as more comfortable and effective.
- Suggestions included:

- Offering SMS and email options (with calendar links) for communication.
- Providing instant message services or chatbots with predictive links to relevant content.
- Training customer service staff to be patient and avoid interrupting.
- Involving people with lived experience, such as Leicia, in staff training.
- Working with national networks such as People with Disability Australia, Disability Advocacy Network Australia, Children and Young People with Disability Australia, and Council for Intellectual Disability consortiums.

Feeling included and represented

- Important to be heard and represented.
- Need to normalise the word “disability”.
- “Disability is not a bad word and the negative connotations need to go away.” Participants said Council should “centre disabled voices” and make inclusion a key consideration in all decisions.
- Suggestions included:
 - Featuring people with disability in promotional materials, not just disability-related content.
 - Creating safe spaces for open discussion.
 - Using co-design processes with people with disability.
 - Showing how feedback has been used and explaining when it cannot be actioned.
 - Paying people for their involvement where possible.

Sharing information and community outreach

- Want to see information about Council’s inclusion work shared widely.
- Broader communication channels used, noting that Facebook alone is no longer effective.
- Suggestions included:
 - Using Instagram, Threads, and email newsletters with large fonts and embedded calendar invites.
 - Sending text messages with updates or links.
 - Using community boards, posters, and local TV advertising.

Training and organisational improvement

- Support for lived experience training for Council staff.
- Value opportunities for direct interaction.
- Suggestions included:
 - Delivering training led by people with disability.
 - Publicising that staff have received this training to build community trust.
 - Explaining when feedback cannot be implemented and why.
 - Ensuring participation in engagement activities is acknowledged and, where possible, paid.

People who are d/Deaf or hard-of-hearing

Communication and accessibility

- Auslan is the language used by the d/Deaf community and is completely different from English – it is a visual language, not signed English.
- Communication relies heavily on facial expressions and lip reading, so beards and glasses can create barriers.
- Auslan has regional dialects differing from state to state.
- Most have limited confidence in reading written English, including online content assumed to be accessible.
- Many rely on friends or family to interpret written information.
- Prefer to communicate through text messaging and email, as these are more accessible than voice calls.
- For those who can understand written communication, it should be in plain English and straight to the point, with clear visual information.
- Council's customer service webpage should include an interpreted video explaining the ways to contact Council and suggested Council set up its own text messaging service for customer service.

Interpreted videos and accessible information

- Videos with picture-in-picture Auslan interpretation would help the Deaf community know what is happening.
- Council's interpreted videos be shared on Facebook through the South Coast Deaf Community page.
- Sweeney Interpreting was suggested as a provider.
- Videos should explain Council services.
Videos embedded in QR codes, for example, on signs in lifts explaining emergency procedures.

Public spaces, signage and safety

- Buses should include clear signage as to where they are going.
- Lifts a concern because they only have emergency phones, which are not accessible for Deaf people.
- Consider adding text-based help option or QR code that links to an interpreted video.
- Clear lighting is important for a person with low vision.
- Wayfinding signage should use more visuals and fewer words.

Emergency communication

- Contacting 000 problematic as it's voice only.
- Want more options to connect via video call or text.
- Community members are interested in doing first aid and emergency preparedness courses.

Everyday environments and hearing aids

- People who are hard-of-hearing described the challenges of using hearing aids in noisy or echoing spaces.

- Environmental sounds such as sirens or dogs barking are painfully amplified.
- Using aids for long periods can cause irritation and social fatigue.

Customer service and interactions

- Service counters were described as barriers when staff sit behind screens or speak without eye contact.
- Requests for staff to face customers directly, speak clearly, and pause screen-work when conversing.
- Suggestion that staff could learn basic Auslan to help build rapport and inclusivity.

Events, education and public participation

- Hard-of-hearing people benefit from basic PowerPoint with key words.
- Deaf participants benefit more from interpreters.
- Deaf community struggled with education because not enough teachers were skilled in Auslan.

Social connection and community

- Social connection and belonging remain important.
- Mixed-group social activities that are not labelled by disability were seen by one as more welcoming.
- Community members are interested in doing creative workshops

Trust, learning and support

- There's a lack of trust in government.
- d/Deaf people encountering systemic barriers to access and inclusion in schools.
- It is important to allow enough time to promote initiatives through the right channels and in ways that show respect for d/Deaf culture.
- Deaf Connect and TAFE as key organisations for learning Auslan and accessing interpreters.

Suggested actions

- Create and share Auslan-interpreted videos (using Sweeney Interpreting) on the South Coast Deaf Community Facebook page.
- Include interpreted videos on Council's website and in QR codes for artworks, signage, and emergency instructions.
- Provide text and email options for contacting Council.
- Enable text or video options in lifts and for 000 emergencies.
- Use simple, visual signage and adequate lighting.
- Train staff in basic Auslan greetings and communication.
- Promote accessibility initiatives with enough lead time via appropriate channels.
- Provide options such as hearing loops, plain English communication, and inclusive group activities.

Families, carers, and support workers

Events and Venues

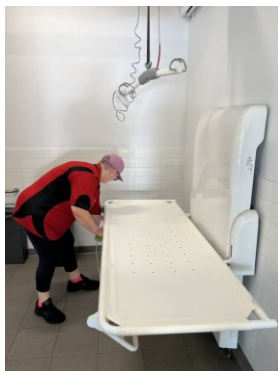
- Council's efforts to improve accessibility at events are recognised, with wheelchair-accessible areas appreciated.
- Accessible events are poorly advertised, and long queues pose challenges.
- Access to venues via service lifts feels unwelcoming.
- Seating arrangements often have poor visibility.
- Doorways and lifts are inadequately sized.
- Access is limited to designated areas rather than the full venue.
- Suggested actions:
 - Introduce a noisy, non-judgemental hour at libraries.
 - Create a centralised source of accessible event information (not just Council events).
 - Use Healthy Cities Illawarra playgrounds info as a model - playillawarra.com.au
 - Introduce and educate staff on the sunflower lanyard initiative.
 - Install hearing loops.
 - Increase shaded areas at events.

Parks and Playgrounds

- Increase in accessible playgrounds and upgrades to existing ones has been noticed
- Stuart Park is seen as a model for inclusive design - features like sensory and water play, accessible toilets, disability parking, and adult-inclusive equipment are valued.
- Issues around shade is lacking, especially for wheelchair users, bathrooms are often inaccessible or missing hoists. Parking and pathways are inadequate, and picnic areas, tables, and BBQs are not inclusive.
- Safety concerns arise near water, and fencing is needed.
- Communication boards need updating with QR codes that link to further information and other formats such as AUSLAN or Easy Read.
- Sensory needs are not always met.
- Suggested actions:
 - Provide accessible change rooms and hoists in showers at pools and wet areas.
 - Install more BBQ facilities.
 - Modify existing playgrounds to improve seating, shade, and wheelchair access.
 - Install height-adjustable tables under shade to accommodate larger wheelchairs.
 - Reconsider parking options for cars and vans with varied disability needs.
 - Update communication boards with QR codes.
 - Improve toileting facilities.
 - Install fences near water or barriers.
 - Create covered, weather-resistant outdoor areas.
 - Add more than one big swing.
 - Provide water play areas and cater to diverse sensory needs.
 - Use Jamberoo's Reid Park toilet as a benchmark.
 - Install solar-powered outlets for medical and dietary equipment, e.g. oxygen tanks and wheelchair battery chargers.
 - Install barriers/fencing between playgrounds and water areas to improve safety.

Toilets, Lighting, and Bins

- Reid Park in Jamberoo is praised as a benchmark for accessible facilities. A participant shared these photos of the facility:



- Kerbside pickups are appreciated.
- Some of the challenges are that MLAK keys are costly for carers on pensions
- Bin sizes are insufficient for group homes where residents use pads and adult pull-ups.
- Cost of waste services, especially for group homes where additional bins are needed, is a concern.
- Suggested actions:
 - Subsidise MLAK keys and larger bin sizes (e.g. Wollondilly Council model).
 - Increase bin pickup frequency for group homes.
 - Introduce dimmed lighting in libraries for sensory-friendly times.

Footpaths, Kerb Ramps, and Parking

- Accessible parking and drop-off areas at events are valued.
- The Blue Mile is praised for its flat, wide paths.
- Footpath upgrades are noted positively.
- Accessible parking is often on slopes, which can be hazardous for wheelchair users, or too small for larger vehicles.
- Scooters obstruct pathways, and drop-off points are limited.
- "Tactile dots + an incline + rain + a wheelchair = a recipe for disaster, because of how the wheelchair hits it".
- Suggested actions:
 - Make kerb ramp areas no-parking zones.
 - Create drop-off points for larger vehicles and extend timing to 30 minutes.
 - Increase accessible parking spaces with rear unloading.
 - Require accessible features in all new developments via the D.A. process.
 - Use development fees to fund new footpaths.

Pools and Beaches

- Beach wheelchairs, hoists in pools, and free pool access are appreciated.

- Programs like Ride the Wave are well regarded - Sutherland indoor splash pool is a good example of an inclusive facility.
- Storage for powered wheelchairs being inadequate or non-existent.
- Beach matting is poorly maintained and disconnected.
- Overcrowding at sensory programs and limited pool access times are problematic.
- Suggested actions:
 - Improve and increase beach matting and wheelchair availability.
 - Install more than one pool hoist.
 - Add multiple strips of matting for better movement along the beach.
 - Introduce inclusive Nippers programs (e.g. Wanda Red Fins at Cronulla).
 - Run sensory-accessible programs concurrently with mainstream ones.
 - Provide an accessible indoor aquatic centre for year-round use.

Buildings and Facilities

- Accessible cabins at Windang and Corrimal are appreciated.
- Accessible accommodation is hard to book during peak times.
- Evacuation facilities used in times of natural disaster lack necessary accessible features, such as hoists, bathrooms, showers, doorways, and quiet spaces.
- Suggested actions:
 - Expand youth centre programs to include disability communities.
 - Schedule programs at varied times to suit different needs.
 - Offer Council venues for accessible events with appropriate facilities.
 - Provide incentives for businesses to improve accessibility.
 - Create a paid directory for businesses to showcase their accessibility.
 - Display inclusive welcome signage in public spaces.

Open submissions

Employment and accessibility

A parent of a 17-year-old with an intellectual disability highlighted challenges in finding paid, meaningful work. They criticised unpaid placements in programs like UOW Project SEARCH and The Disability Trust, suggested Council consider disability employment quotas, and proposed voice-activated forms to promote independence.

Berkeley town centre

A resident reported unsafe footpaths, tree root damage, and obstacles near the bus stop, asking when Berkeley is scheduled for upgrades.

Corrimal playground

A parent requested fencing for the Wilford and Robson Streets playground to make it safe for students from Aspect Autism School, suggesting collaboration with the school or state government for funding.

Inclusive playground design

A child-health organisation advocated for Playwork principles, fencing, inclusive toilets, varied equipment, communication boards, shaded seating, and education campaigns about children's right to play. Parents noted fenced playgrounds improve safety for all children.

Inclusive design benefits

One submission stressed that features like accessible kerbs and paths help everyone, including cyclists and users of personal electric vehicles.

Community inclusion

A person with mental health and neurodivergence challenges praised Wollongong's inclusive sports and social groups, valuing open communication.

Access and transport issues

A resident with multiple sclerosis raised concerns about playground seating, school transport, and Wollongong Central's parking validation process, suggesting number plate recognition for disability parking.

Crowded footpaths

A neighbourhood group asked Council to address difficulties for people with disability navigating CBD footpaths.

Mangerton and broader ideas

A Community Advisory Group applicant raised parking and traffic safety concerns, proposed advisory signs, and noted gaps in mental health referral support. They praised Jamberoo Action Park and suggested initiatives like a holiday shuttle, giveaways for low-income families, more wellness classes, and a monthly supported playgroup with basic facilities. They also called for support workers for volunteers with disability.

Meetings

Person with disability and their support worker

- Discussion around customised employment - an approach developed over 40 years that includes discovery, job development, and on-site support.
- Discovery is described as creating a "life resume" that identifies motivations, skills, and ideal environments.
- The model focuses on matching individual strengths to real business needs, creating roles collaboratively rather than fitting people into existing positions.
- Visual resumes (dot points with pictures) make recruitment more engaging, with support workers able to explain them conversationally with consent.
- Support workers can assist with onboarding at no cost to businesses, and breaking tasks into smaller components makes inclusion practical.
- Employer involvement is critical, including needs analysis and collaboration with job supporters to build confidence and capacity.
- Participants expressed interest in continuing partnerships with Council and local businesses to embed inclusive employment and offered further feedback and

implementation support.

Hard-of-hearing person

- Hearing aids are challenging in echo-prone rooms and with sudden noises; sound bouncing off walls creates discomfort.
- Face-to-face conversation within one metre is essential; hearing from behind is not possible.
- Long periods wearing hearing aids cause irritation and discomfort.
- Service counters with screens or perspex create communication barriers, leading to frustration about disclosing hearing aid use.
- Quieter spaces and dual monitors at one location were helpful.
- Presentations without Q&A reduced anxiety and supported participation.
- Interest in discreet use of hearing loops without announcing it to the room.
- Social isolation is a major concern; inclusive, mixed-age and mixed-gender groups without disability labels are preferred, beyond Council venues.
- Council e-newsletter is valued; suggestions include placing new programs at the top, visible flyers, and simple feedback options.
- Technical issues with online rates caused frustration
- Suggested actions:
 - Clearer communication at service counters.
 - Quiet study areas.
 - Promote hearing loop use.
 - Flexible presentation formats.
 - Inclusive social activities.
 - Improve program visibility.
 - Fix online systems.

Walking, Cycling, Mobility Reference Group

This group is a panel of 10 people that includes people advocating for bicycle users, pedestrians, and individuals with disability, as well as those focused on the needs of families with children and older people. Student representatives are also part of the group. The key points raised included:

- Accessibility is inconsistent—newer buildings are accessible, older ones often are not.
- Frustration that accessibility is not addressed during renovations or lease renewals.
- Positive example: Kathmandu store added a ramp during renovation.
- Suggested shared responsibility between Council and business owners, similar to past façade improvement programs.
- Proposal for Council to work with Destination Wollongong to promote accessible businesses.
- Concerns about poor accessibility at Town Hall.
- Public domain is not set up to prioritise pedestrian movements
- Support for features that make walking safer and easier, such as blisters, street furniture, and stopping points at regular intervals along travel routes.

- Suggestions included using kerb buildouts and prioritised crossing points to improve alignment and accessibility.
- Participants supported making footpaths and cycleways wide enough for multiple users
- Concerns about shared paths that lack safe crossing points.
- Regular maintenance was also seen as important for reducing hazards such as uneven surfaces, overhanging shrubs, and trip risks.
- Timed pedestrian crossings were identified as a positive feature
- More bus stops should be upgraded to include seating.
- Lived experience training for staff is the best way to build understanding.

Carer Gateway Carers Group

- People appreciate some Council efforts, such as free weekend parking at the Council building and support for events like the Brain Cancer fundraiser.
- Suggested adding comfort rooms in facilities for carers and parents managing meltdowns.
- Requests for another 50m indoor heated pool.
- Transport concerns include lack of community transport, expand free bus services to more areas, encourage slower bus drivers and make public transport more affordable.
- Communication with Council is difficult; people dislike being told to “find everything online”, especially carers who are time-poor.
- Payment options are limited; cash payments are not as widely accepted anymore, which affects older residents and carers.
- Basic services like tree and bin maintenance are seen as good.

Feedback from children and young people

Preschooler drawings

Preschoolers submitted drawings in response to questions about disability inclusion.

Places that are easy to use and enjoyed

- Children enjoy parks, beaches, libraries, and playgrounds because they are familiar and easy to access.
- Accessibility features include automatic doors, ramps, flat paths, and familiar environments.
- Activities that make these places fun: slides, library quizzes, beach visits with family or pets.
- Example comments: “Corrimal Library is easy to get into because there is an automatic door,” and outings like “Me and mummy at the Sushi Train” are valued.

Places that are hard to use

- Barriers include stairs, loud environments, lack of signage, and physical challenges (e.g., not being able to swim or climb).
- Some imaginative challenges mentioned (e.g., “jump to the moon” or “travel to Garbage World”).

- Practical examples: difficulty at the beach without swimming lessons, monkey bars being too high, darkness at parks, limited train stops, and long car trips.
- Comments include: "A big rock and lots of stairs!" and "It's hard to stay in the car for so long."

Ideas to make places better

- Add ramps, quiet spaces, games everyone can play, and more swimming lessons.
- Emphasise kindness, inclusion, and helping each other.
- Improve playground equipment for all abilities and ensure flat paths for mobility aids.
- Example suggestions: "Park for everyone," "Playing with my friends and including everyone," and "He needs to be able to hold on and have a flat way to use his walker."

Council's Youth Services LGBTQIA+ programs, outreach, and social media

Feedback was collected from young people aged 14-21 from Council's Youth Services LGBTQIA+ programs and outreach during informal group discussions, a drawing activity, and some one-on-one discussions. Most of these young people are neurodivergent or have disability.

Young people described inclusion as being about both access and attitude; places where they can move safely, be understood, and join in without barriers. They want environments that are physically accessible, socially welcoming, and sustained by kindness and equality.



Some key points raised included:

- Inclusion symbols and familiar, supportive environments help young people feel safe and comfortable.
- Visible signs like rainbow flags and inclusion posters signal acceptance: "it's okay to be yourself here."
- The Youth Centre is seen as welcoming but can feel unsafe when "eshays hang around outside."
- Therapy animals and inclusion of animals in community spaces help people feel safe.
- Supportive staff who understand disability and neurodivergence make a big difference.
- Empathy is important, and young adults with disabilities should not be infantilised.
- Lighting in public spaces was raised as a safety factor, with suggestions for "lots of lighting" and even towers in parks for visibility.
- Damaged footpaths, holes, uneven ground, lack of elevators and ramps, and steps make movement difficult and unsafe.

- Fixing footpaths and repairing cracked or sloped surfaces would improve safety, especially for mobility aid users.
- Strong feedback about obstruction from e-scooters and e-bikes on paths, making access to public transport and facilities harder; some called for a ban.
- Need for more accessible parking, particularly in car parks.
- Better signage suggested to improve navigation.
- Places marked as accessible are not always usable.
- Issues include taps in accessible bathrooms not working for everyone and lighting or sound overwhelming neurodivergent people.
- Participants want information about sensory environments (noise, lighting) to decide if spaces feel safe.
- Important features: ramps, elevators, and wheelchair-accessible play parks.
- Young people prefer simple, familiar communication like text messages and online updates.
- Some like hearing about things through the Youth Centre.
- Advance information about events reduces anxiety and builds confidence.
- Communication issues with international students: teachers speaking slowly despite English proficiency was seen as exclusionary.
- More likely to join when spaces are accessible, predictable, and welcoming.
- Knowing what will happen and having familiar staff (e.g., youth workers) helps.
- Safety considerations important for LGBTQIA+ events.
- Valued features: inclusive equipment, quiet areas, supportive staff.
- Concerns about support classes being excluded from excursions, visitors, and electives.
- Desire for kind, welcoming communities where disability is normalised.
- More public education about disability and normalising disabled spaces suggested.
- Seeing people with disabilities working at Council is a visible sign of inclusion.
- Lack of understanding and flexibility for students needing assistive or medical devices.
- Call to “not diss abilities.”
- Doctors not taking young people’s health issues seriously and lack of empathy.
- Complicated steps to access health support.
- High cost of diagnoses and limited Medicare support, sometimes thousands of dollars.
- Weekly questions posted online invited responses from young people; results are shown in the graphic on the next page.

What could Wollongong do better to accommodate for people living with disabilities?



Better ramps!! I shouldn't be worried about falling back on the road because the ramp is 90°

Reply >



So so many things, I would love to help

Reply >



There needs to be more job opportunities for young people with disabilities (with fair wage)

Reply >



Keep paths clear and well-paved

Reply >

What's something awesome you've seen that makes life better for people living with disability?



Access to ramps or elevators!

Reply >



More widespread recognition of the sunflower lanyard has been great

Reply >



A sensory area for people with disabilities in a shopping centre

Reply >



Quieter spaces (e.g. quiet carriage, supermarkets with a quiet hour)

Reply >



Accessible public transport!! its my favourite thing ever.

Reply >

Ever noticed a space or service that doesn't work for people with disability?



Maybe a braille trail at the botanical gardens and other council places

Reply >



Lack of public transport in areas makes travelling less accessible for everybody (e.g. Yallah)

Reply >



The footpaths around Wollongong have lots cracks/dips and are very uneven!

Reply >

Got a genius idea to make our community more inclusive?



even walkways

Reply >

What makes life easier for you, or someone you know living with disability?



Accessible learning

Reply >



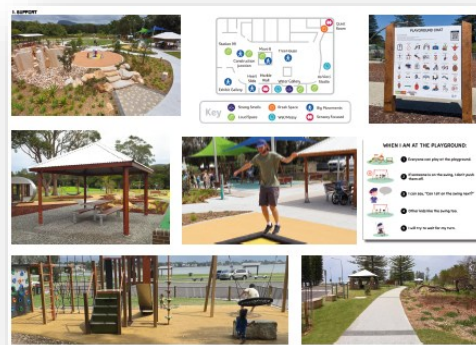
Quiet spaces where there aren't big crowds

Reply >

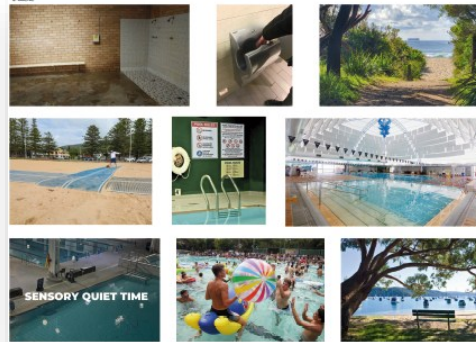
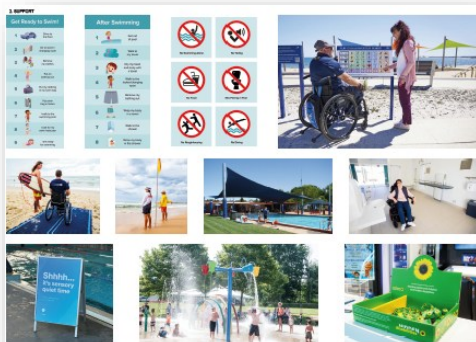
Workshops in schools

We held two workshops in schools. One was with neurodiverse highschoolers. The other was with primary schoolers with mild intellectual disability. During the workshops, students were shown a series of images depicting different scenes and topics. They placed a smiley face sticker 😊 next to things they liked and a sad face sticker 😞 next to things they didn't. Each topic included examples of supports that could be used in those environments, such as quiet spaces, sensory tools, visual aids, and alternative communication methods. Facilitators noted feedback shared during conversations to capture ideas and perspectives beyond the activity. The scenes and topics were:

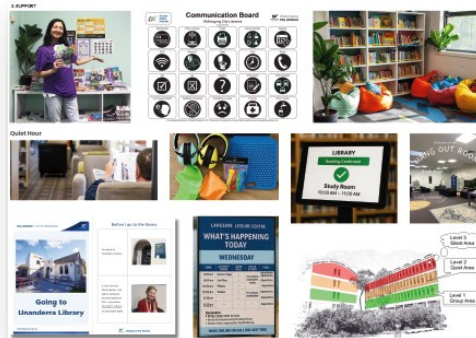
- Parks and playgrounds



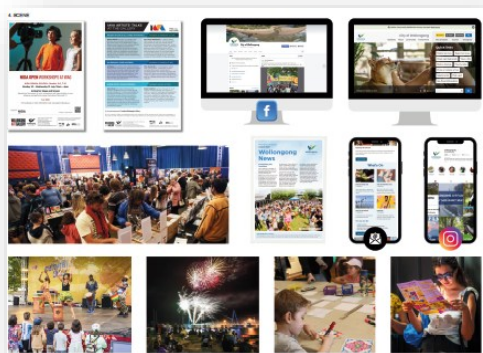
- Beaches and pools



- Libraries, Leisure Centres, and the Youth Centre



- Events, programs, and getting information from Council



Parks and playgrounds

- People enjoy big swings, climbing towers and nets, long and tube slides, spider web frames, trampolines, spinning equipment.
- All Ages All Abilities playground praised for being spacious and suitable for older children.
- Beach playground described as “fun” and “happy.”
- Preferred soft rubber ground over bark chip.
- Some playgrounds lack suitable equipment for older kids (e.g., Luke’s Playground “too small,” Cringila Hills wood frame “uninteresting”).
- Bark chip and bird droppings under trees disliked.
- Cringila Hills feedback: “too many rocks, people can hurt themselves.”
- Seen as “peaceful” and “quiet” by some, “boring” by others.
- Cringila Hills water features sometimes don’t work.
- Shade is a consistent priority; parks without shade described as “too hot,” “too crowded,” and “too noisy.”
- Concrete paths considered too hot for walking.
- Shaded BBQ and picnic areas near playgrounds viewed positively, though BBQ smoke disliked.
- Fenced playgrounds near water felt safe; fencing at Cringila Hills disliked by some.
- Accessible concrete paths appreciated for running and moving between areas.
- Students valued shade shelters, visual signs for navigation, quiet zones, sensory triggers, and busy times.
- “Rules of play” boards seen as helpful; pictures described as “cute.”
- Mixed responses to communication boards with QR codes.
- Positive feedback for colour-coded zones and maps with legends.
- Suggestions for improvements:
 - Better transport options (e.g., minibus to Redgum Estate in Figtree).
 - More bike tracks to stay off roads.
 - Add lighting and trees.
 - Updates on Japanese bridge requested.
 - Playground improvements: hammocks, water bubblers, nearby parking, roundabout play equipment, softfall inside mouse wheel at All Ages All Abilities playground.

Beaches and pools

Beach activities and access – high school students

- Liked sandy track to the ocean, beach walks, dog walking, shade, and beach matting for wheelchair inclusion.
- Dislikes: sand, track being “too hot,” lack of supervision (cold showers, no adults or flags).
- Positive features: lifeguards, flags, communication boards, wheelchair access.

Beach activities and access – primary school students

- Praised beach matting (“My Nan has a wheelchair”) and sandy track (“nice and beautiful”).
- Some initially disliked matting until learning its purpose.
- Enjoyed beaches, surfing, and nearby playgrounds; some disliked sand or felt neutral.
- Mentioned Windang Beach for easier parking; concern about only one bubbler at the beach.

Pools – high school students

- Liked heated indoor pool at Beaton Park, spa, ladders and railings, shaded seating, quieter sessions.
- Valued visual rules and guides (“rules are good”), communication boards.
- Dislikes: hand dryers (loud, germ-spreading), old/dark changerooms, lack of doors, crowded pools.
- Mixed views on sensory quiet time; some prefer swimming at home.

Pools – primary school students

- Frequently mentioned Beaton Park as warm and safe; liked steps, railings, chlorine smell.
- Dislikes: depth, noise, slippery areas.
- Mixed views on inflatables and busy pools (fun vs unsafe).
- Sensory quiet time reactions varied (enjoyed alone time vs feeling lonely).
- Hand dryers widely disliked; visual rules mostly liked, though one said yelling should be allowed.

Safety and inclusion features

- Lifeguards, flags, safety signs, communication boards, and sunflower lanyards viewed positively by most students.

Libraries, Leisure Centres, and the Youth Centre

High school students

- Prefer organised, calm spaces and activities like Dungeons and Dragons, comics, and gaming.
- Libraries valued for helping “search for things” and quiet areas with bean bags, headphones, and fidgets.
- Visual “what’s happening today” boards appreciated, especially with pictures.

- Mixed reactions to colour-coded noise zones and social stories (useful vs “boring” or “for little kids”).
- Disliked busy spaces such as noisy gyms and crowded areas.
- Youth Centre positives: gaming room, graffiti wall, forecourt; hangout room good for “gaming and talking.”
- Concerns: bullies, lack of supervision, forecourt feeling intimidating.
- Suggestions: comic programs, gaming spaces, tours, drums, clearer visual boards.

Primary school students

- Libraries described as quiet and organised; liked “new books.”
- Mixed views on Dungeons and Dragons (quiet vs “too noisy for a library”) and storytime.
- Leisure centres: teen classes and reception liked, though some found classes boring; request for more “learn to swim.”
- Youth Centre: basketball court enjoyed by some, others said too high or unsafe; forecourt liked for playing and relaxing, but “too many people.”
- Indoor activities enjoyed for “friends, chats, and lunch”.
- Graffiti wall feedback mixed (fun vs bad or boring).
- Unanderra Library liked for Bluey books and DVDs.

Supports and accessibility

- Positive feedback for communication boards, quiet spaces, sensory tools, hangout room, quiet hour, and booking system with visual confirmation.
- Headphones help reduce distractions (e.g., “stop my sister annoying me”).
- Mixed or negative views on quiet hour, sensory tools, visual boards, social stories, and colour-coded zones.
- Mostly positive feedback about Youth Services staff sharing information.

Events, programs, and getting information from Council

Event feedback

- High school students gave mixed views on events:
 - Comic Gong was fun for many but “a bit much” and needed “a bigger venue.”
 - Fireworks liked by some, but others found them “too loud” or “scary.”
 - Culture Mix drew mixed reactions.
- Quiet spaces consistently valued (“like to be left alone”).
- Primary school students also had mixed views:
 - Fireworks often popular but noise disliked by some.
 - Culture Mix and Comic Gong seen as positive, neutral, or negative; concerns about “too many people.”

Information preferences

- Flyers with photos preferred over text-heavy versions (“too many words”).
- Instagram, Facebook, and website received mixed reactions.
- Easy Read materials well received—helped students “know what’s happening,” though one map was “too complicated.”

- Emojis liked for feedback.
- Staff uniforms helped students know who to approach.
- Other ideas: car or motorbike events, replacing the 55AC bus with trams.

Communication channels

- Students used Instagram, Facebook, website, email, printed programs.
- Flyers and newsletters often seen as having “too many words”.
- E-newsletter feedback mostly neutral.

Supports and accessibility

- Culture Mix map, social story, and Easy Read materials helped many (“I like having a map at event”), though some found maps or symbols confusing.
- Quiet spaces described as “nice and quiet”.
- Preview videos helped students “know what to expect”.
- Uniforms made staff easier to recognise.
- Emojis preferred for feedback.

High school Community Circles

Two groups of high schoolers from support unit classes used the Community Circle Kit to run group feedback-gathering activities. There were a total of 11 students; five aged 12-13, and six aged 15-17.

Safety and feeling welcome

Young people feel safer when police, fire brigade staff and youth workers are visible, especially near the Youth Centre. Clean public spaces matter – rubbish can make places feel unsafe. Youth-friendly venues with activities help people feel welcome, and free buses support inclusion.

Transport and getting around

Safety on trains is a concern due to drunk or unpredictable behaviour. Seeing more police or guards on public transport would help. Traffic congestion near schools, especially on Lysaght Street, makes travel stressful and can stop young people coming to school. Some areas are hard to reach by public transport, and cycling can feel unsafe on busy roads.

Public places and crowds

Busy places like Wollongong Mall and nearby parks can feel unsafe, making some young people avoid going out. Lack of parking near schools can also be a barrier when support from parents is needed.

Communication

Young people prefer clear, simple information through posters, noticeboards and schools. Teachers are trusted to share information, and more Council visits to schools were suggested.

Joining in

Smaller or quieter events would make participation easier. Young people want more

free programs, better event information, and transport support such as taxis. Clear nutritional information at food venues is important for people with Type 1 diabetes.

Work, respect, and inclusion

Respectful workplaces that understand disability needs are important. Teasing or banter was raised as a reason people might avoid a workplace. Young people want more work experience and entry-level job opportunities with Council, and more chances to talk directly about disability.

Ideas for improvement

Suggestions included a sensory room at the Wollongong Youth Centre, more youth centres or PCYCs, safe small social spaces, a parkour park at Fairy Meadow Beach, and more alcohol-free music events.

Next Steps

Using what we've heard to draft the plan

The information we've collected from the community is helping us understand the challenges that people with disability experience. It also tells us what people think are the most important things for Council to work on first. This information will be used to help us write the actions in Council's next Disability Inclusion Action Plan. When we write the Plan, we will also look at current research and the other great things different organisations are doing. Staff from all areas across Council will help create the Plan.

Sharing the draft plan with the community

We are aiming to have a draft plan ready by early 2026. We will be asking the community to read it and tell us what they think before it is finalised. We will let everyone who gives us feedback know when the draft is ready. The draft plan will also be on our website and at Council libraries.

All feedback is important and is one factor in the decision-making process for Council. The graphic below shows some of the factors we consider in our decision making:

