State Disability Plan and Victorian Autism Plans 2027-2031

Merri-bek City Council submission

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9 July 2026

To whom it may concern,

RE: State Disability Plan & Victorian Autism Plan 2027 – 2031

Merri-bek City Council welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Victorian Government's State Disability Plan 2027–2031 and the Victorian Autism Plan 2027–2031. We acknowledge the important role played by the Victorian Government to advance disability access and inclusion and protect the human rights of people with disabilities and autistic Victorians.

Council has a long and proud commitment to supporting access and inclusion, developing our first Disability Policy and Action Plan in 1998. We note the current alignment of the pillars of the state plans and the goals identified in our current Human Rights Policy (2021-2026) and our Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (2022-2026).

Local governments are widely recognised for their vital role in fostering accessible, inclusive communities and for their deep understanding of the diverse issues affecting residents. Drawing on this expertise, we have gathered valuable feedback on both the Disability Plan and the Victorian Autism Plan from people with lived experience of disability, as well as Council staff who work closely in this area. Please find below our recommendations, based on this input.

State Disability Plan

- Remove barriers to pedestrian access in all public settings. Equal access to public spaces and places is the most important priority consistently identified from our disabled communities. We acknowledge Victorian Government's commitment to Universal Design via its Universal Design Policy and urge the Government to consider mandating universal design (UD) in planning and building regulatory processes. For example, this could involve considering inserting a criterion for all state-funded infrastructure projects to adhere to universal design outcomes. Focussing on universal design has far better outcomes *"rather than providing specialist spaces or services which inevitably contribute to exclusion through exception"*. Merri-bek Disability Reference Group member.
- Many Councils face challenges embedding a Universal Design (UD) ethos in their organisation. Provide greater support to all public authorities to implement UD approaches within their organisations. Consider providing UD training to State and Local Government staff. Establish a state-wide UD network for public authorities. The Mornington Peninsula Shire ran a successful UD network for practitioners that could be replicated.
- We acknowledge and fully support the Victorian Government's supported roll out of Changing Places. Changing Places increases the confidence of people with complex disabilities to participate in the community. Expand existing Changing Places grant opportunities across Victoria.
- Develop practical measures to remove physical barriers to business premisses for people with disabilities. In Merri-bek, most street entrances along Sydney Road, Brunswick and Coburg have step entrances which prevent wheelchairs users from entering. Consider all levers within state

planning and building authorities that tighten requirements to ensure accessibility into shops and other business premisses is addressed at every opportunity.

- Make all modes of public transport, especially trams, tram stops and buses, fully accessible for wheelchair users. The missed Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport (DSAPT) deadline in 2022 makes this an urgent priority. We recommend the State Government release the revised DSAPT as soon as practicable and make a new commitment to accessible public transport, ensuring new targets are guaranteed to be delivered.
- Continue to challenge negative stereotypes, unconscious bias, and harmful attitudes that lead to disability discrimination. Increase displays of positive (or 'normalised') disability representation in media and all Victorian Government communication campaigns. Expand support of Hidden Disabilities Sunflower. Employ more people with disabilities in state government with a focus on increasing disability representation in senior leadership roles.
- Strengthen services and programs for non-NDIS participants. Approximately 90% of people with disabilities are not NDIS participants, however, they still require targeted supports in everyday life. Local governments could play an important role in the delivery of foundational and mainstream supports. Explore opportunities to work with local governments in the roll out non-NDIS programs and services.
- Forge closer links between Victorian Disability Advisory Council (VDAC) and local government Disability Advisory Committees (DACs) so that both can share information and strengthen their knowledge about state priorities and local perspectives.
- The engagement paper highlights the need for safe, accessible and responsive family violence services, but significant gaps remain in prevention and awareness. People with disability experience family violence at disproportionately high rates, yet health and community workers often miss signs of abuse especially when the carer is both the abuser and the main communicator. Stronger prevention and awareness-raising actions should be considered.
- Poverty and the cost of living is disproportionately impacting people with disabilities. Financial insecurity and economic inequality are growing at alarming rates. Consider additional actions within the Plan that addresses and supports people to achieve economic security.
- We support the Victorian Government's commitment to Aboriginal self-determination and support Aboriginal people and organisations making decisions that affect them. First Peoples' levels of disability and disadvantage are significantly higher than other Victorians. Self-determination, self-advocacy and community-controlled models are key to delivering better outcomes for First Peoples with disability.
- Ensure that accountability and transparency is maintained throughout the life of both Plans. A plan without rigorous accountability measures is likely to fail. Attach performance indicators to each action that measure outcomes and publish yearly progress reports that list achievements and explain why goals have not been met.

Victorian Autsim Plan

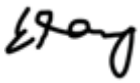
- Develop state-wide guidelines for designing buildings and open spaces for neurodivergent people. Work with people with lived experience, universities, and disability access consulting organisations who are interested in researching and supporting this work.
- Increase affordable support services for neurodivergent people. Waitlists for assessments and therapy costs have been prohibitive for some families.
- People with intellectual disabilities and neurodivergent people are amongst the most unemployed people in Victoria. Provide more opportunities for education and employment for these groups, including work experience programs. The national Integrated Practical Placement

(IPP) program is a good example of the education (TAFE) sector and host employers coming together to provide successful work experience placements for young people with disabilities.

- The previous Autism Plan had a focus on children and autistic people with high support needs which excludes the majority of those living with autism. An Autism Plan should be equally inclusive of all people on the spectrum, regardless of age or ability.
- Some points about employment within the current Victorian Autism Plan 2019-2025 "*are perceived by some autists as offensive. The state and federal autism employment programs, for example, feed into the trope of 'number nerds' and 'pattern lovers' to the exclusion of all others*" (Merri-bek Disability Reference Group Member). Consider the diversity that exists within the autism community and avoid the tendency of stereotyping the abilities of autistic people.

Merri-bek City Council strongly supports the Victorian Government's commitment to developing inclusive disability and autism plans for 2027–2031. We encourage the Victorian Government to build on the strengths of the current plans while addressing the gaps identified by communities across Victoria. Merri-bek City Council looks forward to working together over the next five years to make Victoria more inclusive and accessible for autistic Victorians and people with disabilities.

Yours sincerely,



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Merri-bek City Council