

Opera Queensland

Disability Action Plan (DAP)

2023-2024

Acknowledgement of Country

Opera Queensland acknowledges the First Peoples of the Lands upon which we perform. We pay our respects to all of Queensland's First Peoples, their ancestors and Elders and to our shared future.

Other Acknowledgements

Opera Queensland would like to acknowledge those people who contributed their time and expertise to participate in the development of this plan, including:

- Our 2020 DAP project team, including Jason Barry-Smith, Morwenna Collett, Erica Fryberg, Megan Kair, Lauren Kelly, Annette Kerwitz, Nida Niaz, Patrick Nolan, Louise Simmons, Mark Taylor, Sandra Willis.
- Our 2022 DAP project team, including Aaron Dora, Laura Hansford, Alex Loh, Annette Kerwitz, Louise Simmons, Murray Summerville, Adam Tucker, Simone Vidler.
- Interview participants and survey respondents
- Opera Queensland artists, staff, contractors and Board members
- Opera Queensland audience members, partners, arts organisations, venues and other stakeholders
- Arts, access and inclusion consultant Morwenna Collett.

Opera Queensland acknowledges the leadership of Sandra Willis (Executive Director from 2017 to 2020) and her contribution to the creation of this document.

Alternative Formats

Our DAP is available in alternative formats on our website, including PDF and word. Hard copy formats, in both large and standard print, and other alternative formats are also available upon request.

Language

Opera Queensland recognises that there are varying views on language and terminology around disability in Australia and internationally. Language can be both a personal, and also political, choice. We use the person-first language of 'person with disability' to recognise that disability is just one aspect of a person's life and does not determine who they are. However, we respect that different people have different preferences about language.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
ABOUT US	4
OUR DISABILITY ACTION PLAN	5
OUR ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE	7
METHODOLOGY AND CONSULTATION	8
GOVERNANCE, MONITORING AND REVIEW	9
PLAN VISION, COMMITMENT AND GOALS	9
ACTION PLAN	11
Stage 1 – 2023	11
CONTACT US	15
Appendix A – DEFINITIONS	16
What is disability?	16
Other terms	17
Appendix B – KEY STATISTICS	17
Demographics	17
Participation in Cultural Life	18
Appendix C – LEGISLATION & POLICY	19

INTRODUCTION

“I want us to be of the community and owned by the community. We need to represent Queensland in its widest possible definition.”

Patrick Nolan, Chief Executive Officer and Artistic Director

We want to be an arts company accessible to everyone.

Diversity and inclusion are core values within our organisation and are highlighted within our vision and key organisational documents. We are committed to increasing our disability confidence and competence and we are working to create an environment where all artists, participants, audience members and staff feel welcome and can engage with us equally. By working to remove barriers, we want to play a role in building an inclusive and accessible arts industry where everyone can thrive.

It is with pleasure that we release our first Disability Action Plan (DAP). We are indebted to the advice provided by our internal and external stakeholders via the consultation process used to develop this Plan. We are particularly grateful to those with lived experience of disability who shared barriers they have experienced in accessing the arts, as well as their guidance around our mission to improve the accessibility of our work.

This Plan details our previous work carried out in this area and outlines our ongoing commitment to access and inclusion going forward. Our DAP will act as our roadmap for the future and we look forward to working with the Queensland disability community and arts community throughout the duration of and beyond the life of this Plan.

ABOUT US

Opera Queensland delivers a diverse program of opera productions, projects and activities across the state and beyond. Based in Brisbane, we present an annual program of major works in the Queensland Performing Arts Centre,

Australia's largest performing arts complex. Serving Australia's most decentralised state, the company tours to regional and remote locations with a rich array of performances, education activities and community programs. Audiences include Queenslanders from metropolitan and regional centres, remote areas, primary school children, First Nations communities, people with disability and passionate supporters, connected by the distinct power of opera.

We are dedicated to being welcoming, accessible and inclusive to the widest possible audience. We provide a comprehensive array of services that enable our stakeholders to attend performances and participate in programs.

OUR DISABILITY ACTION PLAN

Our DAP is integral to our strategic thinking shaping how we engage with our artists, audiences, participants and staff as an organisation. This plan is a realisation of Opera Queensland's values – relating to creativity, respect, collaboration, virtuosity and joy.

Being inclusive makes good business and artistic sense. As a publicly funded organisation we also believe it is our responsibility to make our work as accessible as possible.

Our DAP focuses on making access improvements for artists, audiences, participants and staff - all essential stakeholders who are critical to our organisation's ongoing success. Building on our previous inclusive work, our DAP outlines our strategy to embed access and inclusion principles across all areas of our work. The plan's implementation will utilise the talents, skills and interests of our entire team. We will seek external expertise when required and collaborate through partnerships to extend our reach and knowledge.

We are aware of particular challenges around accessibility for our artform – and we will take steps to address and mitigate these. As a presenting

organisation that hires venues to perform our work, we acknowledge that our capacity to control and influence all venue access issues is limited. However, we are committed to engaging in regular dialogue and using our influence to bring about positive, accessible change across the arts and cultural sector.

We are also conscious that this Plan has been developed during the COVID19 recovery. This time has presented particular access challenges for people with disability, who are more likely to be immuno-compromised and may be slower to return to physical events. With this in mind, we are focusing on the accessibility of our digital program in parallel with accessibility for our in-person events. We know that digital performance may be preferred avenue for some audience members with disability over the next few years (and beyond).

We acknowledge that improving access and inclusion is a journey, not a destination. We are committed to continuous improvement and working closely with the community to identify potential barriers and find solutions. We look forward to working collaboratively to realise the aspirations outlined in this Plan.

We're open, inquisitive, willing to learn, flexible to change and responsive. We understand the principles of universal design, the social model of disability and the complexities of intersectionality. Across the life of this Plan, we will continue to increase our understanding of how people with disability, across all our stakeholder groups, engage with us and how we could better engage with them. We will use these insights in our planning and decision making, proactively improving access to our events to create a culture that recognises, respects, values and celebrates people with disability.

We anticipate other opportunities to increase our accessibility will arise over this period that have not been formally documented in this Plan. There will also be further work to do in future years beyond the life of this document. We value your ideas and feedback on our progress and encourage you to share your thoughts and experiences with us.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

The development of this Plan follows several years of working more inclusively across our mainstage, learning and community programs. While accessibility may not always have been a primary focus of our organisation since its inception in 1981, the last few years have seen us grow an increasing consciousness of the importance of being an opera company accessible to all.

Across our mainstage program, we have offered Audio Description for patrons who are Blind or have low vision. In 2020 we scheduled our first Auslan interpreted performance for our new production of *Lorelei*, sadly postponed due to COVID-19. We have since gone on to present numerous Auslan interpreted performances in our QPAC seasons, including *Lorelei* and *The Marriage of Figaro* in 2021 and *The Sopranos*, *La Traviata* and *The Human Voice/The Call* in 2022.

Our community work is where we have achieved and learned the most when it comes to access and inclusion. Our multi-year partnership with Blue Roo Theatre, an inclusive theatre company that was led by Artistic Director Clark Crystal, resulted in a production of *Orpheus and Eurydice*, brought to life by a live orchestra of local musicians, opera singers and talented ensemble members. Many of our audience members for this production were new to Opera Queensland, it sold out and 97% of the respondents (over 200) had a good or excellent experience.

Reflecting on the performance, Clark Crystal observed, "Seeing the ensemble perform together on stage with Opera Queensland's artists was nothing short of amazing". Speaking of his experience in creating the work, Opera Queensland artist, Jason Barry-Smith, said, "I've learned so much about love which is really one of the main themes of this opera and of acceptance, of patience, and a real sense of two groups of people coming together and creating something." More information about this partnership and work is available [here](#).

We have also welcomed people with disability into our community singing programs, such as *Sing Sing Sing*.

METHODOLOGY AND CONSULTATION

We began our development of this Plan by engaging an external consultant with disability as a trusted advisor to help us devise a disability-led approach to its design. We established an internal DAP Project Team, with staff representatives from across the organisation, to champion and guide this project.

Our methodology involved a research phase, a consultation phase followed by detailed analysis. We reviewed internal and public documents and engaged with people with and without disability across various stakeholder groups. We utilised a variety of methods for internal and external stakeholders to provide input into this process, via interview and survey. 26 individuals provided feedback via 19 interviews, with interviewees including core staff, casual staff, Board members, access service providers, singers with disability and arts and/or disability organisations (e.g. local council, peak bodies, venues).

Data from all of these sources enabled us to gather information about what has worked well and what could be improved, as well as new ideas about what we can do to continue to become more inclusive and accessible in the coming years. This has provided us with the foundations to create an achievable, realistic and impactful DAP.

GOVERNANCE, MONITORING AND REVIEW

Our DAP is referenced in our Strategic Recovery Plan and is overseen by our Board. Our internal DAP Project Team will regularly monitor and review our DAP supported by advice from our external DAP Advisory Group. We will include a section each year in our Annual Report, to communicate our work and its successes and challenges. We value community feedback and continually seek to improve our work.

This is a living document that will be monitored and reviewed frequently.

The internal DAP Project Team and the external DAP Advisory Group will review and monitor this Plan at least twice a year. Progress Reports and any suggested plan edits will be prepared and discussed by the Executive and Board on an annual basis. The implementation of the DAP will be reported on publicly through our Annual Report.

Feedback from our external DAP Advisory Group, staff, artists and audiences with disability, as well as arts and disability organisations will be gathered over the life of the DAP, to contribute to the plan's evaluation.

The DAP will be thoroughly reviewed and re-written at least every four years, following appropriate consultation processes with the disability community and other relevant stakeholders.

Our Plan is available to the public via our website and accessible formats are available on request. This plan is also registered with the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC).

PLAN VISION, COMMITMENT AND GOALS

By continuing to break down barriers and acknowledging and removing unconscious bias and championing the work of artists with disability, our

vision is to play an integral part in creating an inclusive arts industry where everyone is welcome and can thrive.

We are committed to increasing our disability confidence and competence and are working towards creating an environment where all artists, audience members, participants and staff can equally engage with us.

We want:

- To ensure our programs can be accessed by everyone, and that all our patrons, artists, staff and our community can have an equitable artistic experience
- To actively eliminate discrimination, so there are no extra steps required for those with disability
- To use inclusive language and create a welcoming community for all people
- To be accountable and to set high benchmarks
- To be accessible across in-person events and digitally
- To be leaders, advocates and champions in the areas of access and inclusion.

To do this, we have set ourselves the following **goals**:

1. **Audiences** – we will remove barriers, so more audience members can engage with us
2. **Artists and participants** – we value diverse artists and create inclusive environments for artists and participants with disability to work with us
3. **The company** – we will embed access and inclusion principles across all our work areas, ensuring all systems and processes are inclusive.

These goals have guided the development of our Action Plan as detailed below. By implementing these actions, we will improve access for artists,

audiences, staff and other stakeholders, as well as advocate for change across the wider arts sector.

ACTION PLAN

Stage 1 in 2023

Goal 1 Audiences

- Develop an access checklist that can be used to select venues that take into account 'whole of journey experience', including public transport, amenities etc. and identify the minimum level of access OQ will accept
- Grow a d/Deaf audience interested in OQ's work
- Partner with arts and/or disability organisations to increase audience reach
- Continue to improve the accessibility of the ticket booking process
- Investigate affordability of ticket prices as a barrier for people with disability, and consider alternatives to ensure people with disability can be part of OQ's audience
- Ensure access services are well promoted and reach potential audiences, using inclusive communication methods appropriate to them
- Utilise strategic marketing and publicity opportunities to increase awareness of OQ's commitment to access and inclusion
- Maintain the accessibility of OQ's new website, and aim to improve upon this over time
- Ensure all social media posts are accessible and use Alt Text, image descriptions, and CamelCase
- Include a question on all invitations to events, asking people if they have any access requirements
- Ensure all communication is designed with access in mind and is available in a range of accessible formats on request (eg. Annual Report etc.)

- Review Festival of Outback Opera plan, ensuring it is inclusive for people with disability and includes access services and/or inclusive community programs
- Ensure accessible offerings are available within OQ's Learning, Regional and Community programming, and any other programming
- Create a list of access service organisations working in disability space who could bring people to performances.

Goal 2 Artists and participants

- Ensure creative teams are open to inclusive casting and knowledgeable in working with artists with disability
- Create a list of companies to propose artistic collaborations
- Seek philanthropic and sponsorship opportunities which will enable expansion of the access program
- During auditions and casting conversations, actively invite artists with disability
- Scope options for increasing the skills of emerging artists with disability
- Produce an Access Guide for each season, which may include virtual venue tours and/or Visual Stories
- Develop clear accessibility information about OQ's Studio for hirers and upload to website
- Advocate for better access by engaging in an ongoing dialogue with regularly used venues
- Utilise consultation, feedback and complaints mechanisms to make access improvements and to ensure people with disability are involved in OQ's continuous improvement
- Review Festival of Outback Opera plan, ensuring it is inclusive for people with disability and includes access services and/or inclusive community programs
- Develop local community partnerships with regional disability and disability arts organisations.

Goal 3 The company

- DAP released and published on OQ website and Australian Human Rights Commission website and shared with internal and external stakeholders (Dec 2022)
- Establish external DAP Advisory Committee
- Develop an annual workplan and timeline for the internal DAP project team to conduct monitoring and review activities
- Facilitate appropriate training for the OQ team presented by trainer/s with lived experience of disability
- Broadly share knowledge, learnings, tools, resources and success stories via conversations, and presenting at conferences
- Conduct an audit of end-to-end HR processes, to ensure our recruitment and selection employment processes are inclusive and any barriers for people with disability to work with us are removed/minimized
- Plan a series of staff engagement activities focused on access and inclusion and arts and disability practice, including a celebration of Disability Action Week and International Day of People with Disability
- Review Feedback Reports on events and activities
- Ensure feedback reports are reviewed by internal DAP project team regularly and integrated with DAP reviews and post-event debriefs
- Establish disability language guidelines, (as part of the organisation style guide), which align with social model of disability and universal design. Ensure the language in all organisational documents and website is consistent with these guidelines
- Develop a section on OQ website to broadly share access knowledge, learnings, tools, resources and success stories
- Ensure access is discussed at key team meetings, to heighten staff awareness and engagement of access and inclusion issues.

Stage 2 - Late 2023-2024

Goal 1 Audiences

- Create an Audience Development Strategy for audiences with access needs, which includes an innovative and accessible marketing plan to reach target groups for programming
- Ensure that staff, volunteers, and contractors are equipped to confidently and appropriately engage with people with disability.

Goal 2 Artists and participants

- Ensure OQ works with a diverse range of artists and considers appropriately skilled artists with disability for creative roles, and provides appropriate access for these artists to succeed
- Meet with local, national and international companies to discuss the improvements to access and inclusion that OQ has made and create a method of sharing knowledge between organisations.
- Scope the implementation of additional offerings for the Queensland disability community – e.g. access to open rehearsals, access to rehearsal space
- Improve the accessibility of OQ's Studio by utilising the space in a more accessible way including: accessible signage symbols, staffing of trained ushers, accessible seating
- Develop local community partnerships with regional disability and disability arts organisations
- Scope additional tailored content / programs of high artistic quality in our learning and community programming for people with disability.

Goal 3 The company

- Lead cross-organisation round table to share knowledge

- DAP integrated across organisation policies, operational plan, and departmental plans
- Ensure diversity data is captured across all projects and personnel and used in decision making
- Ensure all DAP and other access and inclusion activities are planned for and supported in a way that enables them to be successful.
- Ensure access checklist is used by all departments when selecting venue for shows and events
- Develop strategies to increase the number of people with disability working and volunteering with OQ
- Inclusion of access planning in forward budgeting for future financial years.

CONTACT US

Opera Queensland values community feedback on our progress in meeting the goals and actions outlined in our DAP. We encourage individuals and organisations to share their thoughts and experiences to ensure our continued improvement.

Please contact us on:

Phone: 07 3735 3030

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Appendix A - DEFINITIONS

What is disability?

The 2006 United Nations 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.'¹

We subscribe to the social model of disability, which distinguishes between an individual's impairment and 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.

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

¹ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

Other terms

Inclusion is about creating an environment that celebrates diversity and is free from all forms of discrimination and harassment. This environment recognises, utilises and values the knowledge, abilities, skills and ideas of people, irrespective of race, ethnicity or religion, gender or sexual orientation, education level, socio-economic background, age, disability or family responsibility.²

Access is about creating the necessary conditions for all individuals and organisations to utilise services, facilities, programs and employment opportunities. Access is about making space for the unique characteristics that each person brings. Barriers to equitable access fall into the categories of physical, communication, economic, social and attitudinal.

Universal Access is about the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used by all people, regardless of their age, size or ability. An environment (or any building, product or service in that environment) should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to use it. It is a fundamental condition of good design. If an environment is accessible, usable, convenient and a pleasure to use, everyone benefits.³

Appendix B - KEY STATISTICS

Demographics

- Almost one in five Australians are people with disability (18.3% or 4.3 million people)³
- 18.3% of Queenslanders identify as people with disability⁴

² University of Western Australian Disability Access and Inclusion Plan

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics 4430.0 - Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2015

⁴ <https://www.qld.gov.au/disability/community/disability-statistics#:~:text=18.3%25%20of%20the%20Queensland%20population,a%20profound%20or%20severe%20disability.>

- More than 1 million people with disability are from non-English speaking backgrounds⁵
- Just under half of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over, experience disability (45.1%)⁶
- People with disability are twice as likely to be in the bottom 20% of gross household incomes⁷
- 45% of those with disability in Australia are living either near or below the poverty line, more than double the OECD average of 22%⁸
- 45% of the population will experience a mental health issue at some point⁹
- 3.4 million (15%) of Australians have a physical impairment¹⁰
- Vision Australia estimates there are 357,000 people in Australia who are blind or partially sighted
- 1 in 6 Australians are affected by hearing loss. There are approximately 30,000 Deaf Auslan users with total hearing loss.¹¹

Participation in Cultural Life

- In 2019, people with disability were more likely than people without disability to recognise the positive impacts of arts and creativity across all areas, to agree the arts allows connection with others. The arts should receive public funding and artists make an important contribution to society.¹²
- People with disability were more likely than people without disability to give time or money to the arts, be motivated to attend the arts to improve their wellbeing and to express themselves, to creatively participate in the arts and to engage with the arts online.¹³

⁵ National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA) People from NESB with disability in Australia: What does the data say? March 2010

⁶ ABS 4714.0 - National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2014-15

⁷ ABS 4430.0

⁸ Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2011. 'Disability expectations - Investing in a better life, a stronger Australia'.

⁹ ABS 4326.0 - National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of Results, 2007

¹⁰ Australian Network on Disability <http://www.and.org.au/pages/disability-statistics.html>

¹¹ 'Why Auslan Interpreting Matters' www.VicDeaf.com.au

¹² Creating our future: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey (2020). The Australia Council for the Arts.

¹³ Ibid.

Appendix C - LEGISLATION AND POLICY

This Plan aligns with international, national and Queensland social policy and legislative frameworks including:

- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006 (UNCRPD)
- National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 (NDS)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA)
- Disability Services Act 1986 (Commonwealth)
- Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards 2010
- National Arts and Disability Strategy 2009
- The Disability Services Act 2006 (Queensland)
- State Disability Plan 2021-2022 (Queensland), an extension of State Disability Plan 2017-2020 (Queensland)
- A City for Everyone: Inclusive Brisbane Plan 2019-2029