



MAKING PUBLIC FACILITIES ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL

BY SKYE MITCHELL

The Changing Places, Going Places forum highlighted the importance of creating an inclusive built environment in sports and recreational facilities.

The Changing Places forum was held on Wednesday 14 June at Melbourne's iconic MCG. Speakers at the forum included architects, planners, developers, designers, access consultants, facilities managers, policymakers, local government employees and members of the public with an interest in eliminating barriers to social inclusion for individuals with high support needs.

The MCG hosts countless major sports and special events, with more than 3.5 million visitors passing through its gates annually.

MCG General Manager Peter Wearne says, 'We provide all our patrons with the appropriate facilities they need to ensure their visit to the stadium is comfortable and enjoyable'.

The MCG was a perfect venue in which to inform and highlight the need for more Changing Places facilities in the built environment, showcasing best practice in the sector, and, in turn, demonstrating how to meet the needs of people with disabilities and their carers.

Changing Places facilities provide people with high support needs the opportunity to participate and enjoy day-to-day activities that most of us take for granted. The facilities support more than 326,000 Victorians with disabilities, and allow more participation within the community. As a regular user of the facilities and a committee member of the

Association of Children with a Disability, Liz Ellis says that Changing Places has given her and other people with a disability the right to go to the toilet again when out in public. 'In the absence of proper disability facilities, my time in the community is limited,' she says.

The National Disability Strategy 2010–2020 states that 'People with a disability may experience restricted access to social and cultural events and to civic, political and economic opportunities because of inaccessible attributes of the built and natural environment'. The provision of a Changing Places facility is therefore a good step towards creating an inclusive built environment.

Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing, the Hon. Martin Foley MP spoke at the event, and announced the Victorian Government's \$2-million 2017 Changing

Places funding round to support up to 20 extra Changing Places facilities in Victoria.

'Building more of these bigger, safer [and] more accessible bathrooms will enable people with disabilities to live their lives with greater freedom, and participate more fully in our community,' Minister Foley said.

Funding of up to \$100,000 will be provided to assist not-for-profit organisations and/or local government authorities (Victorian) to build a Changing Places facility.

'Changing Places are changing lives for people with a disability – that's why we're investing in them,' Foley said.

Each Changing Places facility is required to provide:

- ▶ a height-adjustable changing bench
- ▶ a ceiling track hoist system
- ▶ a centrally located toilet
- ▶ circulation spaces (defined by design specification)
- ▶ an automatic door with a clear opening.

Organisations, businesses and building owners who provide Changing Places toilets can promote their commitment to and awareness of community needs and social responsibility.

Wearne, as the MCG's General Manager, is seeing the positive impacts of installing a Changing Places facility at the stadium. 'The Changing Places facility has fundamentally made it much easier for disabled patrons and carers to access and use the bathroom at the MCG. It has helped to alleviate anxiety that these visitors may have previously felt about coming to the stadium,' he says.

Liz says, 'Changing Places at the MCG has meant that I can be confident and assured that I can be comfortable, and have the right once more to use the bathroom. I can watch a game of football with no worry and stress'.

The Labor Government has provided funding throughout Victoria for the facilities, as well as for a mobile Marveloo

to be available for public hire at events and festivals. Local councils and not-for-profit organisations are encouraged to apply for grants to build new Changing Places facilities in areas where they're needed.

Wearne says that installing a Changing Places facility at the MCG was a 'worthwhile investment', and he recommends utilising the existing information and research that is out there. 'There is a wealth of material that can assist you with the design and, ultimately, the successful implementation of a facility,' he says.

These kinds of facilities are changing the lives of people with a disability. 🚻

For more information, please visit www.dhs.vic.gov.au/changingplaces. Applications for Changing Places Funding Round are open until 13 October 2017.

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