



Community Access and Inclusion Plan

2015 – 2017

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The overarching projects and actions outlined in this Plan are supported by a number of key Benalla Rural City strategies including: the Council Plan, Consultation and Communication Strategy, Information Communication and Technology Strategy and the Youth Strategy.

These documents are available upon request by contacting the Community Development Manager on (03) 5760 2600.



Message from the Mayor



It is with great pleasure that I introduce the Benalla Rural City Access and Inclusion Plan 2015 – 2017.

Benalla Rural City's vision is for a sustainable, thriving and cohesive community where lifestyle, culture, health and wellbeing are important.

The Community Access and Inclusion Plan 2015 – 2017 supports the Council's ongoing work in building an inclusive community by promoting measures that improve access for people of all abilities who live, work and participate in the community.

The document itself covers four key areas:

- Encouraging public participation and engagement
- Improving physical access to the built and natural environment
- Ensuring communication and information is provided in accessible formats
- Leadership to model and manage change.

I am pleased to note that strategies outlined in this plan build on what has already been achieved by the Council and community over the past three years and form a solid basis for progress.

The strategies outlined in this plan are designed to promote collaboration between the Council and community groups, traders and service agencies. By working together we can embrace the very real challenge of building an inclusive community for all.

It is in this spirit that I encourage you to embrace the Community Access and Inclusion Plan 2015 – 2017.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Justin King'. The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name.

Cr. Justin King
Mayor of Benalla Rural City
Council 2014 - 2015

1. Our Commitment to Access and Inclusion

The collective experience of people with a disability constantly demonstrates that it is not just disability itself that makes life difficult. It is the barriers that society imposes because of disability – barriers both physical and technical, and barriers that stem from attitudes.

The number of people with a disability is far higher than many people assume.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics report *Census of Population Housing 2011*, an estimated 1 in 5 people in Victoria identify themselves as having some form of disability, with the prevalence higher in regional areas.

The estimated population of Benalla Rural City is 13,700. Based on ABS estimates, that means that disability impacts on more than 2,700 members of our community in varying degrees. More than 6% of our municipality's population (approximately 850 people) have disabilities causing profound or severe restriction to communication, mobility and self-care.

As the population ages over the next 20 years, the need for disability support is expected to increase by almost 25% - nearly a quarter.

For people with disabilities, access can mean different things depending on the type of disability and what is necessary to participate in their community. For a person using a wheelchair, access is important for physical access such as wide, self-opening doors, car parking with room to unload and large enough toilets.

For a person with vision impairment, access is important in lighting, signs that are readable, safe path of travel and information provided in a range of formats.



A person who has an intellectual disability may think of access in the use of language that is easy to understand, symbols on signs and less reliance on written words.

A person with a psychiatric disability or mental health disorder may think of access in terms of perceptions of others' attitudes toward them and feeling included.

People who are deaf or hard of hearing typically consider access in terms of communication, particularly visual forms, the use of sign interpreters and telephone access via electronic aids.

Strategies to improve access and inclusion for people with disability will inevitably improve access for everyone in the community.

The Council recognises the important role that families and carers play and the need for them to be supported, valued and respected.

The Community Accessibility and Inclusion Plan 2015 – 2017 is a proactive commitment from Benalla Rural City Council to improve accessibility and inclusion across all facets of Council facilities and services.

To treat someone with a disability less favourably based on the grounds of disability is prohibited under the *Federal Discrimination Act 1992*.

The Community Access and Inclusion Plan helps the Council meet its legislative and ethical obligations under the following laws and standards:

- Victorian State Government Disability Act 2006
- Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 2010
- Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- Commonwealth Disability, Access to Premises – Building Standards 2010
- AS1428.1 – 5 Series – Standards, Australia, Design for Access and Mobility 1992, 2009, 2010
- World Wide Web Access: Disability Discrimination Act Advisory Notes 4.0
- Commonwealth Work Health and Safety Act 2011
- Risk Management Standards 2010



The implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is an important initiative that will have wide-ranging impacts on the way services are delivered at the national, state and local level. The Benalla Rural City Community Access and Inclusion Plan will complement this, helping the Council to prepare for change and respond with innovation and flexibility.

2. Notable Achievements

There have been notable achievements toward improved access and inclusion over the life of the previous three year Community Access and Inclusion Plan through a strong focus on best practice principles and building strong networks and partnerships.

- Ongoing audit and upgrade of existing disability car parking, footpaths and seating within the Benalla business district.
- Appointment of a Rural Access Officer to liaise with the community and identify opportunities to improve access and inclusion for people of all abilities.
- Consultations have commenced on the development of an accessible playground for the Rocket Park upgrade.
- Implementation of the Community Safety Register, previously the Seniors' Register.
- Staging of a Youth Mental Health Forum in July 2014 and August 2015.
- Collaboration with Central Hume Primary Care Partnership and health organisations such as Benalla Health and Women's Health Goulburn North East to identify and promote family and breastfeeding friendly facilities.
- Work completed to enhance the Benalla Indigenous Garden, a focal point for NAIDOC week celebrations, with subsequent tours incorporated into the 2014 and 2015 Seniors Festival program.
- Education and awareness training for staff about the National Relay Service and communicating with people with disabilities.



- Launch of Who What Where Benalla, a one stop, online directory of local services and community groups.

Who?What?Where?
Benalla



- Creating Community Connections Expo held in November 2014 with an emphasis on volunteering.
- Consultations around upgrades to the Benalla Aquatic Centre.
- Review of Council emergency management and evacuation procedures to ensure safe evacuation for people of all abilities.
- The Realistic Race – a great initiative with participation from Council management and community leaders.

- Adoption of the Heatwave Plan. Council actions to open up facilities such as Benalla Performing Arts and Convention Centre (BPACC) and the Senior Citizens' Centre as cooler places during January 2014 was welcomed by vulnerable members of the community.
- Benalla Festival 2013 incorporated an exhibition wheelchair basketball game with participation by people of all abilities.
- Benalla Festival 2014 included the Kitchen Gardens event at BPACC. While targeted at older people, it was a great success bringing together a wide range of ages.

- Bridges Out of Poverty training was delivered over six sessions between 2012 – 2014 and improved the understanding of service agencies about the situation for people experiencing disadvantage in their daily lives.
- Trialling of an augmented hearing system at the Benalla Talks Farmer's Forum.



There is always more that can be done.



3. Community Consultation

People with disability have “lived experience”, a unique insight into the barriers they face and practical suggestions to reduce these. They have repeatedly stated that they wish to be consulted on matters that affect them, giving rise to the saying: “Nothing about us, without us”.

The consultation process for the review of the Community Access and Inclusion Plan involved input from more than 150 people over a four-month period between August and November 2014. Community consultation involved a number of engagement methods including desktop research, small group discussions with disability support and advocacy groups, a survey and one-on-one interviews.

While community members enthusiastically identified many positives things about living in Benalla Rural City, there is still more work to be done to make sure that people of all abilities can participate in the community in the same way that everyone else takes for granted.

Identified areas for improvement included:

- Access to information
- Understanding of complex communication needs
- Appropriate signage
- Access to buildings
- Maintenance of pathways
- Adequate lighting
- Consultation in planning processes
- Valued employment and education
- Accessible facilities at events
- Affordable and flexible transport options

The Community Access and Inclusion Plan responds to the most important concerns and views of people with a disability living and working in the Benalla Rural City.

Subsequently, the proposed projects and actions outlined within this revised plan have been organised into the following four key themes:

Theme 1

Community Participation

Theme 2

Built and Natural Environment

Theme 3

Communication and Engagement

Theme 4

Leadership





What Our Community Has Said ...

“

How best to communicate with us....

- More advertising in the local paper
- Information in a wider variety of formats
- Use of recognised disability symbols
- Broader community consultation
- Don't assume we can use the Internet
- Positive attitudes and language

”

“

Barriers to community participation...

- Access to buildings and businesses
- Cost of some programs
- Lack of flexible, affordable transport
- Accessibility of footpaths and roads
- Gaining meaningful employment
- Attitudes and assumptions

”



What we like about living in Benalla...

- Friendly
- Attractive environment
- Lake and walking tracks
- Great selection of shops
- Terrific health services
- Small town living
- Tourist attractions



How we find out about things...

- Local paper
- Word of mouth
- Community groups
- Online sources
- Posters and brochures



What does respect for Human Rights mean to you?

A community where people with a disability are included, not just tolerated. Recognition and appreciation of the potential and achievements of a person with disability.

To feel valued and respected and have one's basic needs met in a dignified manner.

To be given the same opportunity to participate in community life as anyone else has.



4. Themes, Aims and Projects

Theme 1: Community Participation

Goal:

We are committed to building a healthy, active, safe and socially connected community that offers opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to participate in community life.

The Council aims to:

Achieve tangible changes in attitudes and practices that may discriminate against a person in reference to the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*.

People with a disability want the same opportunities to connect with others through taking part in recreation and leisure activities, learning and employment.

For people living with a disability, key challenges to participation include:

- Feeling unwelcome
- Lack of accessible transport
- Having economic capacity to participate
- Finding out about opportunities
- Narrow definition of disability

The Council plays a vital role in advocating for a more inclusive community. Through its networks and strategic links, the Council can facilitate improved disability awareness and practical support for clubs, groups and traders to improve access and inclusion.



Projects

1.1 Good Access is Good Business

Objective: To provide practical information, support and incentives to assist Benalla Rural City businesses meet their legal obligations and the community expectation that all people should have fair access to goods, services and opportunities.

1.2 Accessible Tourism

Objective: To ensure tourist destinations, products and services are accessible to all people regardless of their physical limitations, disabilities or age. To provide relevant travel guides, accessibility maps and online tools to assist people with a disability plan and travel to and around Benalla Rural City.

1.3 Arts Access for Everyone

Objective: To facilitate links between arts programs and events and people with a disability. To create opportunities for public exhibitions and performance, support excursions to major events and provide avenues to socialise with peers with shared passion for the arts.

1.4 Creating Inclusive Events

Objective: To develop an Inclusive Events Guide to actively promote participation for people of all abilities in Benalla Rural City events, activities and festivals. Informed staff are able to provide assistance and equipment is available for hire to address access issues, for example, portable toilet, ramps, signage and augmented hearing systems.

1.5 Access for All Abilities (AAA) Sport and Recreation

Objective: To work with agencies and community groups to promote and celebrate physically active lifestyles for people of all abilities. To create opportunities for people with a disability to become involved in mainstream sport and recreation activities.

1.6 Celebration of Abilities

Objective: To create ongoing opportunities to raise awareness of and celebrate the valuable contribution people with a disability make to our community culminating with International Day of People with a Disability.

1.7 Mental Health Awareness

Improve community awareness, knowledge and support for mental health challenges and services available for community members.

Theme 2: The Built and Natural Environment

Goal:

We will provide community places and spaces to meet the needs of our community and focus on thoughtfully planned growth to maintain and enhance the high amenity and character of our Rural City.

The Council aims to:

Provide for the needs of people of all abilities in the design, construction, refurbishment and maintenance of Council facilities, buildings and infrastructure by incorporating universal design principles.

People with disability want a welcoming and accessible built environment, streetscapes, community places and spaces that are designed to make them feel safe and encourage their participation.

Participants in the consultation process identified many positives about the facilities, buildings and surrounds in their community.

Important elements of accessible places and spaces included:

- Being close to public transport
- Easy navigation between and through buildings
- Connected pathways
- Local and affordable recreation and leisure opportunities
- Up to date information
- Signage in appropriate sizes, fonts and colours
- Adequate seating and lighting

- Sufficient disability parking,
- All access public toilets
- Safe and well equipped play areas
- Family friendly facilities

Universal Design

The intent of universal design is to simplify life for everyone by making products, communications and the built environment more usable for as many people as possible and benefiting people of all ages and abilities.

Taking a universal design approach to services and facilities is an effective way to remove barriers for everyone, not just people with a disability. As the population ages, the incidence of disability will increase dramatically and universal design will become even more important.

Projects:

2.1 Accessible Community Infrastructure

Objective: To progressively undertake works to ensure that public areas across the municipality are accessible for all residents including:

- Public domain such as footpaths
- Public places such as parks and playgrounds
- Transport facilities such as car parks

2.2 Accessible Buildings and Facilities

Objective: In partnership with community based groups and accredited access auditors, identify high-use public facilities and prioritise access audits to identify capital improvements necessary to address access barriers.

2.3 Accessibility Guidelines – New Buildings

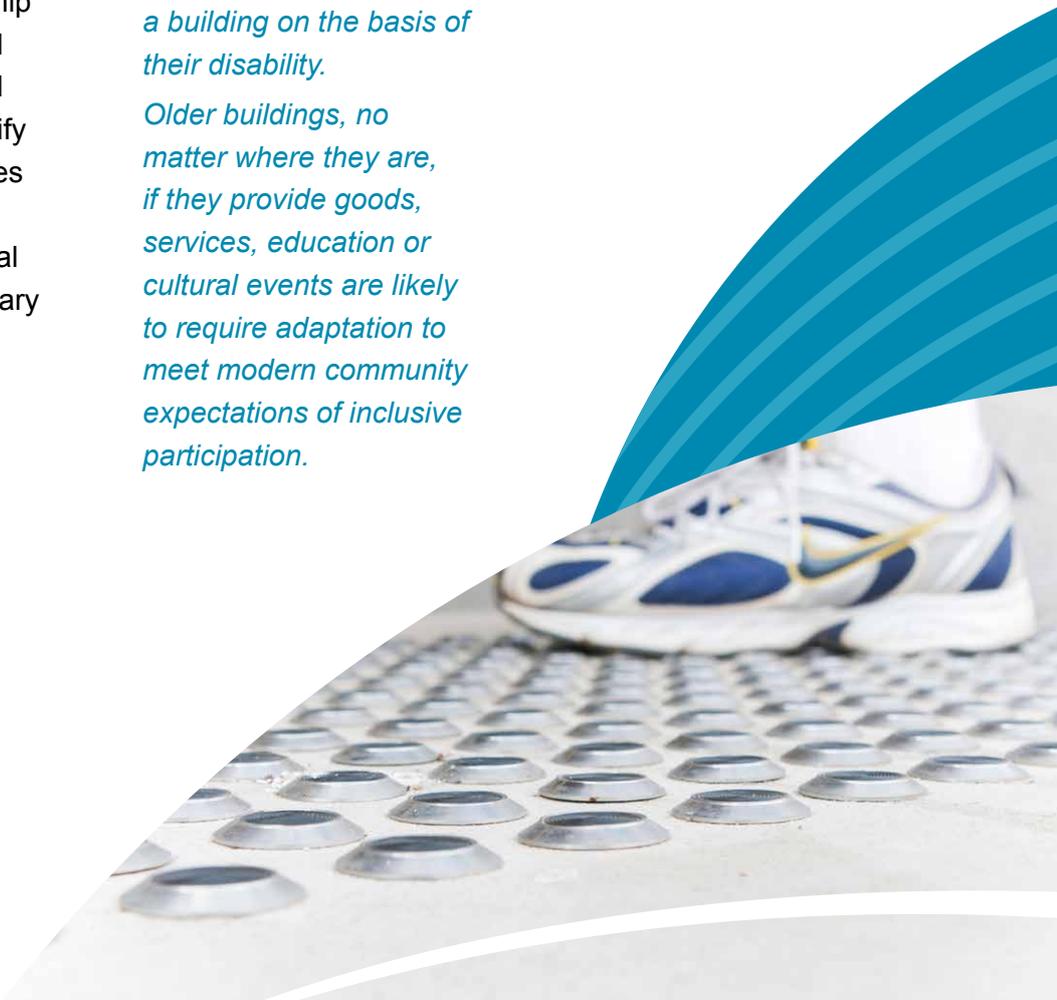
Objective: To ensure that new developments, particularly public buildings, are designed in a manner that provides a high standard of access to all. This includes developing guidelines to ensure agents and contractors comply with the AS1428 suite for ongoing maintenance works, new or renewed.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Federal) it is unlawful to deny a person access to a building on the basis of their disability.

Older buildings, no matter where they are, if they provide goods, services, education or cultural events are likely to require adaptation to meet modern community expectations of inclusive participation.

2.4 Changing Place – Accessible Toilet

Objective: To gain national accreditation for the Changing Places toilet facility at the Sir Edward “Weary” Dunlop Learning Centre – an accessible toilet with extra space and a height adjustable changing bench and hoist to support teenagers and adults.



Theme 3: Communication and Engagement

Goal:

We will actively and openly communicate and engage with our community and work collaboratively with others through strategic partnerships and relationships.

The Council aims to:

Review key strategies for Communication, Community Engagement and Customer Relations to ensure civic participation opportunities are inclusive and accessible to all community members.

Being able to communicate is something most of us take for granted. When a person has a communication difficulty, everyday interactions are a challenge. Often people who communicate differently are left out, ignored or unable to take part.

People with hearing, vision, language or cognitive impairment face barriers when information is in a format that is hard to access or understand or when services and staff are not confidently able to adapt to a different way of communicating.

“Retail and service staff often don’t know what to expect. They feel intimidated because they don’t want to look stupid. They usually just ignore me”.

“It takes me much longer to spell out what I want to say than it does for someone to speak. People don’t usually make allowances for my slower rate of communicating”.

It is important that businesses and services develop alternative and effective ways to communicate with people with a disability.

The Council is committed to ensuring all of its staff and volunteers are confident in supporting the communication and information needs of people with communication difficulties.

The Council understands the need to provide information in accessible formats and technologies appropriate to different kinds of disability in a timely manner without additional cost.

Feedback from community consultation identified the need for the Council to increase the participation of people with disability in its planning processes and to ensure that community engagement strategies provide for the needs of people of all abilities to encourage participation.

Projects:

3.1 Communication Access Accreditation

Objective: To achieve accreditation to display the Communication Access Symbol at all Council customer service points, website and on organisational documentation. This symbol indicates that an organisation has removed communication barriers for people with communication difficulties by ensuring staff have positive attitudes and communication skills and access to relevant communication aids.

3.2 Accessibility and Inclusion Communications Resource Kit

Objective: To develop a communications resource kit to promote organisational wide compliance with accessibility standards for information provision. This includes guidelines for creating accessible communications, providing information in alternative formats and using communication aids.

3.3 Website Accessibility Audit

Objective: To review and redesign the Council website to comply with World Wide Web Access (W3C) Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

3.4 Recommissioning of Hearing Loops

Objective: To recommission the hearing loop systems installed at BPACC, the Customer Service Centre and the Library. Hearing or induction loops transmit magnetic energy directly to hearing aids fitted with telecoils.

3.5 Accessibility Reference Group

Objective: To establish an Accessibility Reference Group comprising of members of the public with lived experience of disability, relevant Council staff and service agency.

This Reference Group will act as a mechanism for giving people with a disability a voice in Council decision-making, to support accessibility projects and to be involved in the implementation and review of the Community Access and Inclusion Plan.



Theme 4: Leadership

Goal:

We will demonstrate leadership and advocacy on key local issues on behalf of our community.

The Council aims to:

Create opportunities to raise awareness of the valuable contribution people with a disability can make as employees and volunteers in Benalla Rural City.

The Council recognises its responsibility as a key service provider and employer to take a leadership role in improving access and inclusion for its residents.

Through partnerships and interactions with community members, businesses, service providers and organisations, the Council has the opportunity to address local issues affecting people with disabilities.

People with disability want valued work or employment opportunities and require opportunities and support in the process of finding education, valued work and employment, both paid or volunteer.

Disability service providers have indicated a desire to work more closely together to ensure a smooth transition in line with National Disability Insurance Scheme and Aged Care Reforms and the Council can play a key facilitation role.

Projects:

4.1 Equal Opportunity Employer

Objective: As a major employer of choice, to develop a strategic approach for the Council to enhance employment, volunteering and traineeship opportunities for people with a disability.

4.2 Accessible Transport Options

Objective: To advocate for resources and funding on behalf of the community to address the lack of accessible and affordable transport options for people with a disability.

4.3 NDIS Ready Community

Objective: To develop a strategic approach in preparation for the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

5. Implementation and Reporting

The Community Access and Inclusion Plan aims to communicate clear expectations of how the Council will, over the next three years, deliver accessible, flexible services that inform and meet the changing needs of people with a disability, their families and carers.

The themes and aims identified in the Community Access and Inclusion Plan are linked to strategies underpinning the 2013-2017 Council Plan. This will facilitate a Council-wide approach to implementation of outcomes.

The establishment of an Accessibility Reference Group, made up of members of the community with lived experience of disability, is seen as a vital step to ensure support for the implementation of the Action Plan and ongoing monitoring and reporting outcomes.

The Accessibility Reference Group provides people with a disability a voice that is heard and the chance to positively influence the future of their community.

The Community Access and Inclusion Plan will be reviewed annually and reported on in the Council's Annual Report.

Acknowledgements

The Council would like to thank all the contributors involved in the review and revision of the Community Access and Inclusion Plan, with special thanks to the Benalla Rural City Council Community Access and Inclusion Steering Group and the Benalla Access Awareness Group.

Feedback

As part of our continuous improvement processes we welcome feedback about your experiences of access and inclusion.

You can contact us via:



Email

council@benalla.vic.gov.au



Telephone

(03) 5760 2600



In writing

PO Box 227, Benalla VIC 3671

6. Community Access and Inclusion Summary Action Plan

No	Aim	Action	Responsibility	Timeframe
1.1	Good Access is Good Business	Roll out of the Benalla Good Access is Good Business campaign.	Council and Benalla Business Network	2015 - 2017
1.2	Accessible Tourism	Launch of the Benalla Accessible Tourism Information Guide.	Initiated by Council	2015 - 2016
1.3	Arts Access for Everyone	Delivery of diverse visual and performing arts projects that link people with a disability to mainstream activities.	Council in partnership with Arts Access Victoria	Ongoing
1.4	Creating Inclusive Events	Adoption of an Inclusive Events Guide and creation of an Inclusive Events Equipment Kit for community use.	Council	2015 - 2016
1.5	Access for All Abilities (AAA) Sports and Recreation	Uptake of access audits, resources and training by key Benalla sporting and recreational clubs.	Council in partnership with Valley Sports AAA program	2015 - 2017
1.6	Celebration of Abilities	Implementation of a promotional plan to raise awareness of the contributions people with a disability make to our community culminating in an annual event for International Day of People with Disability (December 3rd).	Council in collaboration with disability service and support groups	Ongoing
1.7	Mental Health Awareness	In collaboration with mental health services and support groups, a range of awareness raising activities are provided within the community.	Council in partnership with mental health services and support groups	Ongoing
2.1	Accessible Community Infrastructure	An audit report prepared that maps recommendations to ensure accessible parking, access ways, toilet facilities, signage and pathways meet legal and best practice standards.	Council	Ongoing
2.2	Accessible Buildings and Facilities	An audit report prepared that maps recommendations to ensure existing Council buildings and facilities meet legal and best practice standards.	Council	Ongoing
2.3	Accessibility Guidelines – New Buildings	Guidelines developed to ensure agents and contractors comply with the AS1428 suite.	Council	2015 - 2016

No	Aim	Action	Responsibility	Timeframe
2.4	Changing Place – Accessible Toilet	Launch of the Changing Place toilet Facility at the Sir Edward “Weary” Dunlop Learning Centre.	Council	2015
3.1	Communication Access Accreditation	Accreditation gained to display the SCOPE Communication Access Symbol at all Council Customer Service points.	Council in collaboration with Benalla Health	2015 - 2016
3.2	Access and Inclusion Communication Resources Kit	The Council Corporate Style Guide updated to incorporate best practice guidelines for creating accessible documents.	Council	2015 - 2016
3.3	Web Accessibility Audit	A plan implemented for the incremental upgrade of the Council’s web based platforms to meet W3C standards.	Council	2015 - 2017
3.4	Commissioning of Hearing loops	Hearing loop systems installed and operational at BPACC, the Customer Service Centre and the Benalla Library.	Council	2015 - 2016
3.5	Accessibility Reference Group	An Accessibility Reference Group created to drive and review the implementation of the Community Access and Inclusion Plan 2015 – 2017.	Council in partnership with community members, service providers and support groups.	2015
4.1	Equal Opportunity Employer	A Council Policy for the Employment of People with Disability adopted. Partnerships formed with employment specialists and schools to promote work experience, school to work transitions and training opportunities for people with disabilities.	Council in collaboration with Job Access Australia, local schools, training agencies and employment services.	2015 - 2016
4.2	Accessible Transport Options	Affordable and accessible transport options within the region are mapped and promoted to the community.	Council initiated	2015 - 2017
4.3	NDIS Ready Community	In collaboration with disability agencies and support groups, information sessions, forums and training provided to better understand the impact and opportunities around the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme.	Council initiated	2015 – 2017

A copy of the detailed Community Access and Inclusion Implementation Plan 2015 – 2017 is available upon request by contacting the Community Development Manager on (03) 5760 2600.

7. Glossary of Useful Terms

Access	Access refers to the ability of a person to use goods, services, facilities and information and to take part in the community.
Access Audit	The aim of an access audit is to rate a building or service for useability and accessibility by people with a disability and to identify barriers and solutions.
Accessible Format	Information is provided in formats suitable for people with limited vision or hearing. Examples of different formats include Word Rich Text Format, Braille, large print, audio and Easy English.
Augmented Listening System	Technology, for example a hearing loop, that allows people who use hearing aids to hear more clearly in a group setting.
Australian Standards	Legislated Building standards for the built environment to ensure accessible design.
Barriers	Barriers to access are not just about ramps and accessible toilets. Attitudinal and communication barriers can impose limitations on a person's access.
Built Environment	The physical, public environment including commercial and public buildings, toilets, parks, shopping strips and footpaths.
Disability Discrimination Act (1992)	Commonwealth legislation which protects the rights of people with a disability in the areas of employment, education, access to premises, provision of goods, services and facilities, accommodation, buying land and activities of clubs and associations and sporting groups.
Discrimination	To treat someone less favourably on the basis of factors such as their disability, age, gender, religion or ethnic background.
Easy English	A very simple language format especially designed for people with an intellectual impairment or whose understanding of English is limited.
National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)	The NDIS links community and individualised support for people with permanent and significant disability, their families and carers.
National Relay Service (NRS)	Telephone access service available to all Australians that enables communication between a standard telephone and someone who is deaf and uses a Text Telephone (TTY).
W3C	World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines are standards that determine how accessible a website is.

BENALLA RURAL CITY COUNCIL

Customer Service Centre
1 Bridge Street East, Benalla VIC 3672

PO Box 227, Benalla VIC 3672

Tel: (03) 5760 2600

Fax: (03) 5762 5537

Email: council@benalla.vic.gov.au

www.benalla.vic.gov.au