Accessibility and Inclusion Plan

2024 - 2027

Essential Energy is committed to an inclusive and diverse workforce, reflective of the communities we serve, where people can bring their whole selves to work every day.

Essential Energy | **I&D**

essentialenergy.com.au

Acknowledgement of Country

48 First Nations
96 Depot locations

Essential Energy acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which our company is located and where we conduct our business.

We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders past, present and emerging.

We are committed to honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas and their rich contribution to society.

First Nations and Essential Energy Network Area
For map notes and information sources see essentialenergy.com.au/acknowledgement

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■ **Cover image:** Accessibility ramp at Port Macquarie Corporate Office.

A message from our Executive Sponsor

I am honoured to address you as the Executive Sponsor for our Accessibility Inclusion Plan—a commitment that reflects our dedication to creating an environment where every individual, regardless of ability, feels valued, supported, and included.

Our mission to foster a workplace that is accessible to all is not just a corporate initiative; it is a pledge to uphold the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion. As we embark on this transformative journey, it is essential to recognize the collective strength and potential that arises when each member of our team is given the tools and opportunities to thrive.

I extend my deepest gratitude to the members of the Disability Reference Group for their invaluable contributions to the development of our Accessibility Inclusion Plan. Your expertise, insights, and dedication have been instrumental in shaping a strategy that is not only comprehensive but also reflective of the diverse needs of our team. Your commitment to promoting inclusivity has been an inspiration.

Our Accessibility Inclusion Plan is not merely a checklist but a dynamic roadmap. It is an ongoing commitment to fostering a culture that transcends barriers and empowers every team member to do their best each and every day.

I encourage each of you to actively engage in this initiative. Together, we can build a workplace where the principles of accessibility and inclusion are not just policies on paper but an integral part of our organisational culture.

I am excited about the positive impact our collective efforts will have on our workplace and the communities we serve. Championing accessibility inclusion is a shared responsibility, embracing the diverse strengths each of us brings to the table.

Thank you for your commitment to this important initiative.

Luke Jenner
Chief Operating Officer

Our Vision, Purpose & Values

Our Vision

What we want to be
Empowering commuities to share and use energy for a better tomorrow.

Our Purpose

What we stand for
To enable energy solutions that improve life.

Our Values

What we care about

Make safety your own

Be easy to do business with

Make every dollar count

Be courageous, shape the future

Be inclusive, supportive and honest

Our Inclusion and Diversity Vision

Vision

An inclusive and diverse workforce, reflective of the communities we serve, where people can bring their whole selves to work every day.

Key Priorities:

1

HIGH LEVELS OF INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP CAPABILITY

To develop inclusive leadership capability and skill in leading diverse teams, at all levels of leadership.

2

AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE

To foster a workplace culture that is inclusive, collaborative and empowered, that celebrates the talent and diversity of our people.

3

A DIVERSE WORKFORCE

To attract, develop and retain a diverse workforce that reflects and enhances the communities we serve.

Key Focus Areas:

Gender   **Indigenous**   **Disability**   **LGBTQIA+**   **Multicultural**

Our Disability Reference Group Vision

Disability

Vision

An environment based on caring and respect which fosters a sense of belonging, empowerment and inclusion for people living with disability.

Mission

To engage, encourage and support people with a disability, or those caring for or working with people with a disability, by creating a platform for employees to share their experiences and provide input for improving and raising awareness of disability inclusion in the workplace and broader community.

Our Journey:

In 2017, we launched the Inclusion and Diversity DisAbility Reference Group.

The Reference Group is employee led and consists of representatives from across the organisation who are either living with a disability, caring for someone living with a disability, or passionate about supporting those living with a disability.

The development of this Accessibility and Inclusion Action Plan was led by the Disability Reference Group.

Introduction to Disability

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:

"Persons with disabilities include 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."

Statistics:

One in five Australians has one or more disabilities and this proportion is increasing with the ageing of the population.

77% of people with disability have a physical disability as their main condition, which can be non-visible and non-apparent.

45% of Australians aged 16–85 years, experience a mental health condition during their lifetime. 3 million Australians live with depression or anxiety.

Although some people are born with disability, many people who have a disability may have spent much of their lives without it and may have acquired their disability through an incident or accident, or as they age (e.g. hearing or sight loss).

1.2%

1.2% of Essential Energy employees identify as having a disability in Oracle ERP, and 2.4% of respondents to our annual (anonymous) Engagement Survey identify as having a disability. As we focus on our journey to inclusion and accessibility, we expect to see these figures increase.
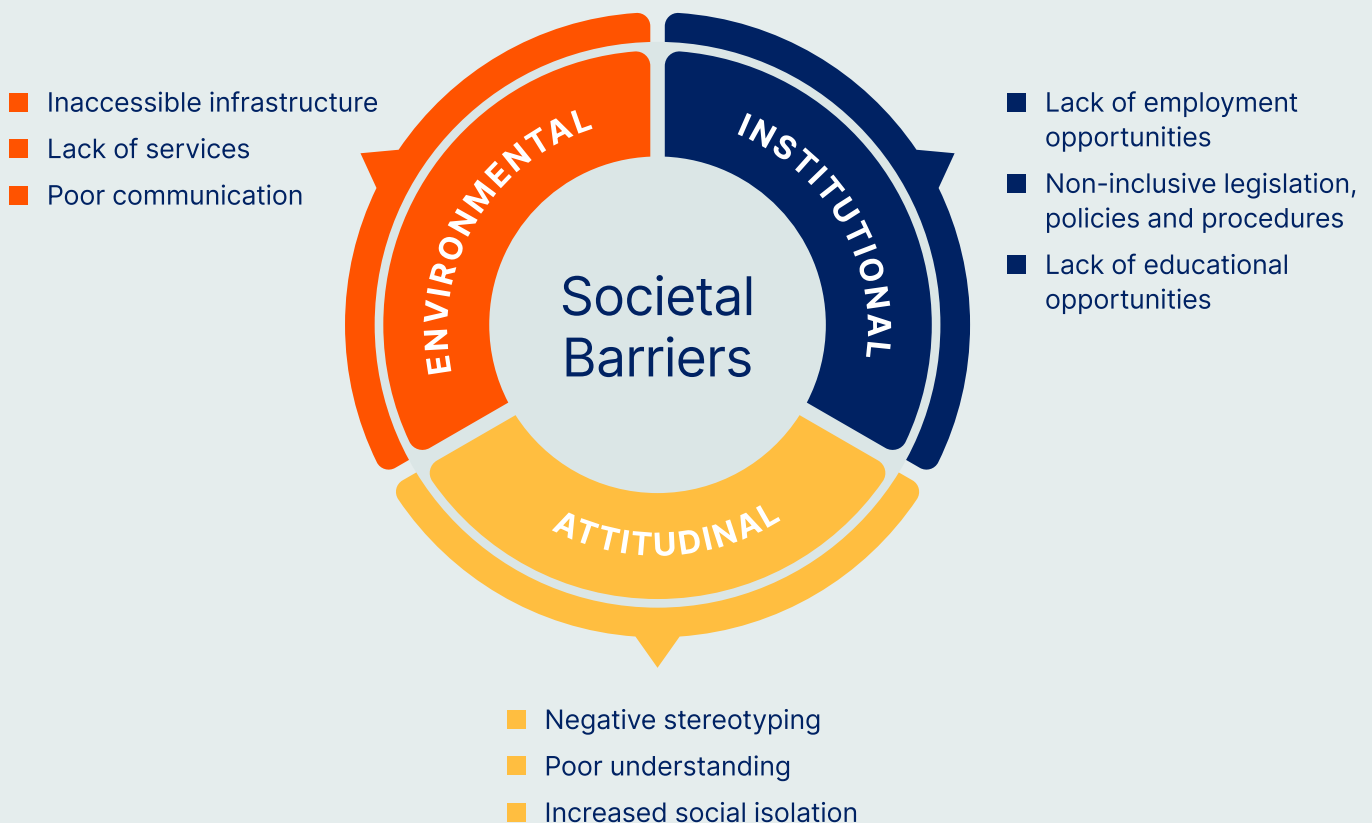
Introduction to Disability

The social model of disability recognises the barriers that individuals with disability will face within society that create low expectations, and result in people with disability losing independence.

Barriers are:

- 🟧 Environmental and physical
- 🟦 Institutional
- 🟨 Attitudinal

Our Plan aims to address all these types of barriers.

🟧 Inaccessible infrastructure
🟧 Lack of services
🟧 Poor communication

🟦 Lack of employment opportunities
🟦 Non-inclusive legislation, policies and procedures
🟦 Lack of educational opportunities

ENVIRONMENTAL
INSTITUTIONAL
Societal Barriers
ATTITUDINAL

🟨 Negative stereotyping
🟨 Poor understanding
🟨 Increased social isolation

The Accessibility Inclusion Plan

Purpose:

To address barriers to access and inclusion for our employees, customers and community through three key pillars:

PEOPLE, CAPABILITY AND CULTURE

We empower our people with disability and/or who care for people with a disability to grow and thrive through:

1 Building a culture of inclusivity and belonging through awareness and understanding of disability.

2 Attracting and retaining people with a disability.

3 Ensuring our people with a disability and/or who care for people with a disability are connected and supported.

4 Empowering our people with disability to drive career development and growth.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

We support the physical needs of our people with disability through:

1 Ensuring accessible technology for employees and customers with disability.

2 Ensuring work environments, systems and processes are accessible.

3 Ensuring our communications and marketing align with best practice accessibility standards.

CUSTOMERS AND SERVICES

We ensure our services to the community are accessible and inclusive for all people through:

1 Working with our customers with disability in an inclusive way to provide accessible services.

2 Building relationships and networks to build awareness of disability.

3 Working with organisations and communities who demonstrate commitment to disability inclusion.

Pillar 1

People, Capability and Culture

We empower our people with disability and/or who care for people with a disability to grow and thrive through:

GOAL		ACTION	
1	**Building a culture of inclusivity and belonging through awareness and understanding of disability**	**1.1**	Develop an annual calendar for celebrations and events designed to raise awareness of and support our people with disability, and people who care for people with a disability.
		1.2	Develop an Inclusion and Diversity training program, which includes disability confidence training, and mandate completion of program for all leaders.
2	**Attracting and retaining people with a disability**	**2.1**	Review our current hiring processes to identify unintended barriers for people with a disability to ensure we are tapping into the entire talent pool and people with disability are welcomed and included.
		2.2	Implement a process to identify requested adjustments and ensure these are acted on and regularly reviewed.
		2.3	Develop programs to increase disability workforce retention based on information received from regular reviews.
		2.4	Establish a mentoring and/or work experience program to support people with a disability who are not employees of our organisation to develop valuable skills and experience.
3	**Ensuring our people with a disability and/or who care for people with a disability are connected and supported**	**3.1**	Formally engage with employees who have a disability, or care for a person with a disability, to provide and promote support, and to inform policy and procedure development.
		3.2	Develop a formal program to educate leaders on supporting employees with a disability.
		3.3	Develop and implement a standalone workplace adjustment policy and procedure and educate our workforce on the policy. Ensure this policy includes making adjustments for career development opportunities such as training or work relocations.
		3.4	Develop and implement a workplace adjustment passport and educate our workforce on the passport.
4	**Empowering our people with disability to drive career development and growth**	**4.1**	Ensure employees with disability are included in our organisational career development and retention strategies.
		4.2	Identify opportunities for specific initiatives to support employees with a disability in career growth.
		4.3	Establish a mentoring program for employees with a disability that aligns with the corporate mentoring program.
		4.4	Investigate and implement training and support for managers to increase awareness of employees with disabilities and the barriers they face for career development.

Pillar 2

Physical Environment

We support the physical needs of our people with disability through:

GOAL		ACTION	
1	**Ensuring accessible technology for employees and customers with disability**	**1.1**	Commit to meet WCAG 2.2 level AA or higher for Essential Energy's public website and intranet.
		1.2	Develop a process and review the procurement policy to ensure ICT purchases are accessible.
		1.3	Ensure ICT adjustments are captured within formal Workplace Adjustments policy.
		1.4	Establish and formalise a review process to monitor internal ICT standards and guidelines to ensure the latest standards and technology are supported.
		1.5	Seek feedback from customers and employees with disability and apply these learnings to improve processes and experience.
2	**Ensuring work environments, systems and processes are accessible**	**2.1**	Undertake an ADN Dignified Access Review to assess the accessibility of our offices.
		2.2	Provide training to property team members regarding premises accessibility and dignified access.
		2.3	Ensure all employees are asked if they require a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) form, not just those who self-identify as having disability.
3	**Ensuring our communications and marketing align with best practice accessibility standards**	**3.1**	Provide guidance or training to people working in communications including marketing, to ensure they use appropriate language in relation to disability.
		3.2	Review branding against the required W3C compliance to determine fit for purpose branding.

Pillar 3

Customers and Services

We ensure our services to the community are accessible and inclusive for all people through:

GOAL		ACTION	
1	**Working with our customers with disability in an inclusive way to provide accessible services**	**1.1**	Develop clear guidelines for our customer service teams and other employees that outline and guide on how to be inclusive and provide accessible services.
		1.2	Provide regular disability confidence training for employees, on how to welcome customers with disability to your organisation.
		1.3	Establish an annual process to review services to ensure that they continue to be accessible and inclusive for customers with disability.
		1.4	Ensure our public information is accessible via a variety of channels.
		1.5	Review *Customers in Distress Policy* to ensure it is inclusive of our customers with disability.
2	**Building relationships and networks to build awareness of disability**	**2.1**	Provide regular learning and development opportunities and resources to all employees, including during induction to build their disability confidence.
		2.2	Continue to partner with ADN and Diversity Council Australia to access and progress opportunities and initiatives to support employees and customers with disability.
3	**Working with organisations and communities who demonstrate commitment to disability inclusion**	**3.1**	Review examples of innovation by other ADN members and consider how Essential Energy could demonstrate their commitment in this area.
		3.2	Partner with organisations in our footprint to offer resources and support and raise awareness of people living with disability (e.g. Go Red for Dyslexia, Aspect School).

Appendices

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Disability Definition

Image: Adjustable standing desks allow individuals to customize their workspace height, ensuring their workstation is tailored to their unique requirements.

Disability Defined

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 defines disability as:

(a) total or partial loss of the person's bodily or mental functions; or

(b) total or partial loss of a part of the body; or

(c) the presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness; or

(d) the presence in the body of organisms capable of causing disease or illness; or

(e) the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person's body; or

(f) a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction; or

(g) a disorder, illness or disease that affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgment or that results in disturbed behaviour.

and includes disability that:

- presently exists

- previously existed but no longer exists

- may exist in the future

- is imputed to a person (meaning it is thought or implied that the person has disability but does not).