Art Gallery of New South Wales
Disability Inclusion Action Plan
2017–20
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It is my pleasure to introduce the Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2017–20 for the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

The plan highlights our progress and presents our strategy for further improving accessibility and inclusion at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

The Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) 2017–20 reinforces our commitment to the inclusion and participation of people with disability. We want to ensure that all members of the community have an opportunity to experience our collection, exhibitions, programs and facilities.

Our new DIAP coincides with an exciting new era in the Gallery’s history, following the landmark announcement of the NSW Government’s funding to support our expansion project. As our much-loved and historic Gallery transforms into one of the world’s great art museums, we will deliver an iconic new building and upgrade of the existing building, creating a truly inclusive and accessible Gallery for all.

Our plan strives to improve access across four key areas: attitudes and behaviours; liveable communities; employment; and systems and processes.

I am confident that our plan will ensure a more accessible and welcoming experience and culture at the Gallery.

I would like to thank our disability organisation partners for their continued support of our efforts in improving the Gallery, and I look forward to building on these relationships and developing new connections over the coming years.

Dr Michael Brand
Director, Art Gallery of New South Wales

Our mission

From its base in Sydney, the Art Gallery of New South Wales (the Gallery) is dedicated to serving the widest possible audience as a centre of excellence for the collection, preservation, documentation, interpretation and display of Australian and international art, and is a forum for scholarship, art education and the exchange of ideas.

Attracting over 1.3 million visitors annually, the Gallery holds New South Wales’s significant collection of art. The Gallery’s collection is renowned for its Australian, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Asian, contemporary and international art.

Audiences

The Gallery, located within the Domain and adjacent to the Royal Botanic Gardens, belongs to the people of New South Wales; as such, it is essential that diverse communities of all abilities across the state are provided with inclusive, engaging and accessible opportunities to participate and experience our collections, exhibitions, facilities and programs.

Our employees

The Gallery has 212 full-time staff located across three sites; the Gallery also manages the Brett Whiteley Studio in Surry Hills and the off-site storage facilities. The workforce includes administration and clerical staff, conservators, curators and registrars, program producers, librarians and archivists, security, senior officers and senior executive staff. Of these, in the 2016-17 financial year, 1.9% identified as having a disability.

Building the future

The Gallery is transforming into a global art museum that will further enhance Sydney’s reputation as a global city and provide visitors with greater access to the art collection of New South Wales. By 2021, in time for its 150th anniversary, the Gallery plans to open a new gallery building designed by Japanese architectural firm SANAA. Together with the existing building, the Gallery will be at the heart of a new, unified cultural precinct, linking the Australian Museum to the Sydney Opera House; the Royal Botanic Gardens to Woolloomooloo.

Future generations will enjoy the Gallery’s visual arts, live performances, films, lectures and symposia in the new and expanded spaces. Building on the Gallery’s pursuit of lifelong learning and inclusive engagement, the expansion will feature accessible spaces and facilities for a variety of activities, with enhanced digital capabilities to advance online engagement both at the Gallery and off-site.

As the Gallery’s collections, exhibitions and programs flourish and grow, the Gallery will inspire and engage more diverse local, national and international audiences. With every step on this journey, the Gallery will move toward creating a welcoming and innovative museum that provides unparalleled access to the story of Australian art in an international context.

Opposite: Gallery host at front entrance
What is disability?

The 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities defines persons with disabilities to include those ‘who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others’.

The Gallery subscribes to the social model of disability, distinguishing the difference between the individual’s impairment and the disability as the environmental or attitudinal barriers created by society. ‘Barriers’ are disabling factors that limit opportunity and create disadvantage. Disability can be temporary or permanent, visible or invisible.

The Gallery acknowledges that not everyone who encounters disabling factors identifies as a person with disability. People who are deaf or hard of hearing may identify as part of a cultural and linguistic group, their first language being Auslan. Mental health is also included in this definition, but not everyone with a mental health condition identifies as having disability.

Data profile

Demographics

- One in five Australians are people with disability (18.3% or 4.3 million people).¹
- Approximately 1 million people with disability are from non-English speaking backgrounds.²
- 45.1% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over experience disability.³
- 45% of those with disability are living either near or below the poverty line, more than double the OECD average of 22%.⁴
- 45% of Australians will experience a mental health issue at some point.⁵
- 15% of Australians have a physical impairment.⁶
- Vision Australia estimates that there are 357,000 Australians who are blind or partially sighted.
- One in six Australians are affected by hearing loss.
- Approximately 30,000 deaf Auslan users have total hearing loss.⁷
Employment

- In 2015, the median gross income for a person with disability aged 15 to 64 years was $465 per week, less than half the income of people without disability ($950 per week).

- In 2015, the unemployment rate for people with disability was 10%, higher than that for people without disability at 5.3%.

- 2.1 million Australians of working age (15–64 years) have disability.

- 1 million people with disability are employed and 114,900 are looking for work.\(^8\)

- The unemployment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability is 25.3%, compared to 9% for non-Indigenous people with disability.\(^9\)


discussion

Human rights

- More than a third (39%) of complaints lodged with the Australian Human Rights Commission are against businesses and related to disability.\(^12\)

- Although there have been improvements in anti-discrimination legislation, the Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) data shows that people with disability are still less likely to be participating in the labour force than other Australians. According to SDAC data, there has been a minor change in the labour force participation rate for people with disability aged 15–64 years between 1993 (54.9%) and 2012 (52.8%).\(^13\)

- Almost one in twelve Australians with disability (281,100 people or 8.6%) reported they had experienced discrimination or unfair treatment due to disability.\(^14\)

Participation in cultural life

- In 2012, nearly four in five people with disability aged 15 to 64 years participated in a cultural activity at least once a year (79%). People with disability aged 65 years and over had the lowest attendance rates across all activities.\(^10\)

- Australians are not participating in the creative arts because of the cost and the time that it takes. Overall, access barriers were reported more often in 2013 (73%) than in 2009 (64%).\(^11\)
History of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan

The Gallery's Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) 2017–20 builds on our past and continuing commitment to the right of all people to fully participate and experience the cultural life of our Gallery and the community at large. The Gallery is proud of its many achievements since the launch of the Disability Action Plan 2009.

Selected highlights

**Programming**
Audio description programs are offered as scheduled and on-demand events for all major exhibitions and collection shows.

Free community access workshops are offered once a month, led by artist educators.

The Gallery’s Signing Art program is delivered once a month (except December) by invited presenters and artists from the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community.

The Starting with Art program, supported by Variety - the Children’s Charity, offers free, artist-led experiences at the Gallery to K–12 students with disability.

The 2015–16 Art Pathways outreach arts education project provided free arts experiences for over 500 students with disability, both in the Gallery and at participating schools.

Free, artist-led children’s access workshops are held during school holidays.

The Gallery develops programs in association with Seniors Week, Youth Week, Deaf Awareness Week and International Day for People with Disability.

The Gallery’s flagship creative ageing program, Art and Dementia, has grown since its beginning in 2010, with participation doubling since 2014. The Gallery published a research project with the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) on the impact of arts engagement for individuals with dementia based on research conducted in 2015–16. These findings have informed future actions to improve and expand access to the arts for people with dementia.

**Partnerships**
In partnership with the Australian Centre for Arts and Health, the Gallery hosted the International Arts and Health Conference in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

In 2015, Momentum was a unique four-month collaboration between Sunnyfield Disability Services, Parramatta Artists Studios and the Gallery, providing mentorship for emerging artists and resulting in a public performance piece showcased during the Art After Hours program. The project, funded by Arts NSW (now Create NSW) and City of Parramatta Council, focused on twelve emerging artists with disability from Western Sydney.

The Gallery’s partnership with Front Up in Western Sydney has provided a unique mentorship and development opportunity for 35 artists with disability.

Since 2016, the Gallery has hosted and presented at Dementia Awareness Month community events, in partnership with Alzheimer’s Australia.

Launched in 2017, the Gallery is a proud project partner of Accessing Sydney Collectively, a project managed by Accessible Arts with the support of the City of Sydney.
The Disability Inclusion Action Plan process

Legislation and social policy context

The Art Gallery of New South Wales is a statutory body established under the Art Gallery of New South Wales Act 1980 (NSW). The Gallery’s DIAP 2017–20 aligns with state, national and international social policy and legislative frameworks, including:

- Disability Discrimination and other Human Rights Legislation Amendment Bill 2009 (Cth).
- National Arts and Disability Strategy 2009.
- Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (NSW).

Methodology and consultation process

The Gallery partnered with Accessible Arts, the peak arts and disability organisation in New South Wales, over the 2016–17 period to engage in a rigorous research and consultation process. The process was led by consultant Sarah Houbolt.

Accessible Arts conducted an analysis of the Gallery’s buildings, programs and digital spaces. Accessible Arts also reviewed internal and public Gallery documents, and consulted and interviewed staff, including directors, volunteers and contractors. External users of the Gallery’s services were also interviewed. Survey data was presented to Gallery staff for feedback. Data from this process provided invaluable information on access issues and best practice, informing and underpinning the final DIAP.

As part of the development of the Gallery’s DIAP, informal consultation was also conducted with Front Up, a disability-led arts and cultural program based in Western Sydney.

The Gallery sincerely thanks the team from Accessible Arts, particularly Morwenna Collett, Gaele Sobott and Michael Huxley, as well as all individuals and organisations involved in the consultation process for their ongoing support of improving access at the Gallery.
Outreach Art and dementia program
Our vision

While there have been many successful outcomes as a result of the Disability Action Plan 2009, the Gallery’s recent consultation process has shown that there is still work to be done.

Our new plan will focus on improving access in the following areas:

1 **Attitudes and behaviours**: through training, consultation and review of protocol, the Gallery will increase awareness and change perceptions.

2 **Liveable communities**: the Gallery will review its physical and digital space and explore new ways of providing universal engagement.

3 **Employment**: the Gallery will investigate opportunities to increase its commitment to workplace equality and inclusion.

4 **Systems and processes**: the Gallery will review and improve systems and processes to ensure better access to services, venues and support.

Leading into the expansion and growth phase of the Gallery, the DIAP will provide a framework for the Gallery to continue to support and value artists and visitors with disability and their invaluable contribution to the community. The DIAP further focuses on understanding how people with disability, across all our stakeholder groups, engage with the Gallery now and into the future.

We will draw upon these insights in the planning, decision-making and progress towards detailed design development and content creation, to proactively improve participation and access to our new and existing buildings, services, information, programs and other engagement opportunities. We will continue to create a culture and practice that recognises, respects, values and celebrates people with disability.

Delivering against the DIAP, we will, in accordance with the principles of universal design, and the social model of disability, seek to create a more equitable, welcoming, diverse, accessible and inclusive expanded Gallery environment and experience.
Monitoring and review

The DIAP 2017–20 will be lodged with the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) and available to the public on the Gallery website and in accessible hard-copy formats on request. A web link to the DIAP will also be sent to the Disability Council of NSW.

The Gallery’s director of public engagement will ensure that progress is reviewed and reported.

The DIAP Project Team and the Disability Equality Advisory Group will regularly review and monitor the DIAP. Progress reports will be prepared every six months for the Gallery executive and Board of Trustees.

Feedback from the Disability Equality Advisory Group, staff, artists and audiences with disability and their carers, as well as arts and disability organisations, will be sought throughout the life of the DIAP.

The success of the DIAP will also be monitored through:

- Annual numbers of people with disability attending bespoke programs and events (using 2017 statistics as a baseline).

- Positive feedback on the quality of the Gallery experience by people with disability reflected in visitor experience data, staff surveys and artist comments.

- Gallery employment statistics.

- Publicity of the Gallery’s equality initiatives in both mainstream and industry-specific media.

We value your feedback on our progress, and encourage you to share your thoughts and experiences with us to ensure our continued improvement (see ‘Contact the Gallery’, p 31).
Starting with Art
Case study
Attitudes and behaviours

The Gallery’s Starting with Art program, supported by Variety - Children’s Charity, engages students with disability aged 5–18 years in a wide variety of art-making experiences, encouraging open discussion and experimentation with different modes of creative expression. A supported experience out of the classroom provides a rich and stimulating opportunity for many students with disability who may have limited access to social outings, city visits or cultural organisations.

Essential to the success of the program is the artist educator. The artist educator’s role is to facilitate discussion around the artworks, encouraging observation, interpretation and connections between students and the art. Working on access education programs requires additional training and commitment to ensure that students receive the support that they need.

The Gallery provides access training to Gallery artist educators to heighten observation skills and awareness of the needs of the individual, emphasising the importance of different kinds of communication needed to engage students. Workshops are designed to be flexible, driven by the needs and interests of the participants. Artist educators are trained and mentored to provide a sensory experience, learning to adapt to students’ moods, energy and the group dynamics, noting which materials and mediums students are drawn to, to inform the planning and preparation of subsequent sessions. Post-workshop reflection is encouraged to further the educators’ learning and skill development.

Staff training ensures that each program is tailored to the needs of the group and the individual, ensuring a positive and creative experience and helping students to reach their potential and increase their wellbeing and self-esteem.

The wonderful staff were flexible, adapted to our students and were so caring and patient. We had a wonderful experience and the students were so proud of the artworks they made.

Teacher in Starting with Art program

Opposite: Student from Starting with Art program
In March 2017, the exhibition *The National 2017: new Australian art* presented the latest ideas and forms in contemporary Australian art across three institutions: Art Gallery of New South Wales, Carriageworks and the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA). This was part of a six-year initiative planned over three editions in 2017, 2019 and 2021.

The Nelson Meers Foundation generously supported the Gallery’s team to specifically develop a single major website to deliver content on all exhibitions, participating artists, their practice and their works in a fully responsive digital platform for mobile, desktop and in-gallery.

From the beginning, full accessibility was one of the primary objectives for the website, with approximately 15–20% of the budget allocated towards access functionality and content. The front-end was designed by DMG and the underlying web platform was built collaboratively by digital teams from the Gallery and MCA.

The website places access front and centre, incorporating it into all parts of the site. The code adheres to the highest level of WCAG, all video content includes captions, and all audio content includes transcripts and Auslan.

The website provides a robust framework for the addition of accessible content as The National partnership continues over the next two exhibitions. Work is currently in progress for audio descriptions of all artworks featured on the website to further enhance user experience into the future.

The National website was nominated as a finalist in the 2017 AMY Awards, administered by the Australian Interactive Media Industry Association, and has been recognised by Accessible Arts for its commitment to accessibility principles. The Gallery’s head of digital engagement presented the project to an Accessing the Arts Group (ATAG) meeting in August 2017, sharing knowledge and expertise as an accessibility leader.

The project serves as an inspiration and exemplar for future development of the Gallery’s primary website.

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**This website is an excellent example of accessible digital communication: easy to navigate, and utilising a range of accessible formats, including Auslan video, mp3 and transcript.**

*Morwenna Collett, CEO, Accessible Arts*
In 2015, the Gallery reinvigorated its Signing Art program, inviting artists from the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community to lead tours of temporary exhibitions. It signified a major shift in Gallery programming as it identified and celebrated the importance of disability-led programs. Previously, the Gallery had only offered Auslan-interpreted talks and events; the new program served to empower Deaf artists and the broader Deaf community.

The Gallery offers a Deaf-led tour of an exhibition on the last Sunday of every month (except December), and regularly offers additional tours on Wednesday nights for major exhibitions. Deaf artists are provided with mentoring and support from the Gallery’s access program producer to prepare for their talks, giving them the opportunity to develop valuable new skills, confidence and experience presenting about art.

As the program has grown and developed, the Gallery has been widely praised by the Deaf community and key access organisations, including the Deaf Society and Accessible Arts, for its innovation and community consultation.

In the next few years, the Gallery will increase employment opportunities for artists with disability based on the success of the Signing Art model.

Since becoming a presenter for the Gallery, I received the opportunity to learn about a wider range of artists, art styles and mediums. This gave me the opportunity to develop further as an artist, feeding into my creativity and encouraging me to share my passion with my community.

Sue Wright, artist

Opposite: Sue Wright leading a Signing Art tour in Archibald, Wynne and Sulman Prizes 2017 exhibition
In 2016, the Gallery partnered with Front Up, a Western Sydney–based arts and culture hub founded by Ability Options. The partnership was developed to deliver the pilot Emerge engagement project, connecting emerging artists with disability with professional artists and arts professionals at the Gallery to enhance skills and build networks.

The partnership established unique opportunities for eleven artists living with disability, mental health or access needs to engage with the Gallery’s collection and staff over several days of immersion in the Gallery. Gallery artist educators provided mentorship and inspiration in a series of workshops that formed the basis to the final collaborative art installation *I’m still here* 2016 at Barangaroo in Sydney.

The project allowed artists to build networks with key organisations in the arts sector and make friends while building professional skills, confidence and self-esteem. Many artists from the 2016 Emerge pilot have since been invited to present and deliver exhibition talks and workshops at the Gallery. Furthermore, many artists are now employed as assistant artists at the Front Up hub, designing their own workshop projects for others with disability, mental health or access needs.

Through the successful Emerge 2016 project, Front Up and the Gallery established a memorandum of understanding partnership with Ability Options to continue working collaboratively into 2017 and 2018 with the Discover and Emerge projects.

I considered myself an artist but nobody else in my life did really, they knew I was the ‘arty’ girl but they didn’t think it was a career or way of life. But now, working with the Art Gallery of New South Wales, that gives you a legitimacy.

M.Sunflower, artist
1. 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. Attitudes and behaviour permeate all aspects of life.

**Goal**
Develop positive attitudes through increasing awareness and revising policy and practice.

**Actions**
- Achieve a top-down and bottom-up culture where all staff are responsible for creating an accessible and equitable Gallery environment.
- Establish a Disability Equality Advisory Group comprised of people with disability.
- Conduct an access review of the current Gallery scholarship program and target promotion of scholarships to artists with disability.
- Scope the potential for a dedicated Art Gallery of New South Wales scholarship for an artist with disability.
- Scope collecting, exhibiting and commissioning work by artists with disability.
- Include access awareness training in all staff induction activities.
2. Liveable communities

Creating liveable communities for people with disability is more than modifying the physical environment; it covers areas such as access to transport, community recreation and culture, social engagement and universal design.

**Goal**
Deliver an accessible physical and digital space to enable universal engagement.

**Action**
- Conduct a full building audit of existing building (Domain site). Identify audit report actions that may be implemented within the DIAP period.
- Provide more accessible seating inside and outside the Gallery.
- Upskill front-of-house workers to support Gallery visitors with disability.
- Review current Gallery website to see how we comply with WCAG 2.0 standards, with a view to making sure that the new Gallery website (in the planning phase during 2017) meets at least the AA level and, where possible, the AAA level.
- Explore the potential for providing audio descriptions for artworks, with a view to establishing an audio description policy. Explore providing audio description training for curators.
- Investigate Easy Read options for key information on the Gallery website.
- Ensure relevant Gallery documents are available in accessible formats.
- Investigate how to integrate access into exhibition planning and design, including access to labelling or wall text in exhibitions especially for people with vision impairment (lighting, font size, positioning, braille and multi-sensory labels).
- Scope the resources needed for ensuring videos shown on the website are accessible, with captioning and transcripts.
- Research best practice around audio descriptions of video content and how this may be applied to Gallery-produced video.
- Include access line in all budget templates.
- Review artist application process for Archibald, Wynne and Sulman prizes to include access requirements and possibility of identifying as an equality role model.
3. Employment

Employment rates for people with disability are significantly lower than for people without disability. 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, and rigid role descriptions and online testing that may place applicants at a disadvantage. These factors reduce the opportunities for people with disability to gain and retain employment. Research indicates that organisational commitment to workforce equality and inclusion is closely linked to strong business performance.

**Goal**
Increase workplace equality, diversity and inclusion.

**Actions**
- Prioritise contractors who support employment of people with disability.
- Scope a staff mentor program to support employees with disability.
- Review internships with a view to implementing an equality internship for under-represented groups.
- Develop an equality workforce strategy.
- Survey Gallery workers to gauge perceptions on equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Compare results to the recent NSW People Matter Employee Survey.\(^15\)
- Ask all workers for information on access requirements as part of the induction process. Apply this information to future workplace design and flexibility strategies, and, where possible, implement individual support requirements.
4. Systems and processes

A common barrier for people with disability is the difficulty in navigating systems and processes to access essential community services, venues and support. This could relate to ways of accessing information, available channels of communication, or simply a lack of options to access services.

**Goal**

Increase visibility of Gallery services, processes and systems to enhance visitor experience.

**Actions**

- Ensure that there is a range of feedback and complaint mechanisms that meet various access requirements. Ensure there is adequate signage to enable people to submit feedback. Explore the potential of feedback using portable devices.
- Ensure feedback reports are regularly reviewed and integrated with DIAP reviews.
- Review current building evacuation procedures and training to ensure the requirements of people with disability are addressed.
- Conduct periodic tests and maintenance for all assistive technologies (including hearing loops).
- Scope phone and online booking/ticketing system that provides clear options for customers with disability to request assistance or support for events.
- Review bespoke programs for people with disability.
- Review report from the 2015–16 UTS research project on the impact of arts engagement for individuals with dementia.
- Review and further develop partnerships with arts and disability organisations.
- Conduct a systems and processes audit that will inform the next DIAP and detailed design development of the expansion project.
- Ensure disability equality programs and services are well communicated.
Equality is about ensuring everybody has an equal chance to take up opportunities, to make full use of the opportunities on offer and to fulfil their potential. Promoting equality should remove discrimination in the following categorisations: age, disability, gender assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation. Equality is backed by legislation.

Diversity is about creating a culture and practice that recognises, respects, values and celebrates people’s differences in a broad sense.

Inclusion refers to an individual’s experience within the workplace and in wider society, and the extent to which they feel valued and included. The Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (NSW) requires NSW public authorities to have Disability Inclusion Action Plans.

Equality, diversity and inclusion are different, but they need to be advanced together within an organisation.

Workers includes staff, contractors and volunteers.

The Gallery values community feedback on our progress in meeting the goals outlined in the DIAP 2017–20. We encourage individuals and community organisations to share their thoughts and experiences to ensure our continued improvement.

Please contact us at artmail@ag.nsw.gov.au or on 02 9225 1700.

Opposite: Audio description and tactile program
Acknowledgements

The Gallery gratefully acknowledges the support of the following organisations and supporters who have contributed toward the growth and development of access programs and accessibility at the Gallery.

Ability Options
Accessible Arts
AGNSW volunteer access guides
Alzheimer’s Australia
Artspace
Australian Centre for Arts and Health
Black Dog Institute
Blind Citizens Australia
Bus Stop Films
Carriageworks
City of Sydney
Create NSW
Conexu Foundation
Crown Resorts Foundation
Holdsworth Community Centre
Information and Cultural Exchange (ICE)

Museum of Contemporary Art Australia
Nelson Meers Foundation
NSW Department of Family and Community Services
Outlandish Arts
Packer Family Foundation
Parramatta Artists Studios
Private donors
Sunnyfield Disability Services
Studio Arts, Hornsby
Sydney Opera House
The Deaf Society
University of New South Wales
University of Technology Sydney
Variety - the Children’s Charity
Vision Australia

Notes

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Opposite: Student in Starting with Art program