A guide to your private session
with the Disability Royal Commission
A more inclusive, just society
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Thank you for registering for a private session with the Royal Commission.

Hearing from people with disability, their families, support people and the broader community helps us understand the nature, extent and impact of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability, and how it can be prevented in the future.

We acknowledge that coming forward to share your experience is a big step. We want to make you feel as safe as possible.

The purpose of this booklet is to help you to prepare for your private session.

If you have any questions, before or after your private session, please contact us.
What is a private session?

A private session is a confidential meeting with a Commissioner where you tell them about your personal experience.

Private sessions can happen via telephone, video link and in person in locations around Australia, allowing you to share your experiences with a Commissioner in a confidential setting.
Preparing for your private session

If you wish, you can bring a support person with you to your private session. Your support person could be a friend or family member, or even a professional person who you feel comfortable with, such as a counsellor or lawyer. If you choose to bring your support person into your session, their role will be to support you while you tell the Commissioner about your experience.

To make the most of your time with the Commissioner during your private session, it might help to prepare.

Thinking about your experience

The questions below may help you to prepare for your private session. They are only a guide. It is okay if you can’t remember everything or don’t answer every question.

What happened?

What would you like to tell us about your experience or knowledge of violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation?

• Are you telling us about violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation that happened to you or someone else? If it is someone else, who is that person and what is your relationship to them?

• When, or around when, did the violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation happen? If you can, please provide us with a date, or range of dates.

• Can you tell us what happened?

• Have any of your family, carers, workers or others provided you with assistance or support related to what happened?
Reporting the violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation

Have you told anyone about your experience/s?

- Who did you tell?
- What did you tell them?
- When did you tell them?
- Did you put it in writing? If yes, can you provide us with a copy?
- Was it difficult to report your experience? Can you explain why or why not?

The response

If you reported your experience, what happened in response?

- How did the person/organisation you reported it to first respond?
- What else did they do about it?
- Was there any investigation of what happened to you? If so, by who?
- Were you offered any support? If yes, did you accept the support? Why or why not?
- Have you ever received any redress or compensation?
- Would you consider the response to reporting good or bad? Can you please explain why?
Recommendations for change

Are there any suggestions or recommendations you would like to share, including any examples of what worked well or ideas for how things could be done better? You might also like to tell us about any people who have supported you.

Anything else?

Is there anything else you would like to share with the Royal Commission?

In a few sentences, what would you like to tell Australia about your hopes for the future?

Counselling, adjustments and supports

Sharing your experience can be hard.

We want to help you feel comfortable in your private session.

If you have not already provided us with information about the adjustments and supports you need or if you have anything to add, please contact us as soon as possible.

The Disability Royal Commission has a team of experienced counsellors. Counselling support is available for participants before and after private sessions, and a counsellor will be on hand if necessary during your private session.
If someone has supported you in the past, you may want to reconnect with them so they can help you through this process.

Blue Knot Foundation offers free specialist counselling support and a referral service for people with disability, their families and supporters, and anyone affected by the Disability Royal Commission. You can call the national hotline on 1800 421 468 (9am-6pm AEDT Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm AEDT Saturday, Sunday and public holidays).

If you are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment, and want to access Blue Knot Foundation, 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, and want to access Blue Knot Foundation, online chat facilities and email are available. If you would like to discuss your access and communication needs with Blue Knot Foundation, please contact them at helpline@blueknot.org.au

**Costs associated with attending a private session**

If you need to travel to attend a private session, the Royal Commission may arrange and pay for the costs of travel and accommodation for you and your support person.
What happens at a private session?

A Royal Commission staff member will greet you when you arrive at the private session venue.

If you have brought a support person with you, they can wait in a room close by or they can come into the session with you. It is your choice.

The private session will be attended by a commission officer, one or two Commissioners, you and, if you choose, your support person.

You will be introduced to the Commissioner. Once the process has been explained to you, you will be invited to share your experience. If you agree, the session will be recorded. You will not be asked to take an oath, but you should tell the truth.

You can bring a written statement to hand to the Commissioner if you wish.

The Commissioner and the commission officer may ask you some questions to help the Royal Commission understand the circumstances of your experiences. The Commissioner may also ask about any suggestions for change you might have.

The Royal Commission can accept documents from you during your private session. These can also be provided before or after the session.

During the private session, please let us know if:

- there are some aspects of your experience you don’t want to talk about
- there are questions you don’t want to answer
- there are things you can’t remember
- there is anything we can do to make you more comfortable.
After your private session

After your private session, one of our counsellors will talk with you about your session, answer any questions you might have, and ask you about any support you might need. If you have brought a support person with you, they can stay with you or they can wait in a room close by.

Using information provided in your private session

The information you provide in your private session will help us to:

- identify the extent of the problem
- understand more about the systems and contexts in which abuse is more likely to occur
- develop an understanding of the impacts on people with disability, their families, support people and our community
- gather information relevant to our investigations and research programs
- hear different views.
We may also use the information you provide in your private session in our reports and recommendations. If we do this, your information will be “de-identified”, which means that your identity and anything that would reveal your identity, will not be used in our reports or recommendations.

Confidentiality

Other than in very limited circumstances, the information you provide for a private session that identifies you remains confidential, even after the Royal Commission has ended. It cannot be subpoenaed or disclosed under freedom of information legislation. Information you provide in a private session cannot be used in evidence against you in civil or criminal proceedings.

We can disclose information you provide for a private session that identifies you in limited circumstances including where your information relates to the contravention of an Australian law.

If you are concerned about the confidentiality of the information provided for your private session please get legal advice.
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
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