



Office of the Public Advocate

Disability Action Plan

2019-2022



Diversity Statement

The Office of the Public Advocate (OPA) is a human rights organisation that promotes the diversity and inclusion of all people. This is reflected in its mission for a just and inclusive society that respects and promotes the dignity and human rights of all people. To enable that vision to be actioned, our staff and volunteers support people with disability and mental illness and promote and protect their rights. Our values of respect and compassion, integrity, rights and independence reflect and underpin our commitment to diversity and inclusion.

We respect the diverse range of life experiences, skills, abilities, cultural backgrounds and knowledge that staff, volunteers and clients bring to their interactions with us and understand that one size does not fit all. A diverse environment supports flexibility and adaptability.

We are absolutely committed to being inclusive and ensuring that everyone we interact with feels valued, respected and heard. We strive to empower all people to contribute and participate.

OPA's *Diversity and Inclusion Framework 2019-2022* sets out how, over the next four years, we will demonstrate our commitment to supporting our staff, volunteers and clients in an inclusive way.

The framework consists of five plans that seek to address the barriers that prevent some people who may face multiple disadvantages, from accessing our services, or contributing to the organisation as staff or volunteers.

These plans are:

- Cultural Diversity Plan
- Disability Action Plan
- Koori Inclusion Action Plan
- LGBTIQ Inclusion Plan
- Gender Equity Plan.

Each plan will contain four key strategies to facilitate a common focus and direction. These strategies are:

- systemic inclusion
- data and service improvement
- employment and economic participation
- community education and partnerships.

We strive to be a 'best practice' organisation by creating a welcoming and inclusive culture. The strategies, goals and actions outlined in this framework ensure that the OPA's work and culture is inclusive of all members of the Victorian community that it serves, in line with its human rights vision.

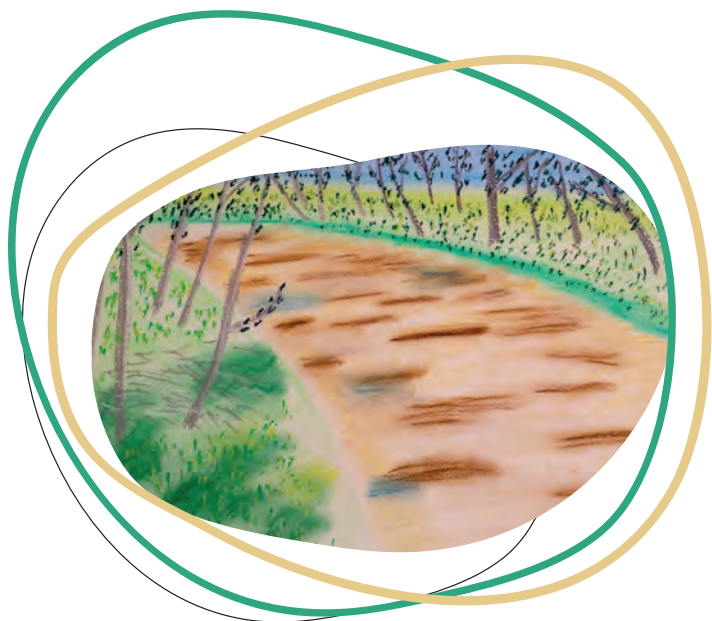
Cover artwork

***The Path* by Orion Yaskewych**

Pastel on paper

Purchased by OPA from State Trustees' 2018 CONNECTED Art Exhibition.

CONNECTED was established in 2003 to showcase the work of emerging artists with a disability or an experience of mental illness.



Message from the Public Advocate



I am proud to champion OPA's third Disability Action Plan (2019-22) and report on some of the achievements of our 2016-2018 plan.

Key achievements

- completing a disability access audit at OPA, resulting in improved workplace accessibility
- meeting and maintaining OPA's website AA accessibility standards as per Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0
- achieving and maintaining accreditation to use Scope Victoria's Communication Access Symbol
- providing AUSLAN training to OPA staff
- making information publicly available in a variety of accessible formats, including Easy English publications
- consulting and working with people with disability and mental illness, and community disability organisations on:
 - policy issues
 - development and progress of the Disability Action Plan
 - projects of mutual interest
- promoting and providing internships and employment opportunities to people with disability and mental illness
- promoting the rights of people with disability and mental illness and advocating for positive changes in attitude towards disability in society, through OPA's individual and systemic advocacy work.

The 2019-22 plan is more ambitious, and I look forward to reporting back on our achievements at the end of this plan.

Colleen Pearce
Public Advocate

Legislation

The Disability Action Plan supports OPA's commitments to meet its international, national and state-based legislative obligations to promote the human rights of staff, volunteers and clients. These commitments are contained in:

- *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006* (United Nations)
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Commonwealth)
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Victoria)
- *Disability Act 2006* (Victoria)
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Victoria).

Policy

OPA supports the policy objectives of the Victorian Government's *Absolutely Everyone State Disability Plan 2017-2020*, underpinned by its four pillars of priorities and actions relating to:

- inclusive communities
- health, housing and wellbeing
- fairness and safety
- contributing lives.

Furthermore, we support the Victorian Government's *Every Opportunity: Victorian economic participation plan for people with disability 2018-2020* and *Getting to work: Victorian public sector disability employment action plan 2018-2025*.

Systemic Disability Inclusion

OPA Goals:

To ensure that:

1. OPA's premises and facilities support barrier-free access in accord with OPA's Incident Management Plan, so that OPA staff, volunteers and visitors are able to access and move freely around the premises and facilities, without any barriers to access.
2. communication and information needs are met by providing information and advice in a variety of accessible formats, including the use of interpreters, translated material and accessible English.
3. guardianship, investigation, advice and advocacy services are rights-informed and work to prevent abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability and mental illness.

For space reasons, the tables following use the word 'disability' to mean disability and mental illness.

| What will we do? | What will success look like? | Responsibility | Time line |
|--|--|---|----------------------|
| Complete a disability access audit of OPA and its facilities, which identifies physical barriers to accessing OPA premises and facilities. | Disability access issues are identified and are addressed as soon as practicable. | Manager, Corporate Services Manager, Quality and Audit Health and Safety Representative | 2020 |
| Incorporate access improvements, as necessary in OPA business planning. | An implementation plan for access improvements is developed and will include any barriers identified through the access audit. | Manager, Corporate Services | Ongoing ¹ |
| Work with like-minded organisations at 204 Lygon St to improve disability access as appropriate. | Access to 204 Lygon St and its facilities is best practice for people with disability. | Deputy Public Advocate | Ongoing |
| Develop schematic designs of proposed enhancements to disability access as required. | Access to OPA's workplace and facilities is best practice for people with disability. | Manager, Corporate Services | Ongoing |

¹ Ongoing means the action happens as is needed or it happens all the time with no specific start or end date

| What will we do? | What will success look like? | Responsibility | Time line |
|--|--|---|--------------------------------|
| Ensure OPA's website meets and maintains AA accessibility standards as per Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0. | People with disability are able to obtain information from OPA's website in ways that meet their needs. | Communications Coordinator | Ongoing |
| Make information available in alternative formats to meet a variety of disability support needs for the people we work with, staff, volunteers, visitors and the public. | <p>Maintain accreditation of Scope Victoria's Communication Access symbol for the Advice Service and Reception staff.</p> <p>Communication access to OPA's information, including the Advice Service and publications, is best practice for people with a range of disability support needs.</p> | <p>Manager, Quality and Audit</p> <p>Manager, Advice and Response</p> <p>Communications Coordinator</p> | <p>Annually</p> <p>Ongoing</p> |
| Increase the number of publications available in Easy English and/or accessible English, whenever practicable. | Increased opportunities for people with disability to access information suitable for their needs. | <p>Communications Coordinator</p> <p>Manager, Advice and Response</p> | Ongoing |
| Ensure people contacting OPA are able to do so in a variety of ways and with various technologies and other supports that address their disability support needs. | OPA increases use of accessible technologies and other supports for communication. | Deputy Public Advocate | Ongoing |
| Provide the people we work with appropriate supports to ensure that their disability communication needs are met. | People with disability are supported to communicate with OPA in a way that suits them. | Deputy Public Advocate | Ongoing |
| Provide advocacy that promotes the will and preferences of people with disability, unless otherwise required by law. | Autonomy and increased access to services, security and enjoyment of life for people with disability are promoted. | Director, Advocacy and Adult Protection | Ongoing |

| What will we do? | What will success look like? | Responsibility | Time line |
|---|--|--|----------------|
| <p>Conduct investigations (own motion and referrals from the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal) in cases where there are issues of exploitation, abuse or neglect of people with disability relating to guardianship or administration matters.</p> | <p>A reduction in the exploitation, abuse and neglect of people with disability.</p> | <p>Manager, Advice and Response</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> |
| <p>Provide a number of ways to contact OPA's Advice Service to ensure that the communication needs of people with disability are met.</p> | <p>People with disability who have communication access needs are able to contact OPA's Advice Service in a way that meets their disability support needs.</p> | <p>Manager, Advice and Response</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> |
| <p>Provide guardianship that promotes supported decision-making, and the will and preferences of people with disability, unless otherwise required by law.</p> | <p>Decisions made promote the will and preferences of OPA clients, whenever possible.</p> | <p>Director, Advocacy and Adult Protection</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> |
| <p>Provide medical treatment decision making that promotes the values and preferences of people with disability.</p> | <p>Decisions made promote the values and preferences of OPA clients.</p> | <p>Manager, Advice and Response</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> |
| <p>Identify in each OPA Strategic Plan priority area systemic issues affecting people with disability and pursue improvements to policies, practices, services and laws.²</p> | <p>The autonomy and human rights of people with disability are promoted through OPA's systemic advocacy work.</p> | <p>Deputy Public Advocate</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> |

²Systemic advocacy is advocacy that works to change the practices of the whole society to improve the lives of people with disability.

Data and Service Improvement

OPA Goals:

To ensure that:

1. OPA has adequate data about the quality of its services to people we work with, staff and volunteers to enable a culture of continuous improvements in line with its organisational vision, mission and values.
2. OPA's strategies for continuous improvements are embedded in its organisational planning processes.

| What will we do? | What will success look like? | Responsibility | Time line |
|---|--|--|------------------|
| Keep abreast of changes to building standards related to accessibility standards with a view to using that knowledge to advocate for increased accessibility in our building. | Increased knowledge of building accessibility standards used as an advocacy tool to promote improved building accessibility standards in our own building. | Manager, Corporate Services | Ongoing |
| Conduct a survey to seek the views of the people with disability we work with and those close to them, about their experiences of the way we perform our roles and draw on this feedback to improve what we do. | Survey feedback will result in improved quality of service. | Deputy Public Advocate Manager, Quality and Audit Communications Coordinator | 2020 |
| Undertake a short anonymous survey at least once every two years to determine how many OPA employees and volunteers are people with disability, and whether their support needs are being met. | OPA has an understanding of any outstanding disability support issues that need addressing, and it has a plan to address them. OPA employees and volunteers feel more confident in disclosing if they have a disability, and more comfortable identifying whether their disability support needs are being met. | Deputy Public Advocate Manager, Quality and Audit Communications Coordinator | 2019 2022 |

| What will we do? | What will success look like? | Responsibility | Time line |
|--|--|--|----------------|
| <p>At least once every two years, OPA legal training will include information on human rights issues and legislation relevant to OPA, including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Disability Discrimination Act</i> (Commonwealth) • <i>Equal Opportunity Act</i> (Victoria) • <i>OPA's Disability Action Plan</i> • <i>Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006</i> (Victoria) • human rights and other legislative issues associated with disability and mental illness. | <p>Employees at OPA have an increased awareness of, and increased skill levels regarding, people with disability and legislative requirements.</p> | <p>Legal Unit</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> |
| <p>At least once every two years, OPA training will include information about current perspectives on disability policy relevant to its work.</p> | <p>Employees at OPA have an increased awareness of, and increased skill levels regarding people with disability.</p> | <p>Education and Training Committee</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> |
| <p>Ensure OPA's volunteers have up-to-date information on disability legislation and other human rights legislation, the OPA disability action plan, and other issues affecting people with disability through training days or the use of newsletters and OPA's Volunteer Hub.</p> | <p>Volunteers have increased awareness of legislative requirements and issues affecting people with disability.</p> | <p>Manager, Safeguarding, Volunteering and Inclusion Communications Coordinator</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> |

| What will we do? | What will success look like? | Responsibility | Time line |
|--|--|--|---------------------|
| Maintain a list of relevant disability and aged care organisations, information and relevant resources on the OPA intranet. | Maintained and increased staff awareness of the range of disability information available to support OPA's work. | Manager, Advice and Response Communications Coordinator | Ongoing |
| Maintain an accessible complaints procedure. | The complaints process is accessible, well-publicised and responsive. | Manager, Quality and Audit Communications Coordinator | Ongoing |
| Information on the complaint procedure is included in staff orientation material and OPA's website. | Staff are well-informed about the complaints procedure and give effect to it. | Manager, Quality and Compliance | Ongoing |
| Ensure that an OPA staff member has responsibility for the development and monitoring of the plan. | The plan is embedded in OPA culture and is implemented and monitored in a timely, efficient manner. | Deputy Public Advocate | Ongoing |
| All managers and team coordinators responsible for implementing actions in the plan will reflect that responsibility in their annual performance plan. | Implementing the plan is a priority for all OPA supervisors. Diversity and Inclusion is an agenda item at every third Strategy Committee. | All Managers and team coordinators | Ongoing |
| Information about the achievements of the plan is publicly available. | The plan is available on OPA's website and publicised to stakeholders in OPA Updates. Progress against the plan is reported on in the OPA annual report (as required by section 38(3) <i>Disability Act 2006</i> (Victoria)). | Communications Coordinator Deputy Public Advocate | Ongoing Annually |
| Register the plan with the Australian Human Rights Commission. | A link to the plan is available on the Australian Human Rights Commission website. | Deputy Public Advocate | 2019 |

Employment and Economic Participation

OPA Goals:

1. ensure that OPA develops and maintains a diverse staff and volunteer profile that is representative of the community we serve.
2. further reduce barriers to people with disability becoming employees or volunteers (including student placements or interns) at OPA.
3. remain an employer of choice (paid and volunteer) for people with disability.
4. promote opportunities to utilise services provided by people with disability whenever possible.

| What will we do? | What will success look like? | Responsibility | Time line |
|--|--|--|----------------|
| <p>Ensure all position descriptions and advertisements for employees and volunteers state clearly that:</p> <p>“OPA embraces diversity among our staff and volunteers and encourages applications from people with disability, including people with mental illness, as well as people from all cultural backgrounds, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.”</p> | <p>Increased public recognition of OPA's commitment to engage people with disability as employees or volunteers, with more people with disability encouraged to apply for employment or volunteer positions.</p> | <p>Manager, Corporate Services</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> |
| <p>Ensure all positions at OPA are advertised widely through Disability Employment Services and community disability networks, including services or networks that support people with cognitive impairments.</p> | <p>Increased opportunities for people with disability (including students) to volunteer, gain employment or internships at OPA.</p> | <p>Manager, Corporate Services</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> |

| What will we do? | What will success look like? | Responsibility | Time line |
|--|---|---|-----------|
| Maintain an awareness of best practice initiatives for employing people with disability. | Increased knowledge about best practice employment strategies, which where appropriate, could be used at OPA to increase employment of people with disability. | Deputy Public Advocate | Ongoing |
| Identify organisations that do well in employing people with cognitive impairments and consult with them to identify best practice strategies. | Increased knowledge among OPA staff of best practices in employing people with cognitive impairments. | Deputy Public Advocate | Ongoing |
| Identify paid staff positions which are suitable for people with cognitive and impairment, or which could be adapted to suit such people and seek opportunities to provide such an employment opportunity. | Increased opportunities for people with cognitive impairments to gain employment at OPA and a pool of potential future employees identified. | Deputy Public Advocate Manager, Corporate Services | Ongoing |
| Provide a short-term graduate (unpaid) internship opportunity for people with disability as per the OPA Graduate/student Internship policy on an annual basis. Where possible, offer mentoring and support opportunities for interns with senior staff at OPA. | Increased opportunities for people with disability (including students) to volunteer, gain employment or internships at OPA to gain work experience and an understanding of OPA, and a pool of potential future employees identified. | Deputy Public Advocate | Annually |
| Endeavour with like-minded VPS/statutory organisations to facilitate a VPS-Graduate rotation placement for a person with disability in those organisations at least once in the life-cycle of this plan. | Increased opportunities for people with disability to gain paid employment in the VPS and to gain work experience and an understanding of OPA/VPS, and a pool of potential future employees identified. | Deputy Public Advocate | 2020 |

| What will we do? | What will success look like? | Responsibility | Time line |
|---|---|--|----------------|
| <p>Ensure all applicants with disability who advise in their application that they have a disability (and who meet the selection criteria for a position at a minimum level) are offered an interview. This includes paid, volunteer, and trainee positions (including student and graduate interns). Provide them with a genuine opportunity to request any necessary supports for an interview.</p> | <p>Increased opportunities for people with disability to gain an interview at OPA.</p> | <p>Identified job contact for a position</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> |
| <p>Offer unsuccessful interviewees with disability the opportunity to receive feedback on their interviews.</p> | <p>Unsuccessful interviewees with disability have increased opportunities to gain interview experience and to receive feedback to increase their chances of achieving employment in the future.</p> | <p>Identified job contact for a position</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> |
| <p>Ensure that, whenever practicable, OPA's work environment supports flexible work practices that meet the disability support needs of staff or volunteers at OPA.</p> | <p>OPA's employment policies and practices are best practice.</p> | <p>All team leaders and managers</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> |
| <p>Accommodate disability support needs and adjust individual workplaces as required for staff with disability employed at OPA.</p> <p>Promote the return-to-work of any OPA staff member acquiring a disability or mental illness during employment at OPA.</p> | <p>Disability support needs of individual staff with disability are met and valued, staff with disability are retained.</p> <p>Increased rate-of-return to work for OPA staff with disability.</p> | <p>Manager, Corporate Services</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> |

| What will we do? | What will success look like? | Responsibility | Time line |
|--|---|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Pay an honorarium to people with disability who are guest speakers at OPA Issues Forums or other OPA-sponsored events, when they are not being paid by another organisation to attend. | Increased opportunities for the skills and expertise of people with disability to be valued and recognised. | Education and Training Committee | Ongoing |
| Utilise established procurement processes to support the economic participation of people with disability and disability social enterprises whenever possible. | Use the business services provided by people with disability and disability social enterprises—that pay an award wage—as appropriate and whenever possible. | All program areas | Ongoing |

Community Education and Partnerships

OPA Goals:

1. To ensure that OPA's willingness to provide appropriate disability supports at community education presentations is promoted.
2. To engage in respectful partnerships with key stakeholders in the disability advocacy, elder advocacy and other relevant sectors, and develop partnerships that provide opportunities for open, transparent discussion and an exchange of ideas.

| What will we do? | What will success look like? | Responsibility | Time line |
|--|--|------------------------------|-----------|
| OPA will promote its ability to provide interpreters, attendant carers and other supports during OPA-initiated community education presentations. | OPA-initiated community education presentations are fully inclusive of people with disability. | Manager, Advice and Response | Ongoing |
| Identify key stakeholders in priority areas of policy development and systemic advocacy for OPA. Recognise the importance of relationships with disabled people's organisations representing key diversity areas such as gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity and impairment type. | Key stakeholders have the opportunity to participate, inform and influence policy development and systemic issues. | Deputy Public Advocate | Ongoing |

| What will we do? | What will success look like? | Responsibility | Time line |
|---|---|--|-------------|
| Stakeholders with disability who are involved in policy development and systemic issues will have any barriers to their participation addressed. | Stakeholders with disability are able to participate effectively in policy development and systemic advocacy. OPA stakeholder engagement is best practice. | Deputy Public Advocate | Ongoing |
| Use the lived experience and knowledge of key community disability stakeholders to seek feedback on the plan. | Key community disability stakeholders have input into the development of the plan and receive an update of progress annually through the OPA annual report. | Deputy Public Advocate | Ongoing |
| Establish a Disability Action Plan staff consultation committee with representatives from programs and areas across OPA, to monitor the effectiveness of the plan and contribute to the development of the next plan. | The members of this committee receive feedback on the plan and act as 'champions' or staff representatives of the plan. | Deputy Public Advocate | 2019 |
| Provide a bi-annual update to OPA staff on the progress of the plan. | Updates on the plan are embedded in OPA's staff information processes. | Deputy Public Advocate Communications Coordinator | Bi-annually |



Office of the
Public Advocate

Office of the Public Advocate

Level 1, 204 Lygon Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053

Tel: 1300 309 337

TTY: 1300 305 612 NRS: 133 677

Fax: 1300 787 510

www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au