

Submission

To Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

Topic Inclusive Communities Fund Consultation

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About

We are an inclusive not-for-profit community service provider working alongside more than 110,000 South Australians each year and have been creating positive change for South Australian communities for more than 120 years. We advocate for systems change across diverse social justice issues to shape public and social policy that delivers better outcomes for marginalised communities.

[NDIS Support Services](#)

Uniting Communities offers personalised NDIS support through one-to-one services that help individuals build independence, engage with their community, and achieve personal goals. Support workers assist with daily living, social participation, and skill development, tailoring services to each person's unique needs and preferences.

[Individualised Living Options Service](#)

Uniting Communities' Individualised Living Service provides tailored support for people with disability to live independently in their communities. The service is designed around each person's goals, preferences, and lifestyle, offering flexible assistance with daily routines, decision-making, and community engagement. It promotes autonomy and wellbeing through respectful, person-centred care.

[Disability Advocacy Service](#)

Uniting Communities' Disability Advocacy Service (DAS) provides free, independent support to help people with disability understand and assert their rights. The service assists with NDIS-related issues, including appeals, by offering legal advice, advocacy, and referrals. Delivered through the Uniting Communities Law Centre, DAS is a multidisciplinary team of lawyers and advocates. Beyond appeals, DAS also supports people outside the formal NDIS review process—for example, assisting those denied access to reapply, providing information and advice on navigating the NDIS system, and linking individuals to broader community supports.

Submission to Inclusive Communities Fund Consultation

Uniting Communities welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Inclusive Communities Fund consultation. The Fund represents an important opportunity to build the capacity of community organisations to create more accessible, inclusive and welcoming communities for people with disability. While many organisations are committed to inclusion, they may not always have the knowledge, confidence or resources needed to effectively remove barriers to participation.

Through our work across South Australia, we have seen firsthand the importance of communication accessibility and meaningful engagement in supporting participation, inclusion and belonging. We therefore highlight the need for greater investment in communication access capability, particularly for people with diverse communication needs, alongside meaningful co-design with people with disability to ensure initiatives are effective.

The success of the Fund should be measured not only by participation rates, but by whether people with disability experience a genuine sense of inclusion, belonging and influence within their communities. Given the time-limited nature of grants, funded initiatives should also support sustainable organisational change, ensuring benefits continue beyond the life of the funding.

Our key recommendations:

- **Support organisations to strengthen communication access capability** through workforce training, Communication Access Accreditation, accessible communication resources such as Easy English, and organisation-wide communication access initiatives.
- **Invest in co-design and lived experience expertise** by supporting meaningful participation, remuneration and engagement of people with disability in the design, implementation and evaluation of community initiatives.
- **Support organisations to increase disability inclusion capability** through activities such as accessibility reviews, Disability Inclusion Action Plans, outcome measurement and other initiatives that embed inclusion into organisational practice.

Consultation

What support, resources or changes would help organisations become more inclusive and accessible for people with disability?

What activities should the Fund support, given that it will not pay for service delivery? For example, staff training, advice on how to make services more inclusive, or other accessibility changes.

Communication access and training

Community organisations often lack the knowledge, skills and tools needed to communicate effectively with people with disability and diverse communication needs. A lack of client-centred communication approaches and accessible written information can result in exclusion, reduced access to services and poorer outcomes. Evidence shows that people with communication disabilities experience poorer outcomes across social inclusion, self-determination, relationships and wellbeing when appropriate communication supports are not in place. System-level gaps in inclusive communication capability can also contribute to disengagement from services and reduced participation in decision-making.

The Fund should support organisations to build communication access capability through workforce training, accessible communication resources and organisation-wide communication access initiatives. Building communication confidence and competence among staff, volunteers and leaders can help reduce barriers to participation and improve accessibility across community settings.

Training initiatives should be tailored to organisational contexts and informed through co-design with people with disability, including people with communication support needs. This would help ensure training reflects lived experience and delivers practical improvements in accessibility and inclusion.

One example is supporting organisations to achieve Communication Access Accreditation through programs such as Scope Australia's Communication Access initiative. Accreditation builds staff capability, strengthens organisational practices and supports the development of accessible communication tools, including Easy English resources. Such initiatives provide a practical framework for organisations seeking to improve accessibility and inclusion.

Uniting Communities understands firsthand the importance of effective and accessible communication, having implemented organisation-wide approaches to improve communication accessibility across our services. Our Uniting Communities U City building is Communication Access accredited, and our organisation has invested significant time and resources into strengthening communication training and capability across our South Australian services. However, this work is not currently supported through dedicated funding and relies on organisations absorbing the costs of implementation. Greater investment in communication access initiatives would help build sector-wide capability, enabling more organisations to provide accessible, inclusive and responsive services for people with disability and diverse communication needs.

Meaningful co-design

For initiatives that seek to build more inclusive communities, the value of lived experience expertise must be recognised. People with disability should be actively involved in shaping community initiatives, organisational practices and decisions that affect them, with universal design principles considered from the outset. There are also opportunities for people with disability to contribute as mentors, advisors and lived experience experts, supporting community organisations to strengthen inclusion and accessibility across their activities.

Effective co-design requires time, resourcing and a genuine commitment to partnership to avoid tokenistic participation. People with disability must have meaningful opportunities to influence priorities, design approaches and outcomes, rather than being limited to providing feedback on pre-determined proposals. The Fund should support organisations to embed co-design practices by providing resources for lived experience participation, remuneration, co-design training and accessible engagement processes.

Investing in these approaches will help ensure community initiatives are informed by the experiences of people with disability and are more likely to foster genuine participation and belonging.

Organisational capability and accountability

Creating inclusive communities requires more than one-off projects or short-term activities. The Fund should support community organisations to embed accessibility and inclusion into their planning, policies and everyday practices, ensuring improvements are sustained beyond the life of the grant.

This could include activities such as developing and implementing Disability Inclusion Action Plans, undertaking accessibility reviews, and establishing processes to monitor and evaluate progress. Supporting organisations to strengthen their inclusion capability will help ensure funding delivers lasting improvements and contributes to more accessible, welcoming and inclusive community environments for people with disability.

Conclusion

We appreciate the opportunity to provide a submission to the consultation on the Inclusive Communities Fund. This Fund represents an important opportunity to equip organisations to better engage with and include people with disability, particularly those with diverse communication needs. Complementing direct service delivery, the Fund can support proactive capacity building, accessibility improvements and inclusive practice across community organisations.