



## Suzanne Orr MLA

Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs  
Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water  
Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services  
Minister for Seniors and Veterans

Member for Yerrabi

Our ref: CSI-24/496

Mr Tom Duncan  
Clerk  
ACT Legislative Assembly  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 3 September 2024 regarding e-petition 035-24, which was lodged to the ACT Legislative Assembly by Miss Laura Nuttall MLA, on 3 September 2024.

The petition calls for the ACT Government to develop and maintain a user-friendly online database and accessible website of sensory friendly venues in the ACT. It further requests the ACT Government liaise with local business and community groups to promote and list their accommodations and ensure the database is kept up to date and is well advertised to the community. The petition calls for the database to record information about each venue, including but not limited to venue name, address, contact information, accessibility and specific sensory accommodations offered; and that the database can be organised by type of venue (e.g. restaurants, grocery stores, private practices, community venues and government services).

The ACT Government affirms people with disability, including people with neurodivergence and sensory sensitivity, have a right to equity of access and fair treatment in community, across public, community and private sectors. These rights are protected through the Australian Government's *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and the *ACT Discrimination Act 1991*. These Acts uphold people's rights to request and receive accommodations, adjustments or modifications which can reasonably be made to overcome barriers to access and participation in all services or opportunities on offer to the ACT community.

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The ACT Government, as a Human Rights jurisdiction, and in alignment with its commitments to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disability, Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-31, the ACT Disability Strategy 2024-33, and *ACT Disability Inclusion Act 2024*, adopts a human rights understanding and social model approach to disability access and inclusion.

In context of the social model of disability, accommodations and reasonable adjustments are needed when the standard design of an environment, system, process or service presents a barrier to a person with disability's ability to fully and equitably participate and engage in a service, environment or opportunity that is available to others.

The ACT Government acknowledges the burden for people with disability, including those who experience sensory sensitivity, to constantly have to seek, advocate for and request specific supports and reasonable adjustments. The ACT Government further acknowledges this burden can be reduced through the systemic and practical application of universal design principles into planning, processes and decision-making for environments, systems, processes or services.

The more universally designed an environment, system, process or service is, the more likely it is to meet the broadest needs of all people. Adopting universal design principles will inherently reduce the need for accommodations to be made, or people to make specific requests. When universal design is done well, the full diversity of human needs is considered, planned for and embedded in standard practice.

The ACT Government has a range of existing commitments to create more systemic and practically inclusive outcomes for people with disability, including neurodivergent Canberrans. This includes:

- a. Responding to recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission and NDIS Review which include commitments to improve information provision for, and assessment of, people who are neurodiverse.
- b. Implementing the *ACT Disability Strategy 2024-33*, including the development of an ACT Neurodiversity Strategy, and the interconnected suite of disability strategies and policies including the *ACT Disability Justice Strategy 2019-29*, the *ACT Disability Health Strategy 2024-34* and the *Inclusive Education: A Disability Inclusion Strategy for ACT Public Schools 2024-2034*.
- c. Ongoing contribution to national policy and strategies such as the development of the National Autism Strategy (which will sit alongside Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-31 and is currently under development by the Australian Government with the final version expected to be released by the end of 2024).
- d. Implementing the *ACT Disability Inclusion Act 2024* passed the Legislative Assembly in September 2024. The Act provides a legislative framework to address ableism and remove physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers people with disability face, through the implementation of disability inclusion strategies, disability inclusion plans and the establishment of a Disability Advisory Council. *The ACT Disability Inclusion Act 2024* will also require the ACT Government to undertake diverse consultation, including with people with

neurodiverse experiences, to ensure their experiences and perspectives are considered in the development of strategies and plans and delivery of services.

- e. Ongoing implementation of sensory friendly environments and activities including quiet hours in Access Canberra service centres, dementia friendly film screenings and audits at public events, and the establishment of a low stimulation room delivered by the Canberra Hospital Expansion Project in the new Building 5 Emergency Department.

In addition, all Access Canberra Service Centres are now proud members of the [Hidden Disabilities Sunflower](#) initiative. The initiative was created to encourage inclusivity, acceptance and understanding of disabilities, conditions or chronic illnesses that are not immediately obvious to others. By wearing a sunflower lanyard or pin, individuals can indicate to our Service Centre teams that they might need extra help, understanding, or just more time. All Access Canberra Service Centre staff have undertaken training and are wearing a Hidden Disabilities Sunflower supporter pin to signal they are willing and able to support people with a hidden disability when completing government services and transactions.

With the current agenda and work underway, the ACT Government is not considering creating an online database and accessible website of sensory-friendly venues in the ACT as described by the petition at this stage given:

- a. The extensive community consultation undertaken to develop the *ACT Disability Strategy 2024-33* and *First Action Plan 2024-26* did not identify this as a priority.
- b. The ACT Government is committed to resourcing and effectively implementing current and planned activities and actions under a suite of disability dedicated policies, strategies and actions to create a more universally accessible and inclusive Canberra for everyone, including for Canberrans with sensory sensitivity.
- c. Sensory-friendly elements are only some of the considerations required for creating accessible and inclusive places and spaces (other elements include inclusive design and planning, communications, physical infrastructure, facilities and wayfinding). People with disability face complex barriers to access and participation and it is essential to take a person-centred and intersectional approach to meet people's diverse needs and address the different barriers they face.
- d. The existing suite of disability policy work that is planned and underway will have a deeper, more sustained, systemic and practical impact on creating inclusive outcomes for people with disability, including people with sensory sensitivity, than a standalone database and website for sensory-friendly venues can achieve.
- d. Providing 'sensory-friendly' accommodations and reasonable adjustments are practicable ways for organisations and businesses to meet their minimum legislative requirements under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and *ACT Discrimination Act 1991*. There is a diversity of ways sensory-friendly initiatives can be implemented by organisations and businesses depending on their size and nature of the services and opportunities they provide to the

public. Best practice would have sensory-friendly accommodations embedded into standard practice, or business as usual processes, through inclusive design and planning.

- f. These details can change and be updated at any time. It is considered more cost-efficient and efficient for public, community and private entities who implement 'sensory friendly' initiatives as an accommodation to access and inclusion to publish and update those details

The ACT Government's continued investments in its existing suite of disability policy work will continue to create the change needed to ensure Canberra is inclusive and accessible to all Canberrans, including people with sensory sensitivity. I thank you for bringing this matter to the attention of the Assembly and I am happy to provide yourself or the petitioners with further information on the current agenda and work underway should you wish.

Yours sincerely



Suzanne Orr MLA  
Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services

29/11/24