

DISABILITY INCLUSION AND ACCESS PLAN:
2026-2028
REVIEWED NOVEMBER 2025

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

City of Palmerston acknowledges the Larrakia People as the traditional custodians of the Palmerston Region. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future leaders and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.



International Women's Day, 2026

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

Through their dedication, commitment, sharing of combined insight, lived experiences and ideas, City of Palmerston would like to acknowledge the following Working Group members Bianca Di Manno, Chris Blackham-Davison, Glen Collins, Heidi Goerlich-Voutt, Jacqueline Johnson, Janine Frost, Karen McEwan, Lyle Markham, Nathan Sheppard, Siobhan Treacy, Yvonne Coleman and Zainab Mohamud, for their valued contribution in helping to shape the new Disability Inclusion and Access Plan 2026–2028.

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INTRODUCTION

City of Palmerston's Community Plan outlines a vision of a diverse, vibrant and welcoming community where everyone belongs. An important part of achieving this vision is ensuring that people with disability can participate fully in community life – as employees, students, business owners, parents, volunteers, customers and community members.

Creating an inclusive and accessible community benefits everyone. When barriers to access are removed, people with disability can more easily participate in everyday activities, while the broader community also benefits. Accessible environments support older people, parents with young children, people with temporary injuries and visitors to our city.

In the Northern Territory, where communities are culturally diverse and experiences of disability can intersect with cultural, social and geographic factors, local governments must work collaboratively with the community to remove barriers and promote inclusive participation.

City of Palmerston is committed to creating a city where every individual has equal access to Council services, facilities, public spaces and community opportunities. This Disability Inclusion and Access Plan (DIAP) outlines the actions Council will take over the next three years to strengthen inclusion and accessibility across the Palmerston community.

How this plan was created

City of Palmerston's first Disability Inclusion and Access Plan (DIAP) 2022–2025 was developed in 2021–2022 in collaboration with people with disability and those with lived experience of barriers to inclusion and access.

In 2025, the plan was reviewed to identify opportunities to strengthen inclusion and accessibility across Council services, facilities and community programs.

As part of the review, a DIAP Working Group workshop was held with 12 participants representing people with lived experience of disability, carers and disability sector organisations. Their insights helped inform the priorities and actions included in this updated plan.

What we learned

During the development of the current DIAP, numerous individuals contributed detailed and specific ideas and feedback. These insights were instrumental in shaping the priorities, goals and actions outlined in the plan. Key lessons learned include:

- City of Palmerston's four Inclusive, Diverse and Accessible principles: Visible, Collaborative, Embedded and Always Improving are valued and endorsed by our community.
- The skills, knowledge, experiences and opinions of people with disability must be prioritised when it comes to planning for and taking action to increase inclusion and access.
- Specific, practical actions such as using technology to support access, signs with visual aids, accessible public changing rooms and toilets and the availability of accessible information – are high priorities for people with disability.

Our priorities

The goals and actions in this plan are organised into *six priority areas*:

Civic Engagement: Maximise opportunities and provide equal inclusion and access for people with disability to contribute to planning, decision making and review activities in our community.

Community, Leisure and Social Participation: Continue to ensure that people with disability can participate in community programs, events and activities.

Economic Participation: Maximise local employment opportunities for people with disability and support local business providers with inclusion and access.

Built and Natural Environment: Continue to improve inclusion and accessibility in Council's indoor and outdoor spaces.

Communication: Increase the availability of accessible formats for communication – online, in documents and in person.

Council Culture, Services and Operations: To be a disability confident organisation.



Children's Weeks, 2025

COMMUNITY PROFILE

The following tables provide a summary of disability statistics for the City of Palmerston and the Northern Territory. Local data is presented alongside broader Territory figures to provide context for the experiences of people living with disability in the region.

INDICATOR	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
People needing help with day-to-day activities due to disability (2021)	1,487	4%
People providing unpaid assistance to a person with disability, health condition or due to old age (2021)	2,564	6.9%
Active NDIS participants (2025)	1,345	-

NDIS Participants by Primary Disability (2025)

PRIMARY DISABILITY	PALMERSTON	%	NORTHERN TERRITORY	%
Autism	548	41%	1,762	27%
Developmental delay / global developmental delay	262	20%	1,053	16%
Intellectual disability and Down syndrome	208	16%	1,278	20%
Psychosocial disability	83	6%	635	10%
Total Active Participants	1,345	-	6,536	-

NDIS Participants by Demographic (2025)

DEMOGRAPHIC	PALMERSTON	%	NORTHERN TERRITORY	%
Indigenous	465	35%	3,382	52%
Non-Indigenous	721	54%	2,683	41%
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse	70	5%	350	5%

Northern Territory Disability Context

INDICATOR	DATA
People living with disability	20,500 (11.6% of the population)
Age profile	68% aged over 45; 30% aged over 65
Aboriginal Territorians experiencing disability	34.7% (6.2% with severe disability)
Workforce participation – people with disability	67.1%
Workforce participation – people without disability	88.3%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021), NDIS participant data (2025).



Low Sensory Christmas Wonderland, 2025

Data Insights

Undiagnosed Disability

Many Australians live with undiagnosed or undisclosed disability, especially neurodivergent, cognitive and psychosocial conditions. Stigma, cost, cultural and language barriers and lack of access to diagnosis contribute to underreporting.¹ The rise in national disability prevalence (17.7% in 2018 to 21.4% in 2024)² partly reflects improved recognition and willingness to self-identify.

Affordability of Diagnosis

High costs, limited rebates and service shortages—particularly in rural and low-income areas—delay or prevent accurate diagnosis for conditions like autism, ADHD and intellectual disability.

Homelessness and Disability

People with disability face higher rates of homelessness, especially those with mental illness or complex needs. In the NT, homelessness rates are 12 times the national average, with Aboriginal people making up 88% of the homeless population. Indigenous women with disability experience compounded disadvantage due to intersecting barriers and limited culturally appropriate housing and support.³

Disability and the NDIS

Only 14% of Australians with disability are NDIS participants; most fall outside the scheme's eligibility. Many face significant "support gaps," especially in remote, First Nations and psychosocial disability contexts, where services are scarce or unavailable.⁴



Palmerston Youth Festival, 2024

ABOUT THIS PLAN

Key concepts and definitions

People with disability: Includes those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)).

People with lived experience: Includes people with disability, parents, friends and family members of people with disability, people who have lived or are living with episodic disability and those who work with people with disability.

Access: When people have permission, choice and the ability to enter, get to, interact with, or use a thing, place, or person.

Accessibility: Whether a product, service, process, or design can be used and/or understood by everyone who interacts with it.

Inclusion: Enabling all groups of people within a society to have a sense of belonging and the opportunity to participate in community life. It is based on fundamental values of equity, equality, *social* justice and human rights. Inclusion occurs when all people feel valued and respected, are connected to their fellow citizens, have access to opportunities and resources and can contribute their perspectives and talents to improve their community.

Discrimination: Occurs when individuals or groups are treated unfairly or disadvantaged because of characteristics such as race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, religion, age, social origin or other aspects of identity.

Universal Design Principles: The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without adaptation or specialised design. These principles may be applied to evaluate existing designs, guide the design process and educate both designers and consumers about the characteristics of more usable products and environments.

Legislative context

City of Palmerston's Disability Inclusion and Access Plan (DIAP) operates within a broader framework of international, national and Northern Territory legislation and policy that promotes the rights, inclusion and participation of people with disability.

- Australia has ratified the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Australia's Disability Strategy 2021 – 2031 sets a national agenda for changes.
- The Northern Territory Disability Strategy 2022 – 2032 sets a path of reform within the Northern Territory context.

City of Palmerston has obligations under the Australian *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, which makes it illegal to discriminate against a person because of a disability when providing goods, services, facilities, or access to public premises.

Relevant Northern Territory legalisation includes the *Disability Services Act 1993*, the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1992*, the *Guardianship of Adults Act 2016*, the *Carers Recognition Act 2006* and *Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011*, including strengthening of compliance requirements for managing psychosocial hazards at work.

Other laws and standards relating to inclusion and accessibility for people with disability are documented in City of Palmerston's Inclusive, Diverse and Accessible (IDA) Policy Framework.

Alignment with Council plans and strategies

The DIAP aligns with and supports the delivery of several key City of Palmerston strategies, frameworks and plans, including:

- Community Plan
- Inclusive, Diverse and Accessible-(IDA) Policy Framework
- Municipal Plan
- Palmerston Local Economic Plan
- Play Space Strategy
- Sustainability Strategy
- Communication Strategy
- Central Palmerston Area Plan

Accountability

The DIAP will guide decisions and actions taken by Council. Progress towards implementing the actions and achieving the goals will be monitored through Council reporting processes and provided to Elected Members in accordance with Council policies and procedures.

Updates on the implementation of the plan will also be shared with the community, including through Council communications and activities associated with the International Day of People with Disability.

In accordance with The Northern Territory (NT) Disability Strategy 2022-2032 and Action Plan, we will submit this plan to the Office of Disability so that it can be included in the reporting against Territory-wide disability inclusion and access reporting.

Every year, as part of the City of Palmerston's celebrations of the International Day of People with Disability, Council will report back to the community on our implementation of actions and progress towards the goals set out in this plan.



International Day of Disability, 2023

KEY PRINCIPLES

Council has adopted four principles under the Inclusive, Diverse and Accessible (IDA) Policy Framework: Visible, Collaborative, Embedded and Always Improving. Feedback from people with disability and those with lived experience helped identify what is most important under each of these principles:

Visible

What's important

- Signs and information about accessibility options are clear, usable and obvious
- People with disability are employed across Council at all levels
- Council awards and events provide inclusive opportunities for people with disability to be recognised and participate in ways that suit them.
- People with disability are represented in Council imagery, language and communications.

Feedback from people with disability and those with lived experience during consultation and review of the plan included:

What people said:

"It's more inclusive to do community awards than change the system. So, it supports us in ways that we'd like to be supported alongside community. It moves to a human and social model for disability, away from the medical"

" I think you should be able to opt in when nominating for awards"

" Integrate into normal awards"

Collaborative

What's important

- People with disability are directly involved in guiding Council on inclusion and accessibility
- Council is a strong advocate for disability inclusion and access
- Council supports local business providers and organisations to improve inclusion and accessibility.

What people said:

"Ask for feedback from businesses, from providers of support, coordination, action."

"Council role is to seek feedback, run forums with business, NFP and often Council staff "

Embedded

What's important

- Regular reviews of services, buildings, and public spaces to improve accessibility
- Training for Council staff by people with disability and lived experience
- Council policies and processes have specific guidelines for inclusion and accessibility
- Sensory and psychosocial disabilities are considered as well as physical disability.

What people said:

" For people working with Council, as in disability, this isn't always translated into goals. We need to change the approach to address the system. Make it embedded".

" Make sure there are regular reviews of the DIAP. We need to bed it in and talk to it and see how it unfolds".

Always Improving

What's important

- Council regularly reports back to the community about how it has implemented the Disability Inclusion and Access Plan
- These reports include evidence of progress against the Plan
- Council has diverse and pragmatic ways that make it easy for people with disability to give feedback both individually and collectively.

What people said:

" Don't be tokenistic. Follow up. Don't just write a plan. Be genuine and seek feedback along the way with regular, transparent evidence. Put that into, Always Improving"



Palmerston Youth Festival, 2025

PRIORITY AREAS, GOALS AND ACTIONS

Civic Engagement

Civic engagement refers to community members participating in decisions that affect their lives and community. We prioritise providing people with disability equal access and opportunities to contribute to planning, decision-making and community review processes.

GOALS	ACTIONS
1. More people with disability are involved in Council's consultation, planning and advisory activities.	1.1 Ensure City of Palmerston committees are promoted to people of all abilities and diverse backgrounds. 1.2 Include guidance about recruitment and engagement with people with disability in Committee documents for example Terms of Reference. 1.3 Diversify the range of marketing formats used to reach people in consultation, planning and advisory activities. 1.4 Ensure all Council meetings, consultations and engagement activities proactively provide opportunities for participants to identify and request access requirements (for example Auslan interpreters, captioning, large print materials, accessible venues and support persons).
2. People with disability have more opportunities to use and develop their leadership and advocacy skills.	2.1 promote and support leadership and civic engagement programs and activities with stakeholders and people with disability.
Key Documents: • IDA Policy Framework • Municipal Plan • Community Plan	Existing Initiatives: • Join the conversation surveys on Council Website • Informal public forums before Council meetings • Council to the community meetings

GOALS

ACTIONS

What people said

"The language in this document. Pay attention to it. Run Easy Read revision through it. It's got to be relevant to staff and to the community".

" Increase the use of flyers and posters to reach people, not all of us are involved with providers".

"Make sure you engage with the schools".

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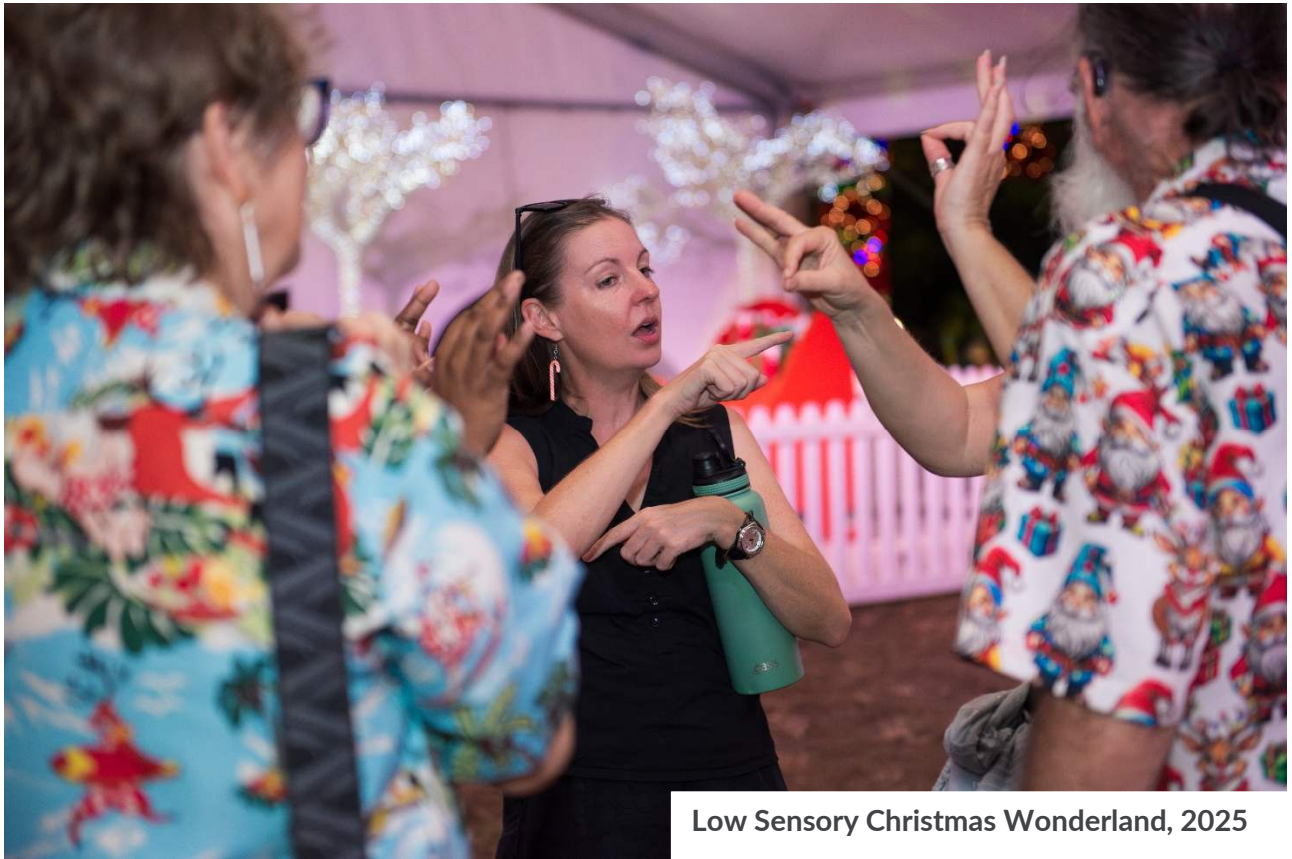
Community, Leisure and Social Participation

Council has an extensive list of celebrations, programs and events each year – sport, art, social, hobbies, recreation and more. Our priority is to build on the work already done to make sure that people with disability have equal inclusion and access to this part of community life.

GOALS	ACTIONS
3. More people with disability are participating in Council’s community social, recreation and leisure activities and events.	3.1 Ensure that plans for events and activities are designed for all abilities and that they include proactively identifying and addressing access requirements such as communication supports, physical access, sensory environment, toilets and change rooms, drop off zones, parking, transport and timing. 3.2 Provide different mechanisms for feedback from people with disability after events and activities and ensure that this feedback informs continuous improvement. 3.3 Consult with young people with disability to identify how Council can improve activities for youth and young adults. 3.4 Promote City of Palmerston’s ‘Accessible and Inclusive Events Guidelines’. 3.5 Promote events with clear information in accessible formats. 3.6 Continue to strengthen sector and digital networks for promotional material for events and activities.
Key Documents: • Annual Calendar of Events • Community Plan • IDA Policy Framework • Play Space Strategy	Existing Initiatives: • Christmas Wonderland - Low Sensory Event • Palmerston Library dyslexic font, audio and large print resources • Captions at Flicnics outdoor movies • MLAK bathroom at SWELL Palmerston

What people said

"Find out what's needed for participation, such as planning for participation, consultation, interpreting for Auslan, live captioning. I shouldn't have to use my phone".



Low Sensory Christmas Wonderland, 2025

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Economic Participation

Employment and opportunities to contribute to the local economy as patrons and consumers, are fundamental to equity and inclusion. Our priority is to maximise local employment opportunities for people with disability and to support local businesses and organisations to provide inclusive and accessible customer service.

GOALS	ACTIONS
4. Adapt and improve Council employment processes, tasks and systems to attract and retain more people with disabilities.	4.1 Conduct a review of Council's employment and volunteer policies against the national standards. 4.2 Ensure recruitment processes are Inclusive and accessible to all. 4.3 Purchase goods and services (within local government procurement policy requirements) from local organisations that employ people with disabilities.
5. More local businesses and organisations benefit from customers and patrons with disability.	5.1 Work with local businesses to be disability confident, accessible and inclusive. 5.2 opportunities to increase access and inclusion in the commitments and actions in the Palmerston Local Economic Plan. 5.3 Promote the NT Government's disability information hub⁵
Key Documents: - Community Plan - IDA Policy Framework - Palmerston Local Economic Plan - NT Disability Action Plan - Code of Conduct	Existing Initiatives: Participation in the Palmerston Regional Business Association (PRBA).

What people said

"Engage people with disability, to be open, change systems through employment"
"Remove barriers to processes, adapt tasks and attract people to jobs".
"Encourage businesses to use assistive technology, access to the tech in the workplace, training re software, magnifiers, computers, chat, GPT. Change the narrative. The goal is that you can do much more than what's presented. It's a huge chance to show ourselves"

Built and Natural Environment

The natural and built environment includes Council-owned buildings and facilities, playgrounds, parks, streets and other public spaces. Our focus is to make these places more inclusive and accessible, using input from people with disability and those with lived experience.

GOALS	ACTIONS
6. Council facilities and buildings are inclusive and accessible for people of all abilities.	6.1 Regular accessibility reviews and upgrades to facilities and equipment. 6.2 All infrastructure developments consider users with different abilities. 6.3 Consider the feedback from people with disability in inclusion and access reviews and plans. 6.4 Provide accessible signage, including visual aids and graphics, Braille and tactile markers. 6.5 Ensure Council facilities, public spaces and events support access for people with assistance animals, including appropriate signage, staff awareness and policy guidance.
7. Transport and parking in Palmerston are more accessible.	7.1 Review and identify opportunities to improve transport and parking access in all Council Plans
Key Documents: • Community Plan • IDA Policy Framework • Palmerston Play Space Strategy • Central Palmerston Area Plan • NT Disability Action Plan	Existing Initiatives: • Audit of all play spaces in Palmerston • SWELL Palmerston free entry • Where we Live Matters

What people said

"Bigger parking spaces for people with disabilities are needed, not just a standard parking site".
"More information is the key. The more I know, the more I'm likely to go, which reduces anxiety and leads to increased participation".

Communication

This includes the Council website, social media, letters, emails, notices, invitations, phone calls, face-to-face meetings and feedback or complaints. Our priority is to make all communications easy to access and understand for everyone.

GOALS	ACTIONS
8. Council information is provided in accessible formats.	8.1 Monitor the Council website, social media and council documents to ensure compliance with national standards and guidelines. 8.2 Provide information in accessible formats such as large print, Plain English, Easy Read, dyslexic font, audio recordings, captions, Auslan and Braille. 8.3 Consider ways to use technologies to assist people with disability to navigate accessible routes and places throughout the city.
9. Palmerston residents have accessible choices when communicating with Council.	9.1 Review multiple accessible and inclusive communication options, including online, posters and newsletters, captions for audiovisual communication, telephone and in person.
Key Documents: - Community Plan - IDA Policy Framework - Social Media Strategy	Existing Initiatives: - Captions on social media videos - Auslan interpreters at events or significance

What people said
" How is Council kept accountable? How is it measured?"

Council Culture, Services and Operations

Council's culture is shaped by its people and the systems that guide them. Its services and operations include permits, recycling and waste management, community grants, rates collection and environmental programs. Our focus is to be a disability-confident organisation that delivers high-quality, inclusive and accessible services for people with disability.

GOALS	ACTIONS
10. Council's commitment to inclusion and access for people of all abilities is embedded in our culture.	10.1 Ensure all Council departments are familiar with this plan and their role in its implementation. 10.2 Provide staff with disability awareness, mental health first aid and other relevant training, including training delivered by people with disability or lived experience. 10.3 Ask people with disability and people with lived experience about their experiences with Council.
11. Inclusion and Accessibility principles are applied across all Council services, programs and activities.	11.1 Ensure that online services meet the Australian Government's Digital Service Standard Criteria. 11.2 Include inclusion and accessibility in internal services and work planning processes. 11.3 Identify opportunities to increase inclusion and accessibility in reviews of Council policies, procedures and processes.
Key Documents: • Annual Calendar of Events • Community Plan • IDA Policy Framework	Existing Initiatives: • Participation in the Palmerston Regional Business Association (PRBA)

What people said

"The biggest (support) is that the people who are there (at Council) are educated and understanding."

"I will always remember the occasion when I was overwhelmed by problems. (Council) staff showed me support, non-judgement and patience and no hint of being condescending. My issue was dealt with in a professional and caring way."