



**uniting
church**
in Australia,
Synod of NSW & ACT

Gungahlin Uniting Disability Inclusion Policy

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Gungahlin Uniting Disability Inclusion Policy

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Gungahlin Uniting Church Disability Inclusion Policy

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)

At Gungahlin Uniting Church (GUC), we seek to be a community of hospitality, where everyone feels welcome.

We are committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming environment where individuals of all abilities can participate fully in our community life. Guided by our faith and values, we believe that every person is created in the image of God and deserves respect, dignity, and equal opportunities to thrive.

Our disability inclusion policy reflects our dedication to accessibility, justice, and inclusion. We strive to ensure that our facilities, programs, and worship services are accessible to everyone, and we actively work to remove barriers that may hinder participation. By embracing diversity and celebrating the unique gifts of each individual, we aim to create a community where everyone feels valued and supported.

The theological statement underpinning the Uniting Church's commitment to disability access can be found in the [Assembly Disability Access Guidelines](#).

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to

- affirm GUC's commitment to inclusivity and equal access for individuals with disabilities
- ensure compliance with relevant laws and regulations on accessibility
- have appropriate action plans in place which demonstrate how we achieve inclusivity and equal access at GUC.

Key Principles

- **Dignity and Respect:** Everyone deserves to be treated with respect and have their inherent dignity recognized, regardless of their abilities.
- **Inclusion:** People with disabilities have the right to fully participate in the life of GUC on an equal basis with others
- **Empowerment:** Disability inclusion at GUC will be informed and led by people with disabilities (including their families/support people)
- **Equity:** We will work with people with disabilities to remove barriers and implement adjustments to provide an equitable experience at GUC, acknowledging that people have different needs and that no two disabilities or people with disabilities are the same.
- **Accessibility:** The GUC physical environment, worship service and programs will be designed to be usable by everyone, including those with physical, sensory, intellectual, or other disabilities.

Definition of disability

Disability is defined in this policy using the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities definition, which describes people with disability as people who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory differences that, when interacting with inaccessible communities and environments, prevent full and equal community participation¹.

In this context, impairment is seen as a medical condition that leads to disability. Disability is the result of the interaction between people living with impairments and barriers in the physical, attitudinal, communication and social environment. For example, it is not the inability to walk that keeps a person from entering a building by themselves, but the stairs that are inaccessible to them.²

There are many types of disability. Below are some common disability types³:

- **Blindness and Low Vision:** Blindness and low vision: A person is considered legally blind when they cannot see at six metres what someone with standard vision can see at 60 metres or have visual fields of less than 20 degrees. A person who is totally blind has no measurable or useable vision, and no light perception. Those with low vision are those whose vision loss cannot be corrected with visual aids, such as glasses or contact lenses. Blindness and vision loss can occur from birth or at any other time in a person's life and result from a range of different causes
- **Deaf or Hard of Hearing** describes functional hearing loss can range from mild to profound and can be caused by a multitude of factors including illness, injury, hereditary or age. People who identify as Deaf (with a capitalised D) often have little or no functional hearing and use sign language to communicate. The term hearing impairment is often used to describe people who have mild to moderate hearing loss.
- **Health Conditions** is used as an umbrella term to describe the variety of conditions or illnesses which may result in impaired function. These include temporary and/or episodic illnesses and degenerative conditions such as cancer, arthritis, fibromyalgia, asthma and more. The episodic nature of many health conditions can mean that there are fluctuating periods of good health and ill health.
- **Intellectual disability** is a broad term used to define a group of conditions, with various causes, which are characterised by an IQ below 70 (the median IQ is 100) and limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour. Intellectual disability is generally identified during childhood and often results in difficulties with communication, socialisation and daily living skills. With the right support, people with intellectual disability can learn and keep learning and can make a valuable contribution to the community.
- **Mental health conditions** is an umbrella term used to describe a range of mental health diagnoses that affect a person's emotions, thinking or behaviour. Mental health conditions can range in severity and duration. Any person can be impacted by a mental health condition, or experience symptoms of a mental health condition at any time during their lifetime.
- An **Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)** is a term used to describe all types of brain injury which occur after birth. The brain can be injured as a result of a traumatic brain injury, stroke, tumour, substance abuse, a lack of oxygen, disease or infection. People with ABI usually retain their intellectual abilities but have difficulty controlling, coordinating and communicating their thoughts and actions. This may include problems with attention and concentration, difficulty in

¹ Adapted from United Nations 2006, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, United Nations, New York.

² Social model of disability <https://pwd.org.au/resources/models-of-disability/>

³ <https://www.adcet.edu.au/students-with-disability/disability-and-discrimination/disability-types>

planning and organisation problems with emotional control, being less aware of other's feelings; and problems expressing themselves or understanding other people

- **Neurodiversity** is an umbrella term for people with neurological differences relating to the way people think, learn and behave. It includes conditions such as:
 - **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder** which can impact a person's ability to control their behaviour and cognition.
 - **Autism Spectrum Condition** which can affect a person's ability to interact with the world around them.
 - **Specific Learning Disability** such as dyslexia or dyspraxia which can affect a person's ability to acquire reading, writing and mathematical skills.
- **Neurological conditions** affect the central and peripheral nervous system and can be acute, chronic, remissive or degenerative in nature. There are over 600 different neurological conditions including epilepsy, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis, dementia and more.
- A **physical disability** is any condition, temporary or permanent, which results in impaired mobility, physical capacity, stamina or dexterity. Physical disability can be caused by a variety of factors such as injury, disease, illness or genetic conditions.

Definition of discrimination

Disability discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably, or not given the same opportunities, as others in a similar situation because of their disability.⁴

Discrimination can be direct or indirect. Indirect discrimination occurs when conditions, requirements or practices are put in place that appear to treat everyone the same but which actually disadvantage some people because of their disability. This would be considered discriminatory unless it can be shown it is reasonable in the circumstances.⁵

Legal obligations

GUC has a positive duty under the *ACT Discrimination Act 1992* to take reasonable and proportionate steps to eliminate discrimination⁶. Under this and the *Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992* GUC must provide employees with reasonable adjustments⁷ to ensure people with disabilities can participate equally. Reasonable adjustments could include, for example, installing a hearing aid loop or a ramp for building access.

GUC must not discriminate against existing or potential employees based on disability. This includes not refusing to hire, promote or terminate an employee or volunteer solely because of their disability. It is not unlawful, however, to refuse employment or promotion if, despite reasonable adjustments, an individual is unable to perform the inherent requirements of the position.⁸

The Commonwealth and ACT disability discrimination legislation do not extend to GUC volunteers, nor do they impose a legal obligation on GUC to make reasonable adjustments to our facilities to ensure equal access, as churches are not defined as a public place. To be clear, however, this disability

⁴ Disability Discrimination, AHRC, https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/GPGB_disability_discrimination.pdf

⁵ See ACT Discrimination Act s8 for definition of reasonable circumstances

⁶ ACT Discrimination Act s75

⁷ Under The Disability Discrimination Act, the definition of reasonable adjustment does not include adjustments that would impose an unjustifiable hardship on GUC. See s.11 of the Act for the definition of an unjustifiable hardship.

⁸ Section 21A of the Disability Discrimination Act

inclusion policy nevertheless applies to all people with disabilities accessing or participating in GUC worship services and programs, including volunteers, regardless of any legal obligation.

Action Plans

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 recommends that organisations make their own action plans⁹. The purpose of an action plan is to encourage, recognise and promote an active commitment to eliminating disability discrimination and to promote the recognition of the rights of people with disability.

Attachment A sets out GUC's action plans and provides strategies on how we are making our building, worship services, programs and social activities accessible and inclusive to people with a disability.

In some circumstances, individual action plans may be developed where an individual with a disability (or their parent/guardian) believes this will be of assistance. Individual action plans remain the property of that individual and it is their decision with whom they share their plan. The plan may not be further shared with others without their permission.

Code of Conduct

Everyone has a right to feel safe. This includes GUC employees, volunteers, those who attend worship or GUC programs, visitors and contractors.

It is important that there is a shared understanding of appropriate conduct, behaviour and attitude so that we can care for each other well and function with peace, mutual respect and care. The GUC Behavioural Covenant and the UCA Code of Conduct sets out behavioural expectations at GUC. This includes not engaging in or tolerating discrimination and not engaging in behaviour that causes isolation. This places an obligation on those who attend, work or volunteer at GUC to not engage in or tolerate discriminatory behaviour and to actively support reasonable adjustments which promote accessibility and equal participation.

In some instances, disabilities may result in behavioural changes which, if not accommodated appropriately, may lead to perceived code of conduct issues. This could include potential conflict, difficulty following rules, maintaining relationships, navigating social interactions, or engaging in inappropriate behaviour.

It is important to understand that these behavioural changes are a result of an impairment caused by a medical condition and are not a character flaw. In these circumstances, issues should be approached with understanding and sensitivity, ensuring all parties feel supported and safe. This may include reasonable adjustments, education and action plans (including individual action plans).

Concerns and complaints

Concerns or complaints may be made to the Church Council (chairperson@gungahlinuniting.org).

Complaints may also be made to the Uniting Church Synod of NSW and the ACT. See Synod Wide Complaints Policy <https://uniting.church/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Guidelines-For-Disability-Access-Final-2.pdf>

⁹ Disability Discrimination Act 1992 Part 3

Review

This policy will be reviewed at least every three years. It is intended that action plans are a living document subject to ongoing review and further development.

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Attachment A: Action Plans

Objectives	Strategies	Actions	Timeframe	Performance Indicators	Responsibility
1. Our church buildings and grounds are accessible	GUC worship services, meetings and programs are held in accessible venues	Our buildings have step free access, wide corridors and doors, and a dedicated, well-equipped bathroom with disability access.	Ongoing	People who want to attend can participate fully	Synod Property Trust, Church Council
		Our stage is wheel-chair accessible. A mobile ramp provides wheelchair access to the stage as required	End 2025	The ramp provides wheelchair access to the stage which is safe and easy to use	Property Committee, Church Council
		Our venue is close to public transport. The church also offers transport to Sunday worship services.	Ongoing	People who want to attend can participate fully	Synod Property Trust, Pastoral Care Team
		Enough clearly visible, accessible parking spaces are available close to the entrance of our church building.	Ongoing	People using the church building can access suitable parking	Church Council
	Our grounds and buildings are well maintained and free of hazards	Regular property audits identify and rectify hazards.	Ongoing	Paths within our facility are even and well maintained. Our buildings are hazard free	Property team
2. GUC has policies, developed in consultation with people with disabilities, that	Review and develop access and equity policies in line with Disability Discrimination Act	Develop a Disability Inclusion policy which is reviewed at least every 3 years	June 2025, then ongoing	GUC has in place a disability inclusion policy developed in consultation with people with disabilities,	Church Council

promote universal access and that end any discriminatory practices within GUC.	1992 and other legal requirements.			families and/or advocates which is reviewed at least every 3 years.	
		<p>Engage people with disabilities (and/or their families /support people) in developing relevant access and equity Disability Action Plans.</p> <p>As a first step, develop a Neurodiverse Action Plan which identifies ways in which GUC worship and programs can better support neurodiversity.</p> <p>Other action plans may include Acquired Brain Injury</p>	Neurodiverse action plan – by end 2025, then ongoing	GUC has relevant action plans in place developed in consultation with people with disabilities, their families and/or advocates.	Church Council
3. People with disabilities can fully participate in worship, GUC programs, social activities and volunteer or employment roles.	Seating in our worship space is inclusive of people with disabilities	Seating needs are incorporated into the general seating layout.	Ongoing	People who want to attend do not feel isolated from others during worship	Church Council
		We provide a separate, quiet area which can be used by people with disability if they need to take a break from worship or other activities held at the church.	Ongoing	People who want to attend have the option of accessing a quiet space if required	Church Council

	Our worship area allows people with poor hearing to engage in services	A hearing aid loop has been installed within the worship space and is supported by appropriate signage	Ongoing Signage to be reviewed by end June 2025	People with hearing loss can hear worship services	Church Council, Property Committee
	Our worship area allows people with poor vision to engage in services	Our building has good quality lighting and our worship area uses clear audio visuals. Our worship services do not use prayer/hymn books that would negatively impact a visually impaired person.	Ongoing	Our lighting and our audio visual facilities support people with poor vision to engage in worship/activities.	Church Council
	Social activities are accessible	Equality of access is a prime consideration when planning social activities	Ongoing	All people who wish to attend social activities can participate fully	Home groups, Church Council, GUC social groups
	Provide online worship opportunities for those unable to physically attend due to disability eg chronic illness	Services are streamed each Sunday, with links on the website and church bulletin.	Ongoing	All people who wish to attend remotely can attend	IT coordinator
	Volunteering at GUC is open to all people	Reasonable adjustments are made to accommodate disabilities / remove obstacles to volunteering	Ongoing	Reasonable adjustments are reflected in action plans (incl personal action plans as necessary). All people can volunteer at GUC in desired roles	Volunteer contact officer, program leaders, Church Council
	The food pantry is accessible to all who wish to use it	People are allocated numbers when using the food pantry, which supports a calmer, less crowded shopping environment.	Ongoing	All people can use the Food Pantry	Church Life Worker – Food Pantry and Administration

		The Pantry is step free and aisles are wide and kept free of obstacles/hazards Volunteers are on hand to assist people where there is a need.			
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