

DISABILITY INCLUSION ACTION PLAN

2026-2030

sutherlandshire.nsw.gov.au



This is Me - Holly Connor

SUTHERLANDSHIRE



Acknowledgment of Country

Sutherland Shire Council acknowledges the Dharawal people as the Traditional Custodians of the land within Sutherland Shire.

We value and celebrate Dharawal culture and language, and acknowledge Dharawal people's continuing connection to the land, the sea and community.

We pay respect to the Elders and their families, past, present and emerging, and through them, to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Image: *Waterway connections: a mangrove migration*, by Merindah Funnell

Acknowledgment of Lived Experience

Sutherland Shire Council acknowledges the lived experience of people with disability and mental health conditions, their families and carers, and their unique, diverse and valued experiences within the Sutherland Shire.

The 2026-2030 Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) was created in partnership with people with lived experience, who shared their contributions and insights throughout the process. We look forward to working together to bring this plan to life.



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Artwork shown here and on the cover of this Plan: *This is Me* by Holly Connor, 2024 Youth Award Winner, ShireABILITY Art Award 2024.

‘I love art and sport and I love that I can do it all and be included’.



Jack Boyd, Mayor of Sutherland Shire
with Holly Connor

Council's Commitment Statement

At Sutherland Shire Council, we are committed to building a community where everyone belongs and has the opportunity to participate fully in community life. Around five per cent of our residents live with disability, encompassing physical, intellectual and sensory disability, chronic illness and mental health conditions. Many others play a vital role as carers, whose contribution is essential to the wellbeing of individuals, families and our wider community. Supporting people with disability and those who care for them is a responsibility we take seriously.

This Disability Inclusion Action Plan reflects our ongoing commitment to equity and inclusion, ensuring our services, places, workplaces and decision-making processes are accessible, respectful and responsive to the needs of all members of our community.

This Plan builds on the strong foundations established through our previous two Disability Inclusion Action Plans. We are proud of the progress made to date and are focused on continuing to adapt and improve as we respond to the changing needs and aspirations of our community.

The actions outlined in this Plan are guided by four key focus areas: promoting positive attitudes and behaviours, creating liveable and safer communities, supporting access to meaningful employment and independence, and improving access to mainstream services through better systems and processes. Together, these focus areas provide a clear framework for advancing disability inclusion across all aspects of Council's work.

Looking ahead, there are many exciting initiatives underway. We are strengthening how we engage with people with disability to ensure their lived experience and voices guide our decisions. We are enhancing the way we design and deliver public spaces, with a strong focus on pedestrian access, safety and usability for all. We are also exploring how our services can be better tailored to be more welcoming and supportive of people with invisible disabilities.

As an organisation, we are committed to leading by example. This includes expanding employment and volunteering opportunities for people living with disability, so our workforce better reflects the diversity of the community we serve. By creating inclusive workplaces and pathways, we can harness a wider range of skills, perspectives and experiences.

We look forward to working alongside our community, staff and partners as we deliver this Plan and continue to build a Sutherland Shire where everyone is valued, included and empowered.

Sutherland Shire Council

Introduction

Sutherland Shire is a thriving community of over 235,000 people, shaped by natural beauty, vibrant neighbourhoods, and a shared commitment to inclusion. We believe true inclusion means more than accessibility, it means ensuring every person feels respected, listened to, and able to take part in community life.

Our Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) 2026-2030 builds on what we've achieved so far from earlier DIAPs and sets out our plans to make Sutherland Shire more inclusive for people with disability, their families, and carers. The DIAP focuses on four key areas: positive attitudes, liveable communities, meaningful employment, and accessible systems.

People use different words to describe disability. We say 'person with disability' because disability is just one part of who someone is.

Our vision

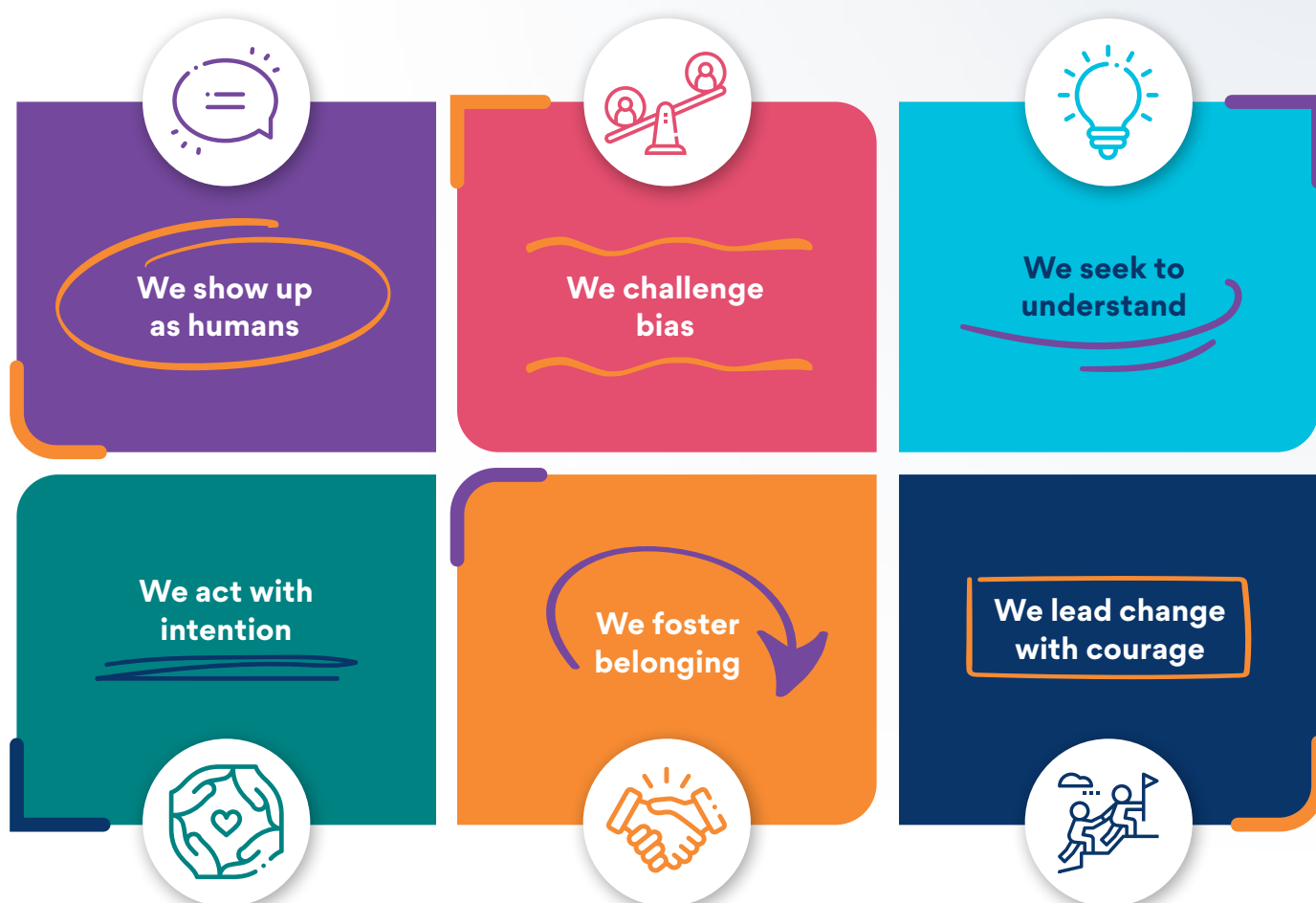
We advocate for the rights of people with disability, working alongside them and their support networks to ensure their needs and perspectives shape our plans and actions, building a more inclusive Sutherland Shire.



Young person enjoying an activity at ShireABILITY Skills4Me 2022.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion framework

The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Framework is Council's commitment to embedding inclusion across organisational culture, service delivery and community outcomes. It provides a shared set of principles and expected behaviours that help us recognise and reduce barriers to participation, challenge bias in decisions and practices, and design services, information and environments that are accessible and welcoming. This Framework has been used to develop the actions within the DIAP.



Community profile

Sutherland Shire



population
235,029

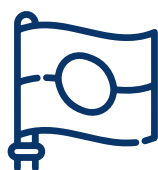
population over 60
57,189

↑↑ **+15%**
by 2036



youth (15-24)
26,974

↑↑ **+11%**
by 2036



Aboriginal
or Torres
Strait
Islander
1.2%

average
median age
41



linguistically
diverse
14%



overseas born
19%



10,369
require day-to-day
help due to disability

229 first nations people reported
they needed assistance for a disability



16,373
have a mental
health condition

375 identified as First Nations people

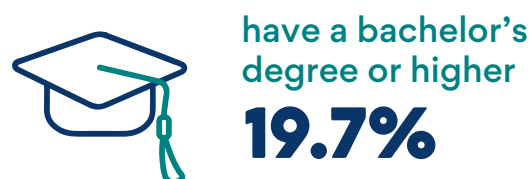
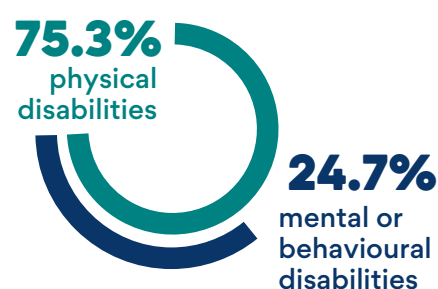
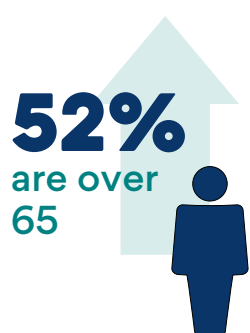
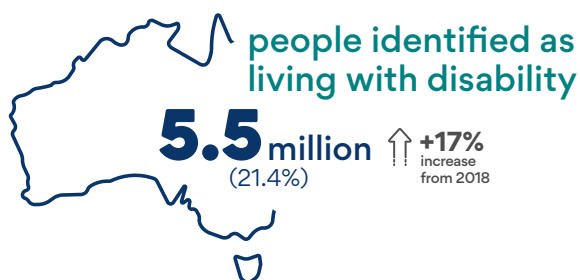


5%
living with
disability



22,896
of people aged 15 and over
provided unpaid care to
someone with a disability,
health condition or old age

National Disability demographic characteristics



Infographic: Demographic information about Disability in Australia, Source: ABS Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia 2022

Policy and legislative context



International

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)



Australian Government

Australian Government

- Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 (ADS)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA)
- National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)



New South Wales Government

- Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (DIA)
Supports the role of government and community in helping people with disability access their rights and requires councils to create a Disability Inclusion Action Plan.
- Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (ADA)
Makes it illegal to treat people unfairly based on things like disability, in jobs, schools, services, housing, and community activities.
- Disability Inclusion Plan 2026-2029 (DIP)
Plan to help make communities in NSW more inclusive and accessible, carried out by councils through their DIAPs.



Sutherland Shire Council

- Community Plan — Towards 2035
- Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2026-2030
- Delivery Program
- Operational Plan

Strategic context

Council's plans and strategies aim to create a connected and safe community in the Sutherland Shire, respecting people and nature.

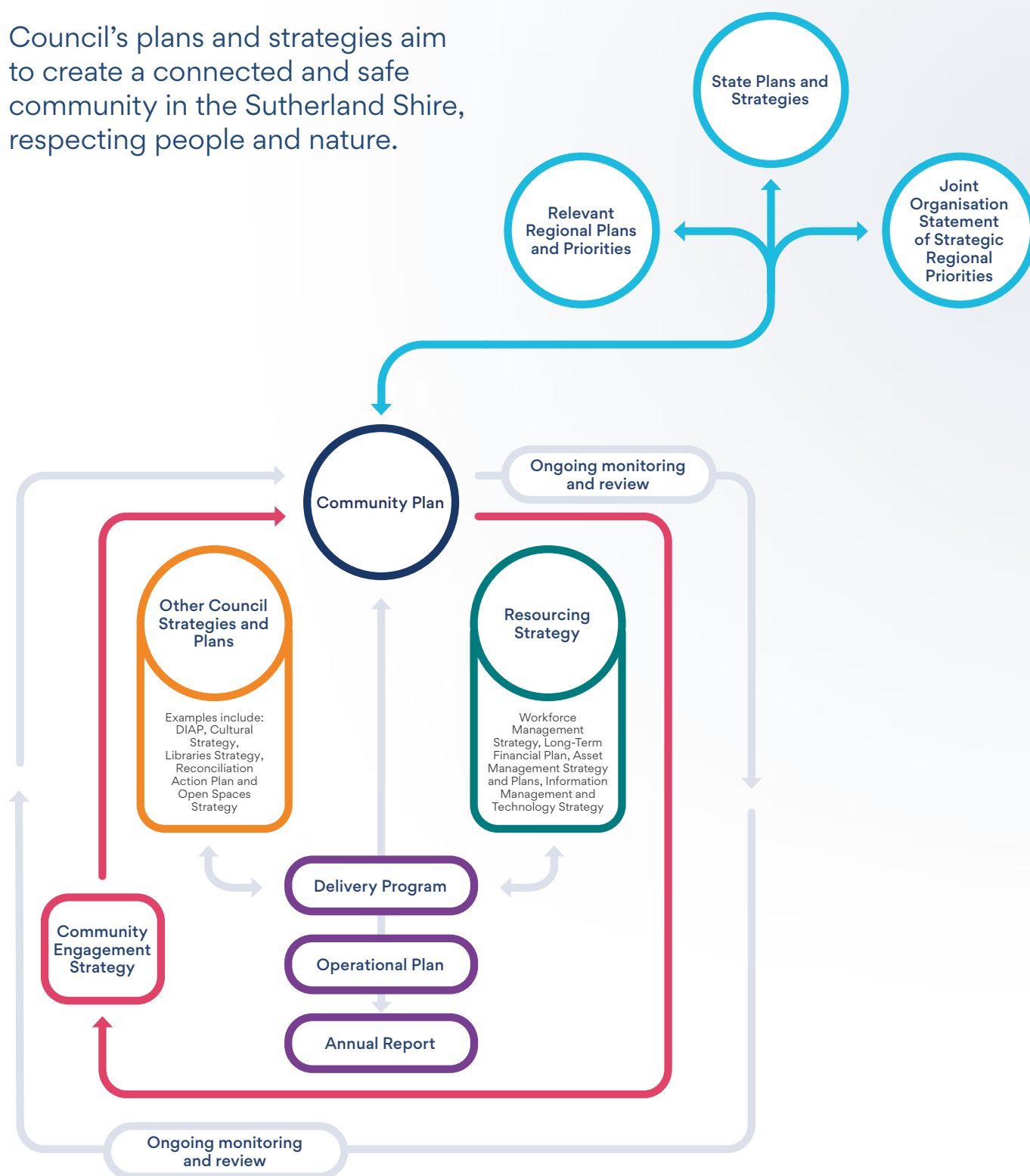


Figure 2: Visual flow chart showing the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework.

We work within the Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) framework, which is mandatory for all NSW local Councils. This framework connects the long-term Community Plan, our vision for the whole Sutherland Shire, with other Council strategies and plans, and short-term plans such as the Delivery Program, Operational Plan, and a suite of supporting documents. These plans transform the community's priorities and aspirations into defined strategies and actions, ensuring Council delivers on what matters most to the community.

The Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) sits within the 'Other Council Strategies and Plans' section of this framework. It works alongside strategies such as the Cultural Strategy, Reconciliation Action Plan and Open Space Strategy to embed inclusion across all areas of Council's work. It is linked to Council's theme of 'Prosperous and Connected' within the Community Plan. The DIAP provides practical actions to remove barriers and improve access for people with disability.

Strategic Documents Framework



Community Plan

A 10 year plan that identifies our community's priorities and vision for the future.



Supporting Documents

A level of interconnected documents that provide further detail about how we are going to achieve positive outcomes for the community.



Delivery Program

Sets out the key activities and projects that will be delivered to the community during the Council term.



Operational Plan

Provides more detail of the Delivery Program including projects, activities and budgets.



Community voices

Meet Daniel Manzini

Council employee and person with lived experience

Daniel Manzini works in Council's Parks and Natural Areas team and shares his unique perspective through lived experience of ADHD, anxiety, and depression. He has experience as a carer for family members who live with cerebral palsy and learning difficulties.

Daniel describes how the environment for speaking up about disabilities has changed. 'More people are talking about it... it's the best time to be more vocal.' Since joining Council in November 2023, Daniel has found a welcoming environment:

'I was able to share my experience [of living with disability] ... It was met with a welcoming attitude, and everyone is very inclusive... no one treats you different. I have access to managers who provide support and check-in with me regularly and I am able to also be transparent when needing time off to provide care for my partner.'



What we've achieved so far

We have achieved 85% of all actions within the 2022-2026 DIAP. Highlights include:

- Improving access to mainstream service through better systems and processes
- Developing positive community attitudes and upholding the rights of people with disability
- Creating liveable and safer communities
- Supporting access to meaningful employment and independence



Established the Access and Inclusion Reference Group consisting of people with lived experience, carers and service providers.



Opened The Pavilion Performing Arts Centre with enhanced accessibility.

Completed first accessibility audit of Council's website.

2022

Celebrated international Day of People with Disability by creating the ShireABILITY Art Competition.

Expansion of St George and Sutherland Shire Disability Interagency consisting of Bayside, Georges River and Sutherland Shire Councils, and service providers.

2023

Created draft town centre designs for Miranda, Sutherland/ Kirrawee with access and inclusion considerations.

2024



Opened Cooper Street Reserve all-abilities playground.

Hosted ShireABILITY events including the ShireABILITY Art Competition.

Provided new information sharing opportunities to increase awareness, such as the ShireABILITY newsletter reaching 105 subscribers.

2025

Opened Waratah Park all-abilities playground.



Completed accessibility audits on Council facilities.

Opened Kirrawee Library+, a fully accessible state-of-the-art library with inclusive quiet spaces.



Supported neurodiverse high school students to participate in Council's Youth Advisory Group and in the Kids in Council work experience program.

Over 4 years

Provided grants to disability services totalling \$435K.

Provided volunteer work experience opportunities through our libraries, admin teams and Bushcare.

Provided financial support to disability social enterprise to the value of \$190K.





Community voices



Meet Tracey Corbin-Matchett OAM

CEO of Bus Stop Films and person with lived experience

'As film producer working with people with disability and a local resident who is active in the Deaf community, I have engaged with Council through a number of channels, in filming at various locations across Sutherland Shire, sharing the inclusively made films of Bus Stop Films as part of the

ShireABILITY Film Festival as well as being a member of the Council's Access and Inclusion Reference Group. I'm proud to see Council supporting the local community through inclusion and creativity. My vision is for Sutherland Shire to offer residents an inclusive community to live, work and relax in.'

How we created the DIAP

We created this Plan in consultation with the community, reference groups, and peak bodies.

Review and reflection

We started by reviewing the 2022-2026 DIAP. We shared the findings with the Access and Inclusion Reference Group and the Internal Working Party. Their feedback helped shape the direction of this plan.

Community consultation

From August to December 2025, we consulted our community. We used easy-to-access formats like focus groups and online surveys. We promoted this through our website, social media, local venues, and community networks so we could reach as many people as possible.

Access and Inclusion Survey 2025

We ran six surveys in formats that were easy to use, including mobile-friendly, easy read, screen reader-compatible, and printed versions. We received 145 responses from:

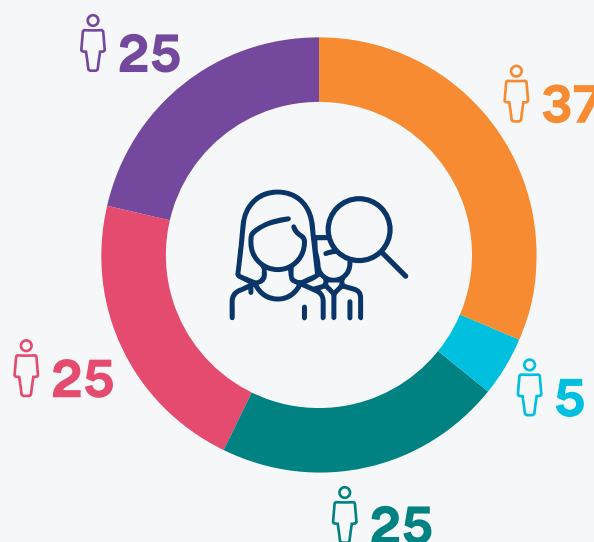
- **People with lived experience** of disability (28 responses).
- **Parents and carers** of individuals with disability (59 responses).
- **Service providers** in the disability and mental health sectors (16 responses).
- **Supporters**, including family members, friends, carers, and other informal supports (18 responses).
- **Council staff** through a tailored survey (24 responses).



In-person focus groups and workshops

We held several forums to hear from service providers and community members. A total of 117 people took part:

- **People with lived experience** (37 participants)
 - Phoenix Community Project Workshop
 - Sylvanvale Client Consultative Committee Forum
- **Parents and carers** (5 participants)
 - St George and Sutherland Community College Forum
- **Service providers** (25 participants)
 - Georges River, Bayside and Sutherland Disability Interagency Forum
- **Community members** (25 participants)
 - Sutherland Farmers Market Intercept Interviews
- **Council staff** (25 participants)
 - Council staff workshops



Targeted focus groups

Hearing from a wide range of voices is important because it helps us understand different needs and challenges. To make sure we included people with different experiences we held intersectionality focus groups where we heard from:

- People with disability who identify as **LGBTQIA+**
- People with disability who identify as **culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)**
- People with **mental health conditions**
- First Nations people

Working with key stakeholders

We worked with key stakeholders while developing the plan:

- **Access and Inclusion Reference Group:** this group includes people with lived experience, carers, service providers, and councillors. They guided the development of the DIAP.
- **Internal working party:** this group includes senior managers and staff with disabilities.
- **Peak bodies** including:
 - The Physical Disability Council of NSW, provided internal training and ongoing consultation throughout the development of the plan.
 - People with Disabilities Australia, led targeted consultations to make sure we included different perspectives.



Community voices

Meet Kym Gleeson

Advocate, service provider, parent and carer of a person with a disability



‘My experience with Sutherland Shire Council has been shaped by both my professional work in the disability sector and my lived experience as a mother of a child with complex needs. I’ve seen the Council take meaningful steps toward inclusion—particularly through initiatives like various *ShireABILITY* events, where my contributions have been valued and disability representation has been genuinely supported.

At the same time, as a resident navigating daily life with my daughter, I’ve experienced gaps where access and understanding could be stronger. Overall, my interactions have been a balance of positive partnership and clear opportunities for the Council to deepen its commitment to accessibility and inclusion across the community.

My vision is for a community “where accessibility is woven into every decision, service, and space—so people with disability and their families feel genuinely included, supported, and represented”.

I want to see universally accessible public places, better communication access (including for Deaf and neurodivergent residents), stronger disability confidence among local businesses, and genuine co-design with people who live with disability. Ultimately, I imagine a community where children like my daughter grow up feeling they belong, and where inclusion isn’t an aspiration but a lived reality for everyone.’

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN



Artists showcasing their work at the ShireABILITY Art Exhibition 2024.



Focus Area 1

Developing positive community attitudes and upholding the rights of people with disability

What you told us:

Inclusion is about how people are treated, understood, and represented. Many of you shared that stigma, especially around hidden disabilities often lead to exclusion, and that respectful engagement and empathy are essential.

‘We need to educate the greater community on what supporting people with disabilities looks like... every community member has a responsibility to support our most vulnerable citizens.’

— Parent of a person with disability

What you’ve asked us to do:

- Deliver disability awareness training for Council staff and contractors.
- Create education initiatives to build empathy and understanding in young people.
- Increase visibility and representation of LGBTQIA+ people with disability.
- Create peer support networks for parents and carers.
- Ensure respectful and inclusive engagement across all Council activities.
- Include people with disability in Council decision-making processes.

Focus Area 1 — Developing positive community attitudes and upholding the rights of people with disability

Goal	Actions	Measures/Expected outcomes	Collaboration	Funded	26/27	27/28	28/29	29/30	Ongoing
1.1 Hidden disabilities, including psychosocial disabilities and mental health conditions, are understood and recognised across the organisation/ community.	Deliver initiatives that raise awareness of hidden disability and ensure consistent recognition and response across Council facilities, services and partner locations.	Lived experience is incorporated into partnership activities, awareness initiatives and training.	Lead: Community Impact and Innovation	Funded					●
1.2 Early education initiatives successfully build and reinforce inclusive attitudes.	Partner with early education centres, schools and family services to promote disability-inclusive education and resources.	Partnerships established with early education centres and schools to support inclusive practice.	Lead: Community Impact and Innovation Collaboration: Department of Education via Local Schools, Local Service Providers and Early Education Centres	Funded	●	●	●	●	
1.3 Accessibility and inclusion are embedded as core drivers of local economic growth.	Integrate clear accessibility and inclusion commitments in the development of the Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030 and other business support initiatives.	Accessibility and inclusion commitments embedded in the final Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030.	Lead: Community Impact and Innovation Collaboration: Local Business Industry Groups	Funded	●	●	●	●	
1.4 Strong partnerships with schools, services and government support inclusive practices across the community.	Expand and strengthen partnerships with education institutions, mainstream services and NDIS providers through regular collaboration and shared initiatives.	Education and awareness initiatives are delivered with education institutions, mainstream services and NDIS providers.	Lead: Community Impact and Innovation Collaboration: Department of Education via Local Schools, Local Service Providers and Early Education Centres	Funded		●	●		
1.5 Cultural safety and intersectional inclusion are embedded across Council policies, services and community initiatives.	Apply the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Framework and embed clear inclusion statements across policies, services and initiatives to create culturally safe and welcoming environments, particularly for women, CALD communities and the LGBTQIA+ community.	The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Framework is implemented and reflected across Council policies, services and initiatives, which demonstrate culturally safe and intersectionally inclusive practices.	Lead: Community Impact and Innovation	Funded					●



Focus Area 2

Creating liveable and safer communities

What you told us:

There are some great inclusive features in the Sutherland Shire such as beach wheelchairs and accessible playgrounds, however, physical and sensory barriers still limit access. Your feedback showed a strong desire for universal design and consistent access across public spaces.

‘Despite some noticeable repairs to some long standing footpath hazards, there are still many kerb ramps that are very challenging, especially for a wheelchair user’

— Person with lived experience

What you would like us to do:

- Repair and upgrade footpaths, ramps, toilets, and lifts.
- Improve accessible parking and enforce proper usage.
- Install adult change facilities and accessible public bathrooms.
- Create sensory-friendly spaces and quiet zones.
- Embed universal design principles in all planning and infrastructure projects.

Focus Area 2 — Creating liveable and safer communities

Goal	Actions	Measures/Expected outcomes	Collaboration	Funded	26/27	27/28	28/29	29/30	Ongoing
2.1 Improve the accessibility of public infrastructure.	Enhance accessibility by upgrading public infrastructure—such as expanding tactile bus stops, increasing accessible amenities, increasing adult-appropriate play equipment, improving pedestrian navigation, and enhancing accessible parking across priority locations.	Accessibility upgrades are delivered across bus stops, playgrounds, pedestrian spaces, parking and public toilets.	Lead: Asset Strategy and Delivery	Funded					●
2.2 People can easily navigate and experience public spaces.	Develop and implement clear and consistent Signage and Wayfinding Guidelines that embed universal design principles and are co-designed with experts and people with lived experience to enhance the accessibility and visitor experience of public places.	Branding, signage and wayfinding elements aligned with universal design principles are developed and implemented for new and upgraded Council facilities.	Leads: Customer and Engagement, Asset Strategy and Delivery Collaboration: Community Impact and Innovation	Funded			●	●	
2.3 People can access and use public environments equitably through universal design.	Collaborate with the Access and Inclusion Reference Group to ensure Place Plans reflect inclusive, accessible design and respond to the needs of people with disability.	Place Plans demonstrate improved pedestrian safety and accessibility for people with disability, informed by consultation with the Access and Inclusion Reference Group.	Lead: Urban Futures Collaboration: Asset Strategy and Delivery	Funded	●	●	●	●	
2.4 Council facilities, services and events consider sensory accessibility so people can comfortably participate.	Embed sensory-friendly design, adjustments and communication across Council buildings, services and events, including approaches such as quiet times and sensory-friendly spaces.	Council buildings, services and events demonstrate improved sensory accessibility and trial quiet times across our venues and facilities.	Lead: Community Impact and Innovation Collaboration: Arts and Culture, Sports and Leisure	Funded		●			●
2.5 People of all abilities feel connected and socially safe within sport and recreation environments.	Identify and progress opportunities within sport and recreation environments to increase connection and social safety.	Sport and recreation environments become more inclusive and accessible for people with disability, informed by consultation with Sport and Active Communities Reference Group.	Lead: Community Impact and Innovation Collaboration: Sports and Leisure, Sporting Associations	Funded		●	●	●	
2.6 People can access timely, inclusive and effective mental health support in the community.	Strengthen partnerships with NSW Health and community organisations to improve mental health service awareness, with a focus on promoting the Helpa Head Hub.	Community awareness of local mental health supports increases through inclusive and accessible communication.	Lead: Community Impact and Innovation Collaboration: NSW Health	Funded	●	●			



Focus Area 3

Supporting access to meaningful employment and independence

What you told us:

Meaningful employment is a key component of inclusion and independence. Many of you shared that while some opportunities exist, people with disability still face barriers to finding and keeping jobs.

‘Council should lead the employment of people with disability, setting the example for other employers. Council should set targets for the employment of people with disabilities—celebrate their achievement and report back to the community in Annual Reports’.

— Supporter of a person with a disability

What you’ve asked us to do:

- Set disability employment targets.
- Establish inclusive employment programs within Council and local businesses.
- Advocate for transition support programs for young adults.
- Increase visibility of people with disability in public-facing roles.
- Recognise and support unpaid carers through dedicated networks.

Focus Area 3 — Supporting access to meaningful employment and independence

Goal	Actions	Measures/Expected outcomes	Collaboration	Funded	26/27	27/28	28/29	29/30	Ongoing
3.1 Council is a leader in workforce diversity, reflecting the community we serve.	Develop and implement employee insights through structured reference groups to strengthen commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.	Employee insights from reference groups contribute to a more inclusive and supportive workplace.	Lead: People and Culture Collaboration: Community Impact and Innovation	Funded	●				
	Review our recruitment and employment practices to identify opportunities to strengthen diversity, equity and inclusion.	Recruitment and employment practices are reviewed with an implementation plan to improve reflection of diversity, equity and inclusion principles.	Lead: People and Culture Collaboration: Community Impact and Innovation	Funded		●			
	Improve workforce data collection and reporting to deliver reliable workforce demographic insights that support informed decisions.	Workforce demographic insights support more informed and inclusive decision-making.	Lead: People and Culture Collaboration: Community Impact and Innovation	Funded				●	
3.2 People benefit from strengthened employment supports through NSW and Federal system improvements.	Advocate to NSW and Federal and sector bodies where systemic barriers affect local employment outcomes for people with disability.	Participation in forums and partnerships help employment supports better reflect local needs and lived-experience insight.	Lead: Community Impact and Innovation	Funded		●	●	●	



Focus Area 4

Improving access to mainstream services through better systems and processes

What you told us:

Access to information and services needs to be simpler, clearer, and more inclusive. You expressed strong support for more regular consultation and communication, and a desire to work with Council to improve systems that support inclusion.

‘Asking the end user what is important to them. Then taking that on board to make positive changes so that people in this community... meld into the community ... because they are able to experience it just like their peers.’

— Person with lived experience

What you’ve asked us to do:

- Create a multi-format accessible information hub.
- Improve communication using easy read, multilingual, and non-digital formats.
- Enrich Emergency Management Procedures to be focused on disability inclusion.
- Regular consultation mechanisms with people with lived experience.
- Develop a comprehensive anti-discrimination framework.

Focus Area 4 — Improving access to mainstream services through better systems and processes

Goal	Actions	Measures/Expected outcomes	Collaboration	Funded	26/27	27/28	28/29	29/30	Ongoing
4.1 People can easily find and use Council information across a range of formats and channels.	Improve access to information through multichannel communication strategies and increased accessible resources.	Information becomes easier to access through formats such as easy-read documents, captioned content and hard-copy options.	Lead: Customer and Engagement Collaboration: Community Impact and Innovation	Funded	●	●			
	Deliver transparent, user-friendly information on accessible facilities and improvements to support people with disability and their carers.	Regular updates on accessibility initiatives are shared through channels such as the ShireABILITY Newsletter, the Council website and through targeted communication campaigns.	Lead: Community Impact and Innovation Collaboration: Customer and Engagement	Funded					●
4.2 Strengthen accessible emergency communication and planning.	Conduct a gap analysis of local emergency management to identify improvements for people with disability.	Gap analysis is completed and findings are reviewed in consultation with the Access and Inclusion Reference group.	Lead: Community Impact and Innovation Collaboration: Local Emergency Management Group	Unfunded			●	●	
4.3 Tools and systems make Council services and information accessible to everyone.	Review the accessibility status of our core customer facing systems and identify actions to improve compliance with accessibility standards.	Create roadmap for more accessible customer portals. Complete accessibility audits and create plans to address identified gaps.	Lead: Information Management and Technology Collaboration: Customer and Engagement	Funded	●	●			

Monitoring, reviewing and reporting

How we will track progress

We will give quarterly updates to the Access and Inclusion Committee and the Internal DIAP Working Party. These groups include senior staff, councillors, service providers, and people with lived experience. They will check progress, guide implementation, and give feedback to keep the plan inclusive and effective.

Reporting and reviews

- 1 We will submit an annual report to the NSW Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services.
- 2 We will prepare an annual DIAP report for Council.
- 3 We will publish an annual progress report on Council's website.
- 4 We will do a full review of the DIAP in 2029-2030 to see how well it worked and to help create the next plan.



Kurranulla Aboriginal Corporation staff members at ShireABILITY Family Fun Day 2022.

Appendix A — Community Consultation Report

Informed by consultation with:

- CommunitiesThrive®
- People with Disabilities Australia
- Physical Disability Council of NSW
- Sutherland Shire Council – Access and Inclusion Reference Group

1. Introduction

This report presents the outcomes of comprehensive community engagement conducted between August and December 2025 to inform the development of Sutherland Shire Council's Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) for 2026-2030. This consultation builds on our current plan and captures community perspectives to guide our continued journey toward greater inclusion and accessibility.

Consultation approach: To ensure methodological rigour, specialist expertise, and third-party objectivity in the consultation process, Council engaged the services of external community engagement consultants. This approach provided enhanced capacity to reach diverse community members, specialist skills in accessible engagement methodologies, and independent facilitation to encourage open and honest community feedback. The consultants worked closely with Council staff throughout the engagement process to ensure alignment with Council's strategic objectives while maintaining the neutrality necessary for authentic community consultation.

Our approach: Community consultation was designed to capture authentic voices from people with lived experience of disability, their families and supporters, service providers, Council staff, and the broader community. Multiple accessible formats ensured broad participation across different disability types, ages, and cultural backgrounds.

Our community: Sutherland Shire Council serves a vibrant population of over 230,000 residents, including approximately 10,000 people with disability (4.5% of the population, based on 2021 Census data for people who reported needing assistance with core activities of self-care, mobility, or communication).

How we listened: The engagement process involved over 275 participants through diverse and accessible methods, including:

- six accessible surveys (including Easy Read versions)
- community workshops and local conversations
- structured forums with Phoenix Community Project, St George and Sutherland Community College, Sylvanvale Client Consultative Committee and Sutherland Shire Council's Access and Inclusion Reference group
- internal Council team engagement sessions

- targeted focus groups for those with intersectional identities
- dedicated 90 minute workshop with the Access and Inclusion Reference group
- ongoing consultation with the Physical Disability Council of NSW.

2. Review of previous DIAP

What's working well

Community engagement:

- successfully engaged over 200 people with lived experience through multiple accessible methods
- six specialised focus groups, including dedicated sessions for people with intellectual disability/autism and multicultural communities
- innovative online engagement approaches developed during COVID-19 restrictions
- transparent reporting through separate Community Engagement Report.

Clear action framework:

- 58 specific actions across four focus areas
- clear outcomes, responsibilities, and timeframes established
- strong alignment with Council's Community Strategic Plan 2022-2032
- transparent communication about funded and unfunded initiatives.

Established partnerships:

- Access and Inclusion Reference Group providing valuable community guidance
- DIAP Working Party supporting implementation
- ShireABILITY reference group bringing community insights
- regular monitoring and annual reporting frameworks in place.

3. Community engagement

How we engaged

Council reached 276 participants through various surveys and forums.

Six accessible surveys:

- Internal Council Survey (24 participants)
- Lived Experience Survey (21 participants)
- Lived Experience Easy Read Survey (7 participants)

- Parents and Families Survey (59 participants)
- Services and Providers Survey (16 participants)
- Supporters and Carers Survey (18 participants).

Community workshop and forums:

- Phoenix Community Project Workshop (25 young people)
- Sutherland Shire Farmers' Market conversations (25 community members)
- St George and Sutherland Community College Forum (5 participants)
- Sylvanvale Client Consultative Committee Forum (12 participants)
- Council staff workshops (25 staff members)
- Georges River, Bayside and Sutherland Disability Interagency Forum (25 participants)
- Access and Inclusion Reference Group Forum (7 participants)
- Intersectionality – Targeted Focus Groups (7 participants).

Accessibility First: All surveys were designed for maximum accessibility – optimised for mobile devices, compatible with screen readers, and supporting keyboard and mouse input. Easy Read versions were offered, hard copies were available at Council's Customer Contact Centre (4-20 Eton Street, Sutherland), and phone completion was available through Council staff.

Resources utilised:

Council engaged the Physical Disability Council of NSW to provide resources and ongoing feedback throughout the development of the DIAP. This included:

- executive access and inclusion training
- feedback throughout community consultation and development of the DIAP
- resources providing guidance on best practice content writing and implementation plans.

4. Focus Area 1: Positive attitudes and behaviours

Community attitudes and behaviours significantly influence how welcomed and included people with disability feel in our Shire. Participants shared both positive experiences and opportunities to build even stronger understanding and inclusion.

What we were told

Key insights:

- Greater visibility of people with disability in community life and employment would help build understanding and celebrate the diverse capabilities and aspirations people bring to our community.
- People with non-visible disabilities such as intellectual disability, mental health conditions, or who are neuro-diverse would benefit from increased community understanding.

- Evolving language and attitudes can help people feel more welcomed and connected; education starting in schools may support long-term positive change.
- Opportunities exist to further develop skills among staff, community members, and local businesses in respectful communication and creating genuinely welcoming environments.
- Enhanced community understanding of what accessibility means in practice would be valuable – clarifying standards and expectations.

‘I’d love to see shops in my local area have proper training on how to communicate with people with disabilities – just treating everyone equally and respectfully.’

What’s working well:

- Council programs successfully promoting inclusion
- strong community spirit and local identity in the Shire
- supportive local organisations building connections
- growing recognition of the value of neurodiversity.

5. Focus Area 2: Liveable communities

Community attitudes and behaviours significantly influence how welcomed and included people with disability feel in our Shire. Participants shared both positive experiences and opportunities to build even stronger understanding and inclusion.

2.1 Services, cultural and recreational opportunities

Community attitudes and behaviours significantly influence how welcomed and included people with disability feel in our Shire. Participants shared both positive experiences and opportunities to build even stronger understanding and inclusion.

People with disability seek opportunities to participate fully in community life, to join local clubs and sporting groups, work and socialise in their local area, and develop local friendships and networks just like everyone else.

What we were told

Key insights:

- Strong interest in opportunities to participate in mainstream activities that cater to different ages, interests, and needs.
- While the NDIS has increased choice for many, some people would benefit from additional assistance navigating the system.
- Information about local activities and participation opportunities would be easier to find with enhanced communication strategies.
- Digital skills training would help many people access online services and connect with others.

- Affordable and accessible housing options represent an ongoing opportunity in the Shire.
- Better communication about construction impacts and alternative accessible routes would enhance experiences for residents with disability.

‘I’d love more opportunities in my NDIS package to participate in activities I enjoy.’

What’s working well:

- accessible recreational facilities, including hydrotherapy at leisure centres
- supportive local organisations like Sylvanvale and Phoenix Community Project
- strong early childhood development outcomes in the Shire (13.9% vulnerability vs 21.8% NSW average).

2.2 Venues and open spaces

Accessible public spaces and venues are fundamental to community participation. We received valuable feedback highlighting both achievements and opportunities in this area.

What we were told

Key insights:

- Some shops, venues, and surf club facilities present opportunities for accessibility enhancements.
- People who are neuro-diverse benefit from calm spaces when in the community; additional supportive fixtures like hearing loops would enhance experiences.
- Streetscapes present opportunities for improvement: enhanced signage, clearer pathways around café seating, additional kerb ramps, and footpath condition improvements would enhance safety.
- Better communication about alternative accessible routes during construction would be helpful.
- Beach access is available at some locations; streamlining beach mat availability and expanding accessible ocean pool options would enhance coastal experiences.
- Coastal walks would be more enjoyable with accessibility enhancements.
- Expanding opportunities for accessible play, exercise, and socialisation would be welcomed.

‘It would be great to have somewhere calm I can go to de-stress when bright lights and noise become overwhelming, rather than having to leave and go home.’

What’s working well:

- beach access mats available at several locations
- inclusive playground upgrades in some locations
- new and upgraded accessible venues.

2.3 Getting around

Moving around the Shire with ease and confidence supports independence, health, and wellbeing. Current satisfaction with accessible parking and transport: 35%, providing a clear baseline for enhancement.

What we were told

Key insights:

- Expanding accessible parking at key destinations would be beneficial, particularly:
 - addressing height restrictions to accommodate larger mobility aids
 - ensuring sufficient space for wheelchair transfers
 - enhancing enforcement of accessible parking regulations
 - reviewing parking fee policies at beaches for people with disability.
- Improving direct public transport options to Sutherland Hospital would significantly benefit people with mobility considerations, particularly those who find long transfers challenging.
- More responsive timeframes for footpath improvements would enhance safety.
- Some bus stops would benefit from accessibility enhancements and improved lighting.
- Clearer communication about alternative accessible routes during construction would be helpful.
- Additional designated parking and drop-off zones would benefit community transport services.
- Enhanced journey planning information and wayfinding would support independence.

What's working well:

- accessible parking available at many locations
- accessible pathways in several areas
- train station upgrades improving accessibility.

6. Focus Area 3: Access to meaningful employment

Meaningful employment brings income, skills recognition, social connection, and feelings of self-worth. Access to employment opportunities near home also strengthens local community connections.

What we were told

Key insights:

- Strong interest in accessing meaningful employment opportunities; expanding pathways to secure employment would be welcomed.

- Some employers would benefit from information about the value of engaging people with disability and available support systems.
- Local employment opportunities would support building networks and strengthening community connections.
- Opportunities exist for Council to provide more employment and skill development pathways and encourage local businesses to do the same.
- Expanding work experience and School Leaver Employment Support (SLES) program opportunities would benefit young people.

‘I’d appreciate more support to find employment and connect with people.’

‘There’s an opportunity to better educate employers about the value of employing people with disability.’

‘Sometimes businesses want to be inclusive but need support to make it work effectively.’

What’s working well:

- successful skill development programs in place
- growing recognition of the value diverse employees bring to organisations
- employment support satisfaction among lived experience respondents: 64.3% (highest rated area, demonstrating strong foundation).

7. Focus Area 4: Improving systems and processes

Thoughtful planning and early consideration of diverse needs can significantly enhance how people engage with Council, find information, and successfully navigate systems. Technology supports this while recognising the value of multiple communication approaches.

What we were told

Key insights:

- Council website would benefit from accessibility enhancements for people with low vision; improving information findability would be valuable.
- Strong interest in meaningful engagement in decision-making to ensure diverse perspectives inform planning and design from the outset.
- Involving people with lived experience from the design phase leads to better outcomes for everyone; universal design benefits the whole community.
- Significant opportunity exists to increase awareness of available Council services and support programs (current awareness 5.6–20% across different programs indicates substantial growth potential).

- Strong preference for multiple communication formats, particularly among older residents and people with intellectual disability.
- Expanding Easy Read and multilingual materials would enhance access.
- Wide variation in community experiences (diversity index: 85%) indicates value of ongoing engagement to understand varied perspectives.

‘Involving people with disabilities from the beginning – not just at the end – leads to genuinely accessible outcomes that work for everyone.’

‘Website accessibility enhancements for vision impairment would be really helpful.’

‘More engagement and consultation would ensure we’re creating solutions that truly work.’

What’s working well:

- Council’s commitment to seeking community input for improvement
- respectful and helpful staff interactions
- established governance structures providing oversight
- strong staff awareness of DIAP existence (87.5%).

Appendix B — Language and definitions

Accessibility

Accessibility means making sure everyone can use places, services, and information—no matter their abilities. It helps people with disability take part in everyday life just like everyone else.

Carer

A carer is someone who helps a person with a disability do everyday things, like getting dressed, making meals, or going places. They give assistance to help with activities of daily life. A carer may volunteer their time or be paid by a service provider.

Client

A client is a person living with disability who receives support from a service provider. NDIS service providers refer to clients as participants.

Disability

Disability is defined under the NSW Disability Inclusion Act (2014) as a long-term condition—physical, mental, learning or sensory that may impact a person’s ability to participate in the community.

Hidden disabilities

Hidden disabilities (also called invisible disabilities or non-apparent disabilities) are disabilities or conditions that aren’t immediately obvious to others, but still impact how a person lives, works and interacts with others. These might include chronic pain, mental health conditions, Autism, learning difficulties, and many others.

Inclusion

Inclusion is the practice of ensuring all individuals, regardless of ability, can fully and meaningfully participate in community life by removing barriers, promoting equity, and celebrating diversity.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality refers to the interconnected nature of social identities—such as culture, age, education, gender, sexual identity, economic status, and personal circumstances—and how these overlapping factors shape individual experience.

Mental health condition

A mental health condition refers to a range of emotional, psychological, or behavioural challenges that affect how a person thinks, feels, and interacts with others. These conditions can include anxiety, depression and others.

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

The NDIS provides funding to eligible Australians with significant and permanent disability to support independence, skills, community participation, and improved quality of life.

Supporter

A supporter is someone who helps a person with a disability. They might be a family member, friend, or paid worker, and can assist with things like daily tasks, emotional support, or making decisions.

READY TO HAVE YOUR SAY?

Join our online community to stay informed and take part in shaping Sutherland Shire's future.



sutherlandshire.nsw.gov.au/jtc

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