



Disability Action Plan:

Discussion Paper

Plain Language Summary

June 2026

What is this about?

Ararat Rural City Council wants to make the community:

- More welcoming
- Easier to use
- Fair for everyone

This includes people with disability.

So, we are making a **Disability Action Plan**.

This plan will say:

- What needs to improve
- What we will do
- When we will do it

Important information

This project is **NOT about the NDIS**.

Council does not control:

- NDIS funding
- NDIS services

If you need help with the NDIS, we have a list of people to call, the list is on page 7

Why accessibility is important

Accessibility means things are easy to use.

This helps everyone, including:

- People with disability
- Older people
- Parents with prams
- People with injuries

When places are accessible:

- People can get around easier
- People can join activities
- People can work and volunteer

This makes the whole community stronger.

What is a Disability Action Plan?

A Disability Action Plan is a simple plan that says:

- What we want to improve
- What actions we will take
- Who will do the work
- When it will happen

It helps Council:

- Plan ahead
- Improve services
- Listen to people with disability

Why we wrote this discussion paper

This paper helps:

- Start conversations
- Share ideas
- Ask for feedback

Your feedback will help shape the final plan.

About our community

In Ararat Rural City:

- Many people have disability
- Many people are older (70+)

This means accessibility is very important now and in the future.

What Council can and can't do

Council CAN control:

- Council buildings (like libraries)
- Parks, public spaces and local roads
- Council services
- Local laws
- Information and communication

Council CANNOT control:

- NDIS services
- Buildings owned by others

We want your ideas

We want to hear from you.

You can share your thoughts on:

Public spaces

- What places are hard to use?
- What needs fixing first?

Jobs and services

- Are Council services easy to use?
- Are there barriers to working at Council?

Events and programs

- Are Council events accessible?

Information

- Is Council information easy to read?

How to share your ideas

You can contact Council in different ways:

- In person (community meetings)
- Online or paper survey
- Email: council@ararat.vic.gov.au
- Phone: (03) 5355 0200
- Mail

Support is available if you need help to take part.

Summary

Council is making a plan to improve accessibility

The plan will:

- Remove barriers
- Improve access
- Include everyone

We need your ideas to get it right

The final plan will be ready by **June 2027**

Thank you

Thank you for sharing your thoughts and helping make Ararat more inclusive.

NDIS & Disability Support

Organisation	What they do / support with	Contact details
Central Highlands Local Area Coordinator (LAC) – Latrobe Community Health Service	Helps people access the NDIS, apply, understand plans, connect with services, and build capacity	1800 242 696 https://www.lchs.com.au/
NDIS (National Disability Insurance Agency)	Access requests, plan approvals, funding, participant enquiries	1800 800 110 www.ndis.gov.au
NDIS Quality & Safeguards Commission	Complaints about providers, report restrictive practices, safeguarding participants	1800 035 544 www.ndiscommission.gov.au
Grampians Disability Advocacy (GDA)	Advocacy support for people with disability (rights, complaints, service issues), NDIS Appeals	(03) 5329 1300 www.grampiansadvocacy.org.au
Australian Federation of Disability Organisations	To represent the united voice of our members and people with disability in national initiatives and policy debate.	1800 219 969 office@afdo.org.au



Ararat Rural City

Disability Action Plan: Discussion Paper

June 2026

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Introduction

Ararat Rural City Council (ARCC) is committed to fostering a more inclusive, welcoming and diverse community, and to equal employment opportunities for all employees and potential employees. Universal accessibility is also incorporated into its capital works and services.

The Disability Act 2006 requires public authorities such as local governments to prepare a Disability Action Plan. The Plan will describe how ARCC will address access and inclusion barriers for people with disability, as both service users and employees.

This Disability Action Plan: Discussion Paper is the beginning of a longer-term journey of identifying what needs to be done now and into the future to help improve access and inclusion in Ararat Rural City.

Note: This document and the associated engagement activities is **not** about the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The NDIS services and any related funding decisions are not within the scope of this ARCC Disability Action Plan initiative. If you require assistance with NDIS, please contact the organisations listed in Appendix 1.

Everyone Benefits

Improving accessibility and inclusion benefits everyone.

At its core, accessibility is about designing environments, services, and systems that can be used by as many people as possible, regardless of age, ability, or circumstance. This includes individuals with temporary injuries, older people experiencing gradual changes in mobility or vision, parents with prams, or people navigating unfamiliar environments.

Inclusive design also drives innovation and better outcomes. When services are built with a wide range of users in mind from the outset, they tend to be more intuitive, efficient, and user-friendly. Features such as clear signage, simple language, step-free access, and adaptable technologies benefit everyone, not just those with specific needs.

There are significant social and economic advantages to improving accessibility and inclusion. Removing barriers enables more people to participate in education, employment, and community life, contributing their skills, perspectives, and talents. In the 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census - Working Population Profile for Ararat Rural City, out of the people who reported having a profound or severe core activity limitation and needed help with daily activities, 85 were employed, with 31 working full time. Out of the 5,211 people who were employed at the 2021 Census, over 1,600 (Approx 31%) reported that they had one or more long term health conditions.

Many people who volunteer also have a disability. In the ABS General Social Survey (2025), nearly a quarter (24.5%) of people who had volunteered through an organisation in the 12 months prior to the Survey had a disability. In the people who had undertaken informal volunteering in the 4 weeks prior, the proportion of people with disability was 29.%. Close to half (46%) of people who provided unpaid work/support to non-household members in the 4 weeks prior to the Survey also had a disability.

Ultimately, accessibility and inclusion are not just legal or ethical obligations, they are key drivers of sustainable growth and community wellbeing.

What is a Disability Action Plan?

A Disability Action Plan (DAP) is a strategic document that sets out how a council will identify, reduce, and remove barriers faced by people with disability, both as community members and as employees. Its purpose is to make local government services, facilities, employment practices, and public spaces more accessible, inclusive and equitable.

ARCC is here for its community. We manage many assets such as libraries, parks, roads, events, community centres, planning processes, and critical local social services. The development and implementation of the DAP will help ARCC to:

- Plan proactively rather than reactively
- Embed accessibility into everyday operations
- Align with state and national strategies, such as the National Disability Strategy and state disability plans
- Engage with people with disability in shaping local priorities
- Demonstrate compliance with disability legislation

Action plans are clear, structured documents that set out exactly how a goal will be achieved. It turns broad intentions into concrete, trackable steps so that a team, organisation, or project knows who will do what, by when, and how success will be measured.

What an action plan includes:

- Goals or objectives — the outcomes you want to achieve
- Actions or tasks — the specific steps required
- Responsibility — who is accountable for each action
- Timeframes — start and end dates, milestones, deadlines
- Resources — funding, staff, tools, or support needed
- Measures of success — indicators or KPIs to track progress
- Monitoring and reporting — how progress will be reviewed

Where the Disability Action Plan fits within Council’s strategic framework

The DAP is one of the key Other Strategic Plans of Council, identified in red below. Progress on the actions identified in the DAP are reported in Council’s Annual Report.

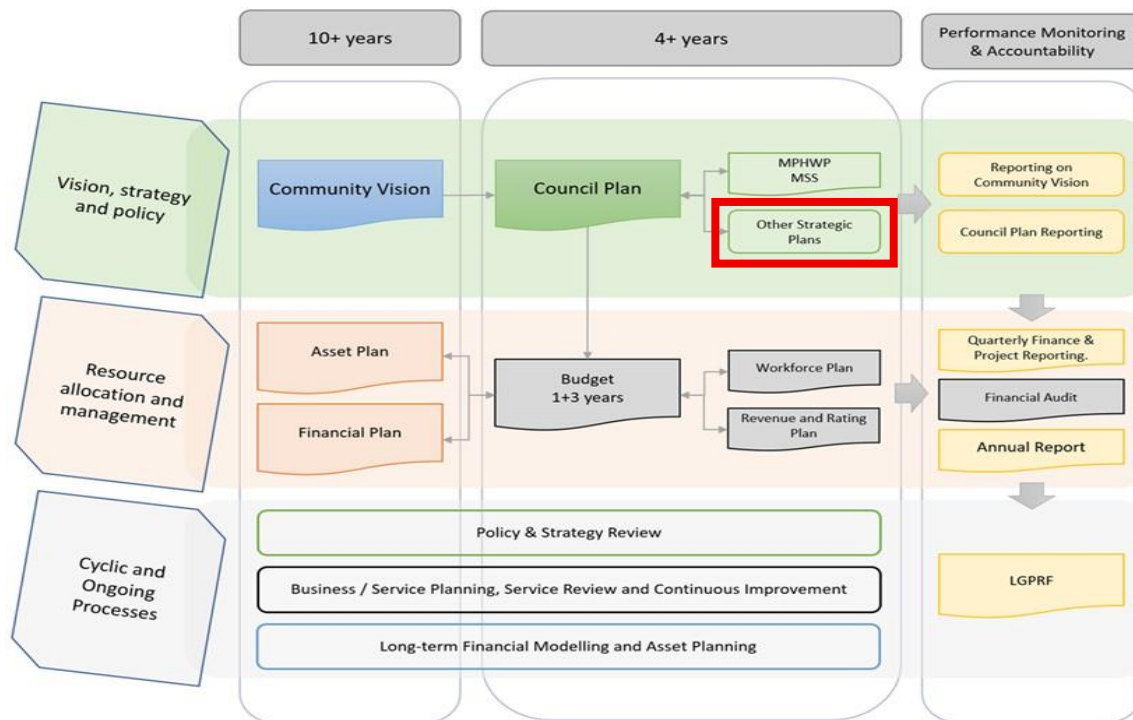


Image source: Department of Government Services

Disability Action Plan Working Group

ARCC has established a Disability Action Plan Working Group to ensure that the lived experience of people with disability will guide the development and implementation of the DAP. The Working Group was established in early 2026.

The DAP Working Group is not an established Committee of Council but works in an advisory capacity to the CEO on the development of the Council’s new DAP.

The DAP Working Group consists of members shown in the table below and consists of:

- Ararat Rural City Council Chief Executive Officer or Nominee
- Ararat Rural City Council project officer
- Community representatives with lived experience as a person with disability or carer
- Representatives of the disability support workforce
- Representatives from organisations with expertise in inclusive practices for people with disabilities.

Table 1. ARCC Disability Action Plan Working Group (2026)

Name	Background
Phuong Au	Deputy CEO, Nominee of the CEO, Ararat Rural City Council
Tim Grech	Project Officer, Ararat Rural City Council
Kathryn Clayton	Chief Executive Officer, Pinnacle Inc
Peter Harrison	Executive Officer, Grampians disAbility Advocacy
Ruby Klemm	Acting Program Leader Healthy Communities / Healthy Ageing Hubs Navigator, Grampians Community Health
Leone Hauser	Owner, Hauser Disability Support Services
Karen Armstrong	Owner, KMA Health and Physio
John Wilkinson	Person with lived experience
Molly McGrath	Person with lived experience
Erin Mahmud	Person with lived experience. Works with people with disabilities and their supports across various different roles
Toni Hobson	Person with lived experience. Support worker
Ronda Preston	Person with lived experience. Support worker
Jessica Batchelor	Support worker
Lauren Walker	Works with people with disabilities and their supports. A counsellor and emerging Behaviour Support Practitioner.

Why a Discussion Paper?

A discussion paper is a critical, evidence-based exploration of an issue. They are designed to spark thoughtful, fruitful and respectful conversations. They help to blend analysis, interpretation, and debate to help stakeholders and wider audiences understand a topic or issues from multiple perspectives.

In the case of Council’s DAP, this discussion paper is a designed to kick start ideas, collaboration, and most importantly, the development of a plan that best suits the inclusion and accessibility needs of Ararat and our surrounding communities.

It is an important initial step in Council developing a DAP that embeds inclusion and accessibility into everything we do and will be designed in conjunction with those living with disability in our own community. This document will grow and evolve into the final DAP over the coming months.

Immediate Actions

This Discussion Paper outlines actions the Working Group identified as immediate priorities for implementation over the next 12 months until the final Disability Action Plan is developed, which is anticipated by the end of June 2027.

The table on the next page lists the immediate priority actions, as identified and endorsed by the DAP Working Group in June 2026.

Table 2. Immediate priority actions, as identified and endorsed by the DAP Working Group.

#	Action	Details	Timeframe
1	Deliver a Changing Places* facility in Ararat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The DAP Working Group have identified their preferred location for this facility as Elizabeth Park, 15 Collings Street, Ararat The DAP Working Group will review design options and exact locations in collaboration with Council Advocate/apply for funding for a Changing Places facility in Ararat 	Ongoing until delivered
2	Review emergencies and natural disasters from a disability perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invite Council's Emergency Management (EM) team to a forum/group meeting to discuss existing EM processes, policies and procedures Identify areas of improvement and collaboration for Council and disability support services 	By 30 Sept 2026
3	Develop the Disability Action Plan 20XX-XX (Duration of Plan to be confirmed)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a communications and engagement plan that ensures access for a variety of different perspectives, e.g. opportunities for CALD people who may need interpreters. Undertake broad community consultation & engagement on future actions Undertake review and engagement with Council staff on employment opportunities and practices Compile feedback, identify priorities and develop action plan. 	By 30 June 2027

* A Changing Place (often referred to as Changing Places) is a specialized, fully accessible public toilet and change facility designed for people with profound or severe disabilities, as well as those with high support needs.

Unlike standard accessible toilets, Changing Places provide extra space and specific equipment, such as height-adjustable adult-sized change tables and ceiling track hoists, allowing individuals and their carers to attend to personal hygiene with dignity and safety.

Summary of demographics of Ararat Rural City

In the second quarter of the 2025/2026 financial year, Ararat Rural City had 424 active NDIS participants (NDIA data). Based on a total population of 11,880 across the entire local government area at the 2021 Census, this indicates that 3.57% of the population is an active NDIS participant, compared to the average of 3.0% across the wider Australian population.

Another important consideration of accessibility and inclusion is that the Ararat LGA has 17.4% of its population aged 70 and above. At the 2021 ABS Census, this compares to the 11.9% average for Victoria and 12.1% average for the wider Australian population. This is relevant because older people are more likely to experience mobility and access limitations as they get older, and would better benefit from universal accessibility.

Of particular interest is that, of those receiving support under the NDIS in the Ararat local government area, the two largest age cohorts are those aged 54-65 and those over the age of 65, suggesting that aging, disability and accessibility have a very strong point of intersection in Ararat Rural City, and that accessibility is only going to become more critical into the future.

The relationship between age and accessibility is a key feature of the Victorian Government's *Ageing Well in Victoria: An Action Plan for Strengthening Wellbeing for Senior Victorians 2022–2026*. This highlights:

- The demographic shift toward a larger population of older Victorians
- The need for age-friendly, accessible environments
- Barriers older people face in transport, public spaces, digital access, and community participation
- Government commitments to improve accessibility as part of ageing policy

The disability support sector also many people, mostly women. At the 2021 ABS Census, there were a total of 337 people in 'Carers and Aides' occupations, or approx. 6.5% of the people employed in Ararat Rural City. Of these, 271 or 80%, were women.

Council & Disability Inclusion

Ararat Rural City Council can support disability inclusion and access in several ways, but there are also areas that are outside of Council's control or influence. These different areas are listed below.

Outside of Council's Scope:

- NDIS services and funding decisions
- Infrastructure and assets owned or managed by others

Within Direct Control of Council

- Accessibility of council-owned buildings, facilities, infrastructure and public spaces, e.g. public toilets, crossings, library facilities.
- Council policies, employment practices and service delivery
- Local laws and planning

- Council's community programs and engagement processes
- Public information and communication accessibility

Areas of Influence:

- Facilitate collaboration and partnerships between services, organisations and groups to support better outcomes
- Encouraging and supporting businesses and organisations to be more accessible through grants, programs and engagement
- Advocating to State and Federal Governments

If you are unsure who owns or manages a facility or asset, one option is to use the Snap Send Solve app (www.snapsendsolve.com), which can help identify the correct authority for you.

A comprehensive list of resources, service providers and useful information is attached as an Appendix to this Discussion Paper. It will also be part of the finalised Disability Action Plan.

Seeking Your Input

We are seeking your input preferably on the areas that are within Council's direct control.

Below are discussion questions to help prompt reflection, identify gaps, and invite practical ideas. Not all of these questions need to be answered, they are purely to generate discussion.

1. Council-Owned Buildings, Facilities, Infrastructure and Public Spaces

- Which council-owned buildings, facilities, infrastructure or public spaces are **difficult to access or use** for people with disability and why?
- Are there particular locations or assets that should be **prioritised** for accessibility upgrades?
- What practical changes would most improve **independent, safe and dignified access** in council-managed public spaces?

2. Council Policies, Employment Practices and Service Delivery

- Which council policies or procedures do not adequately support disability inclusion, and how could they be improved?
- What **specific challenges** do people with disability face when applying for jobs or working at council?
- Are there council services that are **hard to access or navigate**, and what changes would make them more inclusive?

3. Local Laws and Planning

- Are there particular local laws, regulations or planning processes that create **barriers** for people with disability?
- Are there examples of developments or public spaces where accessibility has worked well, or where it has not?

4. Council's Community Programs and Engagement Processes

- Which council programs, events or activities are **not accessible or inclusive**, and why?
- How could council improve its consultation and engagement processes to ensure **people with disability can participate meaningfully**?

5. Public Information and Communication Accessibility

- Which council information sources (e.g. website, forms, signage, social media, publications) are **difficult to access or understand**?
- Are there specific formats or communication methods that need improvement (e.g. Easy Read, captions, screen-reader compatibility)?
- How effectively does council respond to requests for **alternative formats or communication support**?
- What specific improvements would make council information more **clear, accessible and inclusive**?

How to Provide Input

Opportunities to provide your input will be promoted on Council's social media accounts, in print newspaper advertisements, on Council's website, as well as through posters and email networks. Input can be provided in many ways, including:

- A series of face-to-face community forums
- Online and paper community survey
- Via email to council@ararat.vic.gov.au
- By letter to 59 Vincent St, Ararat VIC 3377, or
- Phone call to the Council Office on (03) 5355 0200

Dates and times for the face to face engagement sessions, and access to surveys will be available via the Engage Ararat (engage.ararat.vic.gov.au) website. One on one meetings with the project team can also be arranged by contacting Council.

If you require support to participate in this process, such as interpreters or other adjustments, please let us know.

The face-to-face community forums will have several general, open forums for discussion, while others may have specific themes and topics, such as early years, seniors, women and girls, culturally and linguistically diverse, as well as support sector workers and carers forums.

Appendix 1. Accessing Services Outside Ararat Rural City Council Scope

NDIS & Disability Support



<i>Organisation</i>	<i>What they do / support with</i>	<i>Contact details</i>
Central Highlands Local Area Coordinator (LAC) – Latrobe Community Health Service	Helps people access the NDIS, apply, understand plans, connect with services, and build capacity	1800 242 696 https://www.lchs.com.au/
NDIS (National Disability Insurance Agency)	Access requests, plan approvals, funding, participant enquiries	1800 800 110 www.ndis.gov.au
NDIS Quality & Safeguards Commission	Complaints about providers, report restrictive practices, safeguarding participants	1800 035 544 www.ndiscommission.gov.au
Grampians Disability Advocacy (GDA)	Advocacy support for people with disability (rights, complaints, service issues), NDIS Appeals	(03) 5329 1300 www.grampiansadvocacy.org.au
Australian Federation of Disability Organisations	To represent the united voice of our members and people with disability in national initiatives and policy debate.	1800 219 969 office@afdo.org.au

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH)

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>What they do / support with</i>	<i>Contact details</i>
DFFH Housing (Public & Community Housing)	Housing applications, bond loans, rent support, housing transfers	1800 825 955
Housing Maintenance (DFFH)	Repairs and maintenance for public housing properties	13 11 72
Child Protection	Responds to concerns about child safety and wellbeing	13 12 78 (24/7)

Housing & Homelessness Support

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>What they do / support with</i>	<i>Contact details</i>



Uniting (Ballarat / Western Region)	Housing support, homelessness services, case management, financial support	(03) 5330 1100
Grampians Community Health – Housing Support	Homelessness support, crisis accommodation referrals, case support	(03) 5358 7400
Tenants Victoria	Advice on rental rights, eviction, bonds, disputes	1800 068 860
Victorian Public Tenants Association (VPTA)	Advocacy for public housing tenants	(03) 9416 2577
Tenancy Advocacy CAFS	Advocacy for private rental tenants	(03) 5337 3333

Family Violence

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>What they do / support with</i>	<i>Contact details</i>
The Orange Door (Western Region)	Intake and coordination for family violence and child wellbeing services	1800 271 157
Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre	24/7 crisis support, safety planning, refuge access	1800 015 188 (24/7)
1800RESPECT	National counselling and support for domestic, family and sexual violence	1800 737 732
Grampians Community Health – Family Violence Services	Local case management, support, safety planning	(03) 5358 7400

Health Services (Ararat Region)

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>What they do / support with</i>	<i>Contact details</i>
East Grampians Health Service (EGHS)	Hospital, urgent care, mental health, allied health, maternity services	(03) 5352 9322
Ararat Medical Centre	GP services, general health care	(03) 5352 1021
Budja Budja Aboriginal Co-operative	Culturally safe health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	(03) 5352 4311
Grampians Community Health	Allied health, mental health, AOD, family services	(03) 5358 7400

NURSE-ON-CALL	24/7 health advice from registered nurses	1300 60 60 24
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Advocacy Services

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>What they do / support with</i>	<i>Contact details</i>
Grampians Disability Advocacy	Disability Advocacy, NDIS Appeals support, Disability rights support	(03) 5329 1300 www.grampiansadvocacy.org.au
Rights Information and Advocacy Centre (RIAC)	Disability advocacy, rights support, NDIS issues	(03) 5222 5499
VALID (Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability)	Advocacy, self-advocacy training, rights education	(03) 9416 4003
Villamanta Disability Rights Legal Service	Legal advocacy for people with disability	(03) 5229 3099
ADEC (Action on Disability in Ethnic Communities)	Advocacy for culturally diverse communities with disability	(03) 9480 7000
Women with Disabilities Victoria (WDV)	Advocacy and support for women with disabilities	(03) 9286 7800
Youth Disability Advocacy Service (YDAS)	Advocacy for young people with disability	1800 222 660
Blind Citizens Australia (BCA)	Advocacy for people who are blind or vision impaired	1800 033 660
Disability Justice Advocacy (DJA)	Support navigating the justice system	(03) 9481 2345

Carer Support



<i>Organisation</i>	<i>What they do / support with</i>	<i>Contact details</i>
Grampians Community Health	Carer support programs, respite coordination, counselling	(03) 5358 7400
Carer Gateway	National service for carers – counselling, respite, coaching	1800 422 737
Lifeline	Crisis support for carers experiencing distress	13 11 14

Legal Support

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>What they do / support with</i>	<i>Contact details</i>
Victoria Legal Aid (VLA)	Free legal advice, family law, criminal law, housing issues	1300 792 387
Women's Legal Service Victoria	Legal support for women (family violence, family law)	1800 133 302
Youth Law Australia	Free legal advice for young people	1800 950 570
Consumer Affairs Victoria	Consumer rights, disputes, renting issues	1300 55 81 81

Mental Health Support

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>What they do / support with</i>	<i>Contact details</i>
Grampians Area Mental Health Service (GAMHS)	Acute mental health support, crisis response, community mental health services	1300 247 647 (24/7 triage)
Lifeline	24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention	13 11 14
Suicide Call Back Service	Ongoing phone counselling after crisis or suicidal distress	1300 659 467
Head to Health	Mental health intake, navigation and referral support	1800 595 212

Alcohol & Other Drugs (AOD)



<i>Organisation</i>	<i>What they do / support with</i>	<i>Contact details</i>
Grampians Community Health (AOD Services)	Assessment, counselling, withdrawal support and referrals	(03) 5358 7400
DirectLine	24/7 AOD counselling and referral service	1800 888 236

Emergency & Crisis Support

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>What they do / support with</i>	<i>Contact details</i>
Emergency Services	Police, Ambulance or Fire in an emergency	000
Victoria Police (Ararat)	Non-urgent police assistance	(03) 5355 1500

Financial Support

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>What they do / support with</i>	<i>Contact details</i>
Services Australia (Centrelink)	Income support, disability payments, crisis payments	132 717
National Debt Helpline	Free financial counselling and debt advice	1800 007 007
CAFS (Financial Counselling)	Local financial counselling and hardship support	(03) 5337 3333

Food Relief & Material Aid

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>What they do / support with</i>	<i>Contact details</i>
Ararat Neighbourhood House	Local food relief, community support and emergency assistance	(03) 5352 1551
Salvation Army	Emergency relief, food, vouchers and material aid	13 72 58
St Vincent de Paul (Vinnies)	Emergency relief, food and financial assistance	13 18 12

Transport

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>What they do / support with</i>	<i>Contact details</i>
V/Line	Regional public transport services	1800 800 007
Grampians Community Health (Community Transport)	Transport support for appointments and community access	(03) 5358 7400

Note: These services are available to residents of Ararat Rural City either locally or via phone/online support. Availability may vary based on eligibility and service capacity.

References

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 Census Community Profiles: Ararat. Working Population Profile. <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/community-profiles/2021/LGA20260>

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2026) General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia. Reference Period: 2025. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/latest-release>

National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA). Explore Data. <https://dataresearch.ndis.gov.au/explore-data>