25 February 2014

The Executive Officer
Family and Community Development Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
East Melbourne Vic 3002

Dear Sir/Madam

Submission to the 2014 parliamentary inquiry into social inclusion and Victorians with a disability

On behalf of the City of Melbourne Disability Advisory Committee (DAC), I thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the inquiry into social inclusion and Victorians with a disability.

The City of Melbourne commends the State Government for initiating this inquiry. For our DAC it presents our members with the opportunity to highlight new and emerging issues, point out services and programs which meet the needs of people with a disability and their carers and articulate a vision for the future encompassing genuine inclusion.

Please Contact Elise Baro, MetroAccess Project Officer on [redacted] or email [redacted] if you have any queries regarding this submission.

Yours sincerely

Cr Ken Ong
Chair City Of Melbourne Disability Advisory Committee
Define social inclusion for Victorians with a disability

The City of Melbourne defines social inclusion in the Disability Action Plan 2010-2013:

'The City of Melbourne aims to be a barrier free city where people with a disability can access and participate in all aspects of life with dignity and independence. Council's mission is to lead the systemic removal of barriers in the physical, attitudinal and informational environments to ensure a truly just and inclusive community for all'

Victorians with a disability face several barriers to meaningful social inclusion. In order to address this, the City of Melbourne works closely with our community through our Disability Advisory Committee, ongoing work and partnerships with local organisations and peak bodies and our ongoing community consultations.

Victorians with a disability should have the same level of opportunity and access to civic, economic, social and political spheres. The World Health Organisation (2001) states that social inclusion needs to encompass a range of life domains, including:

- Learning and applying knowledge
- Mobility
- Self-care
- Communication
- Major life areas, eg. work and employment
- Domestic life, eg. housing and preparing meals
- General tasks and demands
- Community, social and civic life

Accessibility and mobility are key principles that underpin a person's ability to fully participate and be included in these life domains. The City of Melbourne acknowledges that accessibility and mobility are crucial aspects of an inclusive society. Recent community consultations for the draft Melbourne For all People 2014-2017 strategy identified that people of all ages and abilities have the right to fully participate in all the city has to offer and have ease of access to move freely, safely and equitably through the municipality.

Through these consultations the community, our partner organisations and stakeholders identified several themes and principles as being important elements of social inclusion, including:

- It is important to improve access and inclusion through the urban, built and informational environments
- Accessible and culturally appropriate services, activities, events and information are needed to allow for cultural expression
- Services and facilities need to be physically accessible
- People need to feel safe.
- Affordability and economic participation are part of access
Inclusion is about cultural attitudes, behaviour and goodwill

3.4 What does social inclusion for Victorians with a disability look like now?

Victorians with a disability continue to be marginalised. There are several barriers to social inclusion across all the life domains. Some examples of these include: limited resources to provide the necessary services, and supports; limited accessible infrastructure; limited funding to cover interpreting costs for people with sensory disabilities, particularly in the arts; limited access or information about access for cultural events, venues and festivals; lack of awareness about disability; and negative, misguided or patronising attitudes towards people with a disability in the community (NPDCC, 2009).

One specific example is the lack of adult change and toilet facilities in Victoria. For many people with a disability and their carers, the lack of appropriate toilet facilities for people with profound disabilities in public, such as Changing Places* toilets, means that these people cannot go out or have to be changed on the floor of public toilets.

Transport options for people with a disability to be able to go out in the first place and get around independently are also limited. There is still inaccessible public transport infrastructure, including inconsistent information about accessible services, inaccessible stations, bus and tram stops such as Parliament Station, and limited accessible taxi services particularly in busy periods (City of Melbourne, 2012).

Despite this, social inclusion for Victorians with a disability has come a long way in the last decade. Programs and initiatives aimed at improving access and inclusion, such as the Community Building Program (MetroAccess, RuralAccess and DeafAccess) and funding for self-advocacy support services, have in a large way contributed to this. Local and State government have also played a key role through the development and implementation of Disability Action Plans and building and modifying infrastructure to meet Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliance. The MetroAccess program plays a key role in implementing the state disability action plan at the local government level.

* Through the MetroAccess Program, the City of Melbourne is currently working with Maroondah City Council to advocate for the inclusion of Changing Places in public premises and infrastructure. For more information about Changing Places visit: http://www.disabilityaccessconsultants.com.au/changing-places-toilets-new-information-kit/ or www.facebook.com/changingplacesvictoria

Understand the impact of Victorian government services and Initiatives aimed at improving inclusion and participation;

The State-wide Equipment Program is an example of a service that can potentially have significant positive outcomes for people with a disability. However, due to the large demand for this service and insufficient funding there is currently a 9-18 month waiting list for equipment (AEAA, 2012). This limits many people with disabilities' ability to participate and be fully included in society.
Another major barrier for people with a disability in Victoria is transport. In a recent submission to the *Victorian Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2012* the City of Melbourne DAC highlighted the importance of accessible public transport for residents and visitors with a disability to be able to access services and facilities. Without accessible public transport many people with a disability remain isolated and lack independence.

One Victorian government initiative that has had a significant positive impact on improving inclusion and participation of people with a disability is the Department of Human Services Community Building Program. Through Victorian State Government Community Building funding, MetroAccess, RuralAccess and DeafAccess Project Officers in each council can deliver programs that meet the needs of the local community. This funding enables local government to plan, develop and implement local capacity building and community development projects, which mobilise and support people with a disability to optimise participation in the life of their local community.

At the City of Melbourne, as with many other local governments, the MetroAccess Project Officer (MAPO) also acts as a facilitator and point of contact for individuals, the community sector and other parts of council as well as for State Government for access and inclusion issues.

The key role of MetroAccess as a link for community to local government is evidenced by the relationship between local community organisations and the City of Melbourne. For example in 2013 the MetroAccess Project Officer worked with Brain Injury Matters, a small self-advocacy group run by women with acquired brain injury, to organise and run a forum for Brain Injury Awareness Week at the Melbourne Town Hall. The MAPO provided support by being their contact point and linking the group with funding, assisting with promotion, and facilitating the involvement of the Lord Mayor, who opened the event. While the group took the lead with this project, it was the accessibility and support of the City of Melbourne through the MAPO that allowed their event to come to fruition.

The MAPO also plays an important role within council to promote and advance access and inclusion issues in Council planning and service provision. While the City of Melbourne strongly embraces and recognises the rights of people with a disability, the MAPO can be a subject matter resource for colleagues and advocate within council to go above and beyond the minimum requirements for disability access and inclusion in council planning and infrastructure development.

A key example of this was the Swanston Street redevelopment. Due to the strong relationships MetroAccess has with the community and community organisations, the MAPO was able to successfully facilitate the consultation of Vision Australia and Blind Citizens Australia to improve access features in the redevelopment. This led to greater accessibility and inclusion for people with a disability in the city.

Another area where the Victorian Government could show leadership and initiative is in its arts and culture institutions and funding arrangements. People with a disability face a range of barriers to participate in cultural life, arts and entertainment. Arts Victoria and Museum Victoria would be well placed to provide accessible tours and events in its venues using captions, tactile displays, interpreters and audio descriptions for people with sensory
disabilities. Having displays and signage lowered to accessible heights, informing people of accessibility features in marketing and publicity, and providing traineeships and more funding opportunities for artists with disabilities through the Victorian Government are other examples of how the state government could improve participation and social inclusion in cultural life and the arts.

**Identify examples of good practice on inclusion and Participation driven by local government and the community Sector:**

All local governments produce, implement and report on a Disability Action Plan (DAP). The City of Melbourne has a strong ten year history of implementing a DAP, which is currently being integrated into the draft *Melbourne for All People 2014-2017* strategy. This work over the last decade has resulted in a strong whole-of-council approach to disability policy and planning and the establishment of a Disability Advisory Committee (DAC).

The City of Melbourne DAC plays a key role in driving disability access and inclusion initiatives. The committee is chaired by a Councillor and populated by members of the community and Council officers. This direct line of communication between the community, Council staff and Councillors is a powerful example of effective and meaningful civic participation. The DAC has successfully advocated for social inclusion for people with a disability on a number of important issues.

For example, the DAC advocated for tactile street signage to be installed in the CBD for people with vision impairment. This work led to all street posts in the CBD to be fitted with accessible tactile signage. The DAC also wrote submissions to support the establishment of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), accessible transport review, State Disability Strategy and the opening up of public toilets at metropolitan train stations. One particular issue, which will focus the energy of the DAC in 2014 will be to ensure that the redevelopment of the Queen Victoria Market will fully meet the needs of people with a disability and their carers for many generations to come.

The Community Building Program has also significantly increased local governments’ capacity to enhance social inclusion in their communities (MAV, 2011). For example, the MAPO facilitated the delivery of disability awareness training across the organisation, promoted and distributed resources for business to adopt good access practices, and continues to develop and implement the DAP. This ensures there is a whole-of-council approach to access and inclusion.

Another example good practice inclusion and participation are community grants. The City of Melbourne Community Grants program allows not-for-profit community groups and organisations to deliver programs and events in the local community which contribute to one or more of the following criteria:

- People are healthy
- People are safe
- People are connected and participate
• People have knowledge and skills
• People feel they belong

Our community grants have allowed organisations like 3CR Community Radio and GRIT Media develop and present innovative programs for International Day for People with Disability which have reached thousands of people across Victoria.

Disability is a specific category of the application process and applicants are provided with support by the MetroAccess Project Officer during the delivery of their project. This program builds the capacity of the local community, including people with a disability, and contributes to a more inclusive and vibrant community.

The City of Melbourne embraces a whole-of-council approach to disability access and inclusion. In order for Victorians with a disability to be fully included in society this whole-of-council or whole-of-government approach is important to ensure the inclusion of people with a disability and that disability awareness becomes embedded in policy, planning and service delivery.

Recommend ways to increase social inclusion, including the roles of and collaboration between Local, State and Federal Governments, the community sector, individuals with a Disability and their carers.

In order to facilitate and maintain partnerships between Local, State and Federal Government and the community it is essential for the State Government to continue to fund the Community Building Program. Local Government, the arm of government closest to the people, is in a strong position to ensure the Community Building Program reflects and responds to the needs of people with a disability unique to that community. This we believe is the strength of this program.

The success of this program can be seen in its capacity to deliver

• A variety of successful capacity building projects and programs.
• Providing strong advocacy and support around issues of access and inclusion to both council and State Government
• Providing and maintaining a strong relationship between different levels of government and the community
• Being an accessible point of contact and support to community members and groups who may be vulnerable, isolated or have unique needs.

However, more value could be gained from the program to improve its effectiveness and outcomes for Victorians with a disability and the community by:

• Establishing formal networks in the DHS areas and regions with regular meetings
• Supporting or funding regional projects across different municipalities
• Facilitating partnerships between Rural, and MetroAccess officers to support the highly under-resourced RuralAccess program.

The Community Building Program can also play a key role in ensuring a smooth roll-out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in Victoria, as well as in the changes occurring to the Home and Community Care Program (HACC). In particular, for people with disability who are under 65 years who will not be funded under the new Federal funding model in 2015. Local government will play a crucial role in building inclusive and accessible communities through infrastructure (such as Changing Places toilets), provision of services and providing information about changes to services.

Another recommendation regarding the inclusion of Victorians with a disability is about ensuring everyone’s right to live with dignity and independence. The Federal and State Government need to ensure that people with a disability have access to the appropriate aids, equipment and resources they need to participate in all aspects of life. The State Wide Equipment Program (SWEP) can only currently deliver a service that aims to meet basic safety and independence-based outcomes due to inefficiencies and insufficient funding (Aids and Equipment Action Alliance, Wait Times, 2012). Therefore, people may not be able to reach their potential or fully participate in society as they may wish.

Employment and access to meaningful work is also a human right, as highlighted in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability (UN, 2006) in the All tiers of government need to work collaboratively with employers and employment services to improve employment outcomes for people with a disability. Australia currently ranks last out of 27 OECD countries for the percentage of people with a disability living in poverty. In fact, disability employment rates have fallen in Australia, as well as in the rest of OECD countries (OECD, 2009).

The City of Melbourne is committed to equitable employment; however, there are still major barriers to employment for people with a disability in Victoria. Providing awareness training to recruiters and employers as well as instituting more accessible recruitment processes, employing people based on their skills not their disability and providing ongoing support where necessary, are examples of some steps that need to be taken by employers. It is important that all levels of government provide leadership in this area and learn from employers and industries who have had success (ADFO, 2013).

Local governments can work with the State and Commonwealth government to show leadership and initiative in promoting social inclusion for all and improving awareness of disability and access in the community and business sector. This can be achieved through information provision, inclusive services and planning, local capacity building programs and funding, advocacy and effective partnerships.

References

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