

# Disability Inclusion Action Plan Consultation Report

January 2022



## Acknowledgment of Country

Byron Shire Council recognises the traditional owners of this land, the people and the wider Bundjalung Nation, Arakwal people, the Widjabal people, the Minjungbul people and the wider Bundjalung Nation.

We recognise that the most enduring and relevant legacy Indigenous people offer is their understanding of the significance of land and their local, deep commitment to place.

The Council respect and embrace this approach by engaging with the community and acknowledging that our resources are precious and must be looked after for future generations.



# All Welcome

Access and inclusion for everyone



Byron Shire

## Thank you

The consultation project and successful implementation of the Byron Shire Council Disability Inclusion Action Plan relies on the involvement of members of the local community and Council staff.

In particular this work is done in partnership with Council's Access Consultative Working Group, made up of members of the Byron Shire community with a lived experience of disability and individuals that support people with a lived experience of disability, and Council's internal DIAP Internal Working Group, made up of members from all Council directorates. Contributors to this project and the consultation process included people with disability, their carers, friends and families, disability services providers, community organisations and Council staff.

Thank you to everyone who participated in this process, your contribution will ensure the Byron Shire Council's DIAP responds in the best possible ways to the needs of people with disability in our communities.

### Abbreviations

ACWG – Access Consultative Working Group

BSC – Byron Shire Council

DIAP – Disability Inclusion Action Plan

IWG – Internal Working Group

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## Executive Summary

Access and inclusion are important aspects of ensuring that everyone can participate in our community. Under the *NSW Disability Inclusion Act (2014)*, Byron Shire Council has operated with a Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) since 2017.

This Plan is being updated for 2022 – 2026 as we build upon the work that has already been done to improve access and inclusion in our community.

The Act requires the DIAP to have four focus areas:

- promoting positive community Attitudes and Behaviours,
- creating Liveable Communities,
- supporting access to Meaningful Employment,
- improving access to services through better Systems and Processes.

To ensure that the voice of lived experience is heard, Byron Shire Council undertook a process of Community Consultation to ask the community about these issues. This process was co-designed with Council's Access Consultative Working Group (ACWG), a group made up of members of the Byron Shire community with a lived experience of disability as well as individuals that support people with a lived experience of disability, and our internal DIAP Working Group. As a result of this process, we undertook a community survey, community conversations, and a staff survey. There were responses from across the shire:

- 148 responses to our community survey:
  - Responses came from across the age spectrum, and included people living with disability, or answering on behalf of someone with disability, family members, carers or support workers, and service providers.
  - Many types of disability were represented, including disability affecting mobility, mental health conditions, cognition, learning, hearing- and vision-related disabilities.
  - 67% identified as female
  - 6.2% identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
  - 15% spoke a language other than English at home
- 5 one-on-one telephone conversations, 3 online workshops, and 3 email submissions
- 22% of all Council staff responded to our staff survey

**“Think about what makes life here so good...then make sure there aren't any barriers for some community members to join in!”**

Across the consultation the issues that stood out as of critical importance were:

## Attitudes and Behaviours

- Greater education and enforcement of the rules relating to mobility parking are required.
- Local businesses need to be encouraged and supported to increase access and inclusion, including tourism opportunities.
- It is important to include people with disability in the design of communications and awareness campaigns.
- There is a need to increase public awareness campaigns, including celebrating people with both visible and invisible disabilities.
- Council needs to lead by example.
- Fixing access issues demonstrates commitment and action to support inclusion.

## Liveable Communities

- Footpaths and appropriate kerb ramps are a priority area in need of improvement across the Shire. Ensuring safe continuous connections between paths is essential.
- Beach accessibility needs to be improved for a range of mobility needs, including ocean viewing areas.
- There is a need for increased accessible parking with appropriate and safe loading space and drop-and-ride locations.
- Accessible public transport and adequately sheltered bus stops are needed.
- The business community needs to be engaged to improve access, in particular medical practices and banking services.
- A range of visible and invisible disabilities need to be considered during public events, including physical access, low energy, hearing- and vision-related considerations.

### Within Council

- 32% reported barriers to community events and programs that relate to physical access and the need to consider adjustments for a range of visible and invisible disabilities. Suggestions include a checklist for event organisers and improved information on accessibility.
- 25% of respondents observed barriers to Council-owned buildings, mostly relating to physical access issues, including adequate footpaths, parking, safe crossings, building access and accessible amenities.
- 33% reported barriers to public facilities and amenities with equitable beach access emerging as an important issue, with increased beach access, improved footpaths and an increase in accessible play parks and equipment the key priorities.

## Meaningful Employment

- Local businesses need to be encouraged to increase employment opportunities for people with disability, including accessible recruitment processes for both visible and invisible disability.
- Increased training around both visible and invisible disability in the workplace is needed.
- Local businesses need to be supported with training and awareness-raising activities.

### Within Council:

- Council can improve accessibility of work sites (both Administration building and the Depot) to improve inclusion.
- Disability Awareness training has been very well received and staff would like more training, especially regarding invisible disabilities.
- More guidance and training on inclusive language would be helpful.
- There is a need for more accessible meeting rooms.
- Use of language and accessibility and readability of Council information is a significant issue, and specific support to address this would help.
- Consideration of both visible and invisible disability needs to be a priority for Council events and processes such as community engagement.

## Systems and Processes

- Continued improvement of accessibility of Council meetings, such as live captioning or Auslan signing.
- Diversity of representation on the ACWG and across other consultation processes such as Place Planning Collectives.
- Introduce sitting fees/compensation for lived experience advisory groups.
- Ensure a diversity of communication strategies.
- Improve staff understanding of invisible disability and how to assist community in navigating Council processes.
- Continue to improve accessibility of online information and systems, including effective search function.

Byron Shire Council looks forward to working within and across Council, in partnership with the ACWG, to integrate these priorities into our *Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2022-2026*.



## Background

The Byron Shire is home to an estimated 5,732 people with disability, which is 16.8% of the local population<sup>1</sup>. In addition, 9.7% of the community care for someone with a disability, which equates to an estimated 3,328 carers<sup>2</sup>. As a significant tourist area, more than 2.2 million people visit every year and the tourism and hospitality industry is our largest employer. Given that 1 in 5 people in Australia live with disability (increasing to 2 in 5 over the age of 65 years), it is important to consider that the number of people impacted by access and inclusion issues in our Shire is significant. It is important that Council works to ensure that people with disability can participate equally in our community. When something is accessible, everyone can use it. When something is inclusive, everyone can take part.

In addition to our social and ethical responsibility to ensure access and inclusion, in 2014 the NSW Government introduced the *NSW Disability Inclusion Act 2014*. The introduction of this Act requires Council to have a Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) that shows what we are doing to enable people with disability to participate equally in their communities. Byron Shire Council endorsed its first DIAP in 2017 for the period 2017-2021 and an interim DIAP was put in place (due to disruptions to Council terms) for the period 2021-2022. This report outlines engagement to inform the 2022-2026 DIAP. Our Plan talks about what we want to do to make Byron Shire more accessible and inclusive.

The Act requires the DIAP to have four focus areas:

- promoting positive community **Attitudes and Behaviours**,
- creating **Liveable Communities**,
- supporting access to **Meaningful Employment**,
- improving access to services through better **Systems and Processes**.

An essential element in preparing a DIAP is community consultation and engagement. This ensures the plan is focused on the needs of community members, service users and staff. This Engagement Report describes the process and results of community consultation that was undertaken by Council to help inform the Plan. We recognise the importance of co-design and collaboration with people with lived experience, staff and communities, in the development of an effective DIAP.

Throughout September - October 2020, Council developed a Communication and Engagement Plan in partnership with its Access Consultative Working Group (ACWG), a group made up of members of the Byron Shire community with a lived experience of disability as well as individuals that support people with a lived experience of disability. The aim of the communication and engagement was to gather community views on what it is like living with disability in the Byron Shire, what challenges people experience and what things Council might be able to do to address some of the challenges.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018/2019) 4430.0 - *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings*, accessed 10 January 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018/2019) 4430.0 - *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings*, accessed 10 January 2022.

The information provided will be used to inform Council's Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) 2022-2026, which will:

- build on the work of our previous DIAP and guide Council in meeting its responsibilities with regard to people with disability and the *NSW Disability Inclusion Act 2014*; and
- provide Council with a strategic approach to further support people with disability to participate in community life and access Council services and facilities.

## Stakeholders

Council worked in partnership with its Access Consultative Working Group to identify relevant stakeholders prior to the commencement of the engagement period.

Key stakeholders included:

- people with a disability, both visible and invisible;
- people with a mental health condition;
- people that care for or live with someone with disability or mental health condition;
- people and organisations that provide services and advocacy.

## Methodology

Community consultation occurred in two linked phases:

### Phase 1a: Community Survey

The survey was developed in consultation with the ACWG and the DIAP IWG, and was also used as a recruitment tool for Phase 2. It was open for 8 weeks, from 7 October until 6 December 2021. The survey tool utilised both checkbox and open text responses to elicit some quantitative data and some open-ended ideas and feedback. In many cases multiple options were able to be selected, in order for responses to capture those answering for themselves and on behalf of someone else.

The survey was hosted online via the YourSay platform, and was available in both standard, Easy Read and text-only Easy Read versions. The Easy Read version used clear, simple messages and images to support the text. This made it accessible to a wider audience, such as people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and people of all ages with low levels of literacy.

Significant promotion of the survey was undertaken. This included:

- 4 quarter-page advertisements in the Byron Echo: 13, 20 & 27 October, 10 November
- A feature article including an interview with ACWG members in the Byron Echo on 10 November
- 2 media releases: 7 October, 3 November
- Council's e-News to approximately 9000 subscribers: 29 October
- Paid Facebook campaign, including additional posts for International Day of People with Disability on 3 December
- BayFM radio advertising: campaign On Air 2 weeks, 3 announcements per day
- Posted on the Social Futures Community Hub: 13 October
- Posters with QR code distributed to public noticeboards across the Shire, and emailed as below with survey
- Email distribution of the poster and Easy Read versions of the survey to 79 stakeholders, including local schools (21), libraries, disability service providers and carer networks, general practitioners, psychologists and counsellors, neighbourhood

centres, and Chambers of Commerce. Surveys were returnable by email and Reply Paid envelopes were made available.

- Presented to Councillors at Strategic Planning Workshop 11 November

Support for the survey included:

- Frequently Asked Question resource
- Staff telephone and email contacts
- Scheduled windows where a Council staff member was available in Council reception to assist community members completing the survey: Tuesdays (8.30am – 11.30am) and Thursdays (1pm and 4pm) from 12 Oct, 2021 - 30 Nov, 2021
- National Relay Service details on website

### Phase 1b: Byron Shire Council Staff Survey

This survey was developed in consultation with DIAP IWG. The survey was hosted online via the Survey Monkey platform, so all responses remain anonymous. The Staff Survey was promoted internally:

- Posters with QR code put up at all tea stations and photocopy areas
- Presentation at All Staff forum by Project Officer from Social and Cultural Planning Team
- 2 All Staff emails
- Distribution to Depot staff by People and Culture

### Phase 2: targeted Community Conversations

Respondents to the survey were invited to nominate for further participation and their preferred mode of interaction, including accessibility requirements: Options included:

- Online focus group (4 - 8 people)
- Online conversation with one other person
- Telephone conversation with one other person
- Email us with your suggestions
- Online workshop/focus group with your organisation or school

Due to ongoing uncertainty and restrictions due to Public Health Orders, no face-to-face consultation was possible.

A Discussion Guide was developed in partnership with the ACWG and distributed to all participants at least one week prior to both individual and group Conversations to allow participants to feel safe, connect with networks and prepare if needed. Group conversations were conducted by a member of the ACWG. One-on-one conversations were conducted by a Project Officer from the Social and Cultural Planning team at Council. Surveys submitted via email or hard copy were entered onto the online platform by a Project Support Officer at Council.

Quantitative and qualitative results from both phases of the consultation process were analysed using simple descriptive statistics in Microsoft Excel and drawn from reports

generated via the YourSay platform. The sample is not considered representative and tests for significance were not undertaken. Results are presented by Community Consultation according to Focus Area, and Staff Consultation according to Focus Area.

This process seeks to amplify the voice of community, particularly those with lived experience of disability and/or as a carer.

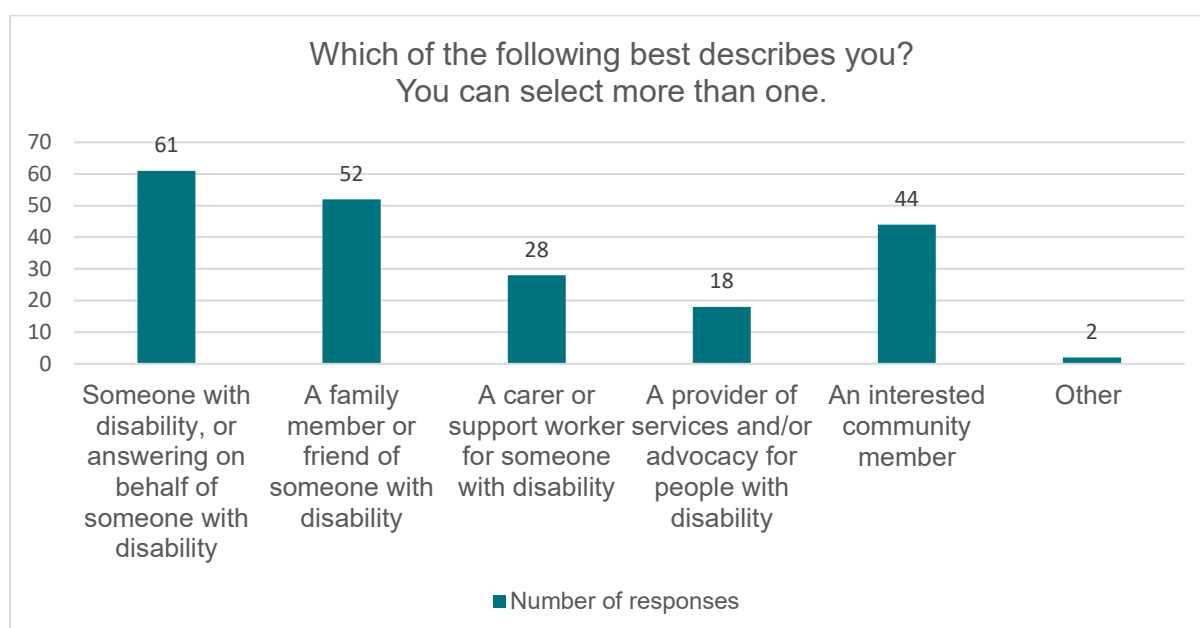
**“It can be very isolating to live with a disability, we find it hard to find people who understand the challenges, and often feel we don't belong. It can also be hard to feel like we aren't in a position to contribute meaningfully to our community when we have so many demands on us already. Thank you for giving us opportunity to be involved in this survey - we would hope that our struggles could help others to live with more ease, and that gives us a sense of contribution and value.”**

## Results – Community Consultation

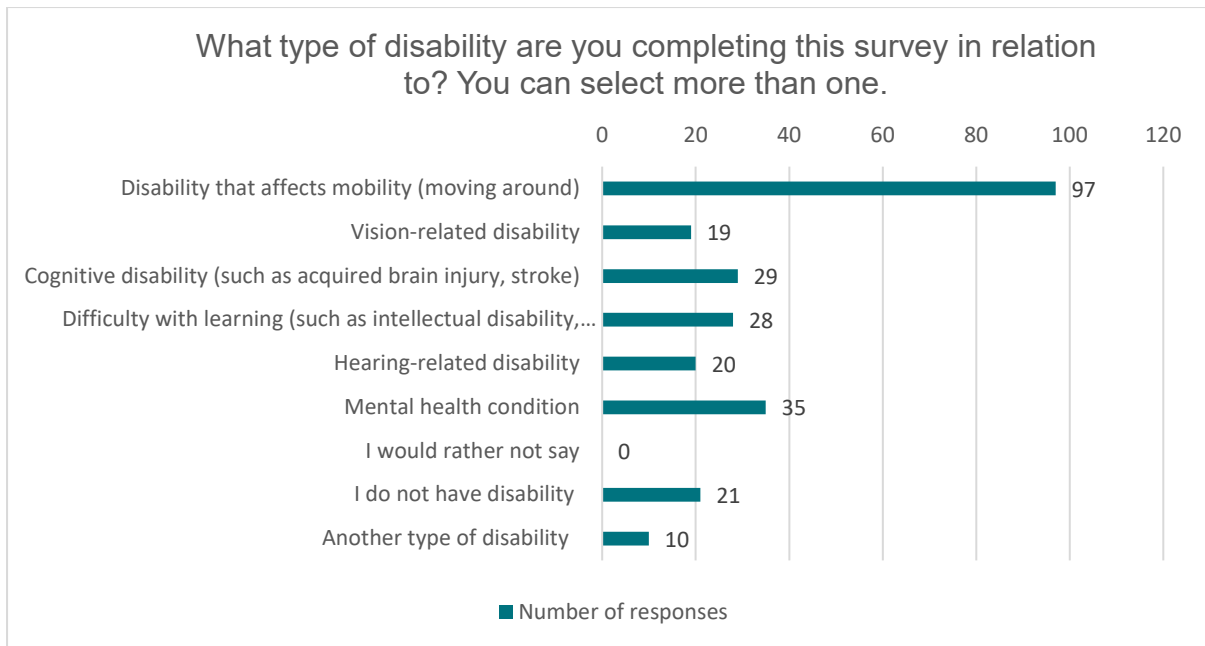
This section outlines the results of both the community survey and community conversations. It begins with an overview of respondents, and then presents results by Focus Area.

### Who responded to the community survey?

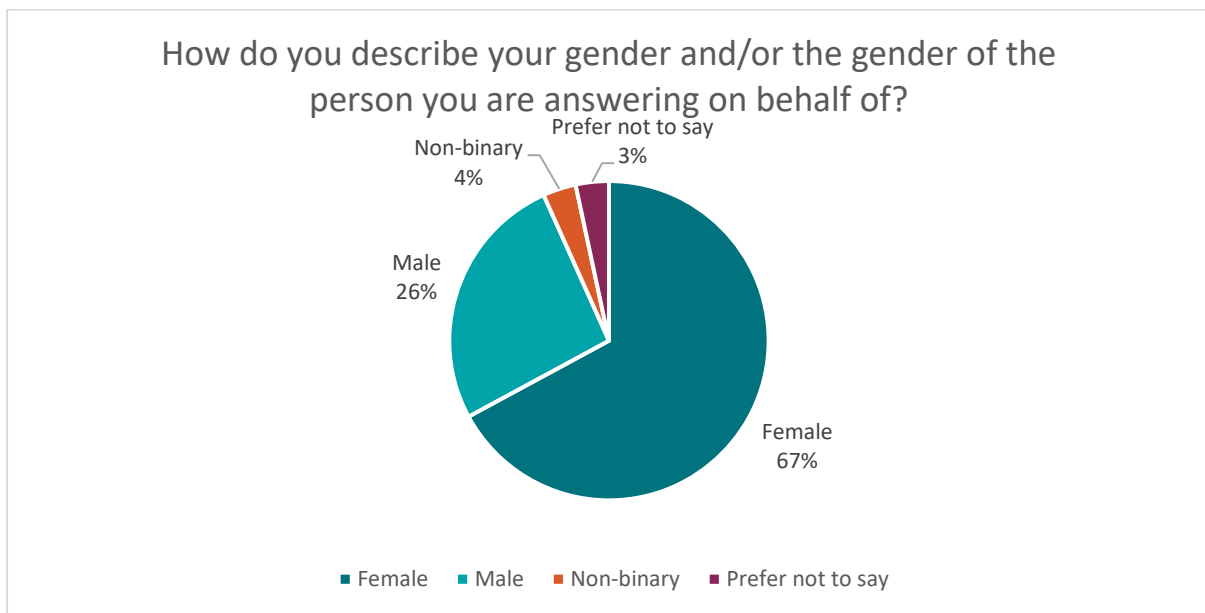
148 people responded to the community survey, with 144 completed online and 4 Easy Read versions returned via email or to Council reception. There was a good spread of respondents, across people with disability, family and friends, carers and service providers, as well as interested community members. Respondents were able to select more than one option so that they could include feedback for themselves and others. There were 205 responses to this question, which may more accurately capture the number of different viewpoints captured by the survey results given the multiple roles respondents may represent (for example, they may be a family member and carer of someone with disability and live with disability themselves).

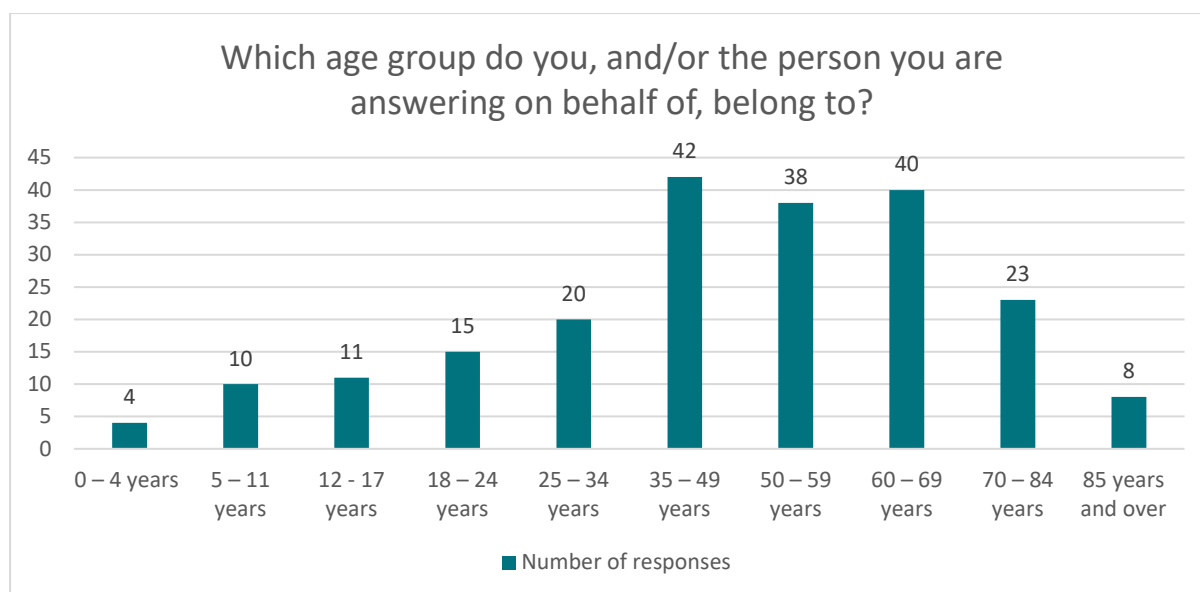


There was also a spread of responses across disability type. The majority of respondents were reporting experiences to do with disability that effects mobility. Again, respondents were able to select more than one option, and there were 259 responses to this question. Additional responses included conditions and acquired injuries that included incontinence, chronic pain and autoimmune issues.



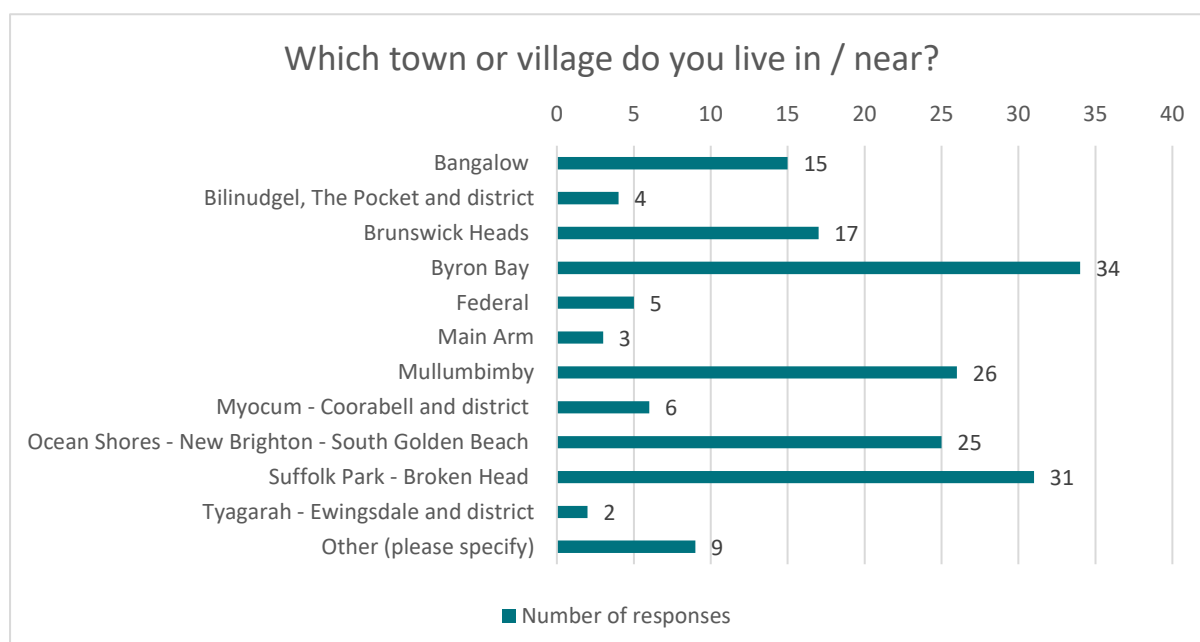
The majority of respondents were female (69%) and there was a good spread across ages. Again, respondents were able to select more than one option to allow data for those answering for themselves and another.





6.2% of respondents were either of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent. Given that the percentage of the Byron Shire population that identifies in this way is 1.8%<sup>3</sup>, this is a good response. 87% of respondents did not identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and 8.2% preferred not to say. 15% of respondents speak a language other than English at home, with Bahasa Indonesian, Sudanese, German, Pashto (Afghanistan), Spanish, and Portuguese listed as the languages spoken by respondents.

As for location, there were responses from across the Byron Shire. There were also 9 responses from outside the Shire from people that either visit regularly or work for organisations that service the Byron Shire. Locations included Ballina, Lismore, Gold Coast, Coffs Harbour and Tweed Heads.



<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016/2017) 2916.0 - *Census of Population and Housing - QuickStats, Community Profiles and DataPacks, Australia, 2016*, accessed 11 January 2022.



## Who participated in the Community Conversations?

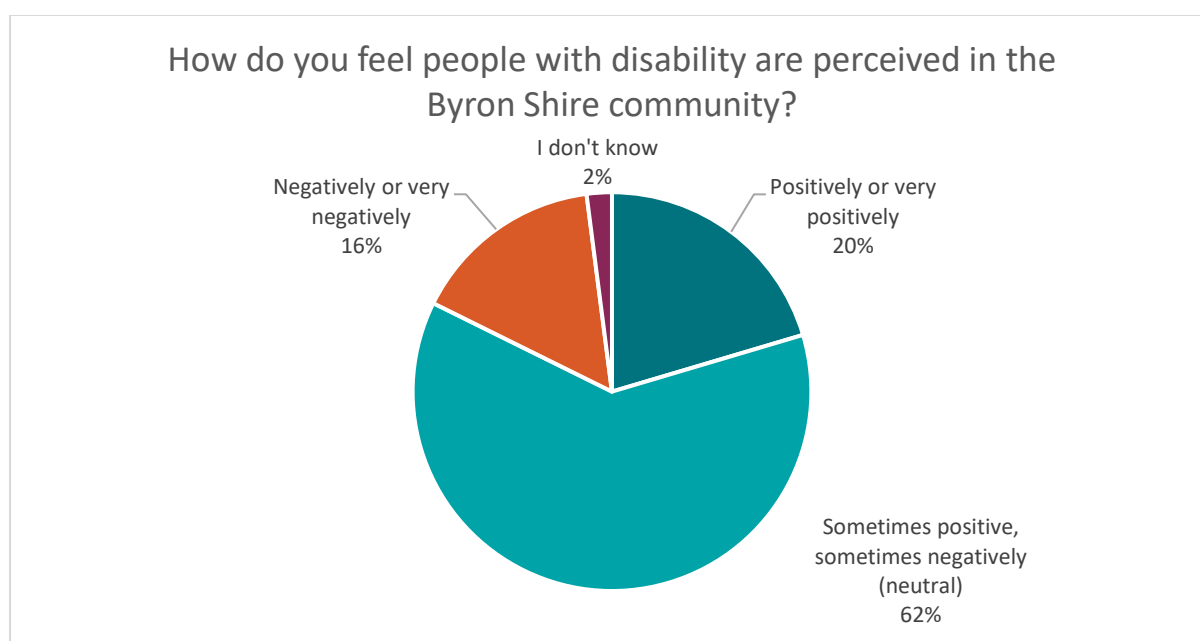
28 community members registered to be contacted for further input and everyone was contacted. From this there were:

- 5 one-on-one telephone conversations,
- 3 online workshops, and
- 3 further email submissions were received, including a group submission.

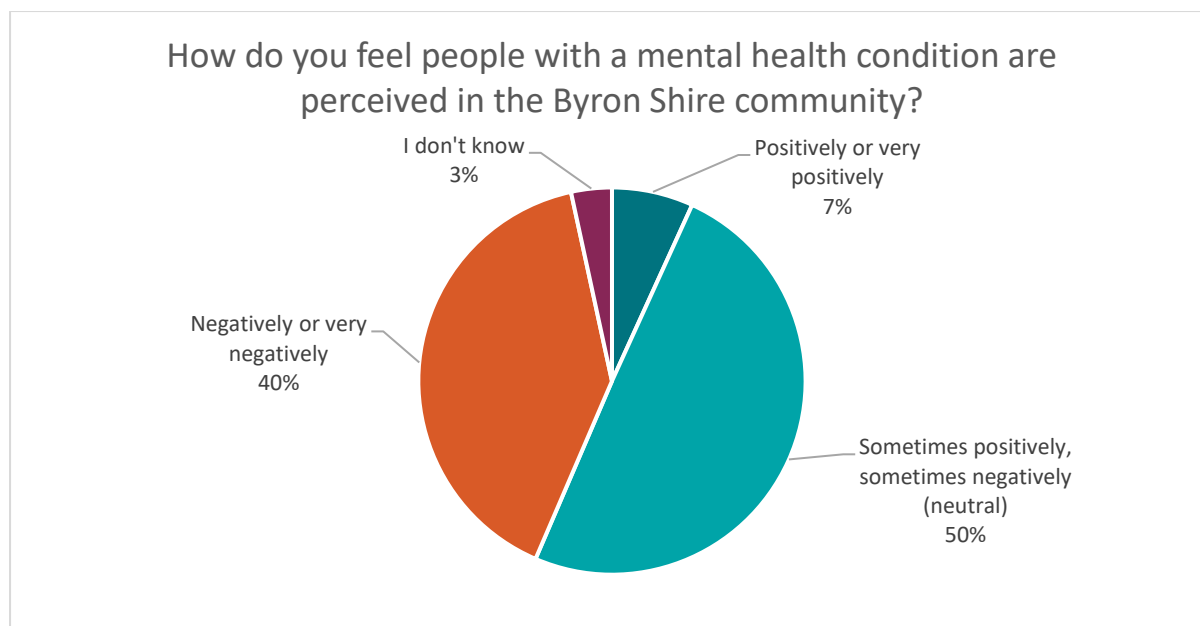
## Focus Area: Attitudes and Behaviours

The attitudes and behaviours of the general community towards people with disability have been described as the single greatest barrier to full access and inclusion. There were mixed results from the consultation. Whilst 20% of respondents reported positive or very positive perceptions of people with disability in the Byron Shire, the majority of respondents felt perceptions were neutral (sometimes positive and sometimes negative) and 16% felt that perceptions were negative or very negative.

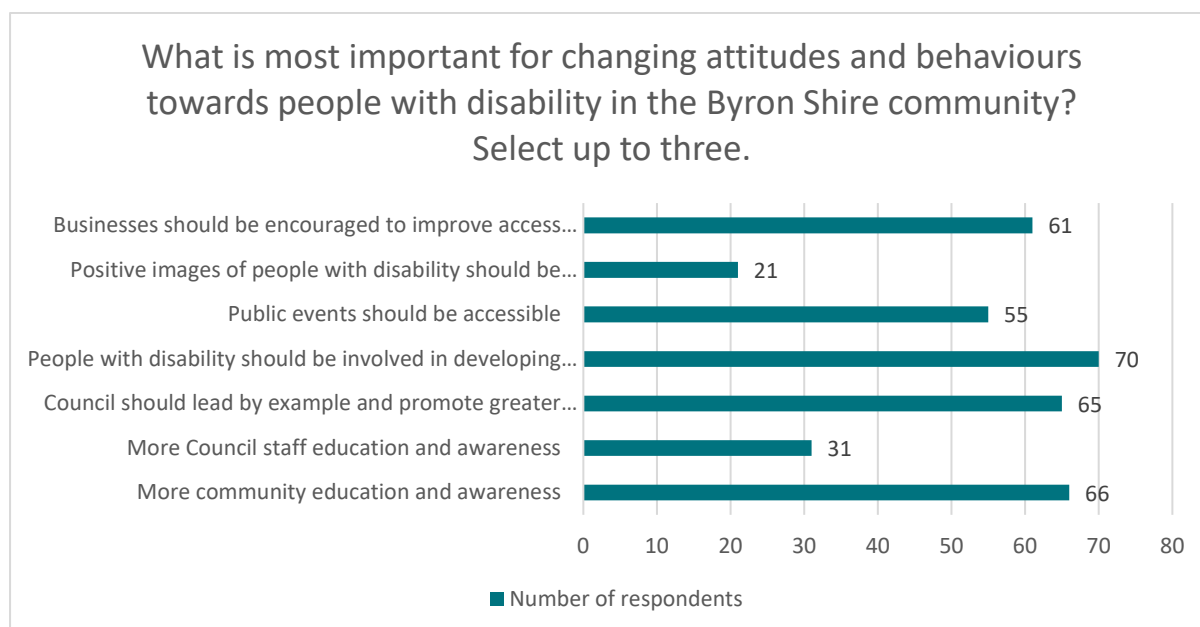
**“My daughter was not welcome at the school. Some parents were concerned that having autistic children in their class would impact their children’s education – but it actually increases their education by modelling an inclusive world.”**



The reported perception of people with mental health conditions was more negative, with 40% indicating negative or very negative perceptions, and half of respondents reporting neutral perceptions.



When asked what is most important to change attitudes towards people with disability, respondents were limited to three responses to help elicit priority actions. Including people with disability in the development of communication campaigns was the top response, closely followed by the need for more community education and awareness, and the need for Council to lead by example. The need for public events to be accessible was also a popular response.



An issue that came up in many of the open text responses was the need for community education about, and official enforcement of, parking in designated accessible parking spots. Many respondents gave examples where designated parking spaces were used by people that did not need them, including:

- Cars parked in mobility spots and/or overhanging pavements to load/unload surfboards.
- Mobility spaces being used as loading zones.

- Personal abuse or arguments when non-eligible people are asked to move from the space.
- Non-enforcement of mobility parking within private developments, such as workplaces within the industrial estate.
- Verbal abuse when people with invisible disability use spaces, even with appropriate permits showing.

In many of the Community Conversations, the issue of accessibility came up in terms of attitudes and behaviours. Many respondents encountered positive attitudes and helpful staff, but when this was coupled with inadequate access – for example safe and clean toilets, having to do banking on the street – it resulted in negative experiences. The need for the community to understand invisible as well as visible disability was an important concern. Overall, respondents relayed that they had good experiences in the Shire with helpful people, but there were concerning examples. In one stand-out example, a local school actively discouraged neurodivergent students and actively humiliated them through negative behaviours, such as asking them to use a separate entrance and delaying necessary supports to discourage attendance. When this family changed schools, they were welcomed and supported by the new school in many large and small ways, such as teachers being sensitive and discrete in the ways they helped the student.

### Key feedback theme: Public awareness and education

**“Ableism is rife in our community. Please hold regular campaigns, online and otherwise, reminding others to be aware of the variety of disabilities in contemporary society, visible and otherwise.”**

### Key feedback theme: Encouraging businesses

**“Businesses should be encouraged to improve access. Maybe the council could have annual disability awards for businesses in various categories, such as: physical access, communication, employment etc. and then publicize these widely.”**

### Key feedback theme: Access leads to better inclusion

**“Physical access for wheelchair users delivers on many levels. Not only does it benefit the wheelchair user as they can then include themselves in ordinary spaces and events, but it also educates the community about the diversity and the capacity of wheelchair users to become independent and/or to participate alongside the public. This then builds positive attitudes about people with physical disability and allows for friendly interactions.”**

## Additional suggestions

- Attitudes and behaviours of dog owners are important – unleashed dogs disrupt assistance animals, and scare people with disability, chronic pain and low energy issues.
- Help make businesses welcome tourism from NDIS, support small businesses to accommodate people with disability.
- Educate and encourage businesses about the National Companion Card (developed to remove the financial barrier for people with disability who require lifelong attendant care support to participate at events, activities and venues), as many businesses do not accept it or make it difficult.
- Affordable housing for people with disability is increasingly difficult and excludes people from our community.
- Increase disability awareness and inclusion in local sporting clubs and teams.
- Make sure people with a disability are understood, heard and respected - this could be done through community action, for example by having an artist create a community art piece with people with disability, making them feel valued and included.
- Celebrate people with disability, both visible and invisible – for example, Neurodivergent Week.
- People living with disability must be centred in any discussion or development of strategies to improve community attitudes and behaviours.
- Normalise and destigmatise disability by communicating openly about it, using communications and images that are inclusive and that proactively contribute to our local identity narratives.
- Provide maps of where there are disability services, facilities, lit areas, bus stops etc.
- Fixing access issues signals commitment and inclusiveness.

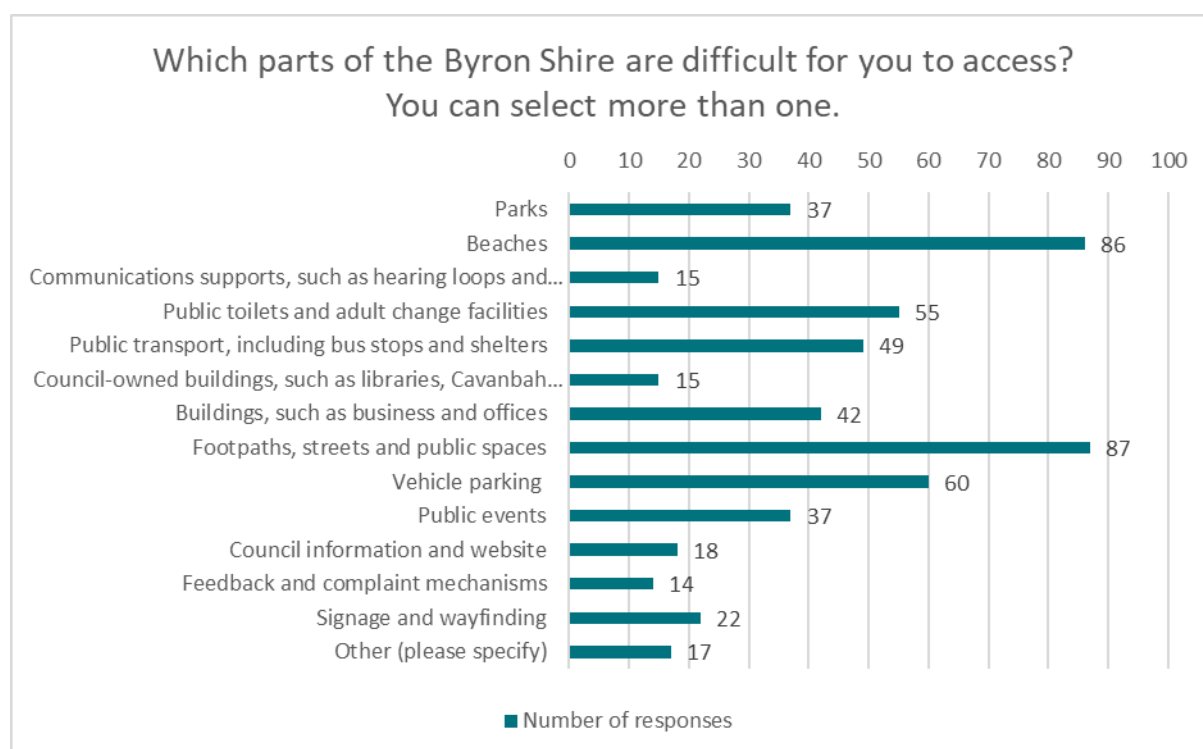
## Key findings

- Greater education and enforcement of the rules relating to mobility parking are required.
- Local businesses need to be encouraged and supported to increase access and inclusion, including tourism opportunities.
- It is important to include people with disability in the design of communications and awareness campaigns.
- There is a need to increase public awareness campaigns, including celebrating people with both visible and invisible disabilities.
- Council needs to lead by example.
- Fixing access issues demonstrates commitment and action to support inclusion.

## Focus Area: Liveable Communities

**“Access means inclusion, you’re already in a vulnerable state so it makes you feel miserable and even more down, when you don’t feel included.”**

Access is a fundamentally important aspect of community participation and inclusion and a key part of creating liveable communities. The majority of responses, suggestions and feedback related to access issues in the Shire. From the survey responses, beaches and footpaths were reported as being difficult to access by the most people, with a number of other issues such as vehicle parking, public toilets and adult change facilities, and public transport also presenting access difficulties for many respondents. Additional access difficulties, beyond those listed, included access to specialist doctors and affordable allied health and mental health services, affordable housing, and Auslan interpreting services.



Many respondents provided detailed locations and suggestions for parking, footpaths and beach access, and provided important insights into the lived experience of access difficulties. Many respondents reported feeling scared, distressed and excluded. In many cases, access equals inclusion:

### Key feedback theme: Footpaths and kerbs

**“As a person who supports people in wheelchairs I find many of the footpaths in the whole Byron Shire either very uneven and hard to navigate or at times very dangerous. Also many businesses have high frontages and are not accessible to a person in a wheelchair, especially as these businesses do not have accessibility ramps.”**

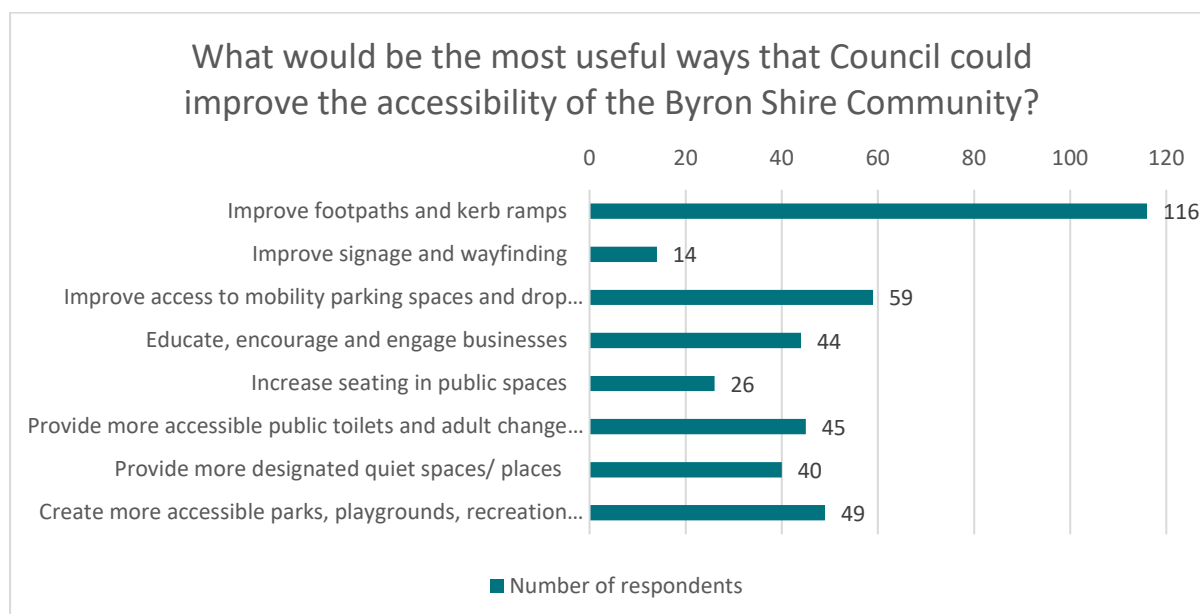
## Key feedback theme: Beach access

**“Our beaches are probably the most prominent aspect of our local way of life, and such a common place for community to gather/use for so many reasons, yet they're not accessible to people with mobility issues or people who use prams (which is a lot of people!!). For me, I couldn't participate in recreation/exercise/social events with friends. This has been very isolating at times and negatively impacted my mental health. It also contributes to negative impacts at the social level - decreasing opportunities for social connectivity and resilience, which are both so valuable.”**

## Key feedback theme: Vehicle parking

**“There are never enough accessible parks at the beach or in town. The one that terrifies me the most is Byron Street where Aldi is - there's one disabled car space on Aldi side and the space itself is not wide enough. We parked and got the wheelchair out and a big 4WD pulled in on the passenger side so there was no space on the passenger side to get out – I just sat in the car because I couldn't go in, I couldn't get out of the car!”**

When asked what Council could do to help, respondents were limited to three responses as a way of determining which actions would be most useful. The most popular response was by far the need to improve footpaths and kerb ramps, which reflects the number of safety concerns highlighted in the open text section. The second most popular response was to improve access to mobility parking and drop and ride locations, followed by the need for more accessible parks, playgrounds and recreation facilities:



## Additional suggestions

In addition to a number of detailed locations of concern that will help inform works planning for footpath, kerb and vehicle parking, the suggestions for Council action included the following:

- Consider employing a person with disability to test accessibility in the shire, or have Council staff go for a walk with a vision-impaired person and witness the obstacles that are encountered.
- Improve accessibility of public transport and ensure bus stops have shelter and seating.
- Ensure year-round access to local pools through heating and accessibility infrastructure.
- Improve safety for vulnerable, low energy and less mobile people by ensuring dog leash rules are followed.
- Fund businesses to improve ramps and handrails or a Council campaign for retrofitting access to existing premises, in particular medical practices and banking services.
- Increase help for deaf community with signing for community events and undertake Safe Listening campaign as part of event approval process.
- Consider the practical applications of mobility parking, in particular for rear-loading vehicles. Parking nose-in to a space, which has ample room on the sides of the vehicle, does not stop it from being dangerous opening the ramp of the van out the back, often onto the road. This can disrupt traffic, but also endangers staff and clients when they come down the ramp, and even further onto the road to get off the ramp.
- Free accessible shuttle bus service on a fixed route around Byron Shire's key spots/villages. A small community mini-bus for those with access issues would be more useful than a large bus that goes irregularly.
- Ensure public events are accessible, including suggestions such as a wrist band system that would allow priority access to buses, mandatory hearing loops, and additional seating for resting. For example, at public events there aren't enough seats to sit and get your breath or rest (because of conditions like anxiety or chronic fatigue) so providing safe spaces like well-being tents where people could go to feel safe and to perhaps lie down or chill out would be very helpful at events.
- Increase seating in public areas, including adequate shelter/weather protection.
- Create accessible ocean viewing areas/platforms.
- Reduce traffic speed and introduce traffic calming measures to allow safe road crossings.
- Increase accessible activities and programs for teenagers.
- Commit to making Byron Bay (and other shire towns) Dementia Friendly Communities.
- Increase accessibility of Community Gardens

## Key findings

- Footpaths and appropriate kerb ramps are a priority area in need of improvement across the Shire. Ensuring safe continuous connections between paths is essential.
- Beach accessibility needs to be improved for a range of mobility needs.
- There is a need for increased accessible parking with appropriate and safe loading space, and drop and ride locations.
- Accessible public transport and adequately sheltered bus stops are needed.



- The business community needs to be engaged to improve access, in particular medical practices and banking services.
- A range of visible and invisible disabilities need to be considered during public events, including physical access, low energy, hearing- and vision-related considerations.

## Focus Area: Meaningful Employment

Employment and economic security for most people are closely related. Employment contributes to feelings of self-worth, social interaction and mental health, and increases opportunities to support individual choice and control. Employment rates for people with disability are significantly lower than those without disability across all sectors. People with disability experience multiple barriers at all stages of the employment process, ranging from inaccessible interview venues, lack of reasonable adjustments to the work environment, poor career planning opportunities, rigid role descriptions and online testing that may place applicants at a disadvantage. These factors reduce their opportunities to gain and retain employment. Whilst there were some encouraging examples of employment opportunities and flexible workplaces, such as feedback from the survey indicated that young people have a particularly difficult time accessing meaningful employment in the Byron Shire.

### Key feedback theme: Insufficient employment opportunities for young people with disability

**“I am answering for my 24-year-old autistic son. Employment in the community is unattainable. The employment agencies have extreme difficulty in finding any suitable employment, and my son is unable to search or approach opportunities without support. We need to improve local business acceptance and understanding of disability.”**

### Key feedback theme: Encourage local businesses

**“Encourage and educate businesses and the Byron Council to hire and include local people with different abilities - mental health issues, autism, etc. Reward those businesses with special recognition. People with special abilities need to be visible and recognized for contributions that they can make to the community.”**

### Key feedback theme: Flexible work arrangements

**I'm very fortunate, my employer lets me have flexible work patterns, because I have good days and bad days.”**

### Additional suggestions

- Consider human resource policies that allow carers and/or people with disability to have access to additional leave requirements as the need for leave makes it difficult to maintain a job, for example currently a single person with no caring commitments receives the same amount of leave as a person with a disability who is also a carer for someone with a disability.
- Consider a mandatory percentage of people with disability employed in all areas of Council business via positive discrimination EEO.
- Offer training to increase opportunities.

- Have an accessibility award for efforts businesses make toward increasing employment of people with all different abilities.
- When considering job applicants, many businesses are unable to think outside the box in how to tap into the unique abilities of someone who is not neurotypical. Businesses and Council do not have a hiring process that is accessible for individuals with mental health issues or autism. Over 70% of autistic people are NOT employed. The very first obstacle is the hiring process. Employers need to be educated.

### Key findings

- Local businesses need to be encouraged to increase employment opportunities for people with disability, including accessible recruitment processes for both visible and invisible disability.
- Increased training around both visible and invisible disability in the workplace is needed.
- Local businesses need to be supported with training and awareness-raising activities.

## Focus Area: Systems and Processes

A common issue for people with disability is the difficulty in navigating systems and processes to access the services and supports they need in the community.

### Key feedback theme: Diverse representation across Council operations and projects

**“Council should have identified roles and PAID community roundtables of people with lived experience of disability (of several types, not just one) to be making these decisions and advising.”**

### Key feedback theme: Improved communication of accessibility

**“When advertising an event, eg markets, discuss if the terrain is concreted or grassed, sloped or flat, it would help bring confidence to decide if an event is accessible to attend.”**

### Key feedback theme: Diverse methods of communication

**“I have chronic osteoarthritis which makes using computers difficult. Everything with Council is more and more web-based which makes it more and more difficult for me to access things.”**

## Additional suggestions

- The parking system payment online is very complicated. It should be simplified for people who are older in our community.
- Improved building signage that details accessible attributes - plus ability to search this information on the Council website.
- Consideration needs to be given to people with disabilities during peak holiday periods re parking, and designated quiet times in local supermarkets for the elderly and vulnerable.
- More community connection/ accessibility online. Recent Zoom Meetings or Facebook Lives for Council candidates have shown how easy it is to connect community members who may not be able to easily access/attend public meetings/ events etc.
- Include people with a disability in the greet and meet roles, give them pride of place.
- Acknowledge that disability is not always visible - improve front of house staff communication skills for invisible disability (including hearing-related disability and deaf awareness) so that they can effectively help community members with Council services.

- All Council meetings could be held with live captioning and/or Auslan signing.
- Improved search function on Council website to make it easier to locate relevant information.

## Key findings

- Continued improvement of accessibility of Council meetings, such as live captioning or Auslan signing.
- Diversity of representation on the ACWG and across other consultation processes such as Place Planning Collectives.
- Introduce sitting fees/compensation for lived experience advisory groups.
- Ensure a diversity of communication strategies.
- Improve staff understanding of invisible disability and how to assist community in navigating Council processes.
- Continue to improve accessibility of online information and systems, including effective search function.



**BYRON**  
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