Please be aware that the content in this report may be distressing or raise issues of concern for some readers.

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The Royal Commission is committed to transparency. We have therefore decided to publish Progress Reports at intervals of approximately six months. The reports are primarily intended to provide a brief account of the Royal Commission’s activities over the preceding half-year period. They are distinct from the interim report which the Royal Commission is required to deliver by 30 October 2020.

The First Progress Report of the Royal Commission was published in December 2019. That Report provided an overview of the Royal Commission’s program from its formal establishment in April 2019 until 30 November 2019. The Report also outlined the Commission’s proposed program for 2020. This Second Progress Report summarises the work carried out by the Royal Commission during the period 1 January 2020 and 30 June 2020.

The foreword to the First Progress Report noted that the Royal Commission provides an opportunity, with the active participation of people with disability, advocates and the disability community generally, to bring about the transformational change necessary ‘to prevent and better protect people with disability from experiencing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.’ The foreword acknowledged the magnitude and complexity of the task but gave an assurance that the Royal Commission embraces the challenge and is determined to meet it.

For the first two months of 2020 the Royal Commission’s work proceeded as foreshadowed in the First Progress Report. Among many other activities, in February 2020 the Commission held an important nine day hearing on Health Care and Services for People with Cognitive Disability (Public hearing 4) at Homebush (NSW). Public hearing 4 was to be the first of a series of public hearings taking place in all States and Territories over the course of the year. The Royal Commission’s proposed program for 2020, as set out in the First Progress Report, incorporated many other forms of engagement with people with disability, including First Nations people and culturally and linguistically diverse people with disability.

All Australians have been affected — physically, socially, economically and psychologically — by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, no group has been more profoundly affected than people with disability, especially those living in closed environments or who rely upon service providers or support workers for the essentials of life.
The Royal Commission has not been immune from the effects of the pandemic. Our schedule has been interrupted in ways that no-one in Australia could have foreseen in December 2019.

Public hearings and the Royal Commission’s other public activities have had to be postponed. Face to face meetings, such as private sessions or roundtable discussions, create an unacceptable risk to the health of people who are vulnerable to infection and therefore have also had to been postponed or conducted remotely through the use of technology. Depending on circumstances and location, staff and Commissioners have been required, or at least encouraged, to work from home at a crucial stage in the Royal Commission’s work.

Yet during these extraordinarily difficult times, the Royal Commission has made considerable progress. We shall present the interim report by the end of October 2020, as required by the Terms of Reference. We published six issues papers during the first half of 2020 and processed large numbers of submissions and responses to issues papers. Preparations for public hearings have continued with a view to ensuring that the Royal Commission will resume its program of public hearings as soon as feasible, with the aim of regaining as much lost time as possible. The Royal Commission has used technology – with all its advantages and attendant frustrations – to maintain engagements with people with disability and to preserve the momentum built up before the pandemic arrived. The research program has produced substantial reports that will soon be published, as will reports from each of the public hearings conducted to date.

The highest priority for the Royal Commission, apart from ensuring the safety and wellbeing of people engaging with us, is to place people with disability at the forefront of our inquiry. As the country responded to the pandemic we observed with increasing anxiety complaints from people with disability and their advocates about the absence of measures to safeguard the health, safety and wellbeing of people with disability during the crisis.

In response to the complaints, the Royal Commission issued a Statement of Concern calling on all Australian governments urgently to implement strategies to protect people with disability and to ensure that they have appropriate care, support and access to necessary goods and services, including food and medications. Shortly after issuing the Statement of Concern we published an issues paper inviting comment on the measures that should be in place during a crisis such as a pandemic.

COVID-19 restrictions permitting, our inquiry will be taken further at the first public hearing to be held after the onset of the pandemic. A hearing scheduled for August 2020 will investigate the experiences of people with disability during the pandemic and the responses of governments to those experiences.

No society can claim to be inclusive unless it ensures the safety, health and wellbeing of the most vulnerable people during times of crisis.
As the recent resurgence of COVID-19 in Victoria demonstrates, neither people with disability nor the Royal Commission can be sure of when the pandemic will be over or even under control. In the meantime the work of the Royal Commission must continue. The dedication and skill demonstrated by the staff of the Royal Commission during extremely trying circumstances augurs well for the completion of the important work of the Royal Commission.
I would like to live a full life where I do not have to feel discriminated against due to my disability. I would like to see the police and hospital staff as people I can trust when they are at my door and when I am in hospital, respectively. I would like to be treated in a humane way. I would also like to be able to make a complaint without fear of retribution. Lastly, I would like to be involved and included in understanding the decisions being made around my treatment.

Anonymous, Submission, 24 April 2020
On 5 April 2019, the Australian Government announced the establishment of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. The Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission are contained in the Letters Patent establishing the Commission. They direct the Royal Commission to inquire into all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability in all settings and contexts.

The Hon Ronald Sackville AO QC is the Chair of the Royal Commission. He is supported by six other Commissioners: the Hon Roslyn Atkinson AO, Ms Barbara Bennett PSM, Prof Rhonda Galbally AC, Ms Andrea Mason OAM, Mr Alastair McEwin AM, and the Hon John Ryan AM.

This is the Second Progress Report on our work. The Royal Commission’s First Progress Report was issued on 20 December 2019 and covered the period from 5 April 2019 to 30 November 2019. This report covers the period from 1 January to 30 June 2020. It provides details about the Royal Commission’s work over the last six months, both before and after COVID-19 restrictions were first put in place in March 2020.

In the early part of 2020, the Royal Commission embarked on the extensive public program foreshadowed in the First Progress Report. The activities included the very important nine day public hearing on health care and services for people with cognitive disability held at Homebush, New South Wales, community forums in Queensland, and the commencement of private sessions.

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic forced all Australian governments to place unprecedented constraints on the movement of people and community activities to prevent the spread of the virus. The Royal Commission, in common with all sections of the Australian community, has had to adjust to these constraints.

From its inception the Royal Commission has been acutely aware that many people with disability may be particularly vulnerable to infection and its serious consequences. This means, among other things, that the Royal Commission must not expose people with disability to the risk of infection by the COVID-19 virus. Our priority and overriding concern must always be to ensure the safety of all people engaging with the Royal Commission and of our staff.

These considerations led the Royal Commission to announce on 16 March 2020 the suspension of all activities involving gatherings of people or close contact between individuals. This decision was not taken lightly but was unavoidable in the circumstances confronting the Royal Commission. As a consequence, the planned programs of public hearings, consultations and other forms of community engagement with the disability community were put on hold. Private sessions also had to be suspended for a time.

Despite these interruptions to the work of the Royal Commission, the time has been put to very good use. The drafting of the Royal Commission’s interim report has been a very substantial challenge. That challenge has involved a great deal of work carried out in less than ideal circumstances. The challenge has been met and the interim report should be presented within the time specified in the Letters Patent (30 October 2020).
While some activities have been temporarily suspended, the Royal Commission has continued other important work. Six issues papers were published between January and June 2020. The Royal Commission has continued to receive and process substantial numbers of submissions and responses to issues papers. Engagements with advocacy organisations and people with disability have continued with the assistance of technology. Technology has also enabled the Royal Commission’s Intake, Counselling and Support team to continue to provide support to people who have, or will, engage with the Commission, including people who participate in public hearings and private sessions.

With the guidance of Senior Counsel Assisting the Royal Commission and the Office of Solicitor Assisting, the Royal Commission has prepared a revised program of public hearings. The first hearing in that program will take place in August 2020 and will address government responses to the impact of COVID-19 on people with disability. Considerable work has also been done by the Royal Commission to ensure that a succession of public hearings can be held as soon as practicable after COVID-19 restrictions are eased.

These public hearings, and all our future engagement activities, will adhere to government regulations and health advice related to COVID-19.

Other activities undertaken in the first half of 2020 are outlined in this Report.
COVID-19

As the COVID-19 situation got worse, all my out of home support activities... ended quite abruptly and almost all at once. I was never so concerned about COVID-19 compared to the thought of being home alone and seeing no-one for an unknown period of time. I became quite distressed and very anxious about how I would manage being even more isolated than what I already was. I knew that my mental health would deteriorate very quickly with complete isolation and that regular contact with my core support people was going to be even more vitally important to me at this time.

Name withheld, submission in response to Emergency planning and response issues paper, 1 May 2020.
COVID-19 Statement of Concern

On 26 March 2020, the Royal Commission issued a Statement of Concern about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people with disability. The Royal Commission continues to be deeply concerned about the impact of the pandemic on people with disability.

In light of this unprecedented public health, social and economic emergency, the Royal Commission called on all Australian governments to ensure that their strategies for responding to the COVID-19 pandemic included all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of people with disability.

The key areas addressed in our Statement of Concern include:

- access to health care, including medication
- access to essential support services
- availability of accessible information
- ready access to food and nutrition
- employment and income support
- reduced independent formal and informal oversight in closed settings.

The Royal Commission emphasised the importance of specific strategies to provide guidance, support and funding to meet the particular needs and requirements of people with disability, including First Nations people with disability and culturally and linguistically diverse people with disability. The Royal Commission urged all Australian governments to seek input from people with disability, leading disability experts and advocates in developing a dedicated strategy.

The responses to the Statement of Concern by the community and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Ms Catalina Devandas Aguilar, were swift and positive.

Emergency planning and response issues paper

The Emergency planning and response issues paper followed the release of the Royal Commission’s Statement of Concern and invited responses from the public on the impact of crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2019/20 summer bushfires on people with disability. Guided by Article 11 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the Royal Commission wants to understand how emergency planning and responses can ensure that people with disability are supported and protected in times of emergency.

The Royal Commission has received a number of responses from individuals and organisations that highlight the importance of including people with disability in all stages of emergency preparedness and response measures. Responses have emphasised the critical importance of accessible information for all people with disability during times of crisis, as well as outlining difficulties in accessing essential support services, and the lack of safeguarding and oversight practices in closed facilities and segregated settings during emergencies.
Ask for input from people with disability about how best to increase their safety and wellbeing during emergency situations. Better still speak with people with disability and listen to what they have to say about what special needs they have at times of emergency, what helps them and what does not help.

Name withheld, submission in response to Emergency planning and response issues paper, 1 May 2020.
Submissions on COVID-19

The Royal Commission also continues to receive submissions from people with disability who are, like others in the community, very anxious about the COVID-19 pandemic. We have also been told by people with disability and their supporters that this anxiety is exacerbated by the feeling that they are being left behind or ignored in government and community responses. Many of these submissions have also outlined issues that people with disability have experienced during the COVID-19 isolation, particularly with delivery of services and supports.

Public hearing 5: Experiences of people with disability during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic

The Royal Commission plans to resume its hearing program in Sydney during the week commencing 17 August 2020. The hearing will examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people with disability.

The Royal Commission is expecting to hear evidence from people with disability, peak advocacy groups, public health and disability experts, as well as government representatives. The hearing will consider whether, in preparing for and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, governments and other entities adequately considered measures to prevent violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability. The hearing will also examine any systemic issues that may have arisen, or been exacerbated, during the pandemic.

In planning this hearing, the Royal Commission has been mindful of the need to protect the health and wellbeing of all involved. We will use technology and hold parts of the hearing virtually to enable people to participate while also complying with COVID-19 restrictions. These measures also extend to our other activities, including private sessions and community engagement.
Public hearings

I want to speak up for people who can’t speak up.
We all need to be understood and supported.

Ms Kylie Scott, witness at Public hearing 4: Health care and services for people with cognitive disability, 18 February 2020.

Public hearing 4: Health care and services for people with cognitive disability

The Royal Commission held its fourth public hearing at Homebush, Sydney from 18 February to 28 February 2020 (Public hearing 4). The Commissioners who participated in the hearing were the Hon Ronald Sackville AO QC, the Hon Roslyn Atkinson AO, Ms Barbara Bennett PSM and Professor Rhonda Galbally AC.

The principal purpose of Public hearing 4 was to inquire into the provision of health care and services to people with cognitive disability in Australia and to examine whether people with cognitive disability experience systemic neglect in relation to their health care. People with cognitive disability include people with intellectual disability, autistic people, and people with acquired brain injuries.

The Royal Commission heard evidence from:

• people with cognitive disability
• families, friends, carers and support workers of people with cognitive disability
• experts in the health of people with intellectual disability
• representatives of advocacy and community organisations
• representatives of the Australian and New South Wales governments
• the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Quality and Safeguards Commissioner, Mr Graeme Head AO.

The Royal Commission took steps to ensure that the witnesses at Public hearing 4 were able to give their evidence in an environment that was as comfortable and supportive as possible. This included organising an orientation day and arranging the set-up of the hearing room so that witnesses were sitting close to and on the same level as Commissioners and other people participating in the hearing. The set-up also included placing screens, lights and electronic monitors in such a way that they did not interfere with the witnesses’ view of the Commissioners and Counsel Assisting.
The manner in which evidence was taken from people with disability at Public hearing 4 was also modified in some cases to take into account the wishes and suggestions of witnesses with disability, including by:

- having advocates known to individual witnesses provide support to, and be involved in the questioning of, those witnesses
- Counsel Assisting sitting beside a witness during questioning
- using pre-recorded videos of statements previously made by witnesses as part of their evidence to the Royal Commission.

Some witnesses had friends or family members seated close to them in the hearing room while they gave evidence. The venue included separate spaces for witnesses to take a break if needed.

The Royal Commission’s Counselling and Support team also provided support to many witnesses before, during and after they gave their evidence.

Witnesses gave personal and professional evidence about the health care experiences of people with cognitive disability around Australia. However, the primary focus of the hearing was on the New South Wales health system, as well as initiatives that have been developed by the Australian and New South Wales governments to improve health services for people with cognitive disability.

Among other things, the hearing examined why people with intellectual disability have a mortality rate two to four times higher than the general population, and a life expectancy two decades shorter than the general population.
There aren’t enough good practitioners who are affordable and available to help me with my sons. I feel like their human rights are being violated every day. They exist. We live in a society where everyone who exists should get what they need, but they don’t. I’m reminded all the time that there are kids with more severe autism and severe mental illness, but you can’t compare hardship. Sometimes all I can see is that my boys have no hope of having a good life. And no matter what I do I can’t make that happen, because no one’s helping me. I’m an educated, media savvy woman of resources and my kids are still not okay. When I do get help it’s patchy and so I don’t have any trust. I don’t trust the health care sector. I don’t know if they’re trained or not, but I’m tired of trying to figure it out. I can’t fix the world. I’m too busy just trying to raise my boys.

Ms Jo Abi, witness at Public hearing 4: Health care and services for people with cognitive disability, 28 February 2020
Other key themes explored at the hearing included the:

- prevailing attitudes and assumptions about the quality of life and value to society of people with cognitive disability, and how this may influence decision making in health care
- importance of, and approaches to, communication between health professionals and people with cognitive disability, their families and supporters
- importance of strong advocacy for people with cognitive disability in the health system
- particular challenges faced by people with cognitive disability in accessing health services, including preventative, dental, paediatric, and mental health services
- intersection between the health and disability service sectors
- ways of reducing distress and trauma for people with cognitive disability in the health care system
- role of data and research in evaluating health services for people with cognitive disability, exposing disparities in health outcomes, and highlighting population health needs
- challenges of delivering quality health care to people with cognitive disability in rural and remote areas
- particular barriers to quality health care faced by First Nations people with cognitive disability
- development and implementation of initiatives to improve health care and services for people with cognitive disability in the context of both the Australian and New South Wales government health systems.

The evidence touched on a number of matters that the Royal Commission will consider further, including the:

- training and education provided to doctors and other health care professionals, including the ways in which disability-related content is taught in medical and health care courses across Australia
- culturally appropriate measures that could improve access to health services for First Nations people with cognitive disability
- measures that may enable people with cognitive disability to make more informed decisions about their lives
- support that families, carers, support workers and others receive in advocating for appropriate health care and treatment of people with disability
- programs for people with cognitive disability in rural and remote communities
- initiatives taken by the Australian Government Department of Health in terms of encouraging greater uptake of annual health assessments for people with cognitive disability
• measures that could be taken to increase awareness of oral health care needs for people with cognitive disability
• experiences of children and young people with cognitive disability with respect to their transition from paediatric to adult health care
• extent to which the Australian, state and territory health systems provide mental health services targeted for people with autism and intellectual disability.

More information about Public hearing 4, including transcripts, can be found on the Royal Commission website. The Royal Commission will publish on the website a report on Public hearing 4 by those Commissioners who participated in Public hearing 4. Reports will also be published on Public hearing 2 (Education) and Public hearing 3 (The experience of living in a group home for people with disability), both of which were held in 2019.

Future public hearings

The COVID-19 pandemic required us to temporarily suspend our public hearing schedule in March 2020. COVID-19 restrictions permitting, the Royal Commission plans to resume our public hearings program in August and to conduct hearings examining the following topics during the remainder of 2020:

• **Public hearing 5**: Experiences of people with disability during the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic as at August 2020. Tentative date: week of 17 August 2020. Location: Sydney
• **Public hearing 6**: Psychotropic medication, behaviour support and behaviours of concern. Tentative date: week of 21 September 2020. Location: Sydney
• **Public hearing 7**: Barriers experienced by students with disability in accessing and obtaining a safe, quality and inclusive school education and consequent life course impacts. Tentative date: week of 12 October 2020. Location: Brisbane
• **Public hearing 8**: Long term, including indefinite, detention and interactions with the criminal justice system experienced by people with disability. Tentative date: week of 16 November 2020. Location: Brisbane
• **Public hearing 9**: The experiences of First Nations people with disability and their families in contact with child protection systems. Tentative date: week of 23 November 2020. Location: Brisbane
• **Public hearing 10**: Training and education of health care professionals in relation to people with cognitive disability. Tentative date: to be determined for December 2020. Location: Sydney
• **Public hearing 11**: Systemic barriers in the pathways to employment for people with disability. Tentative date: to be determined for December 2020. Location: Sydney
Building trusting relationships and goodwill with people with disability and a range of stakeholders in the broader community is the cornerstone of our engagement. The Royal Commission has engaged regularly with a diverse range of key stakeholders in disability and other priority sectors, such as First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse representative organisations. These engagements have allowed us to share information, raise awareness and understanding of the Royal Commission’s work, its Terms of Reference and how people can participate in our work.

Underpinning the Community engagement strategy are two documents which set out our approach to engaging with two priority groups: First Nations people with disability and culturally and linguistically diverse people with disability. Both documents have been developed through consultation with key external stakeholders.

The First Nations engagement principles was published on our website on 19 June 2020. The Culturally and linguistically diverse engagement principles document is being reviewed following a recent national roundtable consultation on 26 May 2020. Once finalised, this document will also be published on our website.

Engagement with First Nations people with disability

Commissioners Mason, Atkinson and McEwin, supported by our First Nations Community Engagement team, met with a diverse range of organisations who support...
First Nations people with disability in both metropolitan and regional jurisdictions and some First Nations communities. These engagements included:

- North Queensland Bwgcolman (Palm Island): 8 November 2019
- South East Queensland (Logan, Ipswich and Brisbane City): 4-6 February 2020
- Northern Territory (Darwin, Alice Springs and Papunya): 10-14 February 2020
- South West Queensland (Cherbourg and Toowoomba): 5-6 March 2020.

These engagements have enabled Commissioners and staff to meet and hear from First Nations people living with a disability and develop insights into the experiences and challenges they face. This has also helped raise awareness of the Royal Commission’s work. A key focus of the Northern Territory ‘listening tour’ in February 2020 was to raise awareness of the planned First Nations hearings, the first of which was scheduled for May 2020 in Alice Springs. Unfortunately this hearing has had to be postponed.

Targeted media interviews were also part of these engagements. Commissioner Mason has conducted extensive interviews with mainstream and First Nations media about the work of the Royal Commission.

Despite the restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Commissioners and the First Nations Community Engagement Team have prepared for engagements with stakeholders in urban and regional areas across Victoria including Melbourne, Dandenong, Frankston, Mildura, Shepparton and Bendigo. These engagements, led by Commissioner Mason, commenced in June 2020 and use videoconference facilities.

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**First Nations Peoples Strategic Advisory Group**

In our First Progress Report, the Royal Commission announced the establishment of the First Nations Peoples Strategic Advisory Group (FNPSAG). The FNPSAG is an expert panel of seven First Nations people with experience in the disability sector. The members are:

- Joanna Agius OAM
- Jody Barney
- Jake Briggs
- Damian Griffis
- Dr Jackie Huggins AM FAHA
- Dr Hannah McGlade
- Aunty Louisa Uta

The FNPSAG is co-chaired by Commissioners Mason and Atkinson. Commissioners Galbally and McEwin are also members of the FNPSAG. The FNPSAG supports the work of the Royal Commission by providing leadership and guidance on matters specific to First Nations people with disability.

On 2 March 2020, the FNPSAG held its first meeting in Brisbane to discuss a range of matters including community engagement, public hearings and the development of the First Nations engagement principles. The second meeting of the FNPSAG was held via video conference on 19 June 2020.

The key highlights of each meeting are published in the Royal Commission’s Connect newsletter after the meeting.

In June, Commissioner Mason joined members of FNPSAG in a series of interviews to promote the First Nations people with disability issues paper. Commissioner Mason also provided opinion pieces for NITV Online and the Koori Mail newspaper and recorded video messages for use on social media.
Respectful listening
In January 2020, the Royal Commission commissioned an original artwork from Wiradjuri artist and lifelong disability advocate Paul Constable Calcott. Uncle Paul has created a spectacular work of art for the Royal Commission titled, *Respectful Listening*.

*Respectful Listening* depicts the story of the Royal Commission, translated into a traditional style of art and symbols used by many of Australia’s First Nations peoples to share information and stories for thousands of years.

This story is made up of seven people who are Elders and/or respected members of their own communities. These seven people, the Commissioners, come from different community groups including Australia's First Nations people, people living with disability, and the LGBTIQ+ community.

Together, this group carry a message, depicted as a message stick for the Royal Commission. This group of Elders will travel across many language groups and communities, depicted as multiple circles connected across many areas of the country. The blue colours represent the salt water coast and islands, the colour red for the desert regions, the green the hinterlands, and the yellow for the coast they will travel through.

The entrusted Elders will travel through these areas and nations, gathering stories of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation from people with disability, their family members, carers and Elders.

The U shape in the painting represents a person and the shape we leave behind in the sand after we’ve been sitting and yarning. The U shape with another smaller u shaped inside of it represents an Elder, someone with knowledge and standing in their community protecting and supporting other members of their community.

A person with a disability is also represented by the U shape, however, the shape representing them is slightly shorter on one side to show that a person with a disability may leave a different shape in the sand, leaving their own unique mark on the world.

At the end of their journey, these seven Elders will take these stories that have been entrusted to them and present them to a group of government representatives. These representatives will use the information from all these stories to suggest changes, to make sure people with disability and Elders are cared for, supported and respected in the future.
Disability Strategic Engagement Group

The Royal Commission has established the Disability Strategic Engagement Group (DSEG) to strengthen our engagement with the disability sector. The DSEG comprises Commissioners, senior advisors within the Royal Commission who have lived experience of disability, senior Commission staff, and external people with disability who have expertise and experience in engaging with the disability community. The DSEG will reach out to advocacy and representative organisations to encourage and facilitate their engagement with the Royal Commission. The external members of DSEG are:

- Ms Judy Huett
- Ms Rosemary Kayess
- Ms Janet Meagher AM

The DSEG is co-chaired by Commissioners Galbally and McEwin. Commissioner Atkinson is also a member of the DSEG. The first (videoconference) meeting of the DSEG is planned for August 2020.

Engagement with culturally and linguistically diverse people with disability

National roundtable

The Royal Commission held a national roundtable consultation with key stakeholders from the culturally and linguistically diverse disability sector on 26 May 2020. Commissioner Bennett chaired the consultation with the assistance of Commissioners McEwin and Atkinson. The primary purpose was to discuss the Royal Commission’s Culturally and linguistically diverse engagement principles and gain a deeper understanding of the particular challenges and barriers faced by people with disability in culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

The roundtable was held via videoconference and was well attended by 17 stakeholders across the country. A communique has been prepared explaining the outcome of the National roundtable. The communique will be published on the Royal Commission’s website.
Forum with culturally and linguistically diverse health experts

The Royal Commission hosted a virtual meeting with a group of culturally and linguistically diverse health stakeholders in Queensland on 22 April 2020. These stakeholders have specific expertise in working with multicultural communities, including refugees and asylum seekers with disability. They provided significant insight into the specific issues and barriers for culturally and linguistically diverse people with disability with accessing the health system and services. The Royal Commission’s newsletter, Connect, featured an article on this forum.

Culturally and linguistically diverse youth

The Royal Commission has engaged with the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN), the national youth peak in the culturally and linguistically diverse sector. MYAN released a COVID-19 pandemic policy platform on 26 May 2020 advocating for targeted approaches in policy and service delivery to address the impact on young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

We have translated our suite of information brochures into a range of languages to support people who speak languages other than English to understand how they can participate in the Royal Commission. More details are provided in the section on Media and Communications.

Focus group with self-advocates and advocates

The Royal Commission held a targeted focus group with five self-advocates and two representatives from an advocacy organisation in Tasmania on 20 May 2020. This focus group had initially been planned as a face to face activity but was changed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Key themes arising from the engagement included accessibility of information, discrimination, autonomy and decision making, accessible and appropriate service provision, the appropriateness of language and its reinforcement of discriminatory attitudes towards people with disability, and financial and mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
Community forums

Since January 2020, the Royal Commission has held two community forums in Logan and Ipswich, Queensland. A total of 100 people registered to participate in these forums. A further two community forums were scheduled to be held in Launceston and Burnie, Tasmania in March 2020 but these had to be postponed.

As at 30 June 2020 the Royal Commission has held a total of eight community forums in six locations across Australia:

- Townsville, Qld – one community forum
- Adelaide, SA – two community forums
- Hobart, Tas – two community forums
- Gawler, SA – one community forum
- Logan, Qld – one community forum
- Ipswich, Qld – one community forum.

While community forums were initially advertised as public events, the Royal Commission received feedback from advocates that attendance should be restricted to people with disability, their families and advocates. This approach was adopted for the forums held in Logan and Ipswich to ensure that participants could share their experiences in an environment they felt was safe.

Community forums have attracted over 560 registered participants, and there have been a total of 600 attendees. Eighty-nine speakers have shared their experiences.

During our community forums, we have heard from people with disability, relatives of people with disability, advocacy groups and professionals. Topics discussed by speakers included:

- abuse and neglect experienced by people with disability in a range of accommodation settings
- inadequate responses from Australian governments and regulatory bodies, and a lack of oversight
- barriers to accessing inclusive education
- the use of restrictive practices in schools and the difficulties experienced in obtaining appropriate supports within schools
- discriminatory attitudes experienced by people with disability when participating in community life
- the difficulties of advocating within complex systems, particularly the mental health and health systems
- the barriers faced by culturally and linguistically diverse people with disability who are not permanent residents and require access to support services
- the barriers experienced in accessing the NDIS and the struggle to meet the eligibility criteria
- positive experiences of the NDIS and how it enhanced independence and autonomy.
National hotline

The Royal Commission’s enquiries phone line received a total of 2446 calls from 1 December 2019 to 30 June 2020. This brings the total number of calls to 4447 at 30 June 2020. The phone line continued operating at all times during the COVID-19 pandemic, with Royal Commission staff operating the phone line remotely from their homes. While we initially saw a decrease in the number of daily calls during the COVID-19 restrictions, those numbers increased as restrictions eased.

The enquiries line received 203 calls related to the COVID-19 pandemic during the same period. Many callers expressed frustration with government and provider responses. They shared concerns about the difficulty of receiving necessary support including obtaining basic necessities such as food, medications and protective equipment, and reduced contact with support workers.

The Royal Commission has provided support and referred 1156 callers to external support services between 1 December 2019 and 30 June 2020. The Royal Commission has been in regular contact with external support services to confirm the availability of services during the COVID-19 pandemic. All services, including emotional support services and advocacy support services, such as Your Story Disability Legal Advice, have continued to operate, including by offering online or phone services.

Upcoming community engagement activities

Closed institutions

The Royal Commission’s inquiry extends to people with disability residing in closed institutions, such as prisons, forensic mental health and disability facilities, youth detention centres and other closed environments.

We are taking a national approach to this work, with the first phase to be implemented in Queensland. Phase 1 involves distribution of materials about the Royal Commission to a range of Queensland institutions. The materials include:

- brochures about the Royal Commission and how people can tell their story
- information about support services and how to contact them
- posters.

The Royal Commission will advise institution staff on how to manage questions that people in their care or custody may have. The staff will also be given material to enable them to refer people in institutions to available sources of support and information.
The Royal Commission is working with individual institutions to ensure access and privacy for people wishing to be involved in our work. This will be followed by Phase 2 which will involve conducting face to face engagement at four institutions in Queensland. The approach will involve identifying and engaging with one of each of the following institutions:

- prisons
- youth detention institutions
- forensic mental health facilities
- forensic disability units.

The Royal Commission has held meetings with representatives from Queensland government agencies and with other agencies and services to discuss the proposed approach.

The decision to commence this work in Queensland was informed in part by the location of the Royal Commission’s Community Engagement team in Brisbane. This provides a greater level of flexibility as we work within changing COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. We anticipate that both phases will be completed by the end of 2020 and that further engagement will occur in Queensland and other jurisdictions during 2021.

Other engagement activities

During the remainder of 2020 the Royal Commission plans on holding a number of relatively targeted engagements in place of community forums. These will include small forums where people can share their experiences with a Commissioner and focus groups. Where COVID-19 restrictions prevent us from undertaking engagements face-to-face, we will hold them by videoconference.
The Royal Commission received 766 submissions between 1 December 2019 and 30 June 2020. This brought the total number of submissions received by the Royal Commission to 1137 at 30 June 2020.

On 14 February 2020, the Royal Commission made changes to the submission form in response to feedback from the community. Changes included:

- reducing the number of guiding questions in the form
- simplifying the questions
- asking individuals and organisations to tell us how the Royal Commission can use the information in our work.

The submission form can also now be filled out online or downloaded.

Submissions can continue to be made by email, post or phone and in any language or format the person feels most comfortable, including video and audio. We also accept submissions that do not use the submission form.

Snapshot at 30 June 2020

The Royal Commission seeks to collect a small amount of demographic data through the submissions form. Data collected includes gender, age, postcode, whether the submitter identifies as a First Nations person or from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, or LGBTIQ+, and is a person with disability.

People may choose not to provide this information. The statistical information below is therefore indicative of broad trends only:

- Around half of submissions (46 per cent) were from people with disability, and around 36 per cent were made by family members. Approximately, 15 per cent of submissions come from support workers or advocates.
- The majority of submissions are received via email (65 per cent) with 24 per cent being received directly via the online form.
- Most submissions have come from the more populous eastern states
  - 32 per cent are from New South Wales
  - 22 per cent are from Queensland
  - 20 per cent are from Victoria.

Some respondents, including family members, have made submissions on behalf of a person with disability living in another state or territory.

- A small proportion of submissions were from, or on behalf of a person from, a culturally and linguistically diverse background (8 per cent). Around 5.4 per cent of submissions were from or on behalf of a First Nations person.

We heard from a small number of people who identify as LGBTIQ+ (4 per cent).
People with disability have told us about their experiences of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation across a range of settings, including education, homes and living arrangements, the health and justice systems and the NDIS.

Common themes include lack of choice and control, lack of access to services and inclusion in the community more broadly, the use of restrictive practices, involuntary treatment and negative attitudes held in the community about people with disability.

People with disability say that it can be difficult to report violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, and that they feel that their complaints are often unheard or do not receive appropriate action.

Most submissions discussed more than one topic but in recent months many of the submissions received have discussed issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.
With the Coronavirus pandemic at the moment, I am worried that most of my support workers don’t have masks. I don’t know where they have been or who they come into contact with in their daily lives ... I don’t want my health to be compromised, but I obviously need the support. Only one of my support workers wears a mask. I really think that agencies should give all support workers masks, for their own protection, as well as their clients’ protection, although I understand it could intimidate some clients.

Anonymous submission, received on 26 March 2020
The Royal Commission opened registrations for private sessions in January 2020 and the first five private sessions were held in February 2020. The advent of COVID-19 caused the program to be suspended. However, the program resumed on a limited basis in late June 2020 using video and teleconference facilities. We propose resuming face to face private sessions in August 2020, subject to the easing of COVID-19 restrictions.

Despite the program being temporarily postponed, the Royal Commission has continued to accept registrations for private sessions. Once a person registers for a private session, a Royal Commission staff member will call them to conduct a detailed intake call. The purpose of the intake call is to capture the information necessary to schedule, coordinate and later tailor the private session to the person’s specific needs. The information collected during intake calls allows the Royal Commission to understand the demographic details of those requesting a private session, as well as providing a summary of the experiences that the person wishes to share when they meet with a Commissioner. Participants may also be connected to a counsellor or support services, if they wish.

### Snapshot at 30 June 2020

As at 30 June 2020, eight private sessions have been held and 356 private session registrations have been received. 237 intake calls have been conducted in preparation for private sessions to recommence.

- 42.9 per cent of those registered for a private session are people with disability
- The highest number of registrations are from New South Wales (31.5 per cent), Queensland (25.6 per cent) and Victoria (21.1 per cent).

Of those registered:

- 7 per cent identify as First Nations people
- 6 per cent identify as being from a culturally and linguistically diverse background
- 3 per cent identify as LGBTIQ+
- 50 per cent are female and 25.8 per cent are male. (Note, some people have not nominated or do not wish to nominate a gender.)
Table 1: Demographics of people requesting a private session

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of person requesting private session</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person with disability that the information relates to</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/guardian</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Nations people</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally and linguistically diverse people</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTIQ+</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support worker</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service provider</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed environments, ie group homes, secure mental health facility</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid carer</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health professional</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointed guardian</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporter</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attorney (under an enduring power of attorney or similar)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note, some people fall into 2 or more categories. For example, a person with disability who also identifies as a First Nations person and is a parent. In this case, we have counted these in each category.
Issues papers

The Royal Commission released six issues papers between January 2019 and 30 June 2020:

- Criminal justice system issues paper (14 January 2020)
- Emergency planning and response issues paper (15 April 2020)
- Rights and attitudes issues paper (28 April 2020)
- Employment issues paper (12 May 2020)
- Restrictive practices issues paper (26 May 2020)
- First Nations people with disability issues paper (9 June 2020).

These are in addition to 3 issues papers released in 2019: Education and learning issues paper, Group homes issues paper, and Health care for people with cognitive disability issues paper.

We have received many detailed, thoughtful and well researched responses to issues papers that provide invaluable information for our inquiry. The responses we have received so far have informed the public hearings, engagement activities and our interim report. The Royal Commission will publish on our website an overview of the responses to each issues paper that summarise what we have been told. We will publish the overviews alongside the individual responses, where we have consent to do so.

We have received responses from a broad range of people including:

- people with disability, their family members and supporters
- representative organisations
- Australian, state and territory government agencies and independent regulatory bodies
- support workers and disability service providers
- human rights organisations
- peak bodies
- research organisations and academics
- professional organisations
- professionals, such as educators, medical/health and legal professionals.

Some organisations and individuals have told us that the COVID-19 pandemic has made it more difficult to prepare their response to issues papers. We have encouraged organisations and individuals to provide responses and have made it clear that the time for responses can be extended.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues paper</th>
<th>Publication date</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education and learning</td>
<td>30 October 2019</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group homes</td>
<td>28 November 2019</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care for people with cognitive disability</td>
<td>16 December 2019</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal justice system</td>
<td>14 January 2020</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency planning and response</td>
<td>15 April 2020</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights and attitudes</td>
<td>28 April 2020</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>12 May 2020</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrictive practices</td>
<td>26 May 2020</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Nations people with disability</td>
<td>9 June 2020</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>186</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Education and learning issues paper outlined a range of key issues and barriers in relation to education and learning for people with disability. This included barriers to accessing education; the accessibility, appropriateness and adaptability of education; and inclusive education. Responses described the potential drivers of these experiences, including gatekeeping, negative attitudes, lack of adjustments and supports for people with disability, and a lack of resources, training and support for educators. We were also told about the need to improve funding and data collection, and about a number of barriers to reporting violence, abuse and neglect of people with disability in education settings.

The Group homes issues paper explored a range of issues for people with disability who live in group homes, including their experiences of violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation. Respondents described enablers of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability in group homes. These include lack of choice and control for residents, resident incompatibility, staff-centred practices, lack of trauma-informed care, and a lack of alternative accommodation options for people with disability. We were also told about barriers to reporting and responding to complaints in group homes. Some respondents outlined their views on whether there is a continuing role for group homes in Australia.

The Health care for people with cognitive disability issues paper explored the range of barriers that people with cognitive disability may experience with the health system. Responses described a range of factors that may contribute to experiences of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability in health settings. These included negative attitudes and values about disability, lack of workforce training about the health needs of people with disability, and lack of coordination and communication between the health and disability sectors. Responses described the current mechanisms for reporting violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation as often inadequate, time-consuming, complex and lacking accountability. Respondents advanced proposals for change including: better education and training, improved data and research, strengthening coordination of care and supported decision-making, improving access to preventative health care, and better oversight and complaints mechanisms.

The Criminal justice system issues paper outlined the issues faced by people with disability, particularly young people and First Nations people with disability, who are over-represented across criminal justice systems in Australia. Responses have highlighted that people with disability in the criminal justice system are not able to access justice on an equal footing with others. We have heard that a lack of awareness of disability and insufficient identification of disability can increase the likelihood of people with disability experiencing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation in the justice system. Responses have identified the need for services to prevent people with disability coming into contact with the justice system, or to support them if they do come into contact with it. This includes culturally appropriate and trauma-informed services for First Nations people.
The Emergency planning and response issues paper and the responses we have received are described in the section on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Rights and attitudes issues paper looks at attitudes in the broader community towards people with disability and the extent to which people generally are aware of the rights of people with disability. Many responses have described how lack of knowledge about both disability and rights can generate negative attitudes. Responses have highlighted the impact of negative attitudes on a person’s life and may contribute to experiences of exclusion, segregation, bullying, violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. Suggestions for change have included more education about the rights of people with disability (especially from a young age), community awareness campaigns, and increased advocacy and support services. The potential role of the media, including social media, in fostering positive attitudes towards people with disability has also been highlighted in responses.

The Employment issues paper considers barriers people with disability face with employment that may prevent financial independence and other benefits associated with work, including a sense of purpose and social connectedness. The issues paper invites information from the public about people’s experiences of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation in employment settings, and their experiences in accessing programs designed to support the recruitment and inclusion of people with disability in employment.

The Restrictive practices issues paper examines the use and impact of seclusion and restraints on people with disability in all areas of life and various settings. The paper also outlines current government approaches to restrictive practices, including in health systems, disability services, under guardianship and in education settings. The Royal Commission wants to understand the effects of restrictive practices on people with disability.

The First Nations people with disability issues paper outlines issues facing First Nations people with disability across their life course and in different settings, such as health, justice and education. The issues paper invites First Nations people with disability, their families, communities and community organisations to tell us what can be done to more effectively prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, including what is already done well, and any examples of effective approaches. We are aware that a number of First Nations organisations are preparing their responses to this issues paper.
In 2020, a significant milestone for the Royal Commission will be the completion of our interim report. The Terms of Reference require this to be delivered by 30 October 2020. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, we have not sought an extension for completion of the interim report.

The interim report will outline why the Royal Commission is needed, describe the events that led to the Royal Commission and explain our terms of reference. It will also explain how we are undertaking this inquiry, including how we support people to engage with the Royal Commission by applying a trauma-informed approach to all our work.

The interim report will record themes that have emerged from hearings, submissions, and other forms of engagement and will identify areas for further inquiry by the Royal Commission.

The interim report will draw upon what we have heard from people with disability, their families and supporters, as well as experts and members of the broader community. The voices of people with disability will be highlighted by including de-identified narratives that are drawn from the experiences people have shared with us through submissions, private sessions and evidence.
Our research agenda has two main aims:

• to build an evidence base of applied research to support the Royal Commission’s work and inform recommendations we make in our final report

• to contribute a high quality research legacy and fill gaps in research and data collection that will assist understanding of disability and the development of policy in the future.

We have commissioned leading researchers to conduct research on our behalf. Several projects are now complete, have been peer reviewed and will soon be published on our website. These include:

• Dr Scott Avery, *Disability language and its meaning for First Nations People*. This report looks at how First Nations people with disability speak of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation as well as self-determination, safety, inclusion and belonging. The report identifies the match or mismatch between professional and policy descriptors and the ways in which First Nations people with disability describe their experiences, particularly in situations of threat of maltreatment.

• Ms Rosemary Kayess, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Shining a light on Social Transformation*. This project provides an introduction to the contemporary human rights approach to disability inherent in the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD). The report covers inequality, segregation and discrimination, shifts in understanding disability and the process of developing the CRPD.

• Emeritus Professor Ron McCallum AO, *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: An Assessment of Australia’s Level of Compliance*. This report examines Australia’s compliance with the CRPD. It focuses on the General Comments made by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the regular engagements between that Committee and the Australian Government.

• Professor Shane Clifton, *Hierarchies of power: Theories and models of disability and their implications for violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of people with disability*. This report describes models and theories of disability developed by scholars and advocates, and considers their importance for our understanding of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability.

• Professor Matthew Stubbs, Professor Adam Webster and Professor John Williams, *Persons with Disability and the Australian Constitution*. This project provides an outline of the constitutional powers that underpin the Australian Government’s legislative and policy agenda for people with disability. The report examines the treatment of people with disability under the Constitution and Commonwealth laws over three periods of social change: at the time of drafting the Constitution, after the Second World War, and today.
Royal Commission research staff are also developing a report on *Past reports and inquiries*. This research examines the implementation of recommendations from ‘seminal’ past inquiries and reports. The review of past inquiries will be used in public hearings to examine why agencies have not implemented recommendations that could prevent and better protect people with disability from experiencing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

The Royal Commission has a number of research projects planned and underway to better understand the nature and extent of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation experienced by people with disability. One of these projects is to scope how information on violence against, and abuse, neglect and exploitation of, people with disability can best be collected. In particular, we want to know how to define and measure neglect and exploitation. This is part of determining what resources and approach would be needed for a study on the extent of violence against, and abuse, neglect and exploitation of, people with disability, including in specific settings such as education and health.

We are also undertaking a systematic literature review to determine what is known about factors that increase and decrease the risk of violence against, and abuse, neglect and exploitation of, people with disability. The findings from this project can help to inform the design of interventions designed to prevent violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.
Confidentiality of information

Subject to limited exceptions, any information or documents provided to us by people with disability, their families, supporters, or any other person, remain confidential during the life of the Royal Commission. More information about the Royal Commission’s approach to protecting confidentiality can be found on the Royal Commission website.

Information given at or for the purposes of a private session remains confidential even after the Royal Commission delivers its final report, currently scheduled for April 2022. Some people have specifically requested private sessions for this reason.

Except for information given at, or for the purposes of, a private session, under existing legislation the Royal Commission cannot guarantee that information will remain confidential after we present our final report. We are conscious that some people with disability, their families or supporters or people who identify as whistle blowers are reluctant to engage with the Royal Commission unless such a guarantee can be given. This reluctance is an impediment to the Royal Commission engaging as fully as possible with the disability community and may be an impediment to the Royal Commission investigating certain issues that fall within the Terms of Reference. The use of private sessions as a means of protecting confidentiality is not a solution to the problem as we may not be able to offer a private session to every person requesting one.

For these reasons, the Chair of the Royal Commission wrote to the Prime Minister on 14 February 2020 requesting an amendment to the Royal Commissions Act 1902 (Cth) to ensure that the Royal Commission can guarantee the confidentiality of information provided to us beyond the publication of the Royal Commission’s final report. It is a matter for the Australian Government to decide whether to present amending legislation to the Commonwealth Parliament.
Media and communications

The Royal Commission launched a new website on 13 February 2020, with improved functionality, accessibility and content. The new website includes the ability to make a submission using an online form, request a private session, and order free information resources via an online ordering portal.

The Royal Commission also launched a suite of information brochures in 9 languages, in Easy Read and for First Nations communities:

- About the Disability Royal Commission
- Sharing your Experience with the Disability Royal Commission
- Public Hearings: A Guide for witnesses at the Disability Royal Commission

These information brochures are available to download from the website or to order free of charge in hard copy via our online order form. A further suite of brochures for people attending private sessions is currently under development, as is an animated video explaining how to make a submission which will be available in Auslan and a range of community languages.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Royal Commission has continued to use digital media to maintain engagement with the Australian community. Our social media channels – Facebook and Twitter – have seen a growth of nearly 150 per cent and 100 per cent respectively over the six months from January to June 2020.

In April, the Royal Commission launched a fortnightly eNewsletter, Connect, providing subscribers with the latest news and information so that they can stay informed and connected with the Royal Commission’s work. So far, six issues of Connect have been published to more than 6000 subscribers, and you can find every issue on the Royal Commission’s website.

List of Publications

The Royal Commission regularly publishes updates regarding its work on the website and other platforms. Information about our work is published in Easy Read format, and is translated into community languages, including Auslan. Our media releases, statements and issues papers are published on our website, in our eNewsletter, on Facebook and Twitter. Our interim report will also be available, by request, in braille.
Media releases issued from 1 January to 30 June 2020:

• 14 January 2020 Royal Commission to focus on people with disability and their experiences in the criminal justice system

• 28 January 2020 Royal Commission to visit Logan and Ipswich, Queensland

• 14 February 2020 Royal Commission Sydney hearing begins next week

• 9 March 2020 Royal Commission to visit northern Tasmania

• 10 March 2020 Royal Commission hearing to continue investigating education

• 12 March 2020 Royal Commission postpones visit to Tasmania

• 16 March 2020 Royal Commission suspends all public events

• 26 March 2020 Statement of concern: The response to the COVID-19 pandemic for people with disability

• 15 April 2020 Emergency Planning and Response issues paper

• 28 April 2020 Rights, Awareness and Attitudes issues paper

• 5 May 2020 First Nations artist depicts Royal Commission story

• 12 May 2020 Royal Commission looks at employment of people with disability

• 20 May 2020 Statement regarding the death of Ann Marie Smith

• 26 May 2020 Restrictive Practice issues paper

• 9 June 2020 First Nations people with Disability issues paper

• 11 June 2020 Royal Commission meets with First Nations people in Victoria

• 18 June 2020 Public hearing to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on people with disability

• 19 June 2020 First Nations Peoples Strategic Advisory Group held their second meeting
Royal Commission Operations

Staff

Our flexible working environment allowed us to quickly adapt to working from home when COVID-19 restrictions came into force in March 2020. This has also allowed us to continue the important work of the Royal Commission.

Staff have been supported to work remotely in a range of ways, including self-assessment checklists, home-based work guides, taking equipment home to support home-based work, and using channels such as video conferencing and email to keep in contact with colleagues. Staff support programs, such as the quarterly wellbeing check and the Employee Assistance Program, have also been maintained and promoted during this period.

Human resources snapshot at 30 June 2020

- Total staff (excluding Commissioners and Counsel Assisting): 199
  - Sydney 112
  - Brisbane 52
  - Canberra 33
  - Other 2
- Staff hired from the Affirmative Measures Employment Register: 19
- Staff who identify as having a disability: 22 (11.2 per cent)
- Staff who identify as a First Nations person: 11 (5.6 per cent).

Our Brisbane hearing room

We have finalised the fit out of a purpose-built public hearing room in our Brisbane office. The hearing room was designed using universal design principles and includes features, such as:

- space to move chairs in the public gallery to allow a person to sit in any place they choose
- fully adjustable bar tables to provide Counsel Assisting with greater accessibility
- a dedicated and carefully configured space for Auslan interpreters to work during hearings.
Contact details for support services

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

For support, please call their national hotline on **1800 421 468** (they are open every day).

In addition to the Blue Knot Foundation, the Australian Government provides support to assist people to engage with the Royal Commission. This support includes:

- free legal advisory services provided by National Legal Aid and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services through the Your Story Disability Legal Service
- advocacy support services provided under the National Disability Advocacy Program.

Further information about these supports, including how to access them, is available on our website.
Endnotes

1 *Letters Patent* (Cth), 4 April 2019 amended 13 September 2019, (a)

2 Additional Royal Commission activities from 1 to 18 December 2019 were also included in the First progress report.