Improving the accessibility of live music venues in Melbourne

A report on the City of Melbourne and City of Yarra Accessible Music Venues project

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MUSIC VICTORIA

CITY OF MELBOURNE

CITY OF YARRA

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PATTERNMAKERS

Acknowledgements

Project Team and Partners

Delivered by Music Victoria, the Accessible Music Venues project was disability-led and involved people and organisations with lived experience of disability. This project was managed by Morwenna Collett, with assistance from access consultant Amanda Lawrie-Jones and access advisor Olivia Muscat. All core members of the project team identify as disabled.

This report was prepared for Music Victoria by the project team and research agency Patternmakers. For any questions, please contact Tandi Palmer Williams, Managing Director on tandi@thepatternmakers.com.au.

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Acknowledgement of Country

Music Victoria acknowledges the many Traditional Custodian groups all across what is now referred to as Melbourne. We pay our respect to all Elders: past, present and emerging. As a peak body we also acknowledge the important role that music has played and continues to play on these lands since the very first sunrise.

About Music Victoria

Contemporary Music Victoria Inc. (Music Victoria) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation and the state peak body for contemporary music. Music Victoria represent musicians, venues, music businesses and professionals, and music lovers across the contemporary Victorian music community. Music Victoria provides advocacy on behalf of the music sector, actively supports the development of the Victorian music community, and celebrates and promotes Victorian music.

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Executive Summary

Need for the program

Disabled audiences face physical and digital barriers to attending music events, but improving venue accessibility is challenging

Live music venues are places of joy, celebration and community. Located in almost every Australian town, they are important to the social and economic fabric of 'place'.

Yet music venues aren't always open to everyone in the community. As many as 1 in 4 Australian arts audiences identify as Deaf or Disabled, or as being close to someone who is. Research shows that Deaf and Disabled audiences and artists face access barriers to arts participation – making them more likely to say the arts 'isn't for people like them'. Although equitable access to music venues is required under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, many live music organisations lack the knowledge, resources and awareness to take on improvements.

Live music is a core part of Victoria's culture – and Music Victoria has identified an opportunity to help music venues tackle accessibility

Music is an essential part of life for many Victorians, and it is an economic driver. With an estimated $3.5B value, Melbourne's night-time economy is significant and the State government "placed creativity at the heart of Victoria's recovery and prosperity".

With support from City of Melbourne and City of Yarra, Music Victoria led the Accessible Music Venues project, to assist venues to build their knowledge and identify ways to improve their onsite and online accessibility.

Working with access consultants and advisors Morwenna Collett, Amanda Lawrie-Jones and Olivia Muscat, the project assessed the online and on-site accessibility of live music venues across these precincts, with the goal of helping venues identify areas for improvement and investment.

The project's ultimate goal was to provide Deaf and Disabled audiences, artists and staff more equitable access to Melbourne's live music industry.

Project details

The Accessible Music Venues project assessed 31 music venues online and 7 venues on-site, providing training and tailored recommendations

This project reviewed the accessibility of selected live music venues across the City of Melbourne and City of Yarra to help them identify:

- Actions to make their venues and productions more welcoming and inclusive
- How to meet community expectations and legislative requirements for disability access and reduce the risk of a complaint under the Disability Discrimination Act
- 'Quick wins' that require little resourcing, ideas for getting started and potential funding sources for some of the bigger items.

By focusing on 'achievable accessibility', this project aimed to demonstrate that solutions to access barriers do exist and many can be implemented with budget, heritage or building constraints. Using the premise that 'access starts online', the project advocates for digital accessibility as well as physical. The project culminated in an online training session for Melbourne live music venues as well as several accessibility checklists with relevant resources and information.

This report outlines the project and evaluation findings, and identifies recommendations for stakeholders to continue improving access

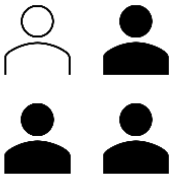
This report provides a summary of the project and the findings of the assessments, which provide insight into 'the state of access' in live music venues in Melbourne.

This report also includes results of the evaluation of the program, conducted by research agency Patternmakers, exploring what worked about the program, any barriers experienced by venues to improving accessibility, and any opportunities for 'tweaks' in the future.

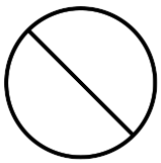
Finally, the report makes recommendations for how Music Victoria, City of Melbourne and City of Yarra can continue to support Deaf and Disabled people wanting to access live music. Read on for the key findings and summary recommendations.

Key findings: the case for better access

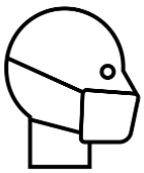
1 in 4 audience members are impacted by access issues in some way, experiencing a range of physical, digital and attitudinal barriers



26% of Australian arts audiences are affected by access issues in some way, either identifying as Deaf, Disabled or immuno-compromised themselves or attending with someone who is.



35% of Deaf and Disabled people feel the arts 'are not really for people like me', compared to 27% of non-Disabled audiences. They're also twice as likely to find safety concerns a barrier to participating in the arts.

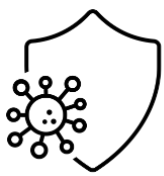


Following the pandemic, they're less likely to feel 'ready to attend' right now (49%, compared to 68% of audiences without disability), and more likely to be inhibited by the virus and by financial barriers.

Deaf and Disabled arts workers and artists are underrepresented relative to their non-disabled counterparts, and earn significantly less

9% of Australian arts workers and 7% of Australian musicians identify as Deaf and/or disabled – significantly less than the proportion of the Australian population (18%).

On average, artists with disability earn just over half (58%) of what their non-disabled counterparts make, and the pandemic appears to have exacerbated existing inequalities.



A survey of 41 Deaf/Disabled artists revealed that 83% reported Covid had 'impacted their ability to participate in the music industry'.

Key findings: the state of music venue accessibility

Among 31 music venues in Melbourne, 3 reached the 'gold' tier for online accessibility, while most were 'bronze' or 'still developing'

Overall, 10% of Melbourne venues reached 'gold' standard for online accessibility, 19% were classed as 'silver', 42% as 'bronze' and 29% as 'still developing'.

51% of venues included some information about accessibility on their websites – while only 1 in 5 included access information in their site navigation.

10% of venues used image descriptions on their social media images, while 16% used Alt Text across their digital presence.

Among 7 music venues assessed for on-site accessibility, 4 had inaccessible levels in their buildings, and 5 had toilets below the current minimum standard

5 venues were multi-level with stairs, with only one accessible via lift.

4 in 7 had entrances that could be independently accessed by people with mobility disability.

2 in 7 had an accessible toilet that met the relevant minimum size described in the Australian Standards.

Key findings: project evaluation

All 7 participating venues that responded to the survey agree the program helped them learn more about accessibility, and 6 of 7 have made access improvements after participating

Almost all (6 out of 7) venues participating have made access improvements after participating in the program, showing the willingness of venues to improve when equipped with the right tools.

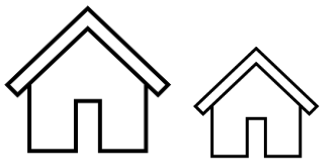
100% of participating venues 'agree' the program helped them learn more about accessibility, with 4 in 7 (57%) respondents 'strongly agreeing'.

The detail provided in assessments, and the expertise and lived experience of the Project Team, were particularly valued aspects of the program.

Venues are motivated to make improvements in order to become more inclusive, but cost and awareness remain barriers – particularly for small venues

Resources and awareness remain major barriers to a more inclusive live music scene – with many venues saying they didn't have the time or funds to tackle more extensive upgrade.

While most venues appreciate the importance of livestreaming, they say copyright and intellectual property laws can limit digital delivery options.



Small venues may be less able to improve access, with the 2022 Live Music Census showing that 57% of small events/venues are physically accessible, compared to 98% of large events/venues.

Summary recommendations

Participating music venues

- Implement the recommendations from the on-site and online assessments.
- Partner with access consultants to periodically update your assessments.
- Seeking funding to support capital works and major improvements to infrastructure.

All music venues:

- Implement processes to enquire about, and respond to, the access requirements of Deaf and Disabled artists and audience members (e.g. access services such as Auslan interpretation).
- Strive to meet the basic requirements for online accessibility – including an accessibility page, a named point of contact, video captions, Alt Text/Image Descriptions, #CamelCase, and appropriate text contrast.
- Undertake on-site accessibility assessments, to identify 'quick wins' and gather support material for applications to fund more extensive improvements.
- Embrace access and inclusion principles across the organisation – including platforming of Deaf and Disabled artists, introducing access services for live events, and promoting the Companion Card program.

Music Victoria:

- Share resources and learnings from this project to 'raise the bar' for accessibility across the state.
- Celebrate those music venues that achieve 'gold' tier of accessibility, by sharing case studies and interesting examples of progress.
- Conduct a state-wide assessment of the accessibility of Victorian music venues, beyond the two LGAs involved to date, and share this with the sector.
- Ensure Deaf and Disabled Musicians are adequately represented on Music Victoria advisory groups.

- Continue to deliver programs and initiatives that remove barriers for Deaf and Disabled musicians.
- Support national efforts to establish an Australia-wide Live Music Accessibility Charter.

Arts Access Victoria, Access professionals and advocates:

- Continue to advocate for positive change in the music sector and champion disability-led approaches to improving access in music venues.
- Seek out opportunities to collaborate with music peak bodies, venues and other live music stakeholders, to continue growing capacity and awareness in the music industry.
- Celebrate interesting examples of progress where it is occurring.

Deaf and Disabled musicians:

- Provide 'Access Riders' to venues and have conversations about access expectations (where it doesn't compromise your comfort or safety).

Local Governments:

- Support music venues to undertake accessibility assessments, provide localised resources and support, and offer grants for accessibility improvements.

Funding bodies:

- Investigate the feasibility of offering grants specifically supporting access improvements in music venues.
- Ensure all music-related funding programs support access costs, and wherever possible allow access costs to be budgeted on top of any funding caps.
- Support the introduction of an Australia-wide Live Music Accessibility Charter.

‘[The] information & resources were helpful in planning for current and future changes.

We have a website redevelopment planned for the future and intend to use some of the feedback to guide the design.’

Participating venue

1 **Context:** Why is this work needed?

Background

Disability is a key source of inequality in Australia, and addressing access issues has benefits for almost everyone

Disability impacts all of us - whether directly, or as a family member, carer, friend, acquaintance or customer. The 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities defines Deaf and Disabled people as those 'who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.'

Disability can be both permanent or temporary; invisible or visible. It can include chronic health or age-related conditions. This report acknowledges that not everyone who faces barriers chooses to identify as Deaf or Disabled, and understands that identity and disclosure in the context of disability is complex and very personal.

This report also acknowledges the complexities of intersectionality and recognise that Deaf and Disabled people who also come from other underrepresented groups (such as First Nations Australians or people of colour) can experience multiple layers of disadvantage and discrimination.

In Australia, the three levels of government and most organisations, including Music Victoria, use the social model of disability. This sees 'disability' as the result of interaction between people living with impairments and an environment filled with physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers (as defined by People with Disability Australia). It is these barriers that need to be removed to enable Deaf and Disabled people to participate equally with others.

The importance of live music accessibility

As many as 1 in 4 audiences have access needs – showing the importance improving the accessibility of live music venues

According to the latest census data, Deaf and Disabled people make up approximately one-fifth of the Australian population.

Recent findings from the Audience Outlook Monitor, a national tracking survey of over 5,000 past arts attendees, suggest that access issues affect a broad spectrum of audiences, including but not limited to:

- The **26%** of Australian arts audiences who are themselves Deaf, Disabled and/or immunocompromised or attending with someone who is;
- The **16%** of audiences who are carers to an older adult;
- The **30%** of audiences who say the provision of seating is helpful for them when attending arts events; and
- The **8%** of audiences who say they benefit from relaxed and sensory-friendly interactions.

It's key to the cultural vitality of the country that these groups can participate equitably in the arts, but many organisations and venues are ill-equipped to meet diverse access needs of the Australian population.

As a result, Deaf and Disabled musicians, industry workers and audience members are disproportionately likely to face barriers to participation. These access barriers have been well-documented in Australia and internationally.

Barriers can include physical accessibility, communication, attitudes, education, skills, programming, cost and internalised ableism

Perhaps because physical disability is more visible and the international symbol of disability is a blue wheelchair, sometimes accessibility is thought of as simply ramps, lifts and toilets. However, the barriers experienced and the solutions are far wider and can be bespoke to a situation.

Arts Access Victoria's 2021 report 'Music Makers: Disability in the Music Industry' found that the accessibility challenges faced by Deaf and Disabled people are complex and multilayered, spanning the psycho-social, physical and economic spheres.

Examples of physical access barriers for audiences include lack of wheelchair access to any part of a venue, or difficulty accessing venues by transport. For musicians, they may include the need to adapt musical instruments for their use, or challenges transporting their instruments.

Barriers may also emerge in communication (for example, lack of interpreters or lack of disability awareness by venue staff), attitudes (for example, stereotyping and stigma) or social connections (lack of networks among Deaf and Disabled audiences or artists). Access challenges may also be a consequence of programming – for example, an event's start time, length of event, lighting, and volume levels.

They may also relate to education or the acquisition of skills – for example, lessons are inaccessible, instructors do not understand or are unable to accommodate for students' needs, and it takes too much time to learn new skills. Technical skills (e.g. not knowing how to use technology, or what technology exists) can also present a barrier.

They can be financial – for example, it may be too expensive to buy instruments/equipment, take lessons, purchase what is needed to be able to adapt the instrument to play.

Barriers can also be internal, such as a lack of self-confidence, brought about by internalised ableism, or difficulty with self-management.

Compared to people who do not experience disability, Deaf and Disabled audiences experience participation barriers at a greater rate

The Australia Council for the Arts' 2019 National Arts Participation Survey found that when compared to non-disabled audiences, Deaf and Disabled people face more barriers to cultural attendance. For instance, Deaf and Disabled people are:

- almost twice as likely to find **safety concerns** a barrier compared to respondents without disability (9% compared to 5%)

- substantially more likely to find **health concerns** (29%) and **difficulty getting to events** (25%) barriers impacting their attendance (compared to 4% and 17% respectively for respondents without disability)
- more likely than those without disability to feel that **the arts are not really for people like me** (35% compared to 27%).

Challenges such as lack of awareness regarding events, lack of personal interest, and difficulty finding time were experienced at higher levels by people without disability.

The converse of these findings is that Deaf and Disabled people know about, are interested in, and have the time to attend events, if substantial challenges do not get in their way.

Similarly, Deaf and Disabled arts workers and artists are underrepresented relative to the population – and those who have 'made it' in the sector continue to face challenges

While 1 in 5 Australians identify as Deaf and Disabled, only 9% of Australian arts workers identify as having disability – as reported in the 2022 'Raising their Voices: An independent review into sexual harm, sexual harassment, and systemic discrimination in the Australian contemporary music industry' report, authored by MAPN consulting.

Deaf and Disabled musicians are similarly underrepresented, relative to the population, with 7% of musicians identifying as having disability.

The report documents the challenges faced by Deaf and Disabled musicians and arts workers, including guilt or shame around needing to take longer to complete tasks or recover from activities like touring, lack of representation of Deaf and Disabled people in leadership roles, and pressure to hide disability.

The 'Raising their Voices' report specifically cites the absence of industry-wide standards for accessibility as contributing to an atmosphere of 'discrimination and exclusion', reporting: 'The lack of accessibility physically excludes workers with disability from spaces in music, and furthermore communicates an implicit message, however unintentional, about who "deserves" to work in the industry and who is valued' (p.49).

The pandemic has exacerbated existing disparities when it comes to the accessibility of live music – making work to address inaccessibility even more necessary

The pandemic has also presented specific challenges for Deaf and Disabled people in Victoria. According to the 2021 'Music Makers' report, a survey of 41 Deaf and Disabled artists revealed that 83% reported COVID-19 had 'impacted their ability to participate in the music industry' – with over half (53%) reporting fewer opportunities as a result of the pandemic.

Furthermore, according to the Audience Outlook Monitor, a national audience tracking survey exploring audience attitudes and behaviours throughout the pandemic, Deaf and Disabled audiences in Victoria are:

- Less likely to feel 'ready to attend' right now (**49%,** compared to 68% of audiences without disability), and more likely to attend 'when the risks of transmission are minimal' (**47%,** compared to 29% of audiences without disability)
- More likely to consider the risk of contracting or transmitting a barrier to attendance (**53%,** compared to 39% of audiences without disability)
- More likely to be experiencing financial barriers to attendance (**51%,** compared to 39% of audiences without disability)
- More likely to be 'lacking energy to go out' (**34%,** compared to 20% of audiences without disability)
- Twice as likely to have changed the location, day or time of their attendance due to the pandemic (**39%,** compared to 19% of audiences without disability).

Responsibilities of venues

In addition to contributing to inclusivity, diversity, and the country's cultural vitality, accessibility of music venues is required by law in Australia

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 states that 'every area and facility open to the public should be open and available to Deaf and Disabled people with a disability.

They should expect to enter and make use of places used by the public if people without a disability can do so.' The only exception is if provision of access will cause 'unjustifiable hardship' such as major difficulties or high costs that the person or organisation cannot meet.

Victoria also has its own Disability Act from 2006, which includes the following relevant objects: (a) advance the inclusion and participation in the community of persons with a disability; (b) promote a strategic whole of government approach in supporting the needs and aspirations of persons with a disability; and (c) facilitate the planning, funding and provision of services, programs and initiatives for persons with a disability. The Victorian Government is currently in the process of re-writing this piece of legislation, due for release in 2023.

The Disability (Access to Premises — Buildings) Standards 2010 (the Premises Standards) came into effect on 1 May 2011. Any application for a building approval for a new building or upgrade of an existing building on or after that date triggers the application of the Premises Standards. The purposes of the Premises Standards (and corresponding changes to the Building Code of Australia and state and territory building law) is to:

- ensure that dignified, equitable, cost-effective and reasonably achievable access to building and facilities and services within buildings is provided for Deaf and Disabled people and:
- give certainty to building certifiers, developers and managers that if the Standards are complied with they cannot be subject to a successful complaint under the DDA in relation to those matters covered by the premises Standards.

2 **Project details:** What did this project do?

Summary

Project description

The aim of this project was to support music venues to be more inclusive so that Deaf and Disabled people can engage in music, as audience members, participants and artists.

The project focused on expanding knowledge in the live music sector by exploring two research questions:

- "How accessible and inclusive are live music venues across City of Melbourne and City of Yarra?"
- "What support do City of Melbourne and City of Yarra live music venues require to improve access and inclusion?"

Participating venues were provided with individual detailed accessibility reports, checklists with resources and a training session.

Methodology

Both online information and on-site accessibility of venues were considered as part of this Project. The methodology included:

- 'No contact' online accessibility assessments
- On-site accessibility assessments
- In-person accessibility training for venues.

31 venues participated in the online accessibility assessments and seven of these also participated in an on-site accessibility assessment. These were selected using the following criteria:

- All venues were located in the LGA of the City of Melbourne or City of Yarra
- Selected venues needed to represent a range of different musical genres and sizes
- Selected venues represented a range of potential access challenges and solutions.

All venue information has been de-identified and no confidential information about an individual venue has been provided in this report without the venue's consent.

Online accessibility assessments

Many Deaf and Disabled people first go online to decide if they will attend a venue and to plan their visits. With the premise that 'access starts online', assessments were undertaken of venue websites and social media channels to determine if they provided adequate access information.

In practice, Deaf and Disabled people often need to contact a venue to find out more information. This impedes independence, is labour intensive and can be a deterrent. If it looks too hard, or there isn't enough information, Deaf and Disabled people often don't pursue further.

This assessment was not a technical, compliance audit against the Web Content Accessibly Guidelines 2.1 (WCAG), but instead focused on the user journey of how a Deaf or Disabled person would go about finding information about a gig (while using some WCAG elements to do this). These assessments only used publicly available information, and venues were not contacted for clarifications where information was inaccessible, unclear or absent.

All venues had an active social media presence, either on Instagram, Facebook or both and at the time of assessment, and all had active websites.

See **Appendix A1** for more detail about the online assessment process and **Appendix A2** for a checklist for online accessibility.

This project defined 6 key elements to online accessibility: information, language, readability, social media, technical and COVID-19

To assess the online accessibility of these 31 live music venues, an industry benchmarking system of six key areas of online accessibility was used, each with their own indicators to demonstrate how accessible (or not) a music venue is when it comes to online content.

This system was also recently used to assess 20 live music venues across the Fortitude Valley precinct in Brisbane, QLD.

1. Access information – can I find out what I need to know to plan my visit?

Providing information about accessibility of a physical space or gig enables Deaf and Disabled visitors to make attendance decisions and plan their visit. This includes things like an accessibility page, contact details for any access related questions, and photos and maps of a venue.

2. Inclusive and accessible language – can I relate to this?

Referencing the words disability, accessibility and/or inclusion can help to ensure Deaf and Disabled people feel welcome. Ableist language, acronyms, jargon or technical language should be avoided. Using Plain English (reading level of a 12-year-old or under) will mean that more people can engage with your content.

3. Formatting for readability – can I understand this?

How text is presented online has a big impact on its readability. Good practice is for text to be left aligned, sans serif font and to avoid using italics and ALL CAPITALS, which can be difficult for some people to read. Text should only be placed over a plain background, not an image and there needs to be an appropriate amount of colour contrast between the text and the background.

4. Social media – can I participate in the conversation online?

Inclusive social media usage ensures people with various access requirements are considered and can engage in online conversations, just like their peers. Using Image Descriptions, captions, #CamelCase and not overdoing emojis all help play a part in ensuring everyone can engage in social media dialogues.

5. Technical considerations – can I access this platform?

There are a number of technical items in the 'back-end' of websites that can impact how accessible it is for some Deaf and Disabled people, especially users of Screen Readers. Alt Text is important to convey meaning for people who are Blind or have low vision. Website speed and accessibility scores for both desktop and mobile are also important factors.

6. COVID-19 accessibility – will I feel safe?

Displaying a venue's COVID-19 safety plan will help Deaf and Disabled people, who may be immunocompromised or house/home bound, feel safer to attend events. This might include online (or live) streaming, which has provided newfound access for some members of the disability community and many now rely on it.

Each element was scored as follows:

Elements	Indicators	Score
Inclusive and accessible language	▸ Inclusive language used ▸ Plain English	x/5
Formatting for readability	▸ Colour contrast levels ▸ Text and formatting	x/10
Access information score	▸ Access information ▸ Specific access webpage ▸ Navigation to the page ▸ Named point of contact ▸ Photos/maps of site ▸ Companion Card	x/30
Social media	▸ Image description ▸ Captioning ▸ Emojis and #CamelCase	x/15
COVID-19 accessibility	▸ Live-streaming ▸ COVID- 19 Policy	x/10
Technical considerations	▸ Website speed/ performance and accessibility rating, Wave score, Alt text	x/20

Overall score		x/90 (x%)

Each venue was then given an overall rating of either: 'Gold' (70% and over), 'Silver' (50-69%), 'Bronze' (30-49%) and 'Still developing' (29% and under). They were also each given a chart showing how they compare to the other 30 venues assessed.

On-site accessibility assessments

A sample of seven venues were also selected for an on-site accessibility assessment by qualified and experienced Access Consultants. The Disability (Access to Premises - Buildings) Standards 2010 (Premises Standards) provided a benchmark and informed the assessments.

The resulting venue reports and their recommendations used the same structure as the Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life:

1. **Am I able to get there?**
2. **Am I able to participate?**
3. **Am I able to stay?**
4. **Am I able to connect?**

While it is recommended that access assessments be undertaken by qualified Access Consultants, an on-site self-assessment checklist has been provided at **Appendix B** to help venues plan for improved access.

Criteria for on-site assessments were influenced by the principles of universal design and Australian Standards linked to the Disability Discrimination Act

Improving access and inclusion for Deaf and Disabled people is an ongoing and iterative process over time. While new and some modified buildings have been subject to the *Disability (Access to Premises - Buildings) Standards (*Disability Standards) since 2011, older and heritage buildings typically did not have design features that would promote equitable access for all.

The Principles of Universal Design (by The Centre for Universal Design, NC State University, 1997) also provide a useful lens to view how we design buildings, events, information and other things in our world.

Principles of Universal Design
Principle 1: Equitable use The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.
Principle 2: Flexibility in use The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
Principle 3: Simple and intuitive use Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills or current concentration level.
Principle 4: Perceptible information The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.
Principle 5: Tolerance for error The design minimises hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.
Principle 6: Low physical effort The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.
Principle 7: Size and space for approach and use Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture or mobility

Designing and adjusting our environment to benefit Deaf and Disabled people makes moving around and participating easier for the majority. Ensuring a place has good signage; handrails to help navigate steps; a ramp or lift as an alternative to stairs; good contrast and other cues to identify important elements; or is free of unnecessary obstacles makes it safer and easier for everyone.

It is good for business, improves equity of access and reduces the risk of a complaint under the *Disability Discrimination Act*.

Planning to resolve access barriers needs to consider the level of risk and exclusion; who owns the property and thus level of control and influence to rectify; planned future works; and the affordability to conduct the works.

The ultimate goal is to create spaces that foster people's independence, safety and fair access. This in turn will generate good-will and reputation for the business.

Training event

On August 4 2022, Morwenna Collet and access advisor Olivia Muscat delivered a one-off training session to participating venues on theme 'Being accessible and inclusive online.' Complimenting the venue audits, this training included key information about the importance of online accessibility, outlined the 6 key elements of online access, and provided top tips and resources for implementing improvements.

Evaluation

In mid-2022, the Accessible Music Venues Project Team partnered with research agency Patternmakers to conduct a parallel evaluation of the program, in order to understand:

- What the impact of the training has been for participants
- Any barriers or challenges when it came to implementing learnings and improvements
- Any areas to improve or tweak the program

The goal of this evaluation was to provide evidence that speaks to this report's second research question: "What support do City of Melbourne and City of Yarra live music venues require to improve access and inclusion?"

Evaluation methodology

In a co-design session with Patternmakers and the Project Team, a two-part methodology was decided upon, consisting of a short email questionnaire to all 31 venues and three case study interviews with venue managers participating in both the online and on-site audits.

While this methodology was designed primarily to reduce 'survey fatigue', response rate was a challenge for this evaluation, with only 23% of venues responding to surveys after an initial invitation, follow-up email, and follow-up phone call.

One explanation for this response is that venues who were yet to implement access improvements were unwilling to 'confess' as much by responding to the survey – with the potential for findings to be skewed towards more proactive participants. However, efforts were made to minimise this risk by ensuring venues that there were no expectations to this effect, and guaranteeing anonymity if desired.

It is perhaps more likely that this response speaks to a sector that is, as one venue reported, 'in survival mode' after the effects of Covid-19, compounded by increased rents and insurance costs.

‘A lot of the changes and suggestions from the training aren’t big things. They’re really easy to do, and they won’t necessarily cost money or take time.

It’s small, incremental changes in everyday things that can have the biggest impact.’

Jessie Upton, Melbourne Recital Hall

3 **Assessment results:** What did the project reveal?

Online assessment outcomes

Overall, around 3 in 10 venues reached 'gold' or 'silver' status, while the majority were 'bronze' (42%) or 'still developing' (29%)

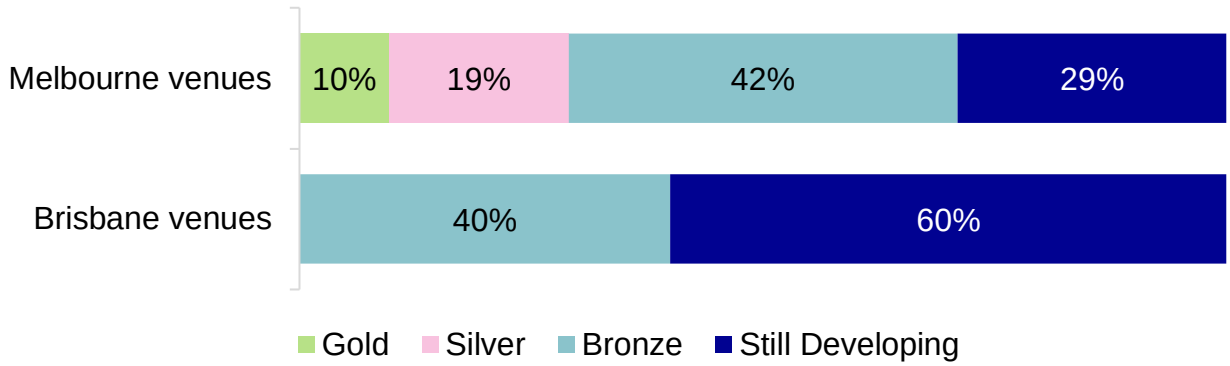
As described in the methodology section above, each venue received an overall rating for the online assessment, which combined weighted scores from each of the six key areas of digital accessibility.

Based on these ratings, most Melbourne venues have room for improvement – with 13 classified as 'bronze' and 9 classified as 'still developing'.

While all venues, to some extent, had areas to continue developing, some venues reached the higher rating tiers – and 3 venues were classified as 'gold', while another 6 were classified as 'silver.'

These results exceed those of the previous Brisbane Accessible Music Venue program, shown in Figure 1 for comparison.

Figure 1: Distribution of venues from Melbourne (n=31) and Brisbane (n=20) Accessible Music Venues programs



A more granular breakdown of findings across the six key categories is shown below.

Online accessibility assessments showed that access and inclusion was referenced by just over half (51%) of venues reviewed

When it came to the availability of access and inclusion information on their websites, around half of venues provided any form of accessibility information, or included photos/images/site maps which can help with visit planning. Specific details, such as a named point of contact, or information about complimentary companion tickets, were rarer:

- Just over half (51%) of the venue websites included any information about accessibility at all. Of these 16 venues, 9 provided a good level of detail and 6 provided only minimal information. A quarter (25%) of the venues had a dedicated accessibility page.
- Six venues (19%) included a reference to the accessibility information appearing in the site navigation, or had search functions that could bring up accessibility information.
- Six venues (19%) provided a named contact point for queries, however these were not the same six venues who included a reference to the accessibility information appearing in the site navigation (only two were the same).
- 15 venues (48%) provided photos/images/site maps, which can assist Deaf and Disabled people to plan their visit.
- Nine venues (29%) mentioned offering complimentary companion tickets.

Most venues had room for improvement when it came to using appropriate disability and access language

Appropriate disability and access language, which helps communicate inclusivity to prospective visitors, was generally an area for improvement:

- Nine venues (29%) were rated as ‘good’, using appropriate disability and access language 100% of the time
- Three venues (9%) were rated as ‘OK’, using some appropriate disability and access language however it could be improved

- The majority of venues (19 or 61%) had room for improvement when it came to disability language, with these venues either using inappropriate or no disability and access language at all.
- Pleasingly, 29 of the venues (93%) had good use of Plain English, with only five of these needing minor adjustments and only two venues needed to focus on this as an area for improvement.

Performance in text readability was mixed, with some venues passing this test and others having room for improvement

While it's important that information be formatted in a way that ensures it can be widely read and understood, results were varied for measures of web readability:

- Ten venues (32%) failed the colour contrast test, and didn't use text-to-background colour contrasts greater or equal to 4.5:1 (as measured by https://color.a11y.com/Contrast/).
- Nine venues (29%) passed the text readability test of:
    - Choose left aligned text, rather than justified to improve readability
    - Use the ordered lists provided in your content management system to present appropriate content
    - Use sans serif (without the 'tails' on each letter)
    - Avoid Italics and ALL CAPITALS. Use bold text and/or using a larger font size for headings
    - Make sure text is placed against a plain background, not overlaid on the top of images.
- A further 15 venues (48%) were doing OK in the text readability test, with seven (23%) needing to focus on this as an area of improvement.

Most venues performed poorly when it came to social media accessibility features like image descriptions, #CamelCase and captioning

The accessibility of social media posts also tended to be an area for improvement, with most venues not following accessibility standards by providing image descriptions, captions and CamelCase in hashtags.

- Only three venues (10%) provided Image Descriptions
- 8 of 27 venues (30%) used captioning on their videos, noting that four venues did not have any video content on their website so this was not applicable
- 2 of 23 venues (9%) used CamelCase in their Hashtags, noting that eight venues did not have any video content or hashtags used.

Most venues performed reasonably well on technical accessibility, as measured by the Wave website accessibility tool

Using the Wave website accessibility tool, most (16) venues had under 5 errors, nine venues had between 6-15 errors, two venues had 16-30 errors, and four venues had over 30 errors.

However, only five venues (16%) used appropriate Alternative Text on their digital images.

COVID-19 safety was a weakness for some venues – and only two offered live-streamed performances

As we move into a new, less acute phase of the pandemic, Covid-19 safety and accessibility will remain a priority for some Deaf and Disabled audiences, as well as people who are immunocompromised but do not identify as Deaf or Disabled.

However, this appeared to be another area of improvement for most venues: nine venues (29%) mentioned their COVID-19 safety plan for visitors on their website – and only two venues (6%) mentioned offering live-streaming on their website.

A local Access Advisor and Screen Reader user had 'mixed' conclusions about the Screen Reader accessibility of the websites assessed

A local Access Advisor, who is also a Screen Reader user, was engaged to assess the 31 music venues involved in this project and provide them with feedback on the usability of their platforms for Screen readers. Her overall summary of the venues assessed is provided below:

"Overall, when auditing the websites for this project my observations were quite mixed. The quality of accessibility varied from excellent to extremely poor and there was no consistency. There seemed to be little rhyme or reason to access choices and to me it came across as if in a lot of cases accessible elements were thanks to flukes of design rather than intentional choices.

The first thing I looked for on every site was the clarity of the landing page. Websites that displayed the venue name as a heading at the top of the page with address, phone number and email address nearby were immediately ahead. This information should be easy to locate.

The level of access provided by venues such as 'The Corner Hotel' and the 'Melbourne Recital Centre' were exemplary and a nice change of pace from much of the frustration I encountered on a lot of sites I would not hesitate to recommend these sites as examples of excellent access both for screen reader user's and for providing excellent disability access information in general.

At the other end of the scale were venues that only had a Facebook page with extremely limited information. Usually only an address. A Facebook page isn't necessarily a bad option, however the level of information provided on a Facebook page is nowhere near enough to provide relevant and useful access information.

Another trend I noticed was websites that simply displayed an overwhelming amount of information without any sort of formatting. This is almost completely useless to a screen reader user as it makes locating any particular information time consuming and labour intensive.

I noticed a lot of sites using heading navigation, but not as many using it effectively or accurately. Heading navigation should only be used to indicate different sections of information and is very useful to make navigating a large page with many subheadings a lot easier for a screen reader user. Bodies of text should not be formatted as headings. I noticed this on a lot of pages, which simply rendered the heading navigation useless. Headings should absolutely be used, but they should be used with intention and deliberation to indicate actual headings and subheadings, and not simply be placed randomly everywhere.

The websites with clear navigational menus definitely stood out. The best navigation menus appeared at the top (and sometimes also the bottom) of every page, had very clearly labelled links, and could navigate a user to any area of the site.

A few sites used slideshows to present information. This is not an accessible way to provide information for screen reader users. Slideshows should be removed, or the information should be presented in an alternate format somewhere else on the site. If that is a chosen option, it should be made clear where on the site the alternatively presented information can be found.

I also observed that there were very few sites that provided image descriptions. Some provided basic alt text. But proper descriptions should be provided for all graphics and images. These can be provided in the alt text, as a caption, or both. Providing descriptions of any videos would also make an enormous difference. These could be provided as in video audio description or as a written accompaniment to any videos.

Image descriptions are also extremely relevant if the venue has a merchandise shop.

I observed a lot of inconsistency in the provision and accessibility of food and drink menus. If venues have food and drink menus they should always be provided in plain text directly on the website and there should additionally be the option to download a Microsoft word version. Venues that provided clear menus formatted with navigational headings with additional information underneath were notable.

I observed that most forms were accessible. The issue encountered with a fair few contact and sign up forms were due to captcha requirements. These are generally inaccessible as they often rely on pictures. I encountered a couple that asked a simple

question instead. I took note of those as they are much easier to use for somebody running a screen reader.

There were very few websites that had a dedicated access section that actually included useful access information. This important to allow disabled patrons to make informed choices about whether they can and wish to attend any particular venue. It also goes a long way to ensuring that any disabled people feel welcomed to the venue. This information includes, but is not limited to, stair, ramp and lift access, width of doorways and corridors, public transport options (including walking instructions from nearby stops and stations), accessible parking options, landmarks or places for taxi or ride share drop off, lighting and sound levels, seating style and availability, companion card bookings, information about assistance animals."

Overall, while there are some promising early signs that venues are committed to inclusivity, these findings do demonstrate a need for further awareness and education in this important area

These results show a lack of digital accessibility literacy in live music venues across the City of Melbourne and City of Yarra precincts, however the results were higher for Melbourne venues, compared to Brisbane venues recently assessed via a similar project. Despite this, there is still opportunity for growth and improvement within the Melbourne live music scene.

On-site assessment outcomes

There's significant progress to be made in physical accessibility – with accessible toilets a particular area for improvement

Based on a small samples size of 7 venues, the on-site accessibility assessments yielded the following key findings:

Four out of seven of the venues were within easy reach of accessible public transport

Four of the seven venues had main entrances that could be accessed independently by people with mobility disability

Two out of the seven venues had an accessible toilet that met the relevant minimum size described in the Disability Standards

Five venues were multilevel with stairs, with only one accessible via a lift

It is important to note that 4 out of the 7 venues had heritage overlay. Fair, equitable and dignified access for Deaf and Disabled people should still be provided within heritage listed places and universal design, or access for all, is an overriding objective that is of high importance to any significant upgrades. Although Heritage legislation seeks to conserve and protect the past, the Disability Discrimination Act still applies and there are limited considerations for not removing barriers for Deaf and Disabled people which include unjustifiable hardship (economic cost), and structural impact.

A more detailed breakdown of findings reveals that while all venue operators are committed to diversity and inclusion, there was room for improvement across multiple accessibility categories

The on-site assessments of accessibility used categories adapted from the Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life, as described above.

Of the seven venues that received an onsite accessibility assessment, we found that:

- All venue operators were committed to diversity and were keen to learn about the barriers that Deaf and Disabled people faced in accessing their venues. The majority were open to implementing any 'quick wins' or simple improvements, such as portable ramps, improving signage and contrast strips on stairs.
- Accessible performances were overall the responsibility of promoters or presenter partners only, however 4 out of the 7 had accessible performances in the past – including with Auslan Interpreters, and Autism friendly performances.
- Four out of the seven venues had accessible public transport close by, with all having a suitable drop-off zone for cars. All venues had accessible parking within close proximity.
- Only one venue had delivered disability awareness staff training, including Mental Health First Aid. Two venues had delivered disability awareness training either to a staff member who had already left, or to managers only.
- Four venues had accessible main entrances for people with mobility disability, and another 3 had portable ramps in place to assist with access over a steps. One venue had no access at all for people with mobility disability at their main entrance, however provided an alternative entrance via an elevator.
- Two venues were single level, with the remaining 5 having internal stairs to the upper level. Only one of the 5 had an elevator to access the upper level. Only two of the 5 venues had sufficient colour contrast strips on the steps of each stairwell.
- Only one venue had Tactile Ground Surface Indicators (TGSI's).
- Four out of the seven venues had accessible bathrooms, however one of these was not accessible independently and needed a portable ramp to gain access. An additional accessible bathroom was obstructed with cleaning tools, which detracted from the required circulation space. Only one venue had Ambulant bathrooms.
- No venues had a lowered section of the bar counter that would provide independent and equitable access for wheelchair users
- Only one venue had a hearing loop

- Only one venue had step-free access to the stage area/s, and one venue had a non-compliant ramp to access the stage.
- All venues were dimly lit when in performance mode to create ambience, however it was highlighted that they were aware of the need to have the premises lit when entering and exiting the venue.
- Clear and concise signage could be improved within all venues, with most adding this as an action to future upgrades.

Four out of seven venues provided barrier-free and independent access for people with disability

Independently accessing a venue is highly recommended, and only four venues out of the seven provided barrier-free and independent access for people with disability. One of these had a small lip of 1.5 cm, and another had a fixed ramp at the entrance, however there is an opportunity to have this ramp upgraded to ensure maximum safety. As for venues with assisted accessible entry, two had portable ramps with one having dependant access via a lift, and a portable ramp after exiting the lift.

Only one venue had Tactile Ground Surface Indicators, which are necessary for independent access for people who are Blind or have low vision.

Suggestions for venues

- Install signage at main entrance (external and internal), indicating alternate accessible entrance
- If a glazed door (and/or side panels) ensure there is a solid non-transparent 75mm wide contrasting line 900 – 1000mm from floor
- Install signage at alternate accessible entrance (including in Braille) describing entrance arrangements
- Install intercom or smart video doorbell on alternate (non-public) entrance so that Deaf and Disabled people can independently access
- Investigate the feasibility of installing a lift where needed, and provide accessible and compliant portable ramps as an alternative where appropriate

- Ensure stairs/steps/ramps have adequate and continuous rails to help a person orientate and stabilise
- Review use of Tactile Ground Surface Indicators (TGSI) at the top and bottom of stairs; minimise their use on landings where possible with uninterrupted rails on landing walls
- Describe the access elements and limitations on the venue's website; photos are useful.

Venues grasped the vital importance of having accessible and ambulant bathrooms, but very few were fully compliant in this area

In discussing the advantages of accessible bathrooms, most venues were amenable to providing this as a human right, however with several of the buildings being old in nature, this is not always feasible. Four out of seven venues had accessible bathrooms, however not all were fully compliant. One of these venues was assessed as having storage items obstructing the required circulation space, and another was not accessible independently as it was accessed via a portable ramp. Two venues without an accessible bathroom were actively considering how to include an accessible bathroom at their venue.

Only one venue had an ambulant bathroom, and it was not apparent or understood by all other venues that this was an option.

Suggestions for venues

Ensure a continuous path of travel between entrance/s, performance areas and bathrooms that:

- Is without clutter or intrusion and is at least 1000mm wide step free
- Has signage installed to educate users of the purpose of an accessible bathroom, and assists someone to find their way to the accessible and ambulant toilets
- A minimum 30% luminous contrast is provided on adjacent surfaces to toilet doors, and internally so that people can more easily distinguish elements; avoid graffiti on walls AND doors, and dark on dark (or light on light) rooms

- Toilets are well lit
- Amenities such as the sink, soap, hand dryer/towel are within reach and installed between 900mm and 1100mm
- A feasibility study is conducted to install an accessible toilet where needed
- A feasibility study is conducted to install an ambulant toilet where needed
- independent access to the accessible toilet is optimised, particularly if via common property.

Five out of seven venues were multi-level, with four accessible only by stairs

Of the seven venues assessed, two venues had performance areas located across one level; five were multilevel, with four of these accessible only by stairs. Within the four venues that were accessible only by stairs, the majority only had a handrail on one side of the staircase, with several having worn or faded colour contrast between steps.

Most doorways met the standard minimum width of 850mm. Some of the venues used luminous contrast well to highlight possible hazards in a way that contributed to the ambience of the space, for example a different coloured dance floor.

All venues had high bars, and although most offering either table service for Deaf and Disabled people, or service via the end of the bar where it is open.

Suggestions for venues

- Investigate the feasibility of installing a lift where needed, and provide accessible and compliant portable or ramps as an alternative where appropriate
- Consider elements that will help people find their way such as signage, use of colour and venue maps/plans. Include tactile information and large fonts
- Use luminous contrast (minimum 30%) to highlight hazards, intrusions and elements in a space

- Use hazard Tactile Ground Surface Indicators (TGSI) where needed to warn people of elements such as steps, change in floor gradient and intruding furniture etc
- Consider providing a lower portion to the bar area, with an undercut for leg room below to assist access for wheelchair users
- Consider how Apps and technology such as QR Codes may assist someone access the bar menu and order
- Consider contrast strip lighting to indicate paths of travel to address low lighting during performances
- Consider providing Mobility Scooter charging points
- Consider providing assistance animals with water bowls

Most venues had limited provisions to help people with disability deal with noise and sound

Music venues are by nature noisy, often chaotic places. They are difficult places for people with who are hard of hearing and may experience muffled sound, unable to hear sounds coming from some directions, have trouble hearing certain frequencies or sounds, or may be profoundly d/Deaf. Some people may also use sign language.

Only one of the seven venues had a hearing loop for performances; and these had sufficient signage, with staff training. Additionally, this venue provided 8 relaxed performances a year, however, did not have a dedicated or allocated space for a quiet room. Two of the seven venues had an adaptable quiet space upon request.

Suggestions for venues

- Consider installing hearing augmentation, and when in place, train staff in its use; advertise on the website and at the venue; install signage system with the inclusion of information on where and how to access (include tactile)
- Consider installing sound absorbing materials in the venues.
- Consider providing a quiet space for people with sensory overload

In most venues, there were barriers to participation by Deaf and Disabled artists and workers

Only one venue provided step free access to the stage area/s. If required, most venues manually assisted a person with mobility disability onto a stage.

In opening up a significant opportunity for Deaf and Disabled people to engage as audience and performers via online methods, no venues were actively engaged in providing online performances.

Only one venue had delivered disability awareness staff training, including Mental Health First Aid. Two venues had delivered disability awareness training either to a staff member who had already left, or to managers only.

Only one venue advised that they had employed a disabled person as a ticket usher long-term, hence very interested in ensuring they were proactive in ensuring their premises were accessible to all.

Suggestions for venues

- Proactively engage and seek performers and Deaf and Disabled artists, and ask them what they need and advise them what can and can't be provided
- Provide and promote step free access to stage/s, including from Green Rooms (Compliant portable ramps can be used)
- When advertising or using social media, include imagery (website photos etc) that reflect the diversity of people, including Deaf and Disabled people
- Assess your own workforce to ensure you include Deaf and Disabled employees, and be proactive about employing Deaf and Disabled people
- Provide disability awareness training, including for mental health first aid to all employees.

Putting it all together

There's a clear need to improve the accessibility of venues, with the results from the Accessible Music Venues project revealing some common strengths and limitations

This report provides an opportunity to consider the results from the project as a whole, revealing some emergent trends and patterns. While, overall, Victorian venues achieved higher accessibility ratings than Brisbane and Sydney venues, there were some access limitations that appeared consistently across the three states.

With regards to digital accessibility, these common limitations include:

- References to accessibility information in the site navigation, or search functions that could bring up accessibility information
- Including a named point of contact for queries
- Using inclusive language
- Using image descriptions on social media
- Using CamelCase in social media Hashtags
- Offering live streaming.

Notably, some of these areas are 'quick wins' for venues, such as including a named point of contact, and using CamelCase in Hashtags — and are more likely to reflect a lack of digital accessibility literacy than resourcing constraints.

Conversely, a consistent strength was the use of Plain English.

In terms of physical access, consistent limitations were:

- Lowered bar counters that would provide independent and equitable access for wheelchair users
- Tactile Ground Surface Indicators (TGSIs)
- Luminous contrast strips on steps and stairs

- Hearing loops or other assistance listening technology
- Provision of disability awareness staff training
- Step-free access to stage area/s.

While strengths were:

- Proximity to public transport and/or accessible parking.

The assessments also highlighted that, across all states, multiple venues had inaccessible main entrances, had multiple levels that were only accessible by stair, and did not have accessible toilets that met the minimum standards.

This latter finding is somewhat surprising given that, according to the 2022 Melbourne Live Music Census, 98% of major Victorian events/venues and 95% of small venues reported having a dedicated accessible toilet – while only 2 out of 7 Victorian venues assessed for the present report had an accessible toilet that met the relevant current minimum standards. This incongruity possibly suggests that venues filling out the census were not aware of the current standards for accessible toilets – consistent with this report's overall findings that a deep awareness of accessibility requirements in lacking in the sector.

Coupled with the results of the 2021 'Music Makers' report, these findings suggest that there is significant progress to be made in Victorian venues

The present report is complimented by the 2021 'Music Makers' study, which performed a digital audit across the websites and social media accounts of 107 Victorian venues, on metrics ranging from Alt Text to captioning.

Similarly to the present report, the 2021 'Music Makers' report concluded that Victorian music venues 'have a long way to go' – with many venues failing to provide accessibility information on their websites, use Alt Text, use appropriate colour contrast, or employ captioning.

In addition to the 'quick wins' possible by improving inclusivity online, they pointed to the importance of:

- Promoting education and understanding, such as public awareness campaigns, disability awareness training
- Attending to physical accessibility and establishing sensory-friendly environments
- Holding events with early starts to allow public transport and ensure safety
- Providing staff with mental health training, with a goal of viewing mental illness 'through the lens of ongoing disability'
- COVID-19 encouraging creative problem-solving – and the importance of some of these solutions, like livestreaming, persisting once the music industry is operating at full capacity
- Increasing representation of Deaf and Disabled people in the music industry – more opportunities, greater representation in mainstream media, platforming, mentorship programs, and role models.

4 **Project outcomes:** What came out of the project?

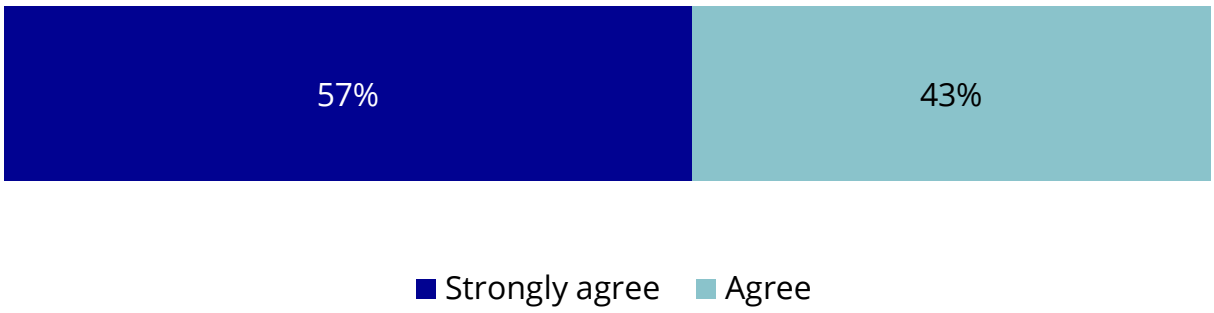
Overall feedback on the program

Participants overwhelmingly agree that the program improved their skills and knowledge about accessibility

Previous research has shown there's often a lack of awareness when it comes to accessibility, including a sense that organisations 'don't know what they don't know' or are unsure where to start.

Importantly, this program has helped grow awareness of access issues amongst Melbourne venue operators – and when asked whether they agreed that the program improved their skills and knowledge about accessibility, 4 in 7 (57%) respondents selected 'strongly agree,' while the remaining 3 in 7 (43%) selected 'agree.'

Figure 2: Do you agree that the program improved your skills and knowledge about accessibility? n=7

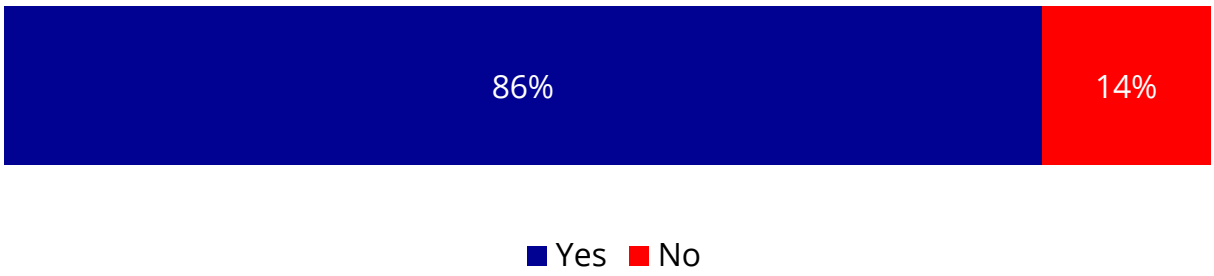


Almost all respondents have made changes to accessibility since they participated in the program

The program has been a catalyst for real change – with the majority of respondents implementing changes to their venues since the accessibility audits and/or training session. According to the survey, 6 in 7 respondents (86%) have made changes to improve accessibility for people with disability, either on their website and/or in their venue's physical space.

Conversely, one respondent has not made changes to their venue or to their website to improve accessibility – with barriers faced by venues when it came to implementing changes explored in greater detail below.

Figure 3: Have you implemented any changes at your venue since the assessment report and/or training session to improve accessibility for people with disability, for your website and/or your physical space? n=7



Program strengths

The Project Team was praised for their helpfulness and expertise – with participants valuing the fact that the program was grounded in lived experience

When asked what they viewed as the 'best part' of the program, many venues named the time, expertise, and helpfulness of the program's administrators.

One venue pointed out that the program and its administrators were 'friendly, helpful and free.' Another venue declared the audit a uniformly positive and enjoyable experience, despite the fact that their venue had significant room for improvement.

Another appreciated the opportunity to learn about improving accessibility from someone with lived experience, stating:

> 'For me, because I got to conduct the physical audit, with Amanda, that was awesome. We were able to walk around the venue with her and actually look at everything. That was so valuable. She's someone with lived experience, and so being able to have the conversations was amazing. Three and a half hours is a considerable time.'

Over the phone, another organisation reported that they were 'overall very impressed' with the program. They shared that any queries or concerns they had about implementing changes were clarified well by the Project Team.

The program acknowledged areas where venues were meeting accessibility guidelines – and encouraged them towards continuous improvement

For some organisations where accessibility was already a priority, the program helped validate their existing efforts and ensure they were pointed in the right direction. One respondent shared:

> 'It was great to get an outside perspective on where the venue sits on accessibility. We had quite good feedback and were already working on a lot of the points for improvement, but really helpful in ensuring we were on the right track.'

Another said,

> 'The reports were really detailed and helpful. A good stepping stone. Written in an accessible way. I have prior training and knowledge, but even without that, they would still be accessible.'

In a phone call, a participating organisation shared that they learnt about areas they were already meeting accessibility guidelines: for example, that their website is using appropriate language, breaking down content for readability, and using accessible fonts.

The report's ultimate conclusion was that 'there is some way to go' before all venues meet requirements under the Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) and other best-practice guidelines. However, this constructive approach helped portray accessibility as a series of continuous improvements, rather than an 'all or nothing' proposition – and motivated participants to continue working towards making their venues a more inclusive place.

The programs identified 'quick wins' which could be rapidly implemented – though it could be 'frustrating' when other changes couldn't be easily made

Another highly-valued element of the program was its ability to highlight 'quick wins' and information about accessibility to organisations in areas they may not have previously considered.

A phone conversation with one venue demonstrated that participating in the program brought a large amount of new information to the team which was rapidly actioned. This venue reported that they learnt a lot of strategies that they could quickly implement on the spot - for example, learning that hashtags without CamelCase are not accessible for screen readers helped them to adjust their social media strategies. Reportedly, they now use this updated social media strategy 'every day', to ensure audiences have access to information about their shows and other opportunities.

However, another organisation shared over the phone that 'the program was good, but the implementation is hard.' While they appreciated that the program created a lot of awareness about accessibility generally, it was 'frustrating' because they are 'not in a position where they can make changes.'

Areas to improve

Funding could enable more organisations to improve accessibility online and within their venues

With many venues 'in crisis' after the effects of Covid-19, a recurring piece of feedback was that costly accessibility upgrades remain out of reach for some venues, despite ambitions to improve. Some organisations who participated in the program suggested that securing funding would assist them in implementing changes.

One organisation said,

> '[It] would be great if there was some grant money associated to spend on some of the proposed activities.'

The cost to implement, and even consider, changes to enhance accessibility were prohibitive for one organisation. In a phone call, they reported that they are short-staffed and don't get paid for doing anything outside of their job descriptions. They are also very time poor because venues currently are in 'survival mode,' and they 'struggle to do anything other than opening the doors.' Even the simple items on the checklist take time to implement.

This organisation flagged that that the program would be more beneficial if it came with funding, and if they were allocated a person with expertise who could implement accessibility strategies for their team.

However, other venues suggested the training was a valuable 'stepping stone' for acquiring funding – suggesting that if a grant opportunity to make accessibility improvements arose, they would leverage their audit report as support for their application.

One venue also suggested improving turnaround times for feedback, commenting,

> 'The timing for this was quite slow and we had already achieved a lot of changes prior to receiving the feedback. [We] understand that it was a big project, but [it] would be improved by faster turnarounds.'

Challenges for making changes to accessibility in venues

Some venues have physical limitations which make it hard for organisations to implement accessibility measures

Respondents were also asked if they have faced any barriers or challenges in making changes at their venue.

Some venues stated that they face physical or space restrictions which limit their ability to implement accessibility measures. However, they acknowledge that the program revealed to them the full spectrum of accessibility strategies they can implement beyond major infrastructure changes.

In particular, venues were likely to cite structural features that prevent them from installing lifts in multi-level or downstairs venues – or point out that renovations of this size are cost is prohibitive in terms of the amount that live music makes.

However, one of these venues acknowledged that 'there is still a lot that can be done', and is focusing on achievable accessibility for the meantime – such as recently installing screens with subtitles.

One organisation stated that their main challenge 'at this stage [is] mainly time. Also physical restrictions of space, but [we] do what we can around this and to provide information where this is not possible.'

The financial and time costs associated with implementing changes can be prohibitive for many venues

Most respondents cited financial reasons as a barrier to implementing changes. One said this is the case for 'larger projects,' while another said that their 'old/heritage building means [it's] hard and expensive to change up. Costs are a major factor.'

In a phone call, a venue said that the big obstacle they face for implementing accessibility measures is time, cost and staffing. For them, improving accessibility in a sustainable way for the business would require funding. Furthermore, there are no additional staff to help put in accessible measures and for strategic planning.

Another venue's financial barriers arise from the fact that they are tenants, not owners, of their building. This means they cannot get loans from banks to make modifications to the space which would enhance access in the long-term, and they are limited to solutions which do not require lots of financing or capital injections.

Digital events can be a good, accessible option – but new copyright and intellectual property laws can limit digital delivery options

Venues who were utilising digital media to share content throughout the pandemic are now facing problems with the introduction of new copyright and intellectual property laws.

Over the phone, one venue said that digital delivery was a vital tool for their organisation throughout the pandemic, and has shown them how to include a population with access requirements that may otherwise be excluded. However, they are now facing challenges delivering things online due to updated copyright and intellectual property laws, established in response to the COVID 'digital boom'.

They mentioned that their venue creates contracts with live performers that say the venue has permission to broadcast their content online, so this is a step that they are doing to ameliorate the copyright/IP issues. However, licensing laws remain a challenge.

Opportunities for changes to accessibility in venues

While a number of complex factors affect the feasibility of various accessibility improvements, it's clear that adjustments are always possible – and many venues report renewed motivation after training.

The program provided participants with skills and knowledge that will assist them to improve accessibility – now and in the future

Respondents were asked how, if at all, the program assisted them in making changes or how it will help them to make changes in the future.

Some organisations stated the program equipped them with a better understanding of what accessibility looked like, both on-site and online, and helped correct misconceptions about what kind of improvements were possible. One said 'they'd never heard of' some of the access requirements raised in the training, but are eager to put their new knowledge to work. This capacity will help venues continue to improve in the future, as one said,

'[The] information & resources were helpful in planning for current and future changes. We have a website redevelopment planned for the future and intend to use some of the feedback to guide the design.'

Another said that Music Victoria provided resources and ideas that 'gave [them] some great cost-effective ideas.'

One said it assisted by 'teaching [them] not only what to implement, but how to effectively.'

In one organisation, the program's act of focusing attention on accessibility has created ongoing internal conversations and habits which prioritise accessibility

The program has also assisted venues in making changes or inspiring them to make future changes by raising awareness of issues relating to accessibility.

In a phone call, one organisation explained that the program helped bring focus to the need for accessibility within their business, which they flagged was not previously a key part of the conversation. For them, the simple act of focussing has created habits. Accessibility is now a normal part of their conversations: they discuss strategies, and review their accessibility regularly.

For example, they face some challenges with the stairs in their venue and their inability to put in a lift. They now prioritise patrons who may have troubles going on stairs and give them early access to the building so they can come to the venue comfortably.

This same organisation said that programs like this do not come around often, but when they do, they are very valuable. It represents for them an important opportunity to incorporate accessibility into their strategy. They hope that people will feel comfortable self-identifying as having accessibility requirements, so they want to create a positive environment where people can do so.

This organisation also now has a member of the team who is fluent in Auslan. They now work to make sure that the building and events are accessible for Auslan users, e.g., signage, information, helping them at the box office with purchasing tickets. They mentioned that the timing of the program helped move this process along and also exemplified the importance of incorporating Auslan into their work.

Evaluation conclusions

The biggest barrier to implementing changes appears to be cost, followed by knowledge/awareness

As noted in this and previous Accessible Music Venue reports, cost is a major factor when it comes to implementing access improvements – particularly those which involve significant capital works. Feedback from venues suggests that there's a disconnect between their goals for venue accessibility and what is affordable right now, particularly given the financial pressure Covid-19 has put on the sector.

Grants supporting access improvements could play an important role in bridging this gap.

For example, City of Sydney has had a "live music and performance grant" which can support access costs: "Up to $30,000 matched cash funding for capital improvements to premises associated with live music and performance and cultural production and participation. Applications requesting the maximum amount available must show how these improvements will lead to significant benefit to the live music and performance industries."

However, another key barrier is awareness – as evidenced by many venues' failure to implement, prior to training, low-cost accessibility improvements such as luminous contrast strips and CamelCase.

Some venue staff report the training had introduced them to disability and access needs they were previously completely unaware of – further proving that the full spectrum of accessibility, beyond ramps, lifts and toilets, lacks visibility in the sector.

Barriers to implementation may be amplified for small venues – and according to the 2022 Melbourne Live Music Census, small venues are significantly less likely to be fully accessible

With some small venues particularly hard-hit by Covid, there's potential for this gap to continue widening—despite the passion shown by many participating venues in making changes for the better.

For example, the 2022 Melbourne Live Music Census, which surveyed 492 small venues and festival/concert events in metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria, found that 98% of major events and concerts were 'fully accessible' by patrons with decreased mobility. By comparison, only 57% of small venues responded that they were 'fully accessible' to patrons with decreased mobility.

Small venues are an important part of Victoria's vibrant live music scene, often home to diverse musical sub-cultures. It's vital that Deaf and Disabled audiences aren't constrained only to major events and concerts, but have equitable access to all live music venues, and can play a part in helping them thrive.

‘The auditor was fantastic. Straight away, she was able to start telling us things that were in her field of vision. She felt bad for us, but we know what’s coming, we wanted the report. You’re not here to dob us in, we want to hear it all!’

Venue Manager

5 Case Studies

Melbourne Recital Centre, Southbank

The Accessible Music Venues project helped Melbourne Recital Centre realise its commitment to 'embedded access' by providing actionable and achievable recommendations.

Image Credit: Melbourne Recital Centre, https://www.embelton.com/blogs/projects/melbourne-recital-centre

Melbourne Recital Centre is a live music venue based in Melbourne Arts Precinct, Southbank. It hosts over 500 concerts a year, across genres including classical and chamber, contemporary, pop, electronica, and jazz – and in a typical year, sees more than 200,000 visitors.

Jessie Upton, Visitor Experience Manager, says the Centre is 'privileged to have artists, audience and staff who really champion accessibility– but we wanted to have actual data to help us tell that story and ensure we weren't working from assumptions.' They say the venue saw the Live Music Venue Accessibility Training as an opportunity to supplement their ongoing work implementing an Access and Inclusion Plan: 'It seemed like perfect timing to get a picture of where we're at, and where we can move forward.'

While Jessie was pleasantly surprised by their venue's performance in the benchmarking study, they say it's only motivated the Centre to continue improving: 'We did well, but we should be doing well. We can always be doing better. It's exciting for us to move forward with that benchmark as our starting point, to listen and draw from lived experience as our next steps forward.'

In the next six months, the Recital Centre will be 'working intensely' on the development of its Action Plan, including making some of the amendments suggested in the venue audit. Over the Centre's maintenance periods, for example, they will be making recommended changes to the comfort of accessible bathrooms, exploring how newly installed digital screens can be more accessible, and installing tactile braille signage.

Overall, Jessie says, the training has 'been really impactful for us. We've got a report that gives us a 360-degree view of what we can do better, as a venue and as an organisation. And it's not just about having that data, but having the data in terms of what's actionable, what's clear, and what's achievable. When you come into conversations about accessibility, you can, unfortunately, face barriers of limited resources or time. This report means you're really easily able to grab those tangible changes and advocate for them whenever the opportunity arises.'

When asked if there was anything from this project they believed all venues should know, Jessie shared,

‘A lot of the changes and suggestions from the training aren’t big things. They’re really easy to do, and they won’t necessarily cost money or take time. It’s small, incremental changes in everyday things that can have the biggest impact. Lofty goals are awesome, but it’s also important to focus on your day-to-day processes and procedures, so access can become embedded in the way you operate.’

In fact, Jessie shares, that’s their ultimate goal for the organisation: ‘that access just becomes embedded within everything we do.’

Old Bar, Fitzroy

How the Music Accessibility Training has given structure to the Old Bar's mission to improve accessibility – and equipped them with tools to apply for grants in support of this work

Image Credit: The Old Bar, captured by Kurt Eckardt, https://www.nme.com/en_au/features/music-features/five-things-i-know-joel-morrison-old-bar-3358108

The Old Bar is a small, Fitzroy-based live music venue that has been hosting nightly line-ups of artists from a wide range of genres for more than 15 years.

Inclusivity, says venue manager Liam Matthews, is a core part of the Old Bar's ethos: 'Our customer base has always been very non-straight, very non-white, and we try to incorporate everyone.' For this reason, 'Accessibility has always played on my mind. We inherited a building that was not very accessible for people in wheelchairs or people with mobility issues. We've always discussed it and kept our eye out for grants.'

The venue elected to participate in the Accessible Music Venues program because they were passionate about improving access, despite constraints on resources: 'We knew it would be a lot, but we wanted to gain some professional insight into how much work there was to be done.'

Despite being 'in the disability and NDIS world because of family', Liam says the training was 'a real education': 'Some of the disabilities raised to us – I hadn't even heard of them.' He praises the expertise and friendliness of the Project Team: 'The auditor was fantastic. Straight away, she was able to start telling us things that were in her field of vision. She felt bad for us, but we know what's coming, we wanted the report. You're not here to dob us in, we want to hear it all!'

Liam says the Old Bar's approach will now be one of continuous improvement, but funding will be key for some of the more significant changes:

'We'll check off, one-by-one, things that the report pointed out to us. It would be great to see government grants around improving accessibility – something that's broad and competitive, and will go toward spaces that everyone can visit. I'm happy to do the hard work, I want to do it. it's about waiting for the right time.'

He notes that, in spite of preconceptions some venues may have about making access improvements, some changes were extremely simple and low-cost, such as installing 'non-slip tape on the stairs and using bright yellow day glo strips'. He reports, 'We're opening up doors, making non-structural changes, that will make people's lives a lot easier. Putting in more built-in seats. We're taking out an old bar and replacing it with

booth seating that's easy to slide in and out of, so people who go to gigs but can't stand for an hour can watch and listen.

Crucially, Liam says the audit report will be an important tool in his arsenal when it comes to applying for funding to make some of the larger changes suggested: 'Even though it's a pipe dream ticking off everything, it's great to know in a bumper year of grants, we can make instant improvements.'

Night Cat

How the Music Accessibility Training gave the Night Cat an ‘eye-opening’ perspective on digital accessibility, while also helping them prioritise accessibility amendments on-site

Image Credit: The Night Cat, https://www.thenightcat.com.au/the-night-cat

Established in 1996, The Night Cat is a genre-focussed live music venue in Fitzroy, Melbourne.

Amber Curtis, General Manager, says the feedback and critiques received from the Accessible Music Venues project were 'welcomed' by The Night Cat team: 'it's always good to have more feedback and information on how we can head in the right direction'.

In particular, Amber found the guidelines provided around social media 'quite eye-opening'. For example, advice on 'changing our Instagram posts so that there's a higher contrast or the background isn't as busy, is better for people who are vision impaired, or including image descriptions for screen readers. That wasn't something I was really aware of.' Amber says that following the training, their new Social Media Manager has been working on 'keeping everything accessible while also consistent with our branding'.

Generally, the program highlighted to the Night Cat that digital accessibility was a broader and more diverse undertaking than they had previously realised. Although they have a webpage dedicated to the accessibility of the venue, Amber realised 'it's a very small drop in the ocean compared to the concessions we could make.'

The key challenge for The Night Cat, according to Amber, is 'figuring out what to prioritise and what can wait until further down the line.' This is exacerbated by financial challenges facing many live music venues: 'Obviously these changes can cost money, and like every venue in Melbourne we are struggling in the aftermath of Covid'.

One example is a planned upgrade of the venue's bathrooms. Amber says it was helpful to get advice from the assessment on what accessibility upgrades they could include, and how best to go about making short-term modifications in the meantime. 'One of the first things we will be doing before we can actually do the complete reno is installing hand or grab rails in at least one or two end cubicles. I think that's going to be the thing that I will feel like is making the biggest difference in the level to which we are accessible.'

The assessment has also helped The Night Cat prioritise accessibility when it comes to their new sound and lighting systems. ‘They gave us guidelines on how we can use the system to the best of its ability to put on really impactful shows without creating an environment that is stressful for people who are neurodivergent or that could trigger a health episode.’

One thing that stood out for Amber from the assessment was advice on the need for different types of seating. This is the number one thing Amber wants other live music venues to know: ‘The bare minimum is ample seating. It’s really hard to find venues that have seating and even when it is provided it’s not adequate or enough. Stools and a bench you can lean against isn’t cutting it.’

‘For me, because I got to conduct the physical audit with Amanda, that was awesome. We were able to walk around the venue with her and actually look at everything. That was so valuable. She's someone with lived experience, and so being able to have the conversations was amazing. Three and a half hours is a considerable time.’

Venue Manager

6 Conclusion and recommendations: What next?

Project questions:

"How accessible and inclusive are live music venues across the City of Melbourne and City of Yarra?"

These assessments demonstrate that across these two Local Government Areas, online and on-site accessibility of live music venues is generally low and there is scope to improve. There is some way to go to meet the requirements under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) and various Australian Standards relating to accessibility.

"What support do City of Melbourne and City of Yarra live music venues require to improve access and inclusion?"

There needs to be increased education and understanding of disability, access and inclusion across the music industry. Music industry workers require a deeper understanding of access issues and solutions, as well as their legislative requirements under the Disability Discrimination Act. From the Project's interactions with venue operators, we witnessed a willingness to learn and an interest in gaining the skills and tools to do better. Disability Inclusion training for music industry workers will be an important component, as will ongoing user testing and feedback from the Deaf and Disabled community.

This project found that there is 'some way to go' before Victorian Venues meet requirements for accessibility – but there are many simple, low-cost improvements that can be made

Overall key recommendations are that:

- Venues use this Project's online and on-site templates and the Music Victoria Best Practice Guidelines to identify quick wins and longer-term strategies for improving their accessibility
- Venues are provided with information on where and how to access Disability Awareness Training for their staff
- Venues sign up to the Victorian Companion Card Program
- Venues actively encourage promoters and presenters to provide accessible services for performances, such as Auslan interpretation and Autism friendly performances
- Venues work to actively book more Deaf and Disabled artists
- Music Victoria, in partnership with Access Professionals and music industry, set up an advisory group of Deaf and Disabled musicians to conduct an annual review/check-in on music venue accessibility
- Councils provide support to music venues in their LGA to undertake an on-site assessment of their premises.
- Councils provide specific funding support to venues to subsequently implement recommendations from their on-site assessments in the form of capital works grants.
- A Live Music Accessibility Charter is implemented in Australia, which provides venues with guidelines on how to improve their accessibility and make progress over time.

Some of the possible access solutions, particularly in the online area, are low or no cost and make a big difference to audiences and Deaf and Disabled artists wanting to engage with live music in Melbourne. There are many free online resources available for industry workers to use and learn from (some listed at the back of this report), as

well as various training programs, if they are aware of the issues and willing to work towards solving them.

To address the financial hardship that may be experienced when improving accessibility, venues are encouraged to apply for government grants – for example, OFTA's Live Music Australia program, the City of Yarra Room To Create funding and the Victorian State Government's Changing Places funding program.

What should venues do?

Venues should meet the basic requirements for online accessibility – including an accessibility page, a named point of contact, video captions, Alt Text/Image Descriptions, #CamelCase, and appropriate text contract

In terms of **online accessibility**, as a minimum, it is recommended that all music venues should include:

- An accessibility page on their website, which clearly outlines the accessibility of their venue (from an audience and artist perceptive)
- A named point of contact for access queries, with both phone and email contact details
- Captioning on social media website video posts
- Alt Text and Image Descriptions on all imagery
- Use #CamelCase for all hashtags
- Use text colour contrast greater than 4:5:1
- Consider having a formal website audit completed, against the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 (WCAG) to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement.

See **Appendix A** for more information about these areas.

Venues should undertake on-site accessibility assessments, allowing them to identify 'quick wins' and supporting applications for funding for more extensive improvements

In terms of **on-site accessibility**, it is recommended that music venues:

- Undertake an assessment of their physical site, so they are aware of the access issues and challenges it presents and these can be clearly communicated to their communities. You can engage a qualified Access Consultant to assess your venue, or Appendix B provides a self-assessment checklist which can be used for this purpose.
- Identify 'quick wins' (fixes that can be done easily) and issues which will require longer-term solutions
- Identify and apply for funding to address access issues which have a budgetary component.

Venues should also abide by more general access and inclusion principles – including platforming of Deaf and Disabled artists, introducing access services for live events, and promoting the Companion Card program

In terms of **general access and inclusion principles**, it is recommended that all music venues should:

- Affiliate with, and promote the Companion Card program to help attract Deaf and Disabled audiences
- Introduce access services for some events (e.g. Auslan interpretation, captioning, Audio Description)
- Seek out and program more Deaf and Disabled artists. Having Deaf and Disabled artists in a venue is useful in terms of continuing to increase the accessibility of a space and build a broader audience base, including other Deaf and Disabled people.

What should others do?

To assist venues to make access improvements, a series of recommendations have been formed for others across the music industry to lead on.

Music Victoria should share resources and learnings from this project to 'raise the bar' for accessibility across the state, and support the introduction of an Australia-wide Live Music Accessibility Charter

Recommendations for **Music Victoria** are:

1. Monitor venue progress by committing to connect again with these 30 venues in 6 and 12 month's time
2. Share resources with music venues across the state on access and inclusion and raise the bar of what is expected across the industry
3. Share the learnings of this project in state and national forums, to influence other venues to make positive changes
4. Support the introduction of a Live Music Accessibility Charter across Australia (see "the Future' section for more details)
5. Partner with Arts Access Victoria and other Access Professionals to:
    - Set up an advisory group of Deaf and Disabled musicians to conduct an annual review/check-in on music venue accessibility
    - Conduct a survey into the experiences of Deaf and Disabled musicians across Victoria, in relation to their experiences working in the music industry
    - Continue to run music-specific capacity building programs around access and inclusion, to continue to build skills and awareness of this area
    - Promote the talents of Deaf and Disabled musicians to the wider, mainstream music industry to encourage more performance opportunities.

Arts Access Victoria and other Access Professionals should seek out opportunities to collaborate with live music venues, growing capacity and awareness throughout the sector

Recommendations for **Arts Access Victoria** and **other Access Professionals** are:

1. Seek out opportunities to work with music venues and organisations wherever possible to help build the capacity and awareness of accessibility issues across the music industry.

Where it doesn't compromise their comfort or safety, Deaf and Disabled musicians should provide Access Riders to venues and have conversations about their access expectations

Recommendations for **Deaf and Disabled** musicians:

1. Continue to advocate for change and provide feedback on experiences with music venues
2. Where possible, Deaf and Disabled musicians should provide venues with Access Riders, and have conversations with venues about their expectations of venue access when they feel comfortable and safe to do so.

Councils should support music venues to undertake accessibility assessments, provide localised resources and support, and offer grants for accessibility improvements

Recommendations for **councils**:

1. Provide support to music venues in their LGA to undertake on-site accessibility assessments
2. Provide financial support in the form of grants for venues to undertake recommended capital works as a result of the on-site assessments
3. Run a similar pilot program with music venues in more Local Government Areas across Australia, to understand the current level of music venue accessibility in different localities

4. Provide localised information, support and resources to venues to help them make improvements including online accessibility works.

Funding bodies should investigate the feasibility of offering grants specifically supporting access improvements, and ensure all arts funding programs support access costs

Recommendations for **funding bodies**:

1. Ensure all arts funding programs can support access costs and that this is well known (e.g. include a line for access in grant funding budget templates)
2. Have clear expectations of required access provisions for venues to be in receipt of grant funding (e.g. ask questions about access on the application and acquittal forms)
3. Scope feasibility of running a funding program which is either specific to, or which can support online and on-site access improvements for music venues.
4. Support the introduction of a Live Music Accessibility Charter across Australia (see "the Future' section for more details).

Opportunities

There are still knowledge gaps when it comes to a full picture of live music venue accessibility in Victoria

This project has been a useful first step in understanding current levels online and on-site accessibility in music venues across the City of Melbourne and City of Yarra. Further research into the following areas is still required:

- Accessible ticketing approaches and platforms, used by live music venues
- Experiences of Victorian Deaf and Disabled musicians in accessing opportunities within the music industry.

There's momentum in the sector to make change – and an accessibility charter could provide a necessary framework

Taken together, these findings suggest both a need for, and an interest in, enacting change to make live music more inclusive and accessible – both on the part of venues, and sector more widely.

Patternmakers' evaluation of the Accessible Music Venues project suggests that offering venues an accessibility 'roadmap' has been highly valued. Many venues suggested that prior to training, they were unsure about where to start when it came to improving access, were unaware of the range of access provisions they could implement, or mistakenly believed that the only improvements they could make were cost-prohibitive 'ramps, lifts and toilets'. Venues have attested to the value provided by reports when communicating with internal stakeholders, and suggested they will be of use in future grant applications.

It is hoped that this report will help lay the foundation for the development of a national live music venue Accessibility Charter. Taking inspiration from overseas examples such as Attitude Is Everything's Charter of Best Practice, there appears to be significant benefit to developing a tiered framework (bronze, silver, gold) tailored specifically for Australia's music industry and our disability legislation. This would provide venues with a roadmap and support to make positive changes to increase their accessibility of their spaces.

Through working with the venues involved in this research, there is clearly an appetite and willingness to become more inclusive spaces – the missing link is the knowledge, expertise and guidance to do this in a successful way. Our hope is that this report begins to demonstrate where our music industry is at, and where we want to get to in the future.

7 Appendices

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Appendices

Appendix A1 – Detailed Online Accessibility Criteria

Appendix A2 – Online Accessibility Guide and checklist

Appendix B – Venue On-site Accessibility Checklist

Appendix A1

The following provides detail about the online accessibility assessment criteria and process.

Online platforms were explored for information and features that a Deaf or Disabled person may need to help them decide and plan their visit, including:

- Standard venue information (e.g. venue capacity, social media channels etc)
- Webpage detailing the venue's accessibility
- Details of who to contact about accessibility queries
- Information on whether a venue has a continuous accessible path of travel (e.g. step-free access or a lift)
- Accessible ticketing systems/information
- Accessible seating and viewing areas
- Information about accessible parking and transport options
- Information about the experience of arriving at the venue
- Information on whether the venue has accessible toilets on-site
- Information for audience members with medical requirements
- Information about whether any performances included access services (e.g. Auslan interpretation)
- Other useful access information (e.g. about assistance animals, strobe lighting, bar/box office counters, mobility scooter charging points, the ability to pre-ordering drinks to avoid queueing)
- Live-streaming
- Information for Deaf and Disabled artists
- Technical access checks, including use of captioning in videos, colour contrast and general web accessibility.

Where hidden from view, the accessibility of online content was analysed using specialist websites recommended by W3C's Web Accessibility Initiative. A comprehensive list of sites and tools, including those used in this study, can be found here. All other categories were assessed based on the visibility of content (e.g. whether or not captions were visibly present on social media videos).

The compatibility of website and social media channels with the Screen Reader was assessed, including whether Alternative Text (Alt Text) and Image Description was used. Assessment prompts included:

- Is this website accessible via Screen Reader?
- How easy is this website to navigate using a Screen Reader?
- Are there any obvious areas for improvement/issues with this website?
- Are there appropriate use of headings/subheadings/text Info opens up on one page? Or another tab? Or downloadable file
- Is the information laid out in a clear and logical manner?
- If columns are used, are they screen-readable?
- Are Image descriptions and Alt Text used?
- Is there good use of language? Is it simple, clear, direct?

Appendix A2 – Online Accessibility Guide and checklist

Item	Ease	How to	Link	Rating	Comment
Language use					
Inclusive disability language	Easy	Read this guide on inclusive language Check your website, socials and ticketing portals to ensure you're using inclusive language	Link to guide here Great example here		
Use Plain English	Easy	Keep your language simple, at a high school reading level. If acronyms, jargon or technical language is required, provide Plain English alternatives or a glossary.	Link to reading level tools here		
Consider using Easy Read	Medium	Use a mix of words and pictures (great for people with intellectual disability or whose first language is not English)	Link to info here		
Consider using Easy Read	Medium	Consider whether any of your website can be translated into Easy Read	Great example here		

Text and formatting					
Make your text easy to read	Easy	Choose left aligned text, rather than justified to improve readability and use the ordered lists provided in your content management system to present appropriate content. Use sans serif (without the 'tails' on each letter). Avoid Italics and ALL CAPITALS. Use bold text and/or using a larger font size for headings. Make sure text is placed against a plain background, not overlaid on the top of images.	Great example here		
Website accessibility	Easy	Use a free online tool to test the digital accessibility of your website	Try this tool or this tool		
Titles	Easy	Give your content a unique title. Using a strong, unique and meaningful title that will clearly describe the purpose of your content. This will assist screen readers and search engines.			
Make links descriptive	Easy	Avoid using catchalls like 'Click here', 'More info' and 'here'. Give your link a meaningful description to assist			

		scan reading and screen readers.			
Use headings to sensibly organise content	Easy	Make use of the heading structures in your content management system using the correct heading level and structure your content using meaningful headings.			
Use tables appropriately	Easy	When presenting tabular information, use an actual table, not an image and ensure headings are used.			
Images of text	Easy	Avoid using images of text except for purely decorative purposes. Instead, use real text or ensure there is a text alternative (like Alt Text) available.			
Colour contrast	Medium	Pay attention to colour contrast. Before overriding the default colours of your content management system, consider the colour contrast. If in doubt use a colour contrast analyser to check. Use text colour contrast greater than 4:5:1 between the text and the background.	Check your website's colour contrast here		

Accessibility information					
Accessibility page on website	Easy	Build an easy-to-find accessibility page on website, which clearly outlines venue accessibility and info on how to get there. No more than 2 clicks from the homepage and easy to search for using the 'search' function. Have access information available to download in a separate document.	Great example here		
Use access symbols	Easy	Use access symbols for events to show things like wheelchair accessible, Auslan interpretation, Captioning, Audio Description, Tactile Tour and Relaxed Performance	Access symbols can be downloaded here		
Demonstrate your venue's access features	Medium	Include images or site maps. Consider filming a 'virtual tour' or developing a Social Story (with pictures and images)	Virtual tour example here Social Story example here		
Access queries	Easy	Include a named point of contact for all access queries, with both phone and email contact details. Include an NRS number for people who are d/Deaf.	Info on NRS here		

Information for performers with disability	Easy	Let readers know whether your venue is suitable/welcomes performers with disability (e.g. reference to stage, greenroom access, rear entrance/load in, backstage bathroom, general access information)			
Access to information					
Screen Reader access to information	Easy	Include meaningful Alt Text for all images on website and social media. Make sure any downloadable documents are Screen Reader friendly (e.g. not inaccessible PDFs). Have a Screen Reader user test your website for you and give you feedback on useability.	Info on Screen Readers here Info on Alt Text here		
Image Descriptions	Easy	Include these in all social media posts, to provide access for people who are Blind or have low vision	Info on how to write Image Descriptions here		
#CamelCase	Easy	'Camel case' looks #ABitLikeThis. When used, Screen readers will read out the words individually, rather than as a long incoherent word.	Great example here		

Provide text alternatives for audio/video	Medium	Add synchronised captions to your video and provide a full transcript for both audio and video. Social media content is 85% more likely to be viewed and understood if captions are included (due to people watching on commutes etc). It's also important for people who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing (1 in 6 Australians)	Check out this video on how to add captions		
Other					
Accessible ticketing	Medium	Make sure your ticketing platform itself is accessible. Sell your accessible tickets online (don't make people with disability call up or come into your venue to buy them). Ask a question about access requirements at point of sale, encouraging people to contact you if they have any access needs.	Read the article here		
Live-streaming	Medium/Hard	Consider live-streaming your gigs for people who can't leave the house or who are immunocompromised	Great example here		

Companion Card program	Easy	Offer complimentary tickets for support workers/carers. Sign up to the companion card program and promote this on your website	Sign up here		
COVID19 safety	Easy	Outline your venue's COVID19 safety plan, so that audiences who are immunocompromised can decide whether they are comfortable to attend			
Mobile phone apps	Medium	These need to work with in phone accessibility settings such as Screen reader and Zoomtext functionality, to be effectively used by people with disability.	Read the article here		

FINAL TIPS

- Read Attitude Is Everything's 'Access Starts Online' guide here
- For a more comprehensive review of your digital platforms, a formal Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 website audit can be conducted by an auditor
- Once you've updated your digital content based on this checklist or an audit, it's a good idea to develop some staff guidelines for everyone who works across your organisation's digital platforms to follow to ensure your platforms maintain good accessibility
- If you're developing a new website and using an external developer, make sure you express your accessibility goals to them so they build your new site with

access in mind. This isn't something all developers will do, unless this is expressly requested.

Appendix B – Venue On-site Accessibility Checklist

1. Introduction

This checklist can be used to conduct a self -assessment of a live music venue.

Qualified Access Consultants would provide a more informed assessment that considers relevant Legislation, standards and broader access issues and opportunities. They will better understand the relevant risk associated with barriers in your venue. (Insert ACAA consultant hyperlink) This includes:

- Disability Discrimination Act (1992)
- Disability (Access to premises – Buildings) Standards 2010
- Building Code of Australia (BCA) 2019
- Australian Standard AS1428.1 (2009) – Design for Access and Mobility – General Requirements
- Australian Standard AS1428.4.1 (2009) – Design for Access and Mobility – Tactile Indicators
- Australian Standard AS1735.12 (1999) – Lifts: Facilities For People With Disabilities
- Australian Standard AS2890.6 (2009) – Off-Street Parking.

Checklist structure

This checklist is organised using the categories from the Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life.

- Am I able to get there?
- Am I able to participate?
- Am I able to stay?
- Am I able to connect?

Risk prioritisation table

Priority	Description
High	High chance that a person with disability will be at risk of injury or unable to gain access, with a likely significant impact on their participation.
Medium	Medium chance that the issue will impact on a person with disability. These issues will be unlikely to be a safety hazard.
Low	Low chance that a person will be denied access as there is another acceptable means of access or there are other way-finding cues. Low probability this will impact person's ability to participate or gain access.

2. Building Overview

3. Snapshot of Key Access Issues

4. Considerations

5. Audit Outcomes

Am I able to get there?

Access Feature	Self-Assessment Comments	Required Action	Risk Priority
Drop-off zones, accessible parking and accessible public transport nearby.			
There is a clear path of travel (clear, flat and unobstructed) from the street to a main entrance when travelling/arriving in a variety of ways; • By foot • By car – from an accessible parking space • By taxi • By mobility scooter (which is not covered in the standards) ✓ • There is passing space for two wheelchair users ✓			
Accessible entrance - If there are several entrances and one entrance is not accessible, there are directions to an accessible entrance (the principal entrance is accessible). Alternate entrances are mainstream entrances, not through loading docks or goods lifts for example.			
Any external stairs have accessibility features (e.g., handrails, Tactile Ground Surface Indicators) There is signage for the alternate accessible path of travel displayed at the steps/stairs?			

Path of travel, including the lift, is accessible			
• There are sufficient directions from the keypad to the lift well • The lift car audio announces (bell, sound or "car A has arrived") at the ground level as well as a visual cue • There is an audio and visual announcement when you arrive at each floor The standard Braille emergency call buttons are at a height and in a position that can be reached by all?			
Accessible and useful venue and directional signage outside venue. Large font with high contrast letters. For example, good signage would include letters at least 17.5mm high for each metre of viewing distance. Signage should use a sans serif font, upper and lower case rather than just upper case.			
The lift must be clearly signposted from the building entry, including Braille and tactile indicators			
Venue outside is well lit and feels safe			
Floor design; do the colours in the carpets / floor surfaces create difficult to navigate patterns or change depth perceptions?			

Am I able to participate?

Access Feature	Assessment Comments	Required Action	Risk Priority
Continuous accessible paths of travel from front door to box office and other destinations (e.g., theatre, toilets) within venue			
Internal stairs have accessibility features (e.g., handrails, Tactile Ground Surface Indicators)			
Box office counters are accessible to people standing or sitting			
Stage/performance area is accessible (including onstage and backstage)			
Various seating options available, in the foyer, bar, performance space, other public areas			
Hearing loops in place with signage			
Emergency evacuation plan/signage considers people with disability			
Accessible performances are offered (e.g., Auslan interpreted, captioned, Audio Described)			
Venue staff trained in disability awareness and mental health first aid.			
Any TV programming or digital screens have captioning.			

Am I able to stay?

Access Feature	Assessment Comments	Required Action	Risk Priority
Accessible and useful venue and directional signage inside venue.			
Convenient and equitable access to the accessible toilet/bathroom that can accommodate a carer and is intuitive to use; • An accessible toilet on each floor • Signage directing people to the accessible toilets • Doors; Door pressure; standards require only 20 Newtons force (only about 2 kg) to open a door, but door hydraulic door closers mean that this is rarely achieved, and toilet doors can be too heavy to open Internal door locks are almost never installed correctly to standards (usually they are too small and hard to grip)			
• D or D level door handles • Transition space (on and off the toilet itself) • Circulation space • Reach from the toilet to toilet roll holder • Toilet roll holder easy to access paper • Handrails • Flushing mechanism • Emergency button that links to reception			

• Appropriate back rest on toilet • Sink and taps; • Area for wheelchair user underneath sink • Space on/next to sink to place personal items • Lever taps • Taps on the side • Consider mirror; tilt and size • Access to soap dispenser/hand towels are close to the basin • Hooks or other device for hanging/storing clothes at an appropriate height for all users Accessible toilets are clear with no obstruction and not used as storage rooms.			
Ambulant toilet/s with clear signage			
Tactile Ground Surface Indicators (TGSIs) are applied consistently and logically.			
Accessible facilities (Service Dog water bowls, mobility scooter charging stations)			
The indoor space is well lit, with good luminous (colour/light) contrast			
Public spaces are free from clutter/hazards			
Quiet room is available for those who may have sensory overload			
Easy to find my way around the venue, with clear signage and cues.			

Am I able to connect?

Access Feature	Assessment Comments	Required Action	Risk Priority
Food, beverage and merchandise counters are accessible			
Information is available in different formats (e.g., Bar menu available in large print, or via an App)			
People with a diversity of ages, genders, cultural background, and access requirements use the venue			
Accessible area with circulation space to socialise			
The space feels welcoming with a sense of belonging and you feel encouraged to return			

Further resources

Reports and guides

- Producers Guide to Access (Melbourne Fringe)
- Inclusive and accessible online event guidelines (City of Sydney)
- Building a musically inclusive future for artists, participants and audiences – elements and success factors (Churchill Fellowship Report, Morwenna Collett)
- Best Practice Guidelines for Live Music Venues (Music Victoria)
- Music Makers report (Arts Access Victoria)

Websites

- Attitude is Everything – offers a wealth of great resources and the whole website is worth delving into. Relevant highlights include The Charter of Best Practice (with associated toolkit), DIY Access Guide and the State of Access Report
- Resources (Accessible Arts)

Articles

- Making Live music accessible (Arts Hub, Sept 2020)
- How to make your music venue more accessible (British Council and Attitude Is Everything)

Videos and audio content

- Music Accessibility Project, MusicNSW (March 2022)
- Making live music more accessible, Radio Nation's Life Matters story (10 Dec 2021)
- "Access to live music for disabled audiences (British Council)

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