



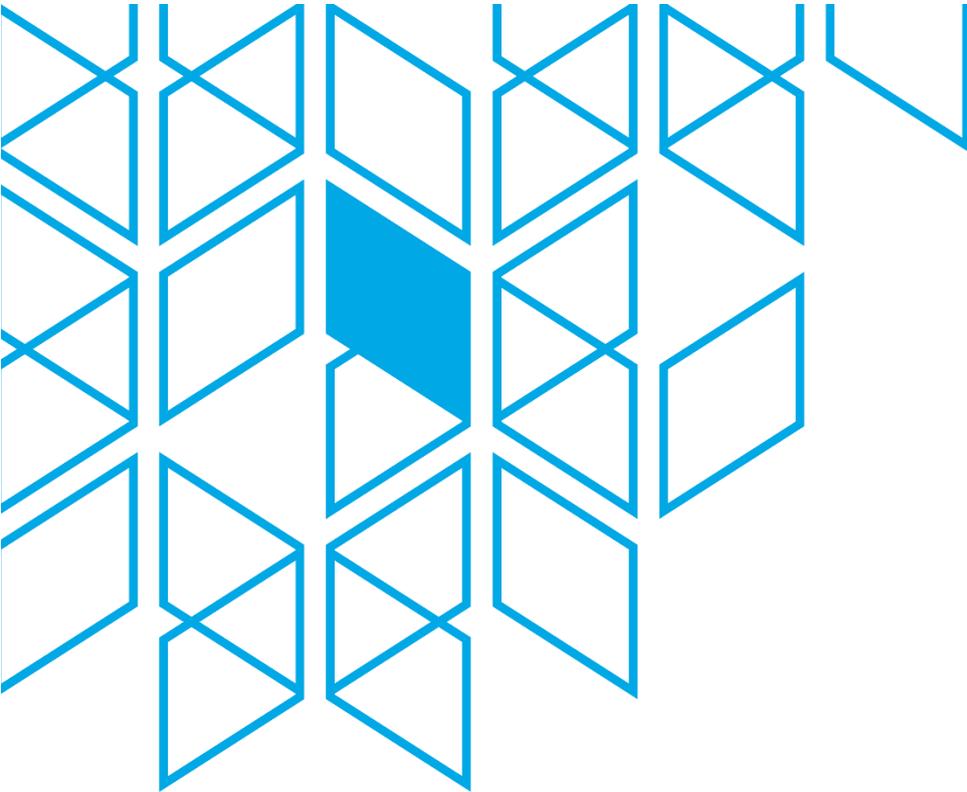
# ACCESS & INCLUSION PLAN

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2024-2028

GEELONG  
REGIONAL  
LIBRARIES





**The Geelong Regional Library Corporation  
Acknowledges the Wadawurrung People of the  
Kulin nation, and the Gulidjan and Gadubanud  
Peoples of the Maar nations as the Original  
Owners of the lands on which our library services  
operate. We pay respect to Elders past, present  
and emerging. We acknowledge and celebrate First  
Nations Peoples of this land as the custodians of  
learning, literacy, knowledge, and story.**

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## VISION

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At Geelong Regional Libraries our purpose is to provide a thriving public library service that boosts our communities' health, prosperity, connectedness and belonging. We acknowledge that access and inclusion to public spaces, services and events is critical to enabling and enhancing civic participation.

Our vision is for an accessible and inclusive library corporation where everyone can use our services, and everyone can participate. A place where everyone in our community can see themselves represented and reflected in our collections, materials, spaces, programs, and events. An organisation that engages a workforce that mirrors the diversity in our community.

We have developed this Access and Inclusion plan for everyone who may interact with our organisation, from our staff and volunteers to those who access our services. Our services are for anyone who works, studies, volunteers, or visits in the communities we serve- the City of Greater Geelong, the Colac Otway Shire, the Surf Coast Shire, the Golden Plains Shire, and the Borough of Queenscliffe.

While this plan has been devised with inclusion for everyone in mind, we acknowledge that groups within our communities are more likely to experience barriers to access and inclusion. These include but are not limited to; people with disabilities, people living with significant health conditions, people experiencing mental health issues, ageing communities, young people, LGBTQIA+ communities, first nations peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD), refugees, asylum seekers, remote communities, women, and people experiencing financial or economic hardships.

Throughout this document we have chosen to use person first language (eg: person with a disability) as way of challenging ableism and identifying a person's right to identify beyond this characteristic. However, we acknowledge that there are many people in our community who prefer to identify first language (eg: disabled person) as it indicates connection and demonstrates pride.

# BACKGROUND

## OUR REGION

The Geelong Regional Library Corporation provides library services across the G21 region. This region is comprised of five local government areas: City of Greater Geelong, the Colac Otway Shire, the Surf Coast Shire, the Golden Plains Shire, and the Borough of Queenscliffe.

There were 358,817 people living in the G21 region at the time of the 2021 Census.

The 2021 Census also details that in the G21 region:

- 22,180 people (6.2%) reported that they needed assistance with self-care, body movement or communication activities.
- 4,488 people (1%) identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- 3% of the population had arrived in Australia within the last 5 years.
- 15.9% of the population were born overseas.
- 8% of the population were speaking a language other than English at home.

(Statistics from profile.id for G21 region)

## LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

In Victoria, we have several key pieces of legislation that support access and inclusion. These include the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006, the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, the Gender Equality Act 2020, and the Victorian Disability Act 2006 which requires all public sector organisations to maintain a Disability Action Plan that support the reduction of barriers and promotion of inclusion.

## DEFINITIONS

### ACCESSIBLE

If something is accessible, it means **everyone** can use it. Whether it is a building, service, information, or website.

### INCLUSIVE

If something is inclusive, it means **everyone** can take part.





## OUR JOURNEY TOWARDS BECOMING ACCESSIBLE & INCLUSIVE

Geelong Regional Libraries' previous Disability Access and Inclusion plans have identified our capability to provide specific resources for people with access needs and our strong connections with community and organisations.

Since the development of the Geelong Regional Libraries Disability Access and Inclusion plan 2018-22 we have worked to remove barriers and promote access and inclusion by:

- Applying access and inclusion principles to our recruitment processes and communication strategies.
- Introducing flexible work arrangements policy and procedures.
- Collaborating with partners to provide accessible library spaces.
- Enhancing accessibility of mobile libraries.
- Introducing flexible use of meeting rooms.
- Increasing diversity and representation in our collections.
- Providing online access to events.
- Introducing of Sensory Storytime and Bilingual Storytime.
- Establishing internal LGBTIQ+ working group, encouraging our staff to use pronouns, and recognising LGBTIQ+ events.
- Removing gendered titles from member accounts.
- Renaming gendered catalogue categories.
- Eliminating late fines.
- Making it easier for young people, those with no fixed address and those fleeing family violence to join the library.
- Development of our Cultural Protocols 2020-202, Youth Engagement Strategy 2021-25, Outreach Strategy 2022-25.
- Participating in networks and developing of partnerships with key stakeholders to support community needs.

## DEVELOPING THIS PLAN

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This Access and Inclusion plan has been developed using data and information collected via engagement with our staff, volunteers, other organisations, and our communities.

Geelong Regional Libraries engaged Ainslee Hooper Consulting, a disability inclusion consultant with lived experience of a disability to gather and understand feedback from our staff, volunteers and community members about access and inclusion at Geelong Regional Libraries. Twenty-four staff or volunteers and fifty-seven community members participated in the stakeholder engagement conducted by Ainslee Hooper Consulting. The engagement was undertaken via surveys, one-on-one phone interviews and workshops from the 23rd of June and 5th of August 2023.

Between May and July 2023 Geelong Regional Libraries collaborated with Latrobe Community Health to review the accessibility of our library spaces using their Provider Self-Assessment Tool. Latrobe Community Health's Community Capacity Building Coordinator assessed 18 of our physical libraries and 3 mobile libraries and provide recommendations to increase accessibility for our community.

In 2022 Dementia Australia conducted a Dementia Friendly Communities Environmental Audit Review and Report after assessing the Bannockburn Library and the Golden Plains Mobile Library.

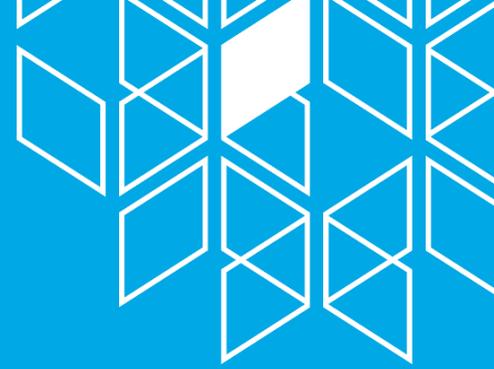
These initiatives have supported us to identify and prioritise actions that will enhance access and inclusion at Geelong Regional Libraries over the next four years, enabling us to continue building our vision of a library service that is accessible and inclusive of everyone in our community.

Geelong Regional Libraries would like to thank everyone who participated in these activities for their valuable contributions.



# GUIDING PRINCIPLES & APPROACHES

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## PERSON CENTRED APPROACHES

Person centred approaches promote the self-determination and empowerment of individuals, recognising individual differences and championing choice. This approach focuses on providing services that are responsive to the needs and preferences of the person or people receiving them.

## SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

The social model of disability recognises that a disability results from discrimination and an inaccessible society rather than individual differences or attribute. This model highlights that a community's attitudes, practices, and structures can create barriers to access and inclusion that can be more debilitating and cause more disadvantage than the disability itself.

## UNIVERSAL DESIGN

The universal design approach prioritises design that enables everyone, to the greatest extent possible, to use spaces, products, and services. Universal design principles seek to reduce the need for specialised or adaptive designs. Universal design is based on seven principles:

1. Equitable use
2. Flexibility in use
3. Simple and intuitive to use
4. Perceptible information
5. Tolerance for error
6. Low physical effort
7. Size and space for approach and use

## INTERSECTIONAL APPROACHES

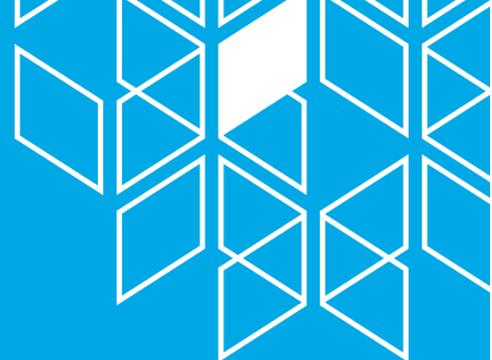
Intersectional approaches to access and inclusion, consider how ableism connects with other forms of discrimination. This approach encourages us to view each other as whole people, with multifaceted lives, experiences and identities that are unique to everyone. Our stories are complex and intersectional approaches acknowledge that multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage can compound a person's experience of exclusion. Recognising the intersectionality between different diversity characteristics can assist us to better understand our staff, customers, and community.

## CO-DESIGN

Co-design approaches involve the active, participatory engagement of those for whom the project is for, or will affect the most, as key element in the design process. Co-design is about working in partnership with people who have a lived experience, valuing that experience as expertise, and applying that information to service design.

# THE PLAN

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## OUR COMMUNITY

Where everyone is included and can participate

- Actively promote inclusion and participation in our libraries and library services.
- Promote the access features of our libraries and services.
- Provide collections, materials, programming, and events representative of our diverse communities.
- Provide accessible communication for our customers and visitors.
- Enhance online access to our services.
- Assess community needs and engage key stakeholders to enhance community participation.
- Codesign material, programs, events, initiatives, and spaces with lived experience communities to enhance access, inclusion, and participation.

## PLACES AND SPACES

Safe and accessible places for everyone

- Apply universal design principles to reduce barriers to our services and facilities.
- Apply universal design principles to provide accessible and inclusive workspaces for staff and volunteers.

## OUR PEOPLE

A diverse, inclusive, and skilled workforce

- Apply access and inclusion principles to our structures and practices to reduce barriers to employment and volunteering at GRLC.
- Enhance inclusive work culture and practice.
- Provide training and support to our staff and volunteers to ensure capacity to deliver accessible and inclusive services.

## REGIONAL LEADERSHIP

We use our core strengths to support and celebrated inclusion and diversity

- Advocate and promote inclusion and participation for everyone in our community.
- Build relationships with key stakeholders and work collaboratively to enhance access inclusion in our region.



## THE JOURNEY AHEAD

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The next part of our journey will involve operationalising and delivering on our plan over a four-year period. Our focus will be as follows.

Year 1	2024	Clarify, consolidate and prepare to grow
Year 2	2025	Promote, share and continue to embed
Year 3	2026	Increase engagement to understand needs
Year 4	2027	Collaborate and extend on what we do

At the conclusion of this plan, we hope to have achieved the continued improvement towards to development of:

- An accessible and inclusive library corporation where everyone can use our services, and everyone can participate.
- A place where everyone in our community can see themselves represented and reflected.
- A workforce that mirrors the diversity in our community.

## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES:

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