

Deaf and Disability Inclusion Action Plan

2021-2025



Always Was, Always Will Be

Melbourne Fringe works on the unceded lands of the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin Nation.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land where we live, work and play.

We acknowledge that the oldest living culture in the world has been kept alive by a rich and continuing history of storytelling, music, dance, art and language.

We pay our respects to the people of the Kulin Nation and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present, who maintain an enduring spiritual and cultural connection to the land.

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Our Vision for Disability Access & Inclusion

To create a more accessible and inclusive Melbourne Fringe for its audiences, staff and artists. We aim to identify and remove barriers to access in all aspects of the organisation's operations and programs. We strive to be leaders in the industry and advocate for disability and Deaf-led arts.

Guiding Principles

- Artists first
- Creativity
- Human rights
- Intersectionality
- Playfulness
- Risk-Taking
- Self-determination
- Universal access

Organisational Context



Tom Skelton, Melbourne Fringe Festival 2019. Photo by Jacinta Keefe.

Melbourne Fringe democratises the arts.

Our vision is cultural democracy – empowering anyone to realise their right to creative expression. We support the development and presentation of artworks by, with and for Melbourne’s people, running the annual Melbourne Fringe Festival, the year-round venue Common Rooms at Trades Hall, and a range of arts sector leadership programs.

We believe that access to the arts and creative expression are fundamental rights of our citizenship and vital to a creative, cohesive, optimistic and empathetic society.

This DDIAP sits within a policy framework guided by the organisation’s Strategic Plan (2021-2025). The strategic plan identifies five goals to drive change:

- **Democratise artistic participation**
- **Provoke social change**
- **Inspire artistic risk-taking**
- **Strengthen Melbourne’s independent arts community**
- **Sustain our artists, our organisation and our planet**

Under the Strategic Plan is the organisation’s newly developed Equity Action Plan (EAP), which aims to build on the successful cultural equity work Melbourne Fringe has conducted over recent years to drive systemic change for our five identified communities of focus: First Nations, Deaf and disability, people of colour, women and non-binary people, and the LGBTIQ+ communities.

One of the actions in the EAP is to finalise and deliver a Deaf and disability inclusion action plan. This plan is designed to work in conjunction with the Equity Action Plan, as well as the organisation’s other policies and procedures in the cultural equity space.

Background



Trades Hall, Melbourne Fringe Festival 2019. Photo by Theresa Harrison.

In 2018, Fringe enacted a three-year Access and Inclusion project centring around the role of an Access & Inclusion Coordinator with lived experience of disability.

The project's aims were to embed accessible and inclusive practice in all aspects of the organisation's operations, building trust and significantly increasing participation in the organisation for disabled and Deaf people as artists, audiences, volunteers and employees.

In 2021, we have developed a Radical Access program in partnership with Arts Access Victoria that we continue our trajectory in this area, including in our role as an influencer of the practice of other artists and the sector more broadly.

The organisation first implemented a Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) in 2013.

Almost a decade later, many of the goals in that plan have been achieved, but there is still much to do. In the spirit of continual improvement, the aim of this Deaf and Disability Inclusion Action Plan is to continually improve on our work to reduce barriers for artists, producers and arts workers who are disabled or Deaf.

Actions will be revisited on an annual basis, with measurement consolidated as part of the organisation's strategic evaluation framework and monitoring of organisational KPIs.

All Melbourne Fringe staff champion the DDIAP, with responsibility for actions sitting in every department.

The Creative Director & CEO and General Manager ultimately sign off on the plan. A working group was created to draft and implement this plan, consisting of the General Manager, Head of Programs & Projects, Communications & Engagement Manager, Access Advisor, Business & Operations Manager and Funding, Strategy & Evaluation Manager.

During this process the organisation undertook consultation with Arts Access Victoria.



Definition

Disability includes but is not limited to visible and invisible disability, chronic illness, Deafness, mental illness and neurodiversity; and other barriers, identifiers and experiences that people may have as part of the disability communities.

Language

At Melbourne Fringe, we say 'disabled people'. Many people in the disability community prefer identity-first language. This positions disability as part of a person's identity and belonging to a cultural group. Another preferred term is 'people with disability' – this term puts the person before the disability, and it acknowledges that disability is caused by societal barriers.

We use 'Deaf people' to refer to people who are culturally Deaf – that is, people who were born deaf, or became deaf early in life, and who use Auslan sign language to communicate.

We discourage the use of euphemisms like 'special needs', 'differently abled', 'handicapable' and 'diffability' because these create further stigma for disabled people.

The disability and Deaf communities are diverse. We follow and respect the community members' lead on what they prefer to be called. Some people don't consider themselves to be disabled at all (especially people within Deaf and Autistic communities), and they will use language that suits them.

More information on language can be found at [People with Disability Australia](#).

The Social Model of Disability

We subscribe to the Social Model of Disability, where disability is caused by a society and environment with physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers. It's our responsibility to create a Festival that reduces these barriers to enable full participation by all people.

Arts and Disability vs 'Disability Arts'

Disability Art is artwork made by disabled people that comes from an experience of being disabled and that has references to disability. Not all disabled make work about this experience, and not all choose to identify with the Disability Art movement.

Goal 1: Talent Development

Build the capacity and skills of Deaf and disabled artists, participants and staff

Program Launch, Melbourne Fringe Festival 2019. Photo by Tanya Voltchanskaya

Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Budget Required	Consultation
Continue to develop and fund identified positions for Deaf and disabled staff, including in non-disability specific roles.	CEO General Manager Access Advisor	Ongoing	✓	
Implement a tailored professional development and mentorship program for Deaf/disabled staff	Access Advisor General Manager Business & Systems Manager	Ongoing	✓	Mentors and trainers with lived experience of disability
Provide direct support to mid-career Deaf and disabled artists through Radical Access commissions and mentorships	Head of Programs & Projects Access Advisor	2022	✓	Arts Access Victoria
Provide targeted support for emerging Deaf and disabled artists participating in the open access Festival program and Common Rooms.	Program Manager (Independent Arts) Program Manager (Common Rooms) Access Advisor	Ongoing	✓	Arts Access Victoria
Facilitate speaking and listening circles for Deaf and disabled artists and arts workers	Access Advisor	Mid-2022		

Outcomes

- Improved representation of Deaf/disabled staff in the organisation
- Deaf/disabled staff build the skills and networks to further positions in the arts (within or external to the organisation)
- Improved pathways and career building for Deaf/disabled artists
- Deaf/disabled artists and arts workers build community with others

Measurement

- Targets set for Board, core/contract and casual staff, reviewed annually
- Demographic data collection via bi-annual anonymous survey of core, contract and casual staff, volunteers and interns
- Distribution of cash from Melbourne Fringe going to Deaf & disabled artists in microgrants, bursaries, commissioning funds (quotas)
- Demographic data collection via Festival and Common Rooms artist surveys
- Annual review of programming data against quotas

Progress to Date

- Access & Inclusion coordinator (a person with lived experience of disability) employed 2018-2020, promoted to Access Advisor in 2021
- Identified positions in the programming team for a person with lived experience of disability in 2019 and 2021
- Mentorship programs for Deaf/disabled artists in 2019 and 2020
- Direct support provided to Deaf/disabled artists in the Open Access Program from Access & Inclusion Coordinator/Access Advisor

Goal 2: Sector Development

Influence the uptake of access and inclusion initiatives within the independent arts sector

Program Launch, Melbourne Fringe Festival 2019. Photo by Tanya Voltchanskaya

Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Budget Required	Consultation
Continue to produce and deliver disability and accessibility related professional development resources and workshops for artists, producers and the wider arts sector	Access Advisor Program Manager (Independent Arts)	Annually	✓	Training partners with lived experience of disability
Create a fund for independent artists to offer access provisions at their events, selected by a panel with lived experience of Deafness & disability.	Head of Programs & Projects Access Advisor	2022	✓	
Create a consultation plan for independent venues and other stakeholders (including presenting partners) advising them about best practice for access and inclusion	Access Advisor	Mid-2022	✓	Independent venues and stakeholders
Continue to develop a Festivals Access Network with other local open access festivals	Access Advisor	End 2021		Other arts festivals
Attend and participate in local, national and international art forums and events	Access Advisor Heads of Department	Ongoing	✓	
Build formal networks with Access/Inclusion officers at other arts organisations	Access Advisor	End 2021		Other arts organisations
Refine and build upon guides and resources for artists and producers to increase accessibility of independent events	Access Advisor, Program Manager (Independent Arts)	End 2022		

Outcomes

- Artists, producers and venues have greater understanding and competency of disability and accessibility
- More events in the Open Access Program offer access provisions (such as Auslan interpretation)
- Independent venues have improved accessibility

Measurement

- Number of events in the Open Access Program with access provisions
- Disability competency/awareness levels of artists measured in the Festival artist survey
- Number of accessible venues in Open Access Program

Progress to Date

- Access & Inclusion network for Melbourne Open Access Festivals created in 2019
- Producer's Guide to Access and other resources available for artists on Fringe's Resource Hub
- Disability & Deaf awareness training offered to Melbourne Fringe community in 2020

Goal 3: Audience & Community Development

Deepen our engagement with Deaf & disability communities, cultivating new and existing audiences

Program Launch, Melbourne Fringe Festival 2019. Photo by Tanya Voltchanskaya

Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Budget Required	Consultation
Formalise marketing & engagement strategy to build Deaf/disabled audiences, reviewed annually	Head of Marketing, Access Advisor, Head of Programs and Projects	Mid-2022	✓	Arts Access Victoria
Collect, analyse and respond to feedback from Deaf or disabled audiences on their experience with Melbourne Fringe	Head of Marketing, Access Advisor	Ongoing		Deaf/disabled audiences
Continue to resource Digital Fringe and hybrid model events to facilitate participation for those who cannot attend in-person events	Heads of Department	Ongoing	✓	
Provide best-practice accessibility initiatives for Fringe-produced events and spaces, building access provisions into the initial planning stages.	Program and Projects team, Access Advisor, Venue Manager	Ongoing	✓	
Ensure accurate, detailed and easily searchable access information for events and venues is published on website, including when access is only partial.	Communications and Engagement Manager, Program Manager (Common Rooms) and Program Manager (Independent Arts)	Ongoing		

Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Budget Required	Consultation
Identify and plan for key external communications to include accessible methods of communication (ie. Auslan videos, plain English versions for recruitment, audio recordings etc)	Communications and Engagement Manager	Annually at the beginning of the year	✓	
Invest in relationships with other Deaf and disability peer organisations to facilitate connections with their communities	Access Advisor, Head of Programs and Projects	2022		Peer organisations
Melbourne Fringe staff identify and attend key Deaf and disability community and industry events	Access Advisor, Creative Director, Senior Producer, General Manager, Program and Projects team	Ongoing		

Outcomes

- Increased audience numbers from Deaf or disabled communities
- Increased sense of safety, confidence and trust in Melbourne Fringe and its programs
- Audiences easily able to find and book events with access provisions
- Feedback is heard and responded to

Measurement

- Demographic data collection via Festival audience survey and Common Rooms audience surveys
- Track number of access requests at point of ticket sales
- Track number and resolution of access complaints from audience members

Progress to Date

- Formal partnership with Arts Access Victoria
- Nurturing relationship with disability support provider Scope
- Our Common Rooms venue at Trades Hall is 100% physically accessible
- We achieved the result of 10.5% Deaf or disabled audience by the end of the third year of our Access and Inclusion program

Goal 4: Internal Systems & Processes

Ensure Melbourne Fringe's systems and processes are as accessible as possible

Program Launch, Melbourne Fringe Festival 2019. Photo by Tanya Voltchanskaya

Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Budget Required?	Consultation
Devise plan to improve the accessibility of the Melbourne Fringe website and ticketing system, including sourcing funding where required	Communications & Engagement Manager	Website upgrade plan devised in 2021, implemented in 2022+	✓	Website designers + developers Accessibility consultants for website
Improve the accessibility of online data collection and artist registration systems	Business & Operations Manager	2023	✓	Accessibility consultants
Implement a tailored multi-level disability and Deaf awareness and competency training program for staff, board and volunteers led by trainers with lived experience of disability	Business & Operations Manager	2021	✓	Trainers with lived experience of disability
Finalise Fringe's internal guide to access resource for staff	Access Advisor	End 2021		
Build disability cultural awareness and safety resources into the organisation's induction processes	Access Advisor and Business & Operations Manager	2022		
Ensure access and inclusion is considered in decision making surrounding procurement of new software and systems	Access Advisor and Business & Operations Manager	Procurement policy drafted in 2022		

Improve accessibility of recruitment and application process through organisation wide Equity checklist for recruitment	General Manager	2021		
Engage artists with lived experience of disability for curatorial and selection panels for Radical Access programs	CEO, Head of Programs & Projects	Ongoing	✓	Arts Access Victoria
Include artists with lived experience of disability on Melbourne Fringe's artist council	CEO, Head of Programs & Projects	2022	✓	
Ensure access provisions are provided for Melbourne Fringe staff (including physical accessibility, JobAccess etc)	General Manager, Access Advisor	2022	✓	

<p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Melbourne Fringe is a first-choice employer for Deaf/disabled staff Increased applications from Deaf/disabled candidates for all positions within the organisation Deaf/disabled audiences can navigate the Melbourne Fringe website with ease Melbourne Fringe staff and Board report greater Deaf/disability awareness and competency
<p>Measurement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> WCAG errors on Melbourne Fringe website Annual audits of staff Deaf/disability cultural awareness and competency Review of feedback from staff via annual reviews and exit interviews reporting safe cultural environment
<p>Progress to Date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Melbourne Fringe office and spaces at Trades Hall are physically accessible Training offered to Melbourne Fringe staff include general accessibility training, Deaf awareness, mental health & disability and image descriptions 10-week Auslan training course offered to staff in 2019