

Disability Access and Inclusion Policy



The Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia

Theological Statement

The Uniting Church in Australia believes everyone is created equal in the image of God. The Church embodies a movement of Christ's reconciliation among all people, in which "the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole" (Basis of Union para 3).

The Uniting Church in South Australia (UCASA) is committed to the principles of welcome, access, and inclusion of any person living with a disability to participate fully in the life of the Church. This is in accordance with the Disability Welcome and Access statement affirmed at the 15th Assembly in 2018 that:

- (a) Christ is most fully present when all people in the Body are unconditionally accepted as people of worth.
- (b) All people are created in the image of God, including people with disability; along with all members, the faith, gifts, hopes, and dreams of people with disability are to be valued and honoured; and
- (c) God is a God of justice and peace, who seeks reconciliation amongst all people.

UCASA believes that in adopting the 15th Assembly's Disability Welcome and Access statement (2018), we should be celebrating all people's abilities in line with clause (b) above "...the faith, gifts, hopes, and dreams of people with disability are to be valued and honoured..."

In building relationships with people with disabilities, UCASA recognises that this is a mutual two-way relationship. As well as responding appropriately to people with disabilities needs, it is our aspiration that all members of the Uniting Church are open to being changed in the process.

1. Introduction

The Uniting Church in Australia, guided by its belief that all individuals are made in the image of God, is unwavering in its commitment to the care, protection, and safety of everyone within its sphere of influence. As a faith community, the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of South Australia is dedicated to providing a safe environment for both children and adults to encounter God, foster relationships, and grow in faith. This commitment is embodied in our Safe Church Policy – Safe Place statement.

1.1 Commitment to Safety

The Uniting Church unequivocally commits to safeguard the well-being of all individuals involved in its programs, ministries, and events. We reject any form of harm. We affirm that every person,

irrespective of age, gender, race, culture, ability, or social background, has an equal right to protection.

1.2 Rights and Respect

Every individual possesses the inherent right to be respected and valued. This requires the Church to prioritise their emotional, physical, and spiritual safety at all times. This policy seeks to uphold our commitment to the well-being, safety and safeguarding of all people, aligning with both National and State legislation and regulations.

This policy is informed by the People with Disability Overarching Principles adopted at the 17th Assembly July 2024 which state:

- The voice, safety and wellbeing of people with disability is embedded in culture, governance and organisational leadership.
- Person-centred and accessible trauma-informed complaints processes.
- People with disability are safe from abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation, including physically, culturally and psychologically, and institutional safety responsibilities and measures are well understood and embedded in all levels.
- Supported decision making and choice and control are encouraged in all levels of an entity.

This policy also seeks to encompass the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations below which the Uniting Church adopted in 2017 as there may be a similar set of principles developed for people with disabilities in the future.

1.3 National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

1. Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.
2. Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.
3. Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.
4. Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.
5. People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.
6. Processes to respond to complaints and concerns are child focused.
7. Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training.
8. Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.
9. Implementation of the national child safe principles is regularly reviewed and improved.
10. Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all areas of the Uniting Church in South Australia's work and activities. It includes the Uniting Church of Australia South Australian Synod, SA Presbyteries, all congregations and faith communities and mission outreach activities. It applies to all Ministry agents, lay leaders, staff, volunteers, and members, including people living with a disability, providing services, activities, community outreach, and support to any other person with a disability. For schools, colleges and agencies in association with the UCASA, as independent organisations, this policy will be promoted to them by UnitingCare SA to encourage the adoption of the policy (or something similar) within their organisations.^

3. Policy

In seeking to be a community of reconciliation, the Uniting Church acknowledges that for many people with a disability, life and faith have not always borne witness to the vision set out in the Introduction. We are committed to creating an environment of safety free from violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation for people with a disability in the Uniting Church and the wider community.

3.1 In accordance with the Assembly Statement, the Uniting Church in SA seeks:

- (a) To embody a community life that in its theology and practice is accessible to all people.
- (b) To ensure that within its own life people with disability are treated justly and have their hopes and rights realised.
- (c) To advocate for justice and equity for people with disability in the wider community.

3.2 UCASA recognises that the more diverse and inclusive the Church community, the richer it will become and that many members will face access and inclusion challenges at some time in their lives.

3.3 UCASA recognises and aligns with appropriate legislation making disability discrimination unlawful in Australia. It covers areas such as employment, education, and access to public spaces and protects against direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment and social injustice.

3.4 UCASA also recognises and upholds all outcomes required under the Disability Inclusion Act 2018 (SA), however, will endeavour to go above and beyond the minimum standards for accessibility and inclusion subject to congregational/organisational financial capacity. **(Appendix A** The primary disability-related legislation in South Australia.) This will involve constantly aiming for best practices and involving people with a disability at every step of the way to ensure as far as is practicable each person is empowered to be a fully contributing and significant member of UCASA. UCASA's commitment to create an environment of safety and opportunity for all people in the Church includes these outcomes:

- (a) People with a disability have equitable opportunities as other people to access and be supported in their employment at UCASA.
- (b) People with disabilities have equitable opportunities to access the services of, and any events organised by UCASA.
- (c) People with disabilities have equitable opportunities as other people to access the buildings and other facilities of UCASA.
- (d) People with disabilities receive information from UCASA in a format that will enable them to access it as readily as other people.
- (e) People with disabilities have equitable opportunities as other people to make complaints to UCASA.
- (f) People with disabilities must have similar opportunities as other people in regard to representation in co-designing, participating in, and contributing to any public forum or consultation held by UCASA.
- (g) People with disabilities must be able to contribute and participate as fully as possible in the life of the Church.

3.5 To strengthen the impact and implementation of this Disability Access and Inclusion Policy, UCASA will develop an Access and Inclusion Plan: Disability (AIPD) that reflects our hope to go above and beyond the predictable and to change the hearts and minds of church and community members about people with a disability so that accessibility and inclusion become second nature to us all. The types of actions that may be covered in the AIPD are outlined in **Appendix B**.

3.6 This policy also encourages all congregations, mission outreach, agencies, schools and colleges to develop aspirational Access and Inclusion Plans: Disability (AIPDs) specific to their situations and legislative requirements which make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities wherever they are within UCASA.

4. Glossary of Terms/Definitions

UCASA In this Policy, Uniting Church South Australia (UCASA) includes the Uniting Church in Australia SA Synod, SA Presbytery bodies, all congregations and faith communities and mission outreach activities. Relationships with Uniting Church agencies, schools and colleges as independent organisations will also be **approached for coverage**.

Disability The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability does not include a definition of “disability” or “persons with disability” but recognizes that:

1. The notion of disability is not fixed and can alter, depending on the prevailing environment from society to society.

2. Disability is not considered as a medical condition, but rather as a result of the interaction between negative attitudes or an unwelcoming environment with the condition of particular persons. By dismantling attitudinal and environmental barriers – as opposed to treating persons with disabilities as problems to be fixed – those persons can participate as active members of society and enjoy the full range of their rights.
3. The Convention does not restrict coverage to particular persons; rather, the Convention identifies persons with long-term physical, mental, intellectual, and sensory disabilities as beneficiaries under the Convention. The reference to “includes” assures that this need not restrict the application of the Convention and States parties could also ensure protection to others, for example, persons with short-term disabilities or who are perceived to be part of such groups.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Australian Government) defines ‘disability’ in relation to a person as:

- (a) Total or partial loss of the person’s bodily or mental functions; or
 - (b) Total or partial loss of a part of the body; or
 - (c) The presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness; or
 - (d) The presence in the body of organisms capable of causing disease or illness; or
 - (e) The malfunction, malformation, or disfigurement of a part of the person’s body; or
 - (f) A disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction; or
 - (g) A disorder, illness, or disease that affects a person’s thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgment or that results in disturbed behaviour;
- and includes a disability that:
- (h) Presently exists; or
 - (i) Previously existed but no longer exists; or
 - (j) May exist in the future (including because of a genetic predisposition to that disability); or
 - (k) Is imputed to a person.

To avoid doubt, a disability that is otherwise covered by this definition includes behaviour that is a symptom or manifestation of the disability.

5. Variations

- 5.1** UCASA reserves the right to vary or change this policy from time to time.

6. Related documents

- 6.1** UCA Assembly People with Disability Overarching Principles 2024.
- 6.2** UCA Assembly Disability Access Guidelines March 2020
- 6.3** United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability CRPD (The CRPD entered into force for Australia on 16 August 2008)

^ Adapted from the Uniting Church WA Disability Access and Inclusion Policy 2023.

^^ Noting that many schools, colleges and organisations may already have comprehensive Disability Access and Inclusion policies (especially those that are NDIS providers).

Appendix A

The primary disability-related legislation in South Australia includes:

1. **Disability Inclusion Act 2018 (SA):** This Act aims to promote the rights of people with disabilities and ensure their inclusion and participation in the community. It includes provisions for developing and implementing Access and Inclusion Plans: Disability (AIPDs).
2. **Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA):** This Act makes discrimination on the grounds of disability unlawful in various areas of public life, including employment, education, and access to goods and services.
3. **Disability Services Act 1993 (SA):** This Act provides a framework for the provision of services to people with disabilities and emphasizes the importance of promoting their independence, community inclusion, and quality of life.
4. **Guardianship and Administration Act 1993 (SA):** This Act deals with the appointment of guardians and administrators for adults with disabilities who are unable to make decisions for themselves.
5. **Mental Health Act 2009 (SA):** This Act provides for the care, treatment, and protection of people with mental illness, including provisions for involuntary treatment and the rights of patients.

These Acts collectively ensure the rights and protections of people with disabilities in South Australia, covering various aspects of their lives from access to services and inclusion to protection from discrimination.

Several Australian government acts support the principles and requirements of South Australia's disability-related legislation. These government acts ensure a consistent national approach to the rights and protections of people with disabilities. Key government acts include:

1. **Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA):** This Act makes it unlawful to discriminate against someone on the basis of their disability in various areas of public life, including employment, education, access to premises, provision of goods and services, and accommodation.
2. **National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013 (NDIS Act):** This Act establishes the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which provides funding and support to people with disabilities to improve their independence and participation in society.
3. **Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986:** This Act establishes the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), which promotes and protects human rights in Australia, including the rights of people with disabilities. The AHRC can investigate and resolve complaints of discrimination and human rights breaches.
4. **Fair Work Act 2009:** This Act provides protections for employees, including those with disabilities, ensuring fair work practices, protection from discrimination, and promoting equal opportunity in the workplace.

5. **Sex Discrimination Act 1984:** While primarily focused on sex discrimination, this Act also includes provisions that intersect with disability discrimination, particularly concerning workplace and educational environments.
6. **Age Discrimination Act 2004:** This Act protects individuals from discrimination based on age, which can intersect with disability discrimination, particularly for older individuals who may develop disabilities.
7. **Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (WHS Act):** This Act provides a framework to protect the health, safety, and welfare of workers, including those with disabilities. It promotes the inclusion of people with disabilities in safe and healthy workplaces.

These government acts provide a comprehensive legal framework that supports state legislation in ensuring the rights, inclusion, and protection of people with disabilities across Australia.

Appendix B – Supporting Setting up an Access and Inclusion Plan: Disability (AIPD)

Implementing the Disability Access and Inclusion Policy in a practical manner within a church community involves concrete actions (an Access and Inclusion Plan: Disability) and initiatives that reflect the principles outlined. Here are some practical ways a church community can apply the policy:

1. Accessibility Improvements

Physical Accessibility

- Install ramps, handrails, and elevators to ensure all areas of the church building are accessible.
- Ensure accessible parking spaces are available and close to the church entrance.
- Provide accessible restrooms with necessary modifications like grab bars and wider doors.

Digital Access

- Ensure the church website and online content are accessible, following Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). [What is the WCAG Standard? Centre For Accessibility Australia](#)
- Provide options for online participation in church services and events for those who cannot attend in person.
- Ensure that videos have captions and that documents are available in accessible formats (e.g., PDFs with readable text).

2. Inclusive Worship and Activities

Inclusive Communication

Use multiple formats to communicate church information (e.g., large print, braille, audio, and digital formats). Offer large-print hymnals and bulletins for those with visual impairments

- Provide sign language interpreters or real-time captioning during services and events.
- Train staff and volunteers in effective communication techniques for interacting with people with various disabilities.
- Use inclusive language in sermons, announcements, and church publications.
- Contrasting colours for PowerPoint Slides with clear typeface fonts.
- Be aware of colour-blind conditions!

Assistive Technology

- Provide assistive devices such as hearing loops, amplified sound systems, or magnifying devices to support participation in worship and activities.

Participation

- Ensure that people with disabilities can participate in all aspects of worship and church activities, such as reading scripture, serving communion, or participating in the choir.

3. Education and Awareness

Training

- Conduct regular training for staff, volunteers, and congregation members on disability awareness, inclusive practices, and how to support people with disabilities.

Cultural Change

- Actively support the two-way relationship between people with disabilities and able-bodied members of congregations. This means that able-bodied people are changed by including people with disabilities effectively within congregations.

Awareness Campaigns

- Organize events or sermons that focus on disability inclusion and the theological basis for inclusion within the church community.
- Celebrate Disability Awareness Sunday or similar events to highlight the importance of inclusion.

4. Inclusive Programs and Activities

- Design worship services that accommodate people with disabilities, such as offering quiet spaces for those with sensory sensitivities.
- Ensure all church programs, such as Sunday school, youth groups, and adult education classes, are accessible and inclusive.
- Encourage and facilitate the participation of people with disabilities in leadership roles and decision-making processes.
- Celebrate Disability Awareness Sunday - closest Sunday to 3 Dec International Day of People with Disability (IDPD).

5. Support and Empowerment

Pastoral Care

- Offer pastoral care and counselling that is sensitive to the needs of people with disabilities. Ensure that pastoral staff are trained to understand and address the specific challenges faced by people with disabilities.
- Create a support group for people with disabilities and their families within the church.
- Offer pastoral care and counselling that is sensitive to the needs of people with disabilities.
- Provide opportunities for people with disabilities to share their experiences and contribute to the church community.

6. Community Engagement, Collaboration, Partnerships and Advocacy

Advocacy

- Advocate for the rights and needs of people with disabilities within the wider community.
- Partner with local disability organizations to gain insights and resources for improving accessibility and inclusion.

- Invite guest speakers from disability advocacy groups to share their knowledge and experiences with the congregation.
- Collaborate with other churches and community groups to advocate for broader accessibility improvements in the community.

Inclusive Programs

- Develop and support programs that are specifically designed to include people with disabilities, such as accessible Bible study groups, support groups, or recreational activities.

7. Policy Implementation and Monitoring

- Develop an Access and Inclusion Plan: Disability (AIPD) that outlines specific goals and actions for your community setting. Ensure that the plan is publicly available and regularly updated
- Establish a committee or task force focused on disability inclusion to oversee the implementation of the policy.
- Regularly review and update the DAIP based on feedback from people with disabilities and other stakeholders.

8. Feedback and Continuous Improvement

- Create channels for feedback from people with disabilities regarding their experiences and suggestions for improvement.
- Conduct regular accessibility audits of church facilities and programs.
- Celebrate successes and recognize individuals and groups who contribute to making the church more inclusive.

9. Emergency Preparedness

- Develop and practice emergency evacuation plans that consider the needs of people with disabilities.
- Ensure that emergency information is accessible to all members of the congregation.

10. Financial Support

- Allocate budget resources for making accessibility improvements and supporting inclusion initiatives.
- Seek grants and donations specifically aimed at enhancing disability inclusion within the church
- Provide financial assistance or resources to families of people with disabilities to support their participation in church activities and events.

By incorporating these practical steps, a church community can actively live out its commitment to disability inclusion, ensuring that all members feel welcomed, valued, and able to participate fully in the life of the church.