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## **GOLD COAST'S LARGEST ACCESSIBILITY TEST SINCE COMMONWEALTH GAMES**

**The Gold Coast has faced its largest accessibility challenge since the 2018 Commonwealth Games, welcoming 1,100 domestic and international delegates for the 18th biennial International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ISAAC) conference worth an estimated \$3.6 million to the city's economy.**

ISAAC delegates and their travel parties have tested the city's accessible fortitude including infrastructure from the G:link, hotels, venues and the airport to the Gold Coast's inclusive receptiveness.

The tourism sector is mobilising towards catering for a growing accessible tourism market, ensuring the Gold Coast is well placed to benefit from \$8 billion spent by Australians with a disability and their travel parties each year.

Destination Gold Coast (DGC) has been working on a city-wide approach to raise awareness through its Accessibility program. Aimed at encouraging tourism operators to champion inclusive guest experiences, the program has seen more than 60 businesses rise to the challenge.

Destination Gold Coast CEO Martin Winter said learning to communicate effectively with people who have disabilities and mobility needs is of great importance.

"The Gold Coast is a city for everyone - regardless of their needs. I encourage all tourism operators to embrace the growing accessible tourism market and pledge to become more inclusive," Mr Winter said.

"According to Tourism Research Australia, the travel parties of Australians with a disability, spend \$1.9 billion in Queensland each year, so it's an area we hope the industry will see benefit in investing in ongoing."

Ease of accessibility and mobility to and from the Gold Coast were paramount considerations for ISAAC, with the delegation consisting of children and adults with complex communication needs associated with the inability to use natural speech, in addition to their families, therapists, teachers, students, doctors and researchers.

The people affected include various disorder conditions, victims of stroke and traumatic brain injury, temporary medical conditions and young children who are at risk of developing communication conditions.



President of ISAAC Australia, Kate Anderson – one of the conference co-chairs – expects the affordability and proximity of the destination will draw more people on the Asia-Pacific region to Australia to enhance their knowledge of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). “We hope that this international conference will stimulate conversations and also increase awareness of people who use AAC.”

Over ISAAC’s six-days on the Gold Coast (July 21 – 26), close to 400 G:link passes have been issued, 100 accessible Gold Coast Cabs are being utilised, and tourism operators including Crowne Plaza Surfers Paradise and the Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre (GCCEC) have undergone specialised staff training to welcome guests.

GCCEC General Manager Adrienne Readings is a firm supporter of the accessibility sector and said staff had worked with the ISAAC committee months in advance to customise the conference.

“We believe our guests and delegates, no matter what their individual needs, have the right to access, use and enjoy our venue and hospitality. We believe accessibility is a key to autonomy and inclusion,” Ms Readings said.

The conference boasts custom menus which include soft textured meals that can then be blended, the inclusion of adult-sized changing facilities and additional parking requirements for wheelchair accessible vehicles with increased height and width have been catered for.

One of the greatest challenges for people with a disability is navigating accessible airport travel, mobility and services.

Gold Coast Airport has been working to provide facilities that promote accessibility to all members of the community, including passengers and visitors with a disability.

Gold Coast Airport supports DGC’s Accessibility program and has recently added a dedicated passenger assistance seating area for people with accessibility requirements and a new area for assistance dogs at the front of the terminal.

The airport is also in the process of putting in place covered passenger ramps (referred to as AVI ramps), which will be used by all airlines at Gold Coast Airport and will have major boarding benefits for people with a disability.

The City of Gold Coast’s Accessible and Inclusive City Action plan ensures infrastructure meets the growing demand for inclusivity. The City has introduced mobility maps, accessible toilets and adult-sized changing facilities at various locations, viewing platforms, beach matting and beach wheelchairs, and the Accessible Experiences Guide to assist all with planning their visit to attractions across the city.



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