About the Disability Royal Commission
A more inclusive, just society
Contents

What is a Royal Commission? 1
The Disability Royal Commission 2
Violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation 4
The Commissioners 6
Public hearings 7
Sharing your personal experiences 8
  Submissions 8
  Private sessions 10
Counselling and support 12
Legal advice 14
Contact us 16
Stay informed 17
A Royal Commission is an official inquiry, independent of government, into a matter of great importance.

Each Royal Commission has terms of reference, which define the scope of its inquiry.

Royal Commissions have broad powers to hold public hearings, call witnesses under oath and compel evidence.

Personal experiences inform the work of a Royal Commission by highlighting systemic issues. However, the Royal Commission cannot decide or resolve individual cases, or award compensation.

Royal Commissions make recommendations to government about what should change.
The Disability Royal Commission

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (referred to as the Disability Royal Commission) was established in April 2019 in response to community concern about widespread reports of violence, abuse, neglect, abuse and exploitation of people with disability.

The Disability Royal Commission will investigate:

- preventing and better protecting people with disability from experiencing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation
- achieving best practice in reporting, investigating and responding to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability
- promoting a more inclusive society that supports people with disability to be independent and live free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation

You can access the full terms of reference at www.disability.royalcommission.gov.au/about-royal-commission

The Disability Royal Commission gathers information through research, public hearings and the personal experiences people tell us about in submissions, private sessions and other forums.

We will deliver a final report to the Australian Government by 29 April 2022. In this report, the Royal Commission will recommend how to improve laws, policies, structures and practices to ensure a more inclusive and just society.
Settings and contexts

The Disability Royal Commission can investigate experiences and conditions in many settings and contexts, including:

• schools
• workplaces
• jails and detention centres
• secure disability and mental health facilities
• group homes or boarding houses
• family homes
• hospitals
• day programs
Violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation

Violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation are important terms for the Disability Royal Commission. In the context of the Royal Commission, these terms have certain meanings.

Violence and abuse

Violence and abuse cover a range of behaviours towards people with disability. These include assault, sexual assault, constraints, restrictive practices (physical and chemical), forced treatments, forced interventions, humiliation and harassment, financial and economic abuse and significant violations of privacy and dignity on a systemic or individual basis.

Neglect

Neglect includes physical or emotional neglect, passive neglect or wilful deprivation. Neglect can be a single significant incident or a systemic issue that involves depriving a person with disability of the basic necessities of life such as food, drink, shelter, access, mobility, clothing, education, medical care and treatment.

Exploitation

Exploitation is when a person takes advantage of someone else. This could include improper use of another person or the improper use of or withholding of another person’s assets, labour, employment or resources including taking physical, sexual, financial or economic advantage.
What does it mean?:

**violence** – if someone is hurting you physically

**abuse** – if someone is treating you badly

**neglect** – if someone is not helping you the way they are supposed to help you

**exploitation** – if someone is taking advantage of you.
The Commissioners

Seven Commissioners have been appointed to examine and expose violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability. They are:

- the Honourable Ronald Sackville AO QC (Chair)
- the Honourable Roslyn Atkinson AO
- Ms Barbara Bennett PSM
- Professor Rhonda Galbally AC
- Ms Andrea Mason OAM
- Mr Alastair McEwin AM
- the Honourable John Ryan AM.

Two of the Commissioners (Prof Rhonda Galbally and Alastair McEwin) are people with disability. Two Commissioners (Chair Ronald Sackville and Roslyn Atkinson) are former judges with extensive experience of the law and the conduct of public inquiries. One Commissioner (Andrea Mason) is a Ngaanyatjarra and Kronie woman from Western Australia, and Commissioners Barbara Bennett and John Ryan have extensive experience in the disability and human services sector.
Public hearings

Public hearings are formal proceedings in which witnesses give evidence about events and issues that are relevant to the Disability Royal Commission’s terms of reference.

Public hearings are informed by individual cases, and how people with disability, as well as their families and carers, have been affected by particular issues.

This may include current and past government, institutional and community practices.

All public hearings of the Royal Commission are recorded and streamed live on the Royal Commission website. Every public hearing of the Royal Commission will have live captioning and Auslan-English interpreters.
Sharing your personal experiences

Hearing from people with disability, families, support people and the broader community helps the Royal Commission understand the extent of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation against people with disability, the impacts, and how we can prevent it in the future.

The Royal Commission knows that coming forward to share your experience is a big step. We want to make it as easy as possible.

There are people who can help you work out what you want to say. Counsellors will provide emotional support before, during and afterwards. Please tell us about any other supports you need.

Submissions

You can share your experience with the Royal Commission online, in writing, by telephone, email, or as a video or audio recording. This is called a submission.

We encourage people to tell their story in their first language, including Indigenous languages and Auslan. We will provide interpreters and translators.
Protecting your identity and information

If you make a submission, we will not publish your submission unless you want us to. If you do want us to publish your account of your experience, we can publish it without naming or identifying you.

If you do not want your information or your identity to be shared with anyone outside of the Royal Commission, we can protect your identity and the information you share with us until the Royal Commission ends in April 2022 (when the Final Report is due).

If you are concerned about your identity or the information you have provided being disclosed after the Royal Commission has ended, you can apply for a private session.

Protection from retribution

We understand that people with disability may be concerned about retribution, for example if they make a public submission that is critical of an employer or accommodation provider. We take this concern very seriously because such retribution can be a criminal offence.

Find out about making a submission at www.disability.royalcommission.gov.au/share-your-story
Private sessions

People with disability, family and supporters can share their experiences with a Commissioner in a private session. Anyone who has information to share that is within the terms of reference can ask for a private session.

Private sessions, which can be in person, via video conferencing, or on the telephone, allow you to share your experiences with a Royal Commissioner in a confidential setting.

Anything you tell us in a private session that identifies you will be kept confidential. Other than in very limited circumstances (such as reporting serious offences to police), the information you provide in a private session that identifies you cannot be disclosed, even after the Royal Commission has ended. It cannot be produced in response to a subpoena or disclosed under freedom of information legislation without your consent. Information you provide in a private session cannot be used in evidence against you in civil or criminal proceedings in an Australian court.

Counselling support is available before, during and after private sessions.

Find out about private sessions at www.disability.royalcommission.gov.au/share-your-story
You can tell us about your experience

• in your first language, including Indigenous languages and Auslan
• on the phone, online, in a video or audio recording
• in a private session with a Commissioner
Counselling and support

Seeing or hearing news about the Royal Commission will be hard for some people. Sharing your experience can be hard too.

There are services available to support you. Some of these are provided by the Royal Commission, others are independent providers funded by the Australian Government.

The Royal Commission has a counselling team who attend all community forums, public hearings and private sessions to provide counselling and support to anyone at these events.

Blue Knot Foundation offers free specialist counselling support and a referral service for anyone affected by the Disability Royal Commission.

Call the national hotline on 1800 421 468. It is open every day.

If you are deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment, call the National Relay Service on 133 677 and give 02 6146 1468 as the number you want to call.

If you are non-verbal or have other communication needs, online chat facilities and email are available. If you would like to discuss your access and communication needs, please contact helpline@blueknot.org.au

There are many organisations who can provide individual advocacy for people engaging with the Disability Royal Commission. To find an advocacy service in your area, go to www.disabilityadvocacyfinder.dss.gov.au/disability/ndap/
Support in other languages

If you require support in another language, please call:

• the National Counselling and Referral Service on 1800 421 468 and ask for an interpreter (the counsellor will make the arrangements), or

• the Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450 and ask to be connected to the National Counselling and Referral Service on 1800 421 468.

If you would like to order any of our documents in braille, please phone 1800 517 199.
Legal financial assistance scheme

You may be able to get financial assistance for reasonable legal costs when you are:

• called, or granted leave to appear, as a witness at a hearing of the Royal Commission

• requested to attend, or attending an interview of the Royal Commission

• complying with a notice to give information or a statement in writing that will be used as evidence in the Royal Commission, and/or

• complying with a notice to produce issued by the Royal Commission.

If you have been called by the Royal Commission in your personal capacity you will be eligible for legal financial assistance. If your organisation has been called, you may be eligible for legal financial assistance, subject to an assessment of whether the organisation can meet the cost of its legal representation without incurring serious financial difficulty.

The Attorney-General Department’s website includes information on how you can apply. Go to www.ag.gov.au
Your Story Disability Legal Support

Your Story Disability Legal Support is a free, national service separate from the Royal Commission. They can give information and legal advice to people about safely sharing their story with the Royal Commission.

This service is available to people with disability and their families, carers, supporters and advocates.

Contact Your Story Disability Legal Support if:

- You want support in sharing your experience through a submission or a private session
- You have concerns that could stop you from sharing your story
- You are concerned about you or someone else’s rights, safety or access to services and employment if you share your experiences
- You are registered to speak at a Royal Commission forum or are invited to be a witness at a public hearing

Contact Your Story Disability Legal Support by telephone 1800 77 1800 from 9am-5pm AEST Monday to Friday or visit the website at www.yourstorydisabilitylegal.org.au

If you are deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment, call the National Relay Service on 133 677 and give 1800 77 1800 as the number you want to call.

Your Story Disability Legal Support has Aboriginal legal services that are here to support First Nations people to share their story in a culturally safe way.
Contact us

Phone

1800 517 199 Monday to Friday excluding national public holidays.

If you are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment, call the National Relay Service on 133 677 and tell them you want to call 07 3734 1900.

To call us in a language other than English call the free Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) on 131 450 and tell them you want to call 1800 517 199.

Postal address

GPO Box 1422, Brisbane, Qld 4001.

Email and website

DRCenquiries@royalcommission.gov.au

www.disability.royalcommission.gov.au
Stay informed

Facebook
facebook.com/disability.royalcommission.gov.au

Twitter
@DRC_AU

Connect eNewsletter
To subscribe to our fortnightly eNewsletter Connect, fill out the subscription form on our website or send an email to DRCmailinglist@royalcommission.gov.au