ASSEMBLY
DISABILITY ACCESS
GUIDELINES

**Uniting Church
in Australia**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 makes disability discrimination unlawful in Australia.

It covers areas such as employment, education and access to public spaces and protects against direct discrimination, indirect discrimination and harassment.

The Act can be accessed here: https://www.legislation.gov.au

The disability access guidelines (guidelines) are for the use of the Assembly and Assembly Agencies.

The guidelines outline how to make an event or activity accessible to people with disability.

It is not a complete checklist covering everything you will need to do for every type of event you host. If you'd like to refer to a checklist, you can find one here: https://www.and.org.au/pages/event-checklist.html

The guidelines have been created from information from **Rev. Dr Trevor Whitney** and **Rev. (Deacon) Andy Calder** and from conversations with other people, including many people with disability.

You can provide feedback on the guidelines to **ucaremail@nat.unitingcare.org.au** or 02 6249 6717. Your feedback will inform future updates to the guidelines.

THEOLOGICAL STATEMENT

The Uniting Church in Australia believes everyone is created equal in the image of God. The Church embodies a movement of Christ's reconciliation among all people, in which "the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole" (Basis of Union para 3).

The reconciliation given by God through Christ, enables and calls us to be an open community of God's Grace and love and to remove divisions within the Body of Christ, which is the Church.

In the World Council of Churches' document Gift of Being – Called to be a Church of all and for all, a powerful image is Paul's message to the Ephesians that Christ has come to tear down the walls that separate us (Ephesians 2:14).

Although people living with impairment are today less likely to be segregated behind walls, the walls of fear and prejudice remain, including within the Church[1].

In light of this, in 2018 the 15th Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia affirmed that:

1. Christ is most fully present when all people in the Body are unconditionally accepted as people of worth. All people are created in the image of God, including people with disability;
2. along with all members, the faith, gifts, hopes and dreams of people with disability are to be valued and honoured; and
3. God is a God of justice and peace, who seeks reconciliation amongst all people.

In seeking to be a community of reconciliation, the Uniting Church acknowledges that for many people with disability its life and faith has not always borne witness to this vision.

The Uniting Church seeks:

1. to embody a community life that in its theology and practice is accessible to all people;
2. to ensure that within its own life people with disability are treated justly and have their hopes and rights realised; and
3. to advocate for justice and equality for people with disability in the wider community.

DISABILITY ACCESS GUIDELINES

The guidelines are listed under four headings: Attitudinal, Physical, Sensory & Communication. There is some overlap between the points under each heading.

Content warning: These guidelines contain language that some people may find offensive.

ATTITUDINAL

People have attitudes, values and beliefs about different issues. It is important to identify these attitudes, values and beliefs. They can guide a person's planning of an event. They can also guide their participation in an event.

1. Planning events

When planning an event, it is important to discuss who will be involved in the event. The agenda for the event should suit everyone attending the event. It should consider the needs of those who speak slowly, need to be listened to carefully, or who take longer to get from one place to another. This may mean the tempo of the event is slower. This may make the event or activity more accessible to others as well.

Has consideration been given to inviting people with disability into leadership roles?

Involving people with disability in the planning of the event will help you to have an event that is as accessible as possible.

Local disability networks or organisations and national Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) may also be able to assist.

This includes Disabled People's Organisations Australia and Australian Federation of Disability Organisations.

2. Appropriate language

Language is important. The words used can include or exclude groups of people. The written and spoken language used should be positive and inclusive of people with disability.

The words used in acts of worship should also be positive and inclusive of people with disability.

Examples of language or attitudes that exclude are:

- "The church is crippled by its lack of vision."
- "To think that way is plain dumb."

People with Disability Australia have a very useful Language Guide you can refer to. It outlines what language to use when referring to people with disability and outlines other examples of language not to use. It can be accessed here: https://pwd.org.au/resources/disability-info/language-guide/

Any belief that only thinks of people with disability as people who are simply there to have things done to them or to be served (for example healed, spoken at or marginalised) is exclusionary.

Any belief that implies that people with disability are to be feared or pitied because of their impairment is exclusionary. Make a conscious effort to be inclusive by thinking and speaking of people with disability in terms of mutuality of relationship and contribution.

PHYSICAL

1. Venue

A venue should only be considered if everyone attending will be able to enter and exit the building and move around the building without obstacle. There must also be accessible toilets available. There is more information on this below.

It is always best to complete an inspection of the potential venue before confirming the booking to check its accessibility.

There are Australian Standards that set out requirements for buildings to meet the access needs of people with disabilities. It is preferable that the venue chosen meets these standards. Sometimes the venue staff may be able to assist with checking this.

The Australian Human Rights Commission has a Disability Standards page on its website. It includes links to the Premise Standards 2010 and Guidelines on application of the Premises Standards. The page can be accessed here: https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/disability-standards

Car parking

Accessible parking spaces should be available close to the entrance(s) of the venue. Additional car parks should also

be reserved close to the entrance(s) of the venue for those needing to use them.

People needing to use these car parks should be informed that they are available.

Car parks should be clearly signed.

Public transport

Select a venue that is close to accessible public transport. Consider providing a map with directions from public transport locations to the venue.

Access to venue

The paths leading to the venue should be even and free from obstacles.

The main entry to the venue should be barrier and obstacle free. For example, it should be free from all steps or have another option such as a ramp that complies with Australian Standards.

The doorway at the entry and doorways within the venue should be wide enough for people who use mobility aids. Automatic doors are preferred.

Desks and tables

Any desks or tables to be used during the event need to be at a suitable height for people using wheelchairs. This includes the registration desk(s) and refreshments table(s).

Accessible toilets

Accessible toilets need to be provided on all levels of the premises. They need to be well signed so that people don't have to ask where they are located.

Stage access

This is vital. It is important people can access the stage and other speaking points. This will ensure they can contribute equally. Portable access ramps which comply with Australian Standards may assist with this issue.

Upstairs events

Does the venue have lifts for people with disabilities who are required to meet in upstairs rooms? If the venue does not have
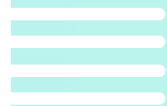
suitable lifts, then all parts of the event will need to be held downstairs at the venue.

<u>**Seating**</u>

It is preferable that the seating layout is inclusive. People with a disability should be seated with everyone else. They may have seating access needs, but they should not be isolated from other attendees.

For example, people with visual impairments may need to be seated close to the stage at the event so they can see the speakers, or close to a projection screen.

It is also important to provide enough space between tables and chairs to ensure people who use mobility aids and support animals can move freely around the venue.

2. Catering

If catering is planned, ensure participants can provide dietary requirements before the event. Consider providing food options that are easy to consume and a range of utensil options including flexible straws. Food provided at the event or activity should be clearly labelled.

3. Liaison

Appoint a person on the day of the event to be responsible for any accessibility issues that arise.

4. Assistance

Most people are self-sufficient and bring additional support and aids with them as needed. Be clear about the extent of any additional support that can be provided.
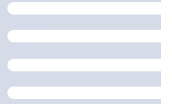
5. Accommodation

If accommodation is needed, check that there are accessible accommodation options available close to the event venue.

SENSORY

1.Lighting and imagery

Ensure the venue has good lighting and avoid dimming it. Dimmed lighting may negatively impact on the ability of people with disability to engage with the event.

Avoid flickering images, flash lighting or other special effects that may negatively impact on people attending the event.

2. Quiet room

Provide a separate, quiet area for people with disability to use if they need to take a break from the event or activities.

COMMUNICATION

1. Consultation

Consulting people with disability attending the event or activity about their needs is crucial to ensuring accessibility and inclusion.

Access needs are not the same for every person. The access needs of people with disability will not be met with a 'one-size-fits-all approach' or generalisations. It is crucial to seek input from people with disability and check with those attending the event concerning their needs. It is very important not to make assumptions.

On registration information and advertising for the event, ask that people get in touch with you to discuss their individual access needs. For example, "Do you have particular needs the organisers need to be aware of?"

Provide a date for this information to be provided by. Use welcoming language to encourage them to contact you and provide multiple contact options.

If the event requires registration, enquire as to whether a support person will be attending with the person with disability and check that they are registered too.

2. Large print

Prepare documents for the event in large, clear print to allow everyone to effectively participate. At a minimum, the most important parts of the programme should be prepared like this. For example, the Installation of the President at Assembly, the sermon and other important parts of a worship service.

Arial is the font that vision-impaired people find the clearest to read. Consider developing information in Plain English and Easy English formats to allow the greatest participation.

Are PowerPoint presentations and overhead projector displays easy to read? Do they have good colour contrast?

A short video on colour contrast can be accessed here: http://www.w3.org/WAI/perspective-videos/contrast/

Vision Australia's Colour Contrast Determinator can be accessed here: https://visionaustralia.org/services/digital-access/resources/colour-contrast-determinator

Are programmes, agendas and other printed documents readable for those with a vision impairment?

Consider providing PowerPoint presentations and other materials to people prior to the event.

This will provide them with the chance to read the material before the event and will provide for more equal participation.

Consider providing devices such as iPads to those with a vision impairment so that what is displayed or projected can be seen up close, particularly if seating people with a vision impairment close to the stage or projection screen is not possible.

3. Signing

The best way to organise for an AUSLAN interpreter to be at the event is to book them when you are starting to plan the event. Then once you know who is attending and what their access needs are going to be, you can always cancel the booking if they are not going to be needed.

If there is going to be an AUSLAN interpreter, advertise this in advance so Deaf people and people with a hearing impairment can consider coming to the event.

At a minimum, signing should occur for the most important parts of the Assembly meeting. For example, the opening and the President's sermon.

4. Hearing

Undertake a check of any audio system to be used to ensure that it is clear.

Is a hearing loop available for people who are hard of hearing?

Ensure good lighting of speakers, including those asking questions or contributing to the conversation, to ensure their lips can be seen and read. Encourage the use of microphones for all dialogue.

Brief speakers to speak clearly and not too quickly.

5. Advertising

Promotional material sent out ahead of the event should indicate the ways in which the event is 'disability friendly'. This may encourage some people to attend and participate who may not otherwise do so. It also sends the right message to the wider church about our priorities.

6. Signage

Disability access signs need to be appropriately displayed at the event wherever they are required to enable full participation.

7. Captioning

Can audio-visual material be captioned for Deaf people and people with a hearing impairment?

8. Feedback

When seeking feedback on the event ensure feedback can be given on the accessibility of the event and whether access needs were met. Provide an opportunity for people to make suggestions for improvements for future events. Multiple contact options should be provided.

9. Website accessibility

For information of website accessibility, refer to: https://guides.service.gov.au/content-guide/accessibility-inclusivity/