

# Sydney Opera House Access Strategic Plan 2016-18

## CONTENT

### OUR MISSION

Who We Are

Our Customers

Our Employees

### OUR ACCESSIBILITY COMMITMENT

### DATA PROFILE

What is Disability?

Key statistics [footnote 1]

### SOCIAL POLICY CONTEXT

NSW Disability Reforms

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

National Disability Strategy 2010-20 (NDS)

### HISTORY AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Highlights of the Access Strategic Plan 2013-15

### ACCESSIBILITY VISION 2018

### CONSULTATION PROCESS

#### REVIEW AND MONITORING

Measurement of Progress

### ACCESS STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-18

The Building

Strategies

Performances and Experiences

Strategies

Workplace

Strategies

Community Leadership

Strategies

Operations & Customer Service

Strategies

Keep in touch

## **I am delighted to present the Sydney Opera House's Access Strategic Plan 2016-18.**

The plan outlines progress to date & our strategy for further improving access & inclusion at the Sydney Opera House. It also fulfils the Sydney Opera House's obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) & Disability Inclusion Act (2014).

Accessibility has been a key focus at the Sydney Opera House in the past decade, through the development & implementation of three successive three-year accessibility strategies.

Our fourth strategic plan is particularly timely, as it coincides with both a new era in the history of the building, the Sydney Opera House's Decade of Renewal, & a period of government policy reform aimed at giving people with disability greater choice, independence & agency in pursuing access & inclusion. This new plan builds on the strong foundation achieved through its predecessors. It focuses on improving access across five key areas:

- The Building;
- Performances & Experiences;
- Workplace;
- Operations & Customer Service; and
- Community Leadership.

I am confident that these improvements will enable us to achieve our key goal, which is to make the building, precinct & experiences we offer more accessible to all people, appropriate to the Sydney Opera House's central role in the nation's life & identity.

I would like to thank the many disability organisations that continue to support our efforts, not least by providing us with a more sophisticated understanding of the challenges faced by people with disability in accessing the arts.

**Louise Herron AM**  
**CEO**

## **OUR MISSION**

**Sydney Opera House belongs to everyone. As an organisation, our goal is to provide barrier-free access, making the site, building & the experiences they offer accessible to all people.**

The Sydney Opera House embodies beauty, inspiration & the liberating power of art & ideas. It is a masterpiece that belongs to all Australians.

- We will treasure & renew the Sydney Opera House for future generations of artists, audiences & visitors.
- Everything we do will engage & inspire people through its excellence, ambition & breadth. We will strengthen our central role in Australia's life & identity.

## Who We Are

The Sydney Opera House is Australia's premier tourist attraction & one of the world's busiest performing arts centres. More than eight million people visit the Sydney Opera House each year & more than 1.4 million attend a performance.

A World Heritage-listed "masterpiece of human creative genius" that belongs to all Australians, the Sydney Opera House embarked on a Decade of Renewal at its 40th Anniversary in 2013 to prepare for future generations of artists, audiences & visitors.

The Sydney Opera House has seven performance venues: Concert Hall; Joan Sutherland Theatre (opera); Forecourt; Drama Theatre; Playhouse; The Studio; & Utzon Room.

The Sydney Opera House is home to seven flagship Australian companies: Opera Australia, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, The Australian Ballet, Sydney Theatre Company, Australian Chamber Orchestra, Bangarra Dance Theatre & Bell Shakespeare.

Through *Sydney Opera House Presents*, the Sydney Opera House also offers its own programming, ranging from contemporary music & dance to talks & ideas events & shows for children & families.

The Sydney Opera House's spectacular harbourside precinct also includes a wide range of restaurants & bars, as well as tours & retail offerings.

## Our Customers

Sydney Opera House customers include:

- The public, who attend events, visit the site, take guided tours & frequent the restaurants, cafes & retail outlets. They include domestic & international tourists, as well as local residents.
- Performing arts presenters & commercial partners, who present in & hire venues & deliver a range of services. They include performing arts companies, schools, community groups, corporations, individuals, government departments, & operators of on-site food & beverage & retail outlets.

## Our Employees

The Sydney Opera House has more than 850 employees (364 full-time employees) located in three sites. The diverse workforce includes technical staff involved in

staging, lighting & sound, theatre managers & ushers, tour guides, maintenance, security & administrative staff, & management.

Of these, 15 staff members (2.5%) have identified as having a disability & four staff members (0.005%) required adjustment at work in the past 12 months

Caption: Accessible Babies Proms

## **OUR ACCESSIBILITY COMMITMENT**

Caption: Vivid LIVE: Lighting of the Sails, audio described tour

**The Sydney Opera House is committed to the following accessibility guiding principles:**

- Access solutions promote the principles of social equity & inclusion, while reinforcing positive community attitudes about people with disability;
- Access issues are addressed early in the planning stage of new initiatives;
- Preference is given to access solutions that achieve integrated & independent access (e.g. people with disability use the same access routes as people without disability);
- Initiatives comply with relevant disability access standards & legislation;
- Access audits to determine access requirements for all areas & key initiatives;
- Consultation with people with disability for all key initiatives;
- The latest technologies should be considered to provide flexible, multi- sensory access solutions (both interpretive & physical); and
- Access solutions must comply with the Sydney Opera House's heritage requirements.

## **DATA PROFILE**

### **What is Disability?**

The Disability Discrimination Act (1992) defines disability as 'any impairment, abnormality, or loss of function, of any part of the body or mind'. This includes:

- Physical;
- Intellectual;
- Psychiatric;

- Sensory;
- Neurological;
- Learning disability;
- Physical disfigurement; or
- Immunological (the presence of organisms causing disease in the body).

## **Key statistics [footnote 1]**

- 1 in 5 Australians (more than 4 million people) has some form of disability;
- 43% of people over the age of 55 have one or more disabilities;
- 2.2 million Australians of working age (15 to 64) have a disability; People with disability are twice as likely to be in the bottom 20% of gross household incomes;
- 3.4 million (15%) of Australians have a physical disability;
- 1 in 6 Australians experiences hearing loss. There are about 30,000 Deaf Auslan users;
- Vision Australia estimates there are 357,000 people in Australia who are blind or have low vision;
- 45% of the population will experience a mental health disorder at some point;
- People aged between 15 & 64 years with disability have both lower participation (53%) & higher unemployment rates (9.4%) than people without disability (83% & 4.9% respectively);
- Graduates with disability take longer to gain fulltime employment than other graduates [footnote 2];
- The likelihood of living with disability increases with age; 31% of 55 to 64 year olds live with disability;
- Almost nine in ten people aged 90 & over (88%) have a disability;
- More than a third (39%) of complaints lodged with the Australian Human Rights Commission are against businesses & are related to disability.

### **Footnote:**

- 1 Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Disability, Ageing & Carers 2012, except where stated.**
- 2 Graduate Careers Australia, GradStats, 2011.**

Caption: Bella in the House Program

**"Ensuring that the Sydney Opera House is accessible to all is an essential part of Renewal. It is vital that everyone feels welcome & is able to engage with the Sydney Opera House as deeply & in as many ways as they wish."**

## **SOCIAL POLICY CONTEXT**

**The Sydney Opera House's Access Strategic Plan 2016-18 aligns with NSW, national & international social-policy & legislative frameworks that include:**

### **NSW Disability Reforms**

NSW is undergoing a period of major reform to improve inclusion for people with disability.

- The Disability Inclusion Act (2014) & the Disability Inclusion Regulation (2014) came into effect on 3 December 2014. Part 2 of the Act requires NSW Government departments, local councils & other public authorities (as set out in the regulation), to develop & implement Disability Inclusion Action Plans.
- Disability Inclusion Action Plans itemise actions to be taken to ensure that people with disability can participate fully in the local community. The plans must contain strategies to support people with disability. They detail how people with disability were consulted & how the plan supports the State Disability Inclusion Plan.

### **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) was ratified by Australia in 2008. It acknowledges that people with disability have the same human rights as those without disability. This commits participating governments to ensure these rights can be exercised & that barriers to exercising such rights are removed. Implementing a rights-based approach under the convention requires governments to address not only the provision of specialist services to people with disability, but also the provision of mainstream services. These are to be provided in a way that does not directly or indirectly prevent people with disability participating fully. This focus on mainstream service access means that all levels of government, as well as other parts of the community, have a role to play in giving effect to the convention.

### **National Disability Strategy 2010-20 (NDS)**

Supporting people with disability has been recognised as a key policy priority through the National Disability Strategy & subsequent National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Developed by the Commonwealth, States, Territories & local governments in partnership, the NDS 2010-2020 sets out a national plan for Australians with disability, their families & carers, in support of the commitment made to the UNCRPD.

The NDS is designed to guide public policy across Australia & to bring about change in all mainstream services & programs. The NDS sets out six priority areas that reflect the broad scope of the UNCRPD. The NDS NSW Implementation Plan 2012-14 was the NSW Government's initial two-year strategy to promote NDS principles. These principles have been aligned with the objects of the Disability Inclusion Act (2014) & Disability Inclusion Plans.

Other relevant legislation & guidelines informing the development of the Sydney Opera House's Access Strategic Plan include:

- Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1993 (DDA);
- NSW Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (ADA);
- NSW Government Sector Employment Act 2013;
- Disability (Access to Premises - Buildings) Standards & Australian Standards for Design of Access & Mobility 1428.1-4; and
- World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

## **HISTORY AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

- The Sydney Opera House's first Access Strategic Plan (2007-09) focused on helping people with disability navigate the precinct & venues via large-scale building improvements, as well as introducing a range of access amenities. For example, the first public lift was opened in 2009, providing independent access to most areas of the site for the first time, including all Western Foyers theatre venues.
- The second strategic plan (2010-12) focused on making the experiences offered by the Sydney Opera House more accessible through touch tours, audio-description, captioning & sign-language- interpreted performances. Dedicated autism-friendly performances allowed patrons & visitors with disability to participate in mainstream performances for the first time.
- The third strategic plan (2013-15) established the first annual Access Program, with bespoke sensory performances & workshops for people with complex & profound disability. The Access Program also broadened its remit to help people facing social & economic disadvantage attend Sydney Opera House performances through the Balnaves Foundation Open House Program. During this phase, planning for the next stage of accessible building upgrades as part of the Sydney Opera House's Decade of Renewal also began with development of the Accessibility Master Plan.

## Highlights of the Access Strategic Plan 2013-15

- Launched inaugural Access Program of events & experiences in 2014; 2015 program launched by the NSW Minister of Ageing & Disability.
- Programmed Oddysea, an immersive sensory theatre experience designed specifically for young people with profound & complex disability – a first for an Australian performing arts centre.
- Expanded Access Program to include a discount \$5 ticket program for people experiencing social or economic disadvantage, offered through the Balnaves Foundation Open House Program .
- Introduced the Starting with Art at the House & Bella in the House programs of excursions for students with disability, in collaboration with the Art Gallery of NSW & Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA).
- Introduced free audio-described tours of the Lighting of the Sails, the centrepiece of the Vivid LIVE festival.
- Provided the first autism -friendly performance of a musical, The King & I, in collaboration with Opera Australia & Giant Steps.
- Introduced regular Accessible Babies Proms series & free Sing & Play sessions, in collaboration with the Lifestart organisation & the Royal Institute of Deaf & Blind Children (RIDBC).
- Partnered with Accessible Arts NSW & the MCA to provide an annual accredited Professional Development Day for special needs teachers titled: Dance, Theatre & Visual Art: Engaging Students with Disability.
- Continued to help emerging artists with disability to showcase their work at the Sydney Opera House. The Can You See Me? Theatre Company, an initiative of Cerebral Palsy Alliance, gave sold-out performances in The Studio in 2014 & 2015.
- Offered people with Parkinson's disease & NSW school students a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to dance at the Sydney Opera House as part of a series of workshops hosted in conjunction with New York's acclaimed Mark Morris Dance Group, as part of its global Dance for PD program .
- Completed the Sydney Opera House Accessibility Master Plan, which includes concept designs to inform building-renewal accessibility upgrades.
- Partnered with Vision Australia to provide accredited audio-description training to Sydney Opera House staff.

- Provided online closed-captioning for Sydney Opera House Presents talks & ideas shows & live-captioning of the Sydney Opera House's digital education program for students who are Deaf or those who have hearing loss.
- Introduced final-year university students with disability to the Stepping Into paid internship program. Students joined the Sydney Opera House's human resources, finance, building development & workplace health & safety teams.
- Live-streamed the first signing choir performing Handel's Messiah in Auslan, in collaboration with Accessible Arts & Sydney Philharmonic Choirs. The live-stream included both audio-description & live captioning.
- A new Sesame lift was installed in Bennelong restaurant, providing mainstream access to the lower dining level for the first time.
- Introduced a quarterly online access e-newsletter, What's On in Access, informing audiences of accessible experiences, performances & programs.
- Access Program received \$60,000 from Sydney Opera House donors since launch.
- Won a prestigious NSW Government Green Globe award, reflecting the Sydney Opera House's social sustainability leadership, including our accessibility programs.

Caption: Access Program Launch 2015

Caption: Accessible Babies Proms

## **ACCESSIBILITY VISION 2018**

**The Access Strategic Plan (2016-18) builds on the foundation established by three successive plans.**

Many access initiatives have become part of business as usual as a result of those earlier plans. Yet work remains to remove remaining barriers to full inclusion. These have been identified through customer feedback & stakeholder consultation.

The Access Program has also begun to attract thousands more people with disability to Sydney Opera House each year. To support our efforts to attract & sustain these new audiences, it is crucial that we provide an accessible & inclusive environment, physically, operationally & in terms of customer service.

The latest plan focuses on improving access in the following five areas:

**The Building:** The Sydney Opera House's Stage 1 Building Renewal program represents an opportunity to address a number of remaining physical-access barriers.

**Performances & Experiences:** The Access Program will continue to explore ways to enhance sensorial access to Sydney Opera House performances & experiences.

The Access Program will continue to broaden its scope to facilitate:

- Access for those facing social & financial disadvantage; and
- Health & well-being benefits for new sections of the community, such as people with Parkinson's disease, through performing arts experiences.

**Workplace:** We will continue to create an inclusive workplace culture & provide employment opportunities for people with disability.

**Operations & Customer Service:** We will enhance customer services for people with disability, making the Sydney Opera House a more welcoming & navigable place.

**Community Leadership:** We will continue to provide leadership in the area of accessibility, looking at new ways to share both our knowledge & resources across the arts & disability sector.

Caption: Dance *for* PD Community Class Utzon room

## CONSULTATION PROCESS

**Key internal & external stakeholder consultations have informed our Access Strategic Plan.**

The consultation identified remaining access barriers & explored current trends & best practice in the area of access & inclusion.

We sincerely thank the following representatives for their participation in the consultation process & their ongoing support for improving access:

**Dr Jane Bringolf**  
Liveable Communities, COTA

**Melissa McCarthy**  
Director, Education Services, RIDBC

**Greg Killen**  
Senior Policy & Advocacy Officer, Spinal Cord Injuries Australia

**Sancha Donald**  
CEO, Accessible Arts

**Carl Southern**  
Teacher, St Edmunds

**Alex Jones**  
Auslan Stage Left

**Vanessa Lucas**  
Music Therapist, Giant Steps School

**Joanna Agius**  
Deaf Arts Officer, Accessible Arts NSW

**Nea Cahill**  
Project Officer, Strategic Initiatives, Arts NSW

**Christian Carter**  
Sydney Opera House patron

**Jennifer Moon**  
Guide Dogs NSW

**Sam Hardy**  
Sydney Opera House patron

These stakeholders represented a range of disability & user groups & were asked to share their thoughts & experiences about four key questions:

- What do you see as the main challenges in visiting the Sydney Opera House?
- What do you currently like about the Sydney Opera House & why do you visit?
- What additional accessibility measures would you like to see at the Sydney Opera House & what matters most to you?
- Can you identify locations or buildings, either locally or overseas that are leaders in accessibility?

The Sydney Opera House will continue to foster strong relationships & work collaboratively with our partners in the disability sector throughout the life of this plan.

Caption: Vivid LIVE: Lighting of the Sails, audio-described tour

Caption: RJ Mitte and Benjamin Law

**"The Access Program has also begun to attract thousands more people with disability each year... it is crucial that we provide an accessible & inclusive environment, physically, operationally & in terms of customer service."**

## **REVIEW AND MONITORING**

**The Access Strategic Plan will be monitored & implemented by the Sydney Opera House's Accessibility Manager, working with various portfolios across the organisation.**

Feedback from patrons, visitors & disability organisations will be sought throughout the life of the plan, as the views of people with disability will help determine the success of the plan's initiatives.

The Sydney Opera House's Chief Executive Officer will ensure that progress towards the plan's goals is reviewed & reported.

The plan will be available on [sydneyoperahouse.com](http://sydneyoperahouse.com), including an audio-file version. Hard copies, including copies in alternate formats (Braille, large print & easy English) can be requested from:

Jenny Spinak  
Accessibility Manager,  
Sydney Opera House, GPO Box 4274,  
Sydney, NSW 2001  
Australia

Telephone: 61 2 9250 7175  
Facsimile: 61 2 9250 7135

Email: [jspinak@sydneyoperahouse.com](mailto:jspinak@sydneyoperahouse.com)

## **Measurement of Progress**

The plan's success will be assessed against qualitative & quantitative measures, including:

- Annual increases in the number of people with disability attending accessibility performances, tours, events & using other access services, measured against baseline measurements taken in 2015;
- Annual decreases in the number of disability access-related complaints;
- Positive feedback on the quality of access events & experiences at the Sydney Opera House from post-event customer surveys & disability organisations;
- Annual increases in the number of patrons & disability organisations subscribing to the What's On in Access e-newsletter; and
- Increased media coverage of accessibility initiatives in both mainstream & disability- specific media.

The plan will be registered with the Australian Disability Rights Commission & achievements will be noted in the Sydney Opera House's Annual Report.

Caption: Oddysea sensory theatre

# **ACCESS STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-18**

**The goals of the Access Strategic Plan will be achieved through the following strategies, to be implemented over the next three years.**

## **The Building**

**GOAL: The Sydney Opera House is an accessible building & site.**

### **Strategies**

Implement accessibility improvements (as identified in the Accessibility Master Plan) as part of new Stage 1 Renewal projects, including the Concert Hall upgrade; new Creative Learning Centre; Function Centre; Theatre & Events offices & Foyers & Lobbies. This include access upgrades to wheelchair seating options; food & beverage & toilet amenities; accessible passages linking southern & northern foyer areas; lifts linking box offices to foyer areas; as well as linking northern foyers with upper levels. Improvements may either be implemented simultaneously or staged over time.

Ensure new upgrades & refurbishments are, at a minimum, compliant with relevant access standards & codes, while aiming to achieve best practice in accessible design, subject to heritage & Utzon Design Principle considerations.

Ensure accessibility is considered as a key customer requirement during the design phase of any relevant new building project.

## **Performances and Experiences**

**GOAL: The Sydney Opera House offers an innovative Access Program that allows people with a diverse range of abilities to engage & benefit from all that the Sydney Opera House has to offer.**

### **Strategies**

Expand awareness & support for the Sydney Opera House's Access Program through staging an annual launch event for key industry, government, sponsor & donor stakeholders.

Make our festival experiences autism-friendly.

Continue to scope quality sensory theatre experiences for audiences with profound & complex disability.

Increase the number of accessible performances, including captioned, audio-described & sign language- interpreted performances.

Expand the subscriber base of What's On in Access, the Access Program's online quarterly newsletter.

Explore & facilitate new collaborations between the Sydney Opera House, its resident companies & community groups to provide access to educational arts experiences for people with disability.

Include key access information for non-designated accessible performances whenever feasible. The aim is to clearly indicate the suitability of regular performances for patrons with disability.

## **Workplace**

**GOAL: The Sydney Opera House is an inclusive workplace that advances the skills, experiences & employment of people with disability, & also enables staff without disability to increase their understanding of the access needs of people with disability & how they can best support their engagement with the Sydney Opera House.**

## **Strategies**

Establish an annual three-month internship opportunity for a young graduate with disability to work for the Access Program, & provide meaningful work experience as a path to further employment.

Create opportunities to place people with intellectual disability into successful & satisfying roles within the organisation through engagement with a supported-employment service. This includes scoping an appropriate position within the organisation & developing a business case to establish a new paid position.

Encourage candidates with disability to apply for Sydney Opera House jobs by advertising employment opportunities through Enabled Employment, a labour hire company for people with disability.

Offer customer-facing staff training to facilitate events, performances & tours within the Access Program. This includes:

- Audio-description training;
- Introductory Auslan (Australian sign-language); and
- Facilitating Bella in the House & Starting with Art at the House tours for students with disability.

## **Community Leadership**

**GOAL: The Sydney Opera House champions & promotes improved access to the arts for all.**

## Strategies

Expand the scale & scope of the Sydney Opera House's Access Strategic Plan & Program, & work with the Sydney Opera House's Philanthropy & Partnerships teams to further diversify & increase funding to this end.

Share Sydney Opera House resources with smaller arts organisations & festivals by developing a resource hire package that includes autism-friendly performance resources & equipment, as well as sharing Sydney Opera House audio-describers & audio-description equipment.

Provide supported venue rental for local arts & disability organisations.

Support disability organisation fund-raising efforts through the donation of performance tickets & other forms of prizes.

Use International Day of People with Disability to showcase the contributions made by people with disability by programming an annual event at the Sydney Opera House.

## Operations & Customer Service

**GOAL: The Sydney Opera House delivers 'seamless' accessibility experiences through integrated customer service & event operations. This will foster inclusion & promote individual choice by providing the support needed for people with disability to access the Sydney Opera House independently.**

## Strategies

Update the Sydney Opera House Customer Access Guide to include additional accessibility features & facilities, including information on:

- Seating options in foyers;
- Recommended viewing areas in the venues for people with different access requirements;
- First-aid facilities;
- Bennelong restaurant;
- Parking; and
- Shuttle bus & taxi access arrangements.

Provide additional accessibility information onsite, including temporary signage informing patrons of accessible paths of travel between staff assistance points & access amenities.

Accessibility Manager to facilitate annual accessible customer service training for all Front of House, Theatre Managers & Host Team staff.

Ensure the Sydney Opera House website complies with WCAG 2.0 AA, including the seat selection process. Investigate alternative access solutions for any areas or functions of the website that cannot reasonably be made AA-compliant.

Develop processes & provide staff training to ensure customer material provided in PDF format on the Sydney Opera House website is accessible to customers with vision impairments who use screen-reading technology.

Scope the development of an app that provides wayfinding information to assist visitors with disability. Deploy audio-description, captioning & Auslan interpretation to convey access information in accessible formats.

Install a permanent captioning system in the Playhouse & replace the old captioning screens in the Drama Theatre, thereby ensuring live-theatre captioning is visible to more audience members.

Trial additional options for live-theatre captioning, including through hand-held devices.

Install new hearing loops in all Western Foyers venues.

Improve services & facilities for patrons with disability by providing:

- Additional accessible seating options in foyers;
- A companion card booking line;
- An adult changing places facility in the Western Foyers; and
- Braille/large-print menus in all food & beverage outlets.

## **Keep in touch**

### **Sydney Opera House**

Bennelong Point

Sydney NSW 2000

Australia

T 61 2 9250 7111

**[sydneyoperahouse.com](http://sydneyoperahouse.com)**

Principal Partner: **SAMSUN**