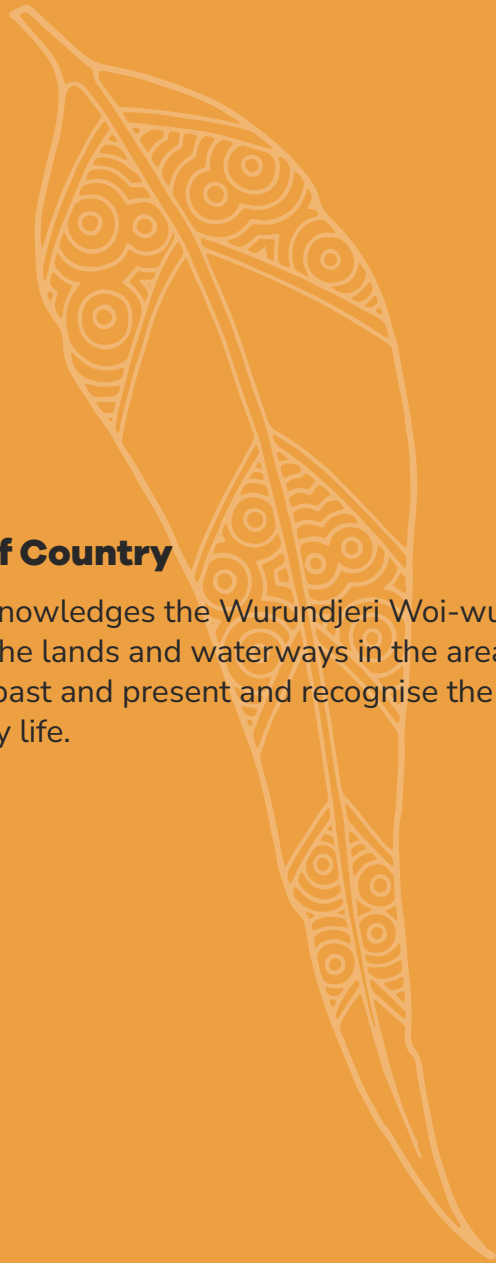




Merri-bek
City Council

Merri-bek
Human Rights
Policy 2016-2026
Highlights from the evaluation





Acknowledgement of Country

Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Merri-bek. We pay respect to Elders past and present and recognise the ongoing contributions of First Peoples to community life.



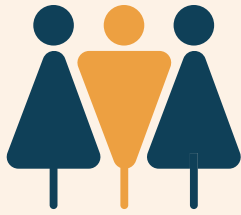
Merri-bek staff and partners at the Walk against Family Violence, Coburg Lake Reserve, 2024.

Contents

About our community – we are proudly diverse	4
About the Human Rights Policy	5
Why we did this evaluation	7
How we did the evaluation	7
What we found	8
What have we learned about what is needed to support Human Rights	14
What's next?	15

About our community – we are proudly diverse

Number of residents



186,534

(2024)¹

Residents with parents born overseas ²



47.7%

People who speak a language other than English at home



34.5%

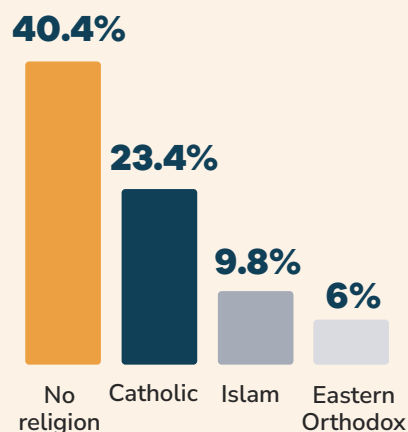
(2021)²

People who speak another language, and do not speak English well or at all

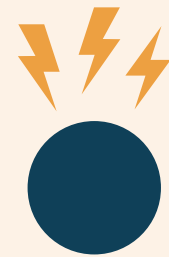


5.1%

Religious affiliation ²



Experience a mental health condition ²



11%

Residents who identify as First Peoples

1,268

(0.67% of the population)

People with a disability in Merri-bek



20%

People who identify as members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender, intersex, queer and aromantic/ asexual communities ³



24.3%

Who speak an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language ¹

2.1%

(26)

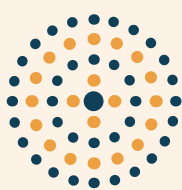
¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2024) Data by region: Merri-bek (<https://dbr.abs.gov.au/region.html?lyr=lga&rgn=25250>)
² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) 2021 Moreland, Census All persons QuickStats | Australian Bureau of Statistics (abs.gov.au)
³ Brown, H. (2022) Proportion of residents who are LGBTIQ+ by municipality (estimate) [Dataset] <http://genderstats.com.au/downloads/prevalence-of-LGBTIQ+-individuals-by-municipality.xlsx>

About the Human Rights Policy

The Human Rights Policy guides how Council upholds the rights of everyone in the Merri-bek community.

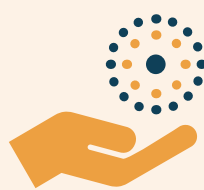
Council adopted the Policy in 2016 and it was updated in 2022 to reflect new legislation and evolving community priorities. The Policy has 3 goals:

Goal 1



Be an inclusive organisation

Goal 2



Deliver Inclusive and accessible services

Goal 3



Advance inclusion and social cohesion in the community

The Policy prioritises groups at greater risk of exclusion, while recognising the unique strengths of these communities:

- First Peoples'
- People with disability
- LGBTIQ+ communities
- Migrant, refugee and faith communities
- Women, girls and gender diverse communities

In 2022, children, young people and older people were added as focus areas of the Policy, recognising the specific challenges, needs and experiences at these stages of life.

The Policy is underpinned by an intersectional approach.

We recognise that discrimination based on age, gender, ability, culture or faith rarely happens in isolation — these experiences are connected and can reinforce each other.

The Policy applies to all Council initiatives. Implementation is supported by 5 plans and commitments, including:

1. Disability Access and Inclusion Plan
2. LGBTIQ+ Action Plan
3. Social Cohesion Plan
4. Gender Equality Commitment
5. Statement of Commitment to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities of the City of Merri-bek

“Merri-bek has a reputation for being a progressive Council. They have a long history of celebrating difference and accepting people.”

Community organisation stakeholder

The Community Development and Social Policy team support implementation of the plans. Dedicated staff roles have evolved over time to strengthen internal structures and systems to support human rights.

Timeline

Foundations 1997 - 2014

1997

First Multicultural Development Policy.

First Statement of Commitment to Indigenous Australians and first Statement of Commitment to Women.

1998

First Disability Policy and Action Plan.

Council joins regional Building a Respectful Community Strategy.

2014

Council supports marriage equality.

2012

Ballerrt Mooroop site lease signed; First Social Cohesion Plan adopted.

1998

Second Social Cohesion Plan adopted; Inclusive Employment Program funded.

Council commits to develop Council's First Peoples Strategy.

2022

2019

Gender Equality Commitment adopted.

2016

Human Rights Policy adopted; Disability Access & Inclusion Plan launched.

2025

LGBTIQA+ Action Plan endorsed; Human Rights Charter training mandatory, Human Rights Policy updated.

2020

Policy launch and milestones 2016 - 2025

2017

Why we did this evaluation

After 9 years of implementation, Council undertook an evaluation in 2025 to assess what has been achieved through the Policy and what more needs to be done. More specifically, the evaluation focused on:

- What has changed within Council
- What difference the Policy has made in the community
- What has been learned and what should guide the next Policy

The findings will guide the planning and development of the next Human Rights Policy.

How we did the evaluation

The evaluation used a mix of qualitative and quantitative data, including:



What we found



Goal 1: Be an inclusive organisation

Evaluation finding

The Policy has strengthened Council's internal systems, skills and structures to support human rights.

Key achievements



Growth in internal capacity

Staff working in direct roles that support human rights, equity and inclusion increased from 3 in 2016 to more than 20 in 2025. Strong support for implementation was provided by the Community Development and Social Policy team.



Increased human rights training and learning

Human rights, cultural safety, disability awareness and inclusion training was completed by 1,407 staff members over the life of the Policy, totalling 2,246 course completions.



Extended opportunities for inclusive leadership

Senior leaders participated in professional learning on diversity and inclusion, including cultural safety learning with First Peoples.



More inclusive policies

Workplace policies were reviewed with an inclusion lens, including recruitment, sexual harassment, family violence and workplace adjustments.



Improved representation of First Peoples' businesses in Council procurement

Spending with First Peoples' businesses has increased 7.5-fold since 2021.



Increased valuing of lived experience

LGBTIQA+ library staff in the Lee Ellis Working Group developed programs, provided lived experience advice and built staff capability in inclusive programming.

“When I started at Merri-bek I felt lucky (to be supported as someone who is gender diverse) but now it is expected...having these roles and teams in Human Resources is important and makes it easier to have these discussions.”

Merri-bek staff member

Case Study: Disability Work Experience Program

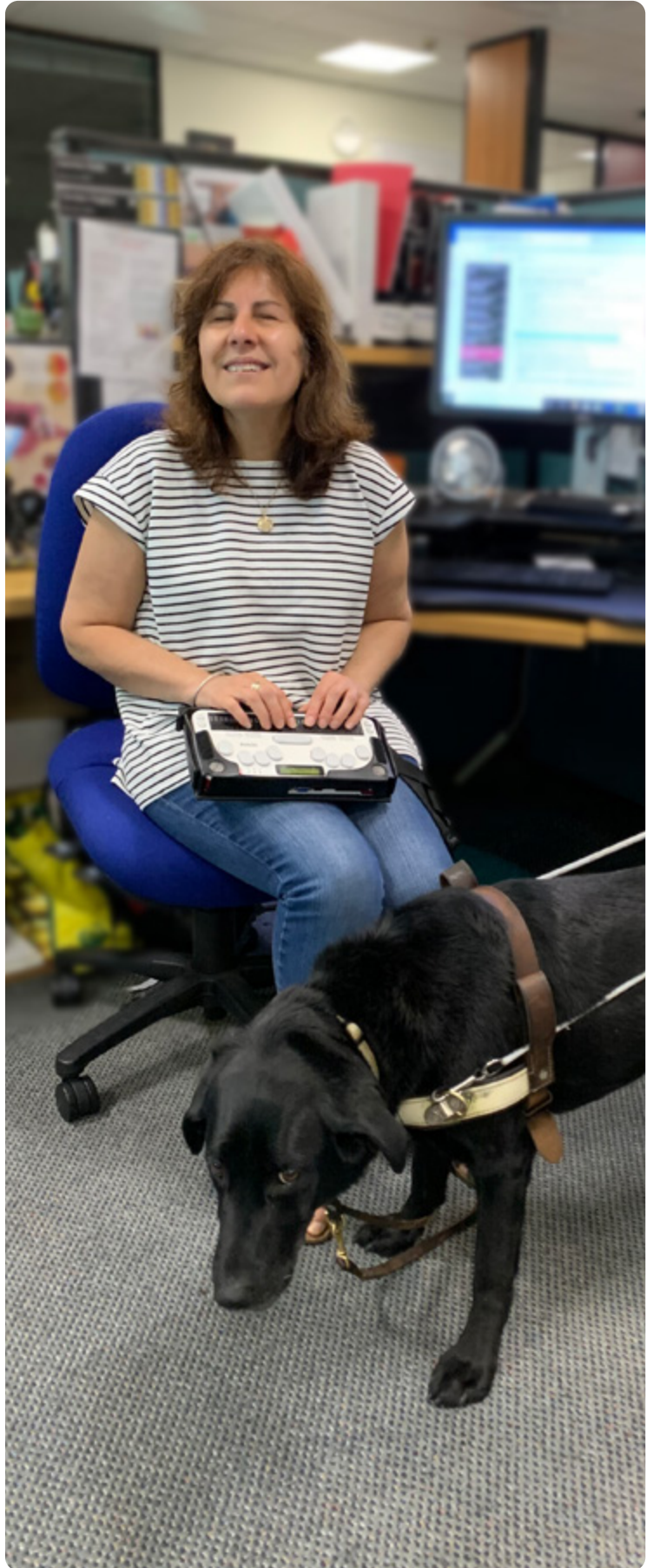
Young people with intellectual disabilities are less likely to be working in mainstream employment compared to other people with disability.

Council partnered with Kangan TAFE to provide work experience for students with mild intellectual disabilities through the Integrated Practical Placement Program.

Students were studying Certificate I or II in Work Education and worked on rotation across Finance, Youth Services and the YMCA.

Participating students gained skills and confidence, and some subsequently enrolled in further education in their area of interest.

Staff involved in the placements reported improved confidence in working alongside people with disability.



Carmela Carey took part in an inclusive work experience program at Council during 2019. During this time, Carmela provided administrative assistance to a several Council teams and enhanced her well-developed administration, communication and organisation skills.



Goal 2: Deliver inclusive and accessible services

“Merri-bek is at the forefront of human rights work, through the explicit framing of urban design through a human rights lens. Urban design has implemented programs such as nighttime walk audits to identify access barriers and improve lighting design for safety.”

Merri-bek staff member, Urban Design

Evaluation finding

The Policy and action plans have helped make Council services more inclusive and accessible. Merri-bek has increased priority group participation in services and programs provided by Council, such as libraries, open space, sport and recreation, and leisure centres.

Key achievements



Libraries

Increase in number and scope of library services that progress inclusion, including LGBTIQ+ programs, bilingual story times, sensory hours and attendance at over 40,000 structured programs in 2024.



Events

Community attendance at human rights related events has more than doubled since 2022. For example, attendance at Ballerdt Mooroop Day, International Women’s Day, Refugee Week, Interfaith Harmony Day and LGBTIQ+ events has grown steadily, doubling from 2022 to over 2,000 people in 2025.



Arts and culture

65% of artists exhibiting at the Counihan Gallery (2022–2025) represented identified priority groups. In 2025, new art projects engaged local migrant artists to bring their voices and stories to new audiences.



Leisure centres

Since 2021, 956 people have joined the YMCA’s Inclusive Pride Gym and Swim Nights. Access for people with disability has improved through the Attendant Support Initiative.



Sport and recreation

Women’s participation in community sport increased from 8% in 2009 to over 26% in 2025, in line with Council’s Sportsgrounds and Facility Allocation Policy. There has also been increased participation of people with disability in sport.



Anti racism initiatives

Council partnered with Victoria University and local communities to develop translated anti-racism resources and launch the Hume Merri-bek Anti-Racism Support Network, now backed by 17 local organisations.



Accessibility improvements

In 2023, community members identified more than 500 access barriers across the municipality, leading Council to establish an internal working group and commit to a range of actions including kerb ramp upgrades.

Case Study: Designing Open Space for Everyone

The Human Rights Policy guided community engagement for Council's Open Space Strategy in 2023. Engagement with 900+ residents led to significant outcomes for priority groups. Changes included:

People with disability

Feedback led to commitments for an All-Abilities playground, a 'Changing Places' facility, and Universal Design principles in future projects.

Older persons

Submissions prompted actions to improve seating, shade, and footpath safety.

First Peoples

The strategy now includes co-designed signage, naming, and public art, created in conjunction with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.

Children and youth

Input from children and young people shaped new Playspace Design Guidelines and a more inclusive Open Space Strategy.

Migrant, faith and non-English speaking communities

Language access and engagement through Merri-bek Connector program supported meaningful participation in the Open Space Strategy.

Applying human rights principles from the beginning leads to more inclusive outcomes.

When engagement is accessible, targeted to priority groups, and continued throughout the planning process community input can be translated into practical strategy and infrastructure design.



Kirrip biik Park, Coburg.



Goal 3:
Advance inclusion and social cohesion in the community

“Seeing members’ confidence and connection with Council grow over the life of the group was really rewarding and a privilege”

Member of the Disability Reference Group

Evaluation finding

Council has strengthened community participation, voice and belonging. Community satisfaction with Council’s support for diversity, inclusion and human rights remains high at **7.5 out of a possible 10** and there has been an increase in sense of belonging associated with participation in social cohesion activities.

Key achievements



Community grants

Increased number of successful applications from migrant, refugee, youth and seniors groups resulting from changes in criteria and development of a simpler application process to align with the Human Rights Policy.



Community voice

Ten advisory and reference groups now support diverse community members to participate in Council planning and decision making. In 2025, 84% of new members in these groups came from priority communities, a significant increase from 2016.



Community partnerships

Long term collaborations support Council to design and implement strategies that support human rights. Since 2011, Council has maintained a partnership with the Wurundjeri Woi wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation to strengthen community outcomes.



Advocacy

Council delivered over **300 human rights related advocacy actions**, influencing decisions about accessible transport, gender equality in sport and embedding the need for all gender toilets in the building code.

Council has been active in supporting the Victorian Treaty process. Merri-bek Council is one of 40+ Councils nationwide advocating for people seeking asylum through the Mayoral and Councillor Taskforce.

Case Study: Democracy Lab – Giving people voice

The Merri-bek Democracy Lab (2019–2025) supported diverse community members, particularly from migrant, refugee, faith, women, disability, and LGBTIQ+ priority groups, to participate in skill building, networking, and community projects.

The Lab boosted civic participation through community led action and helped shift perceptions of local government as an active partner and collaborator.

Completion rates of the Democracy Lab were very high, with 102 people out of 113 successfully completing the program.

Many participants went on to launch new initiatives, including a food hub, a Dementia Café, the Draw Plants Together project, and 2 social enterprises.

The Lab's Seeds of Change stream provided participants with dedicated space to develop and pitch their project ideas to the broader cohort.

The Democracy Lab demonstrates how Council can empower people to take action in their own lives and communities to strengthen social cohesion.

The project has been formally recognised with the inaugural 2025 Municipal Association of Victoria Innovations Lab Award for its collaborative approach with Public Value Studio, participants, and staff.

“The Democracy Lab and Seeds of Change was a fantastic way to share ideas about projects people were working on but also inspire people to be more involved in the community—creating their own projects or joining an established one.”



What have we learned about what is needed to support Human Rights?

- Action plans bring the Policy to life. They provide practical guidance for teams within Council to progress human rights within the organisation and externally in the community.
- Strong leadership and cross team collaboration are essential in creating consistency in messaging and support for human rights.
- Dedicated resource and support is required to coordinate implementation.
- Staff within Council need practical tools and support to apply human rights considerations in everyday work.
- Monitoring and evaluation need to be strengthened for accountability and learning about what works to support human rights in our community.
- The current Policy is framed in line with existing Council commitments and legislative requirements. Beyond compliance, the policy continues to move towards strengthening capability to work with complex concepts such as human rights, diversity and inclusion.
- Ideas like intersectionality—though sometimes difficult to communicate—remain essential for understanding how identity and power shape discrimination. Strengthening shared understanding and clearer communication will be key.
- It is important to continuously review and adapt the Policy and the plans to an evolving Merri-bek community. Human rights concerns such as food security, housing and place based disadvantage are becoming increasingly important issues to address in our community.
- Engaging communities in planning and decision-making takes time, but the benefits are worthwhile. It is a process that supports the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives, and promotes engagement with Council programs, services and facilities.



Dancer from Djirri Djirri Wurundjeri women's dance group at renaming Moreland ceremony 2022.

What's next?

The evaluation supports continuing the Human Rights Policy and strengthening it in the next phase (2026–2036). Key directions include:



Marco Pennacchia's Intersex-inclusive Progress Pride flag mural at Glenroy Hub 2026.



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90 Bell Street
Coburg VIC 3058

Brunswick Customer Service Centre
233 Sydney Road
Brunswick VIC 3056

Glenroy Customer Service Centre
Glenroy Community Hub
50 W heatsheaf Road
Glenroy VIC 3046

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