

POLICY TITLE: ACCESS POLICY

Policy No. 101

POLICY PURPOSE

Alice Springs Town Council will strive to meet access needs in terms of public infrastructure, transport, information, communication and attitudes irrespective of socio-economic status, culture, gender, language or physical or mental ability of the members of the community.

In so doing, Council will work in partnership with government, non government organisations and the business and community sectors to achieve long-term, positive outcomes for those in the community who require special access considerations.

POLICY STATEMENT

Alice Springs Town Council recognises the rights of all people to have equal access to the Council's facilities and services.

Council will work to incorporate the rights-based focus of the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992, in all its services, including the:

- Elimination of discrimination in mainstream services rather than establishing separate parallel "special" services.
- Ensuring equal access for people with disabilities rather than simply improving or enhancing access.
- Addressing all barriers, including physical, information, communication and attitudinal barriers and
- Addressing the rights of all people with disabilities with reference to the broad definition of "disability" in the DDA.

Refer to attached document "Access Procedures and Action Plan" that supports this policy.

Access Policy and Action Plan For Alice Springs Town Council

Initially adopted by Alice Springs Town Council on 22 November 1999, revised plan adopted by Council on 25 November 2002.



Acknowledgments

Alice Springs Town Council wish to thank the following members of the community for their input into developing the original Access Policy and Action Plan for Council. Their contribution in developing the original plan is gratefully acknowledged.

Access Advisory Committee

Chris Valley – Disability Advocacy Services

Michelle Castagna – Disability Service & Liaison

Jo Arrand – Senior Citizens Association of Alice Springs Inc

Lance Robinson – Disability Advocacy Services, Treasurer

Alderman Meredith Campbell

Sharon Elkins – Aged Care Advocacy

The following people were interviewed:

Dean Casey – Aged Care Advocacy

Janet Rattigan – Carers Support

Spokespersons for Menzies School of Health

Spokespersons for Mental Health Association

Spokesperson for Aboriginal Hostels

Alice Springs Town Council again gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Access Advisory Committee in revising the Access Policy and Action Plan in 2002.

Foreword

The original Access Policy and Action Plan has proven to be an invaluable resource for both the Alice Springs Town Council and the local community, in terms of improving access in the town. Council has now continued with this proactive approach by revising the original Access Policy and Action Plan in order to meet the changing needs of the community.

Alice Springs has a very culturally diverse population which includes Aboriginal people from many language groups, people born overseas from both English speaking and non English speaking countries and long terms residents from different backgrounds. We also have many local, domestic and international visitors every year. Council and the community recognise that all residents and visitors have the right to accessible services and infrastructure.

Alice Springs like all communities, also has a segment of the population that have low literacy and numeracy levels, mental and physical disabilities and special health requirements. This requires ongoing planning and development to ensure that all community needs are met.

For these reasons, Council developed the original Access Policy and Action Plan and will now implement the revised version. This Policy has been revised in consultation with the Access Advisory Committee and attempts to contribute to Alice Springs being the most accessible town in Australia in terms of physical infrastructure, communications, information and attitudes.

I encourage your perusal and comment on this document and trust that it will be of assistance in improving access and thus the quality of life for all in Alice Springs.

Fran Kilgariff
Mayor

Executive Summary

The purpose of this document is to provide a clear policy and action plan that will guide Alice Springs Town Council's provision of accessible services and infrastructure for the citizens and visitors of Alice Springs.

The Access Policy and Action Plan attempts not merely to react to the legal frameworks legislating against discrimination, but to develop a proactive approach for addressing the access needs of all citizens.

In particular this Access Policy and Action Plan pays attention to the aspects of:

- Physical infrastructure
- Communication
- Information
- Attitudes

This document provides an overview of the legal framework within which Council must operate to uphold the basic human rights of its citizens. It also provides an overview of the demographic profile and social health needs of people with disabilities. In so doing, it identifies the access needs of those with disabilities and those with other special needs.

Alice Springs Town Council in preparing such a document and its revised edition, is committed to meeting its obligations of access needs and responsibilities as far as possible and as far as practical. Council also recognises that meeting the access needs of the Alice Springs community, cannot be achieved by Council alone and thus will continue to foster partnerships with government and non government organisations, the business sector and the community sector.

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Preamble

Alice Springs is a town of many contrasts and opportunities. It has a culturally diverse population made up of:

- Aboriginal people from many language groups
- People born overseas in both English speaking and non English speaking countries
- Long term residents from many different backgrounds
- People from all parts of Australia who stay for relatively short periods of time
- Local, domestic and international visitors.

Alice Springs has a relatively young population with a high percentage of youth and young parents and although below the national average, a growing number of people over 50 years of age.

Alice Springs has many people with low literacy and numeracy levels, low economic earning capacity, mental and physical disabilities and special health requirements.

In addition, the life chances of citizens in Alice Springs vary greatly. There are professional two income couples, single parents without an income, young people who are unemployed, people living in hostels or supported accommodation, Indigenous residents living in town camps and those without a roof over their heads.

It is for these reasons that Alice Springs Town Council has developed and revised the Access Policy and Action Plan for use by Council and the community.

Statement of Intent

Alice Springs Town Council will strive to meet access needs in terms of public infrastructure, transport, information, communication and attitudes as far as possible and as far as practicable, irrespective of socio-economic status, culture, gender, language or physical or mental ability of the members of the community.

In so doing, Council will work in partnership with government, non government organisations and the business and community sectors to achieve long-term, positive outcomes for those in the community who require special access considerations.

Policy Statement

Alice Springs Town Council recognises the rights of all people to have equal access to the Council's facilities and services.

Council will attempt as far as possible and as far as practical to incorporate the rights-based focus of the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992, in all its services, including the:

- Elimination of discrimination in mainstream services rather than establishing separate parallel 'special' services
- Ensuring equal access for people with disabilities rather than simply improving or enhancing access
- Addressing all barriers, including physical, information, communication and attitudinal barriers and
- Addressing the rights of all people with disabilities with reference to the broad definition of 'disability'¹ in the DDA².

1.0 Mission

Alice Springs is accessible in terms of physical, communication, information and attitudinal indicators.

2.0 Objectives

- Accessible community services and infrastructure developed and carried out in partnership with the community and other government and non-government agencies.
- The promotion of health and social and economic wellbeing in the community through addressing physical, communication, information and attitudinal barriers.
- The fulfilment of requirements identified under the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and associated acts.

3.0 Introduction

The Access Policy and Action Plan responds to aspects of the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992, which are currently relevant to the services and infrastructure provided by the Alice Springs Town Council. They are based on disability discrimination principles in so far as they attempt to incorporate the rights-based focus of the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 including the:

- Elimination of discrimination in mainstream services rather than establishing separate or parallel 'special' services
- Ensuring equal access for people with disabilities rather than simply improving or enhancing access
- Addressing all barriers, including physical, information, communication and attitudinal barriers and
- Addressing the rights of all people with disabilities with reference to the broad definition of 'disability' in the DDA.

4.0 Background – The Right to Access

4.1 The Legal and Policy Environment

“Australia is a party to a number of international instruments that require it to uphold the basic human rights of all Australian. Many of these human rights have particular relevance to people with a disability. They include the right to respect for human dignity and freedom, equality before the law, privacy and protection against discrimination and equal opportunity in employment.”³

The right to access is spelled out in a specific legal and policy environment which outlines Council’s human rights commitments under International and Australian Commonwealth Laws and the right of all Australian citizens to social justice.

Some of these policy documents include:

- Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992.
(This, the primary Act relating to disability discrimination, needs to be considered within a wider legal and policy context such as outlined in the following).
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986.
- Racial Discrimination Act 1975.
- NT Anti-discrimination Act 1992.
- United Nations International Bill of Human Rights.
- Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport.
(These Standards were tabled in the House of Representatives on 19 August 2002 and the Senate on 20 August 2002 and will come into effect on 15 October 2002, provided no parliamentarian moves a motion to amend before this date).

The commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 has three key objectives.

1. The elimination of as far as possible, discrimination against persons on the ground of disability in the areas of:
 - ▶ Work, accommodation, education, access to premises, clubs and sports
 - ▶ The provision of goods, facilities, services and land
 - ▶ Existing laws
 - ▶ The administration of Commonwealth Programs
2. Ensuring, as far as is practicable, that persons with disabilities have the same rights to equality before the law as the rest of the community.
3. Promoting recognition and acceptance within the community of the principle that persons with disabilities have the same fundamental rights as the rest of the community. (Part One, Section Three of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992).

4.2 Definitions

Disability is defined in terms of *degrees of ability* and in terms of its *impact on quality of life*.

Disablement Process

The three dimensions of the disablement process according to the World Health Organisation are “impairment, disability and handicap” and are defined as follows.

‘Impairment’ is defined to be the loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function and occurs at the level of organ or system function.

‘Disability’ is defined in terms of restriction or lack resulting from an impairment of ability to perform normal functions or activities, and thus relates to the person.

‘Handicap’ is a disadvantage, resulting from impairment or disability, that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role that is normal (depending on the person’s age and sex and social and cultural factors). Handicap thus focuses on the person as a social being and reflects the interaction with and adaptation to the person’s surroundings.

Handicap refers to health related limitation in participation in more complex tasks such as self-care, mobility and communication. The ABS survey classified handicap according to four levels of severity, namely: profound, severe moderate and mild. Drawing on this international standard the ABS disability survey (Madden et al 1995) included:

- Loss of sight, not corrected by glasses or contact lenses
- Loss of hearing
- Speech difficulties in own language
- Blackouts, fits or loss of consciousness
- Slowness at learning or understanding
- Incomplete use of arms or fingers
- Difficulty gripping or holding small objects
- Incomplete use of feet or legs
- Treatment for nerves or an emotional condition
- Restriction in physical terms or in doing physical work
- Disfigurement or deformity
- Long term effects of head injury, stroke or any other brain damage
- A mental illness requiring help or supervision
- Treatment or medication for a long term condition or ailment, person still restricted and any other long term condition resulting in a restriction.

The Guide to the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 stresses that:

“The Act uses a very broad definition of disability’ and covers disabilities which are physical, intellectual, psychiatric, sensory and neurological. It also covers physical disfigurement and the presence in the body of an organism capable of causing disease, such as HIV. People with disabilities from Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and non-English speaking backgrounds often encounter additional barriers in attempting to access services. Access is made difficult not only because of the potential client’s disability, but also because services are not offered in a way which is culturally and/or linguistically appropriate... The Act includes people with current, future and past disabilities and it renders discrimination against a person whose associates have a disability. Both direct and indirect discrimination is covered by the 1992 Act”.

4.3 Access

According to the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, access is defined in terms of:

- Physical aspects
- Communication aspects
- Information and
- Attitudinal aspects

Each of these aspects is detailed in the Goals and Actions from page 18 of this document.

5.0 A Community Profile

5.1 Demographic Profile

Alice Springs has a population of approximately 26,779 people (excluding international visitors). The median age of the Central Northern Territory area is 31, however in the Alice Springs Local Government area, the population segment with the highest proportion of people is the 35-39 group. 8.6% of the Alice Springs population is over 60 years, however only 6.0% of the Alice Springs Aboriginal population is over 60 years.

5.2 Household Income

The highest proportion of weekly incomes earned by Indigenous persons over 15 years (33.4%) was in the \$120.00-\$199.00 income bracket. Only 2.7% of Indigenous persons over the age of 15 years earned more than \$52,000.00 per annum. (15.8% of the Indigenous population did not state their weekly income).

The highest proportion of weekly incomes in the Alice Springs Local Government area by people 15 years and over (9%) was in the \$500.00-\$599.00 income bracket. 12.8% of the population 15 years and over in Alice Springs earned more than \$52,000.00 per annum. (10.2% of the Alice Springs population did not state their weekly income).

The median Central Northern Territory weekly income is \$423.00. The cost of living is high, therefore those on lower incomes or who have high mortgage payments and high rentals have limited amounts of disposable income for food and other basic necessities.

5.3 Education

1.1% of the Alice Springs population 15 years and over did not go to school. 38.8% of the Alice Springs population 15 years and over completed Year 12 or equivalent. 3.2% of the Alice Springs population 15 years and over are still attending school.

5.7% of Alice Springs Indigenous persons 15 years and over did not go to school. 26.6% of Alice Springs Indigenous persons 15 years and over completed Year 8 or below. 12.1% of Alice Springs Indigenous persons 15 years and over completed Year 12 or equivalent. 3.7% of Alice Springs Indigenous persons 15 years and over are still at school.

5.4 Family Structure

From the 2001 Census data, in the Alice Springs Local Government Area there were 292 couple families with non-dependant children, 1919 couple families without children, 92 other families and 979 one-parent families. This compares to the Alice Springs Local Government Area Indigenous statistics which were 24 couple families with non-dependant children, 176 couple families without children, 28 other families and 322 one parent families.

6.0 Social Health Needs of People with Disabilities

6.1 Overview of Health Status Statistics

In terms of health status indicators, the residents in the Northern Territory and Alice Springs are below the national average.

The national statistics on mobility handicaps are a baseline for estimating the local needs in the absence of complete data sets. Limited epidemiological data on disability exists, hence the decision to include a specific question on disability in the census in 2001.⁴ The following table shows a projection of the increase in disability in Australia.

Year	Total Population	% of population aged 65 years and over	Population with mobility handicaps number (million)	% of population
1991	17.3	11.2	1.77	10.2
2001	19.5	12.1	2.07	
2011	21.9	13.4	2.41	11.0

Source: Commonwealth's Attorney General's Department 1998, derived from Clare and Tulpe (1994).

In 1998, 3.6 million people in Australia had a disability (19% of the total population). A further 3.1 million had an impairment or long-term condition that did not restrict their everyday activities. Of those with a disability, 87% (3.2 million) experience specific restrictions in core activities, schooling or employment.

In 1998, the disability rate was 13% in the Northern Territory and 11.2% had specific restrictions.

In 1998, 57% of the 3.4 million people with a disability living in household needed assistance to move around or go out, shower or dress, prepare meals, do housework, light property maintenance or paperwork, or communicate. Most people in need of assistance received some help: 64% had their need fully met and 32% partly met. However, there were 4% who felt their needs were not met at all.⁵

In Alice Springs there is no reason to think that the number of people with disabilities is lower than 19% as suggested by the Australian overall figure. The standard of health in the Indigenous population suggests that diabetes-related, respiratory and heart related conditions, plus higher than usual injury rates could lead to a figure close to, if not higher than the suggested national percentage. These factors contribute to the need to access health services in Alice Springs.

Table: Indicators of need in Alice Springs

	In town	Remote
Disability Support Pension	1459	766
Mobility Allowance	38	
Carer Pension	41	18

Source: Centrelink 1998

By realising that citizens and visitors with a disability and special access needs include the elderly, the frail, parents with young children in prams as well as wheel chair users, the size of the population with special access needs could be in excess of 20%⁶.

6.2 Mental Health

ABS⁷ survey cites that at a national level, 1 in 5 Australians (18%) had a mental disorder at some time during the 12 months prior to the survey (ABS 1997:5). As people age, the prevalence of mental illness decreases. In Alice Springs the population is demographically young, hence there is no reason to expect that the statistics for Alice Springs will be lower (particularly in the 18-24 year category) than elsewhere.

It is likely that mental disability in Alice Springs is higher than the national average given⁸ the following factors:

- “The co-morbidity (more than one illness) associated with heavy alcohol intake
- The impact of low school retention rates
- High youth incarceration rates
- High levels of unemployment for Indigenous youth
- High levels of domestic violence
- The transience of the non-Aboriginal population
- The lack of support for young Aboriginal people particularly from remote communities and
- The lack of extended family support for mobile non-Aboriginal workers”.

6.3 Cultural Needs

The people of Alice Springs and the region come from a diversity of cultural backgrounds.

The need to recognise cultural difference and the many and varied backgrounds of community members is important. For example, to be able to safely celebrate diversity in a variety of ways is important in alleviating cultural despair at the 'loss of country' as experienced by those living in isolation from family in other parts of the country and the world.

Access needs to be considered in terms of access to culturally appropriate infrastructure, communications, attitudes and information.

7.0 Process

The Access Policy and Action Plan is based on:

- Issues, which were raised in a series of interviews, conducted for the Alice Springs Town Council, Community Needs Analysis.
- Issues raised by the Alice Springs Town Council Access Advisory Committee.
- The guidelines outlined in the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992.

In order to implement the Access Policy and Action Plan, Council recognises the need to liaise and work in partnership with:

- The Alice Springs Town Council Access Advisory Committee.
- A wide range of locally based government and non government community organisations in Alice Springs, including but not limited to the Migrant Resource Centre, Institute for Aboriginal Development (IAD) and the Disability Advocacy Service.
- The Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment to ensure that building regulations and building certificates bear in mind the concerns of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986.
- Other government departments and agencies at both Commonwealth and Territory levels.
- The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, which was set up to ensure the rights of all Australian citizens are addressed and to address specific complaints.
- The Office of Transport and Infrastructure to ensure the provision of accessible public transport, especially in relation to the Alice Springs Bus (ASBUS) fleet.

8.0 Goals and Actions

Physical	
Goals	Actions
<p>Infrastructure</p> <p>Physical barriers to access removed, as far as is practical, from Council owned and managed properties and facilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to audit and address physical barriers to infrastructure such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pavement surfaces and edges - Types of doors used on public buildings - Ramps - Lift access - Recreational facilities - Business premises and shops from Council managed streets - Shade, etc • Ongoing works program and implementation plan. • Consult with the Access Advisory Committee and other relevant community members on access matters. • Advocate to the NT Government, builders and other agencies for improved access in Alice Springs.
<p>Public Transport</p> <p>Public transport is accessible in terms of physical access, times, routes (geography), affordability and physical infrastructure.</p> <p>Public transport contributes to ensuring that all people are able to access community services, employment, recreational opportunities and public spaces effectively.</p> <p>Refer to the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement as far as is practicable, the standards contained in the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport, which have been developed in accordance with section 31 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992.

Communication	
Goals	Actions
<p>Communication (written, verbal and non-verbal).</p> <p>Council services are accessible in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written communication to meet the needs of people with vision-impairment and a range of literacy levels. • Verbal (non-print options) communication to augment printed communication through audiovisual media. • Non-verbal communication (pace, tone, inflection, body language) that shows respect for all our customers. 	<p>Ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public documents can be made available in 14 point Times Roman font for those who request them. Note: avoid the use of green paper and use dark contrasting ink. • Public signs are accessible in terms of the size of the lettering and culturally appropriate where relevant. • Language for communication to be extended beyond English by forwarding public documents and community information to the Migrant Resources Centre and Institute for Aboriginal Development for translation on an as needs basis. • Staff training is completed to ensure understanding of the community's communication access needs and the availability of resources in Alice Springs. • Establish working links with the Migrant Resource Centre and Institute for Aboriginal Development and other relevant organisation that can assist.

Information	
Goals	Actions
<p>Information (verbal, text and electronic).</p> <p>Verbal information is shared in an open manner based on mutual respect.</p> <p>Alice Springs Public Library provides a friendly environment for access to recreation literature and information through a variety of media and formats including text, multimedia and the Internet.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that staff speak and listen with kindness, consideration and respect, whether or not the person shares the same culture and/or values. • Identify and extend opportunities for members of the public to express their views in an informal and non-threatening environment. • Council and Library to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure Community Information is readily available and accessible in a variety of formats on topics such as but not limited to education, health, accommodation, women's issues, recreation and legal rights. - Respond as far as practicable to requests for library items in other languages and formats. - Support life-long learning through library based community development programs. - Encourage greater use of the library within the community, in order to enhance a culture of learning and recreational reading.
<p>Increase understanding of specific age, gender, culture and disability needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor and address access based complaints and inquiries. • Ensure Council staff have a good understanding of the diverse needs of the community through ongoing learning opportunities and access to relevant information.

Attitudes	
Goals	Actions
<p>All people are treated with respect for their human dignity and rights irrespective of age, gender, ability, cultural background, religion, educational level or income level.</p> <p>Increased opportunities, where possible, for employment within Council for people with disabilities.</p> <p>Aldermen and staff understand that accessible, generic services are a right in terms of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, not a privilege.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To participate in offered program on the legal framework that underpins this plan such as Equal Opportunity Legislation and the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. • Model respect (through appropriate behaviour) for the dignity of all, irrespective of physical and mental abilities and different life chances including choice of language and vocabulary, tone of voice, courtesy and kindness to all. • Ensure that Council represents the diverse community of Alice Springs through creating employment opportunities where possible for people with disabilities.

9.0 Monitoring and Evaluation Process

The Access Policy and Action Plan will be monitored annually with the assistance of the Access Advisory Committee to ascertain to what extent the goals have been reached.

Regular evaluation will allow Council to monitor how well it is working towards:

- “Eliminating discrimination in an active way
- Improving services to existing customers and consumers
- Enhancing organisational image
- Reducing the likelihood of complaints being made
- Increasing the likelihood of being able to successfully defend complaints
- Increasing the likelihood of avoiding costly legal action
- Allowing for a planned and managed change services
- Attracting new consumers....”

(Disability Discrimination Act Action Plan 1992)⁹

Footnotes

¹ Disability is defined in terms of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992.

² Disability rights: Developing an Effective Action Plan. Human Rights and Equality Opportunity Commission, September 1998.

³ “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights; International Covenant on the elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, International Labour Organisation No 111 Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention”.

⁴ According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Report (1997) The Disability, Ageing and Carers Survey (1993) had adequate details on disability but an inadequate sample of aboriginal people.

⁵ AusStats: 4430.0 Disability, Ageing and Carers, 1999. www.abs.gov.au.

⁶ According to Rob Nankerville of The Disability Advocacy Service (Pers. Comm 1998).

⁷ Understanding mental health in Central Australia (part 1 and 2) CARPA Newsletter vol.28: 26-32. According to O’Kane and Tsey (1998: 26) the definition of mental illness is the starting point for all research to assess the extent of mortality and morbidity associated with mental health problems. There are many disagreements about definitions. Wider definitions are essential for preventing social causes of mental health.

⁸ Tsey, K., Scrimgeor, D. and McNought, C. (1998) An Evaluability Assessment of Central Australian Mental Health Services, Menzies School of Health Research, Alice Springs.

⁹ A Guide for State and Territory Government Departments, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.



Alice Springs Town Council

Further Information

Copies of this document are available from:

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Translated copies may be obtained by contacting:

Migrant Resource Centre

Phone: 08 8952 8776

Or

Institute for Aboriginal Development

Phone: 08 8951 1311