



Hobsons Bay
CITY COUNCIL

Hobsons Bay City Council Submission to the Inquiry into Social Inclusion and Victorians with a disability

FEBRUARY 2014

Introduction

Hobsons Bay City Council (the Council) welcomes the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Social Inclusion and Victorians with a Disability. This is a positive step in ensuring that all Victorians are able to actively participate in the community and access services and infrastructure, strengthening health and wellbeing of all individuals and families. The Council looks forward to the release of the outcomes of the inquiry and the setting of an agenda which fosters strong partnerships between key stakeholders, identifies their roles, and maps out a pathway for ensuring social inclusion for Victorians with a disability is addressed.

People with disability in Hobsons Bay

Hobsons Bay City Council is situated approximately seven to 20 kilometres south west of the Melbourne Central Business District (CBD), covering an area of 66 square kilometres. The municipality has a population of 87 360 people which is forecast to increase by 17 per cent (14 864) by 2031.

People with a disability make up approximately 17 per cent of the Hobsons Bay population. Disability is a key priority for the Council, as noted in the Councils leading directional plans, the Community Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017 and the Council Plan 2013-2017.

The Council's commitment to disability is further confirmed with the development and implementation of the Disability Access and Inclusion Strategy 2013 – 2017, which works towards achieving a fully accessible and inclusive municipality where all residents, regardless of their ability, can reach their full potential and lead fulfilling lives.

The Disability Access and Inclusion Strategy 2013 – 2017 (DAIS) is underpinned by various International, Commonwealth, State and local legislation and policies, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992. The DAIS was developed in consultation with our community and continues to have ongoing consultation throughout its implementation and evaluation, especially with the Council's Disability Advisory Committee.

People with disabilities in Hobsons Bay have told the Council that they want the things that everyone else in the community takes for granted. They want to go to school and work, get married, go on holidays, and have access to shops and restaurants. Most importantly people with disabilities in Hobsons Bay want to be accepted and want the opportunity to be spontaneous. They want the chance to participate in and contribute to community life, and require others in the community to share their vision.

Social inclusion

Social inclusion for people with a disability refers to people with disability experiencing no barriers with accessing and moving around the community, and having control on lifestyle choices such as:

- pursuing educational and vocational goals;
- finding and maintaining suitable housing;
- enjoying social, recreation and cultural interests;
- undertaking daily tasks like using transport, going shopping or attending medical appointments; and
- having meaningful relationships.

In order to achieve social inclusion the community environment needs to enable inclusion for all ages, cultures, genders and abilities.

The inclusion and participation of Victorians with a disability have been strengthened following the introduction of the Disability Act 2006. The Act ensures that all public authorities must have a Disability Action Plan, improving their accountability and documenting their work towards inclusion. Despite the introduction of this act however, many people with disabilities continue to face discrimination, inequalities and barriers to full participation in their community. This is largely due to the limited scope that the Disability Action Plans are including and that it is not a requirement of all organisations to have one. Further work needs to be done by the state government to raise awareness of the importance for all organisations to have a Disability Action Plan. This will ensure that all areas are addressed to improve inclusion, including the built, natural and social environments.

Recommendation 1: The Victorian government provide further training and guidance for organisations around how they can address disability and inclusion, looking at the full spectrum of inclusion to support the development of more holistic Disability Action Plans.

Attitudes and awareness

The barriers that people with disabilities face are largely impacted by the community's values and perceptions. Attitudes and social norms take time to change, however it is critical that we continue to encourage inclusive behaviours and perceptions within the community and challenge behaviours that marginalise and or exclude people with a disability. This can be achieved through a range of strategies such as awareness campaigns, champions within the community, and governments that lead the way.

Recommendation 2: That the Victorian government takes the lead role in raising awareness of people with a disability in Victoria, encouraging inclusive behaviours and perceptions to positively affect the attitudes and social norms within the community.

Buildings, infrastructure and public spaces

The built environment is still a huge barrier to participation for many people with disabilities. Currently new buildings have to comply with the Building Code of Australia (BCA), however unfortunately this does not go far enough in creating spaces and buildings that are accessible for all ages and abilities. While the BCA provides a starting point for delivering accessible buildings, it is not enough therefore stronger guidelines and requirements are needed to go beyond minimum accessibility compliance requirements. The Council is currently trying to do this via the development of a Universal Design Policy, however in order to create state-wide change universal design principles need to be included within the state and federal legislations that guide the development new buildings, infrastructure and public spaces.

Recommendation 3: That the Victorian government introduce legislation and standards which require developments of new buildings, infrastructure and public spaces to incorporate Universal Design principles and meet Australian Standards AS 1428.1 - 2009 and AS 1428.2 – 1992.

Services and supports

In order to participate in the community many people with disabilities require support, with the level of support varying between individuals. The Council is responsible for delivering a range of services and programs that are accessible, inclusive and responsive to the needs

of people with disabilities. Despite these services, the Council is limited in its capacity to address all the barriers and issues facing people with disabilities, their families and carers therefore partnerships are needed across all sectors, not just health and disability. The Victorian government needs to lead the way in this collaborative action, integrating disability and access across all departments, particularly transport, housing, education, employment and community infrastructure. These partnerships then need to be continued throughout regions and municipalities integrating with the work of local governments and local service providers.

In addition gender equity needs to be addressed as a key priority within program and service delivery. As data indicates, women and girls with a disability are often faced with greater inequities than their counterparts therefore strategies need to be in place to address this such as greater support for women with disabilities at risk of violence, abuse, and or neglect. Furthermore, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (GLBTIQ) people with a disability are at a greater risk of discrimination and abuse which can have acute impacts on mental health and wellbeing (including internalised homophobia and transphobia). The GLBTIQ community need to be recognised, included and supported in all programs and services.

Recommendation 4: The Victorian government integrate disability across all departments and foster this integration within regions and local governments.

Recommendation 5: The Victorian government recognise the importance of addressing gender inequities and the inclusion of the GLBTIQ community when delivering disability programs and services.

State lead programs

The state government are currently in partnership with local government and other key stakeholders implementing a range of disability programs such as Community Building and Access for All Abilities. Community Building has had some great successes however there is limited documentation at the state level to identify and share achievements and best practice to ensure we are continuing to build on and strengthen the disability work across the state. Strengthening the documentation of programs and projects that emerge from initiatives such as Community Building would also articulate the strategic outcomes across the state which could then reinforce the outcomes of the Victorian State Disability Plan 2013-2016. In addition, the redirection of the state governments Access for All Abilities program has impacted local governments and the community, therefore to ensure the program, in its new form, is meeting the needs of the community and learnings are captured it is crucial that this program is monitored, evaluated and documented.

Recommendation 6: That the Victorian government promotes and shares the achievements of the Community Building program so the state can build on and strengthen its disability work.

Recommendation 7: That the Victorian government evaluate and capture learning from the new Access All Abilities program.

Education and employment

Opportunities to gain formal education, and consequently meaningful employment, have great impacts on health and wellbeing, including social and emotional wellbeing as well as increased income and housing security which will have further positive impacts as people

age. In addition, supporting people with a disability to enter education or the workforce increases the family and carers ability to also return to work in a greater capacity.

Despite having the ability and willingness to work many people with a disability still do not receive the same opportunity to enter the workforce and obtain secure and sustainable employment as the rest of the community. Whether this is as a result of negative attitudes or misconceptions about disability from employers or the lack of support employers have to ensure their workplace caters for the needs of people with disabilities. The barriers to employment for people with disability need to be further explored.

In addition, throughout Australia there is a significant gap between the level of education reached by students with disabilities and those without. Education opportunities need to be adapted to address the individual needs of people with a disability.

Recommendation 8: That the Victorian government further explore and identify steps for how education and employment opportunities for people with a disability can be strengthened.

Affordable, reliable and integrated transport

Getting around can be complicated for people with disabilities. This is further challenged when public transport and taxis, the most common methods of travel for people with disabilities, is inaccessible and or unreliable. Public transport providers need to ensure they have strategies in place to minimise access barriers. This should include elements such as; signage, audio options, movement on and off transport, access to transport stops, as well as safety in and around transport. The Council would encourage the government to review public transport infrastructure using the principles of Universal Design.

Taxis are another key challenge for people with disabilities, especially for people in wheelchairs or motorised scooters. The accessibility of taxis needs to be reviewed and should include the review of international models such as United Kingdom.

Recommendation 9: That the Victorian government reviews public transport and taxis to strengthen accessibility.

Accessible and affordable supported accommodation and housing

The availability of supported accommodation for people with a disability is often limited due to lack of supply therefore many find it difficult to find secure and affordable tenure, particularly in the private housing market. In terms of equity and fairness, the state government must take responsibility in ensuring a supply of affordable housing is available for those who are most vulnerable, in particular people with disabilities. In addition, the supply of public housing has remained relatively unchanged for some time due to limited funding. This needs to be reviewed to ensure funding for housing is catering for more than just the urgent housing cases and people requiring high levels of support.

Furthermore, it is of great concern that young people with disabilities are currently being placed in nursing homes when no appropriate accommodation is available. Legislation needs to be in place to ensure there is appropriate housing for young people with disabilities and that they are placed in accommodation that is age appropriate.

To support the development of accessible housing the Council encourages all new housing developments to align with universal design principles and or be adaptable to the changing needs of the occupants, allowing ageing in place. This would require developers to go

beyond minimum building requirements, for which local government have limited legislated ability to enforce, therefore would require a state or federal legislation to stipulate this. Many current private housing developments do not include the ability for occupants to age in place or be adaptable for people with disability. Retrofits to houses often require substantial modifications and are more costly than if they were considered in the development stages. In addition there is currently limited funding for retrofitting.

Beyond the built form, the provision of accessible housing needs to be located within reasonable proximity to employment, community infrastructure and services with access to public transport to ensure people with a disability have greatest access to essential services.

Recommendation 10: That the Victorian government increase the supply of affordable accessible housing for people with a disability.

Recommendation 11: That the Victorian government introduce legislation and standards which require new housing developments to go beyond minimum building requirements and include elements of universal design to allow ageing in place.

Recommendation 12: That the Victorian government reviews the level of funding provided for modifications of private housing.

Recommendation 13: That the Victorian government introduces legislation to ensure there is appropriate housing for young people with disabilities.

Summary of Recommendations

Below are the summary of the Council's key recommendations articulated throughout the submission. The Council looks forward to the release of the final report from the state government and the recommended ways forward to enable social inclusion for all Victorians with a disability.

Recommendation 1: The Victorian government provide further training and guidance for organisations around how they can address disability and inclusion, looking at the full spectrum of inclusion to support the development of more holistic Disability Action Plans.

Recommendation 2: That the Victorian government takes the lead role in raising awareness of people with a disability in Victoria, encouraging inclusive behaviours and perceptions to positively affect the attitudes and social norms within the community.

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