

What is a Royal Commission?

Royal Commissions are sometimes called “Commissions of Inquiry” because a Commission is set up to look into problems and issues that affect multiple people.

It hears from people about their experiences and has special powers to investigate situations and problems. This includes being able to authorise search warrants and to require people to answer questions.

Why is it called Royal?

When you hear the word royal you may think of the Queen. Well, there is a bit of a link.

In Australia there is a position higher than the government called the Governor General (who is described as the Queen’s representative). A Royal Commission is given its powers by the Governor General - this one was set up by The Hon. Sir Peter Cosgrove AK, MC.

This means that a Royal Commission is independent of the government and cannot be stopped by the government. It also means that it is free to investigate Government and Government departments, policies and practices at local, state and federal levels.

What is the Disability Royal Commission?

The full name of this Royal Commission is the “Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability”. Most of the time you will find this shortened to “Disability Royal Commission” or just “the Commission”.

The Royal Commission's Terms of Reference cover what should be done to:

- prevent, and better protect, people with disability from experiencing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation
- achieve best practice in reporting and investigating of, and responding to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation
- promote a more inclusive society that supports the independence of people with disability and their right to live free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.¹

¹ <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/about/Pages/fact-sheet-about-the-royal-commission-html.aspx>

The Commission is required to look into the violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with a disability **in all settings and contexts**.² This could include schools, community settings, group homes, family homes, workplaces, prisons, transport systems, aged care facilities, Centrelink, banks, hospitals, in-home or out-of home care, institutions, mainstream services, etc.

The Commission is also directed to look at all aspects of the quality of services provided to people with disability, “..including the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and the NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework...”.³

It also will specifically look at the multilayered experiences of people of every “sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, intersex status, ethnic origin or race, including the particular situation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culturally and linguistically diverse people with disability.”

This Royal Commission is based in Brisbane but will run public meetings around the country. The final report is due before the 29 April 2022.

People with Disability

The Disability Royal Commission is for **all** people with disability.

This includes:

- someone who has a disability from birth.
- someone who has a disability because of an accident or getting older.
- people with:
 - physical disability – disability that affects your body and the way it moves or works
 - sensory disability – disability that affects one or more of your senses, such as sight or hearing
 - intellectual disability – disability that affects the way you think
 - psycho-social disability – disability that affects your mental health.⁴

The Disability Royal Commission will use the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) to guide their work.⁵

² <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/about/Pages/fact-sheet-about-the-royal-commission-html.aspx>

³ <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/about/Documents/nsw-letters-patent-signed.pdf>

⁴ <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/Documents/easy-read-terms-of-reference.pdf>

⁵ <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/about/Pages/Questions-and-answers.aspx>

Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation

People with disability should have the same human rights as everyone else and they should be free to use those rights.

People with disability have the right to:

- be safe
- feel like they are valued
- dignity – to be treated with respect.⁶

The Royal Commission has defined Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation into easy English.

- **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.⁷

Violence and abuse might be the use of constraints, restrictive practices, seclusion, humiliation, harassment or a person having their dignity taken away.⁸

Abuse could also include:⁹

Emotional Abuse:

Doing something that makes a person feel sad, scared or not important

Actions that mean a person feels threatened, bullied, laughed at or made fun of

Actions that mean a person isn't listened to, believed or isn't able to get what they need

Physical Abuse:

A person is hit, kicked, pushed, shaken, pinched, stabbed or had their hair pulled.

⁶ <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/Documents/easy-read-terms-of-reference.pdf>

⁷ <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/Documents/easy-read-terms-of-reference.pdf>

⁸ <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/Documents/education-learning-issues-paper.docx>

⁹ Modified from <https://www.disabilitysafeweek.org.au/>

Sexual Abuse:

A person is made to have sex, touch someone intimately, is touched in places they don't want to be touched or made to look at sexual images or activity.

Financial Abuse:

A person's money is taken or spent on another person

A person is stopped from deciding how their money is spent

Neglect could include a person:

Not getting the medicine they need

Not being able to see a doctor when wanted or needed

Not having the supports and opportunities required to get an education

Not being assisted to be clean and comfortable

Not given enough to eat or drink

Not being treated as an equal

Not kept safe

Not allowed to see friends or family

Not treated with respect

Exploitation is when someone is taken advantage of.

This includes where a person, organisation or institution uses a person to get sex, money, power or advantage.

Who does the Royal Commission want to hear from?

The Disability Royal Commission wants to hear from all Australians about their experiences of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability. The Commission is particularly interested in hearing from people with a disability and also from family members and professionals who can share their perspectives.

How do I share my story with the Royal Commission?

If you choose to share your experience with the Disability Royal Commission you can share your story in nearly any format that works for you. This includes in writing, a picture, videos, over the phone, in a community forum, and you can ask for a private face to face meeting with Commissioners. Find out more by looking at the page on [Submissions](#) or [contact us](#) for more information.

Issues papers

Throughout the time of the Commission there will be specific issues looked into on different topics. When the Commission announces a public hearing, they publish a list of questions that people and organisations can respond to. So far there have been papers on Education, the Criminal Justice system, Group Homes and Health Care for people with cognitive disability. The full list can be found at <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/Pages/default.aspx>

References

<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/Documents/easy-read-terms-of-reference.pdf>

<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/about/Documents/nsw-letters-patent-signed.pdf>

<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/about/Pages/fact-sheet-about-the-royal-commission-html.aspx>

<https://pwd.org.au/royal-commission-now/>

<https://www.disabilitysafeweek.org.au/>

<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/about/Pages/Questions-and-answers.aspx>