About the Disability Royal Commission
Wiradjuri artist and disability advocate Uncle Paul Constable Calcott has depicted the Disability Royal Commission story in a specially designed work of art titled *Respectful Listening*.

*Respectful Listening* depicts the story of seven Commissioners who, carrying their message stick, travel across many language groups and communities, depicted as multiple circles connected across many areas of the country. As they gather stories of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation from people with disability, 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.

You can read the full story and what the colours and shapes in this artwork depict on our website at [www.disability.royalcommission.gov.au/share-your-story/first-nations-people/resources-first-nations-people](http://www.disability.royalcommission.gov.au/share-your-story/first-nations-people/resources-first-nations-people)
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In April 2019, the Australian Government established the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

A Royal Commission is an official inquiry, independent of government, into a matter of great importance. It has broad powers to hold public hearings, call witnesses under order, and compel evidence.

Every Royal Commission has terms of reference which outline what it will look into. Our terms of reference ask us to pay particular attention to the experiences of First Nations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) peoples with disability, as well as other groups.

The Royal Commission is listening to the personal experiences and stories of members of the community. These stories will help the Royal Commission understand the issues impacting people with disability in Australia.

The Royal Commission will make recommendations to the government about what should change.
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.

Commissioner Andrea Mason is a Ngaanyatjarra and Kronie woman from Western Australia. Rhonda Galbally and Alastair McEwin are people with disability.

The Chair Ronald Sackville and Roslyn Atkinson are former judges with lots of experience of the law and the conduct of public inquiries, and Commissioners Barbara Bennett and John Ryan have a lot of experience in the disability and human services sector.
What is violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation?

Violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation are important terms and have certain meanings for the Royal Commission.

**Violence and abuse**

Violence and abuse cover a lot of behaviours, but are all about someone hurting someone else in some way. It could be someone physically hurting someone or sexually abusing them. It could be trying to force someone to do something they don’t want to do or stopping someone from doing something they do want to do. It could be taking from someone who has a disability to hurt and shame them over and over again.

**Neglect**

Neglect happens when someone is not given their basic necessities in life. This may be food, water, shelter or a place to live, or access to essential services. It may be mobility - being able to move from one place to another - often a person with disability needs assistance to do through the help of a carer or mobility aid such as a wheelchair.

Neglect is not having access to education so a person with disability is prevented from learning basic skills like reading and writing and socially mixing with other children in a place of learning. Neglect can also be a lack of medical care or treatment. Neglect can happen over and over again. It can happen to individuals or to groups of people as a result of services not being provided in a community to people with disability.
Exploitation

Exploitation is when a person takes advantage of someone else. This could include someone using another person for what they have to benefit themselves. This could mean individuals or businesses using someone who has a disability to get their money without permission, taking their resources like food or water or housing, or even taking advantage of them physically, sexually or to make a profit from them.
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.
Why does the Disability Royal Commission matter?

The Disability Royal Commission was set up because the community was concerned about 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 way in reporting, investigating and responding to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability
- Supporting a more inclusive society that supports people with disability to be independent and live free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

By the end of the Royal Commission, the Commissioners will recommend how to improve laws, policies, structures and practices to ensure a more inclusive and just society.
Places and contexts

The Royal Commission will be investigating and capturing stories from many places and contexts including from:

- schools
- workplaces
- jails and detention centres
- secure disability and mental health facilities
- group homes or boarding houses
- family homes
- hospitals
- day programs
The voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Royal Commission are really important and we want to hear from you.

In order to understand how bad the violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation experienced by people with disabilities is, we need to hear from people with disabilities so we can try to stop it in the future.

The Royal Commission knows that coming forward to share your story is a big step so we want to make it as easy as possible to share your experiences with us.

There are people who can help you work out what you want to say. Trained staff and counsellors will provide support before, during and afterwards when you take part in the Royal Commission.
How to share your story and experiences with the Royal Commission

There are a few ways you can share your story with the Royal Commission, including:

Submissions

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

You can tell your story in your first language, including your Indigenous language/s and Auslan. We will provide interpreters and translators.

If you make a submission, we will not publish your submission unless you agree. If you do want us to publish 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 worried about your identity or the information you have provided being disclosed after the Royal Commission has ended, you can apply for a private session.

Private sessions

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

Anything you tell us in a private session that identifies you will be kept confidential. 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.
How will the Disability Royal Commission protect me if I share my story?

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

You can talk to us, or get free independent legal advice before sharing your experience with us.
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 disabilityadvocacyfinder.dss.gov.au/disability/ndap/
Legal advice

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 Departments 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

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