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MEDIA RELEASE

SOUTHERN MALLEE TO ENHANCE DISABILITY ACCESS AND INCLUSION THROUGH NEW PLAN AND ACTIONS

Improving access to facilities and services for people with a disability is the focus of a new plan adopted by the Southern Mallee District Council.

The Council's new *Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2020-24* (DAIP) sets out a four-year vision to create communities that are inclusive for all, enhance accessibility and provide improved learning and employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

The plan incorporates key actions, including:

- Undertaking an access audit of Council's buildings and developing projects to improve access at all Council facilities for people living with a disability;
- Reviewing footpaths to determine whether they are wheelchair friendly – and upgrading those that require improvement;
- Working with community libraries to encourage the development of digital collections, audio books and large print books;
- Providing disability action and inclusion training to Elected Members and staff;
- Seeking expert advice on access and inclusion when developing projects such as parks, footpaths and toilets; and
- Investigating grant funding opportunities to support the employment of people with a disability, as well as training or workshops to build knowledge, confidence and capacity for jobseekers with a disability.

Southern Mallee District Council Mayor Jeff Nickolls said the new plan reflected Council's commitment to providing a connected community that is accessible to and inclusive of everyone.

"It is essential that all people within our community are able to access and participate in all areas of our community life and this plan sets out a process for Council to improve these opportunities," Mayor Nickolls says.

"Our aim is to ensure everyone in the Southern Mallee district feels welcome, is able to contribute and can access the services and activities they need within our area.

"With at least 30% of our population aged 60 years or over, and a further 10% aged 75 or over, it's also imperative that our facilities, activities and services can be accessed by our older residents.

"This plan will break down barriers to accessibility and inclusion in a range of areas, from physically being able to attend our facilities, to having more choice in borrowing materials from our libraries, and even employment opportunities."

Implementation of the DAIP will occur over the next four years and will deliver benefits to the Southern Mallee community including increased opportunities for social inclusion, improved physical access to facilities and buildings, enhanced community and individual wellbeing and a greater recognition of diversity. The plan incorporates outcomes to support people with physical, mental and intellectual disabilities.

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Council will monitor its progress under the plan annually and report on its achievements and outcomes. As a working document, there is also scope to review and change elements of the plan over the next three years.

The plan's endorsement follows recent community consultation. The Southern Mallee community will be consulted again in future prior to an updated version of the plan being developed to continue the Council's disability access and inclusion efforts beyond 2024.

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