

Advocacy Position Statement

Accessible local communities

What we believe:

- Spinal Life Australia recognises the crucial role that local government plays in working towards an inclusive society.
- All Australians should enjoy participation in ordinary life, regardless of differing levels of ability.
- In the age of emerging technology, Spinal Life Australia believes that local government can and should develop and implement new approaches to place people with spinal cord damage and other physical disabilities at the heart of local planning processes.
- The changing funding environment for people with disability will provide local governments with opportunities in relation to tourism, economic development and education.
- Ensuring Australia is an inclusive society for people with disability means acknowledging that societal attitudes, practices and structures, rather than an individual's impairment, can restrict and exclude people from economic participation, social inclusion and equality.

The current situation:

- A lack of access to services and facilities, social exclusion and isolation are pressing issues that need to be addressed for people with disability from all age groups.¹
- Local governments agree that they themselves could support people with disability in a variety of ways, such as providing accessible information about local government and the community and accessible services and infrastructure.²
- Rural and remote local governments have far less capacity than regional or metropolitan local governments to deliver accessible services and infrastructure.
- Although almost all local governments agreed that they should provide accessible information about local government and the community less than one-quarter of the local governments rated their efforts as strong.
- Queensland local governments lag behind other states when it comes to accessibility issues. Less than half report a strong commitment in terms of advocating for services and support for people with disability.
- Only 9% of Queensland local government have Disability Advisory Committees, with the majority being in metropolitan areas.
- Only 18% of Queensland local government have Disability Access and Inclusion Plans (compared to 97% in Vic and 80% in NSW), with most listing poor reporting as an issue.
- Overall, the biggest challenge faced by local governments in driving access and participation is the availability of resources.

¹ *Disability Inclusion Planning – A Guide for Local Government. Australian Local Government Association 2016.*

² *How local governments can increase the social and economic participation of people with disability. University of Technology Sydney 2017.* This comprehensive survey of local governments was commissioned by the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Its findings summarise responses from 174 local governments. The findings are summarised here.



Spinal Life Australia will:

- Identify which local governments have adopted or endorsed access and inclusion plans, or other forms of policies or procedures to maximise the inclusion of people with disability in their local communities.
- Empower its members to advocate for local governments in Queensland to adopt the principles of access and equity through utilising existing templates.³
- Support the development of local volunteers (member network facilitators, and community connectors) to engage with their respective local government agencies in a professional, positive and pro-active manner.
- Develop models of engagement for use in multiple local government areas and distribute amongst members information relating to influencing local government.
- Continue to support the development and enhancement of local networks of members to strengthen local support for locally developed initiatives to improve accessibility in communities across Queensland.
- Continue to collaborate with local government to advocate for access to funding to address accessibility issues at local levels.

³ Such as that developed by the Australian Local Government Authority in 2016, and the University of Sydney's Institute for Public Policy and Governance in 2017.