



**Royal Commission**  
into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation  
of People with Disability

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# Public hearings

A guide for witnesses at the  
Disability Royal Commission

**Easy Read version**



## How to use this document



The Disability Royal Commission  
(the Royal Commission) wrote this document.

When you see the word 'we', it means  
the Royal Commission.



We have written this document in an easy  
to read way. We use pictures to explain  
some ideas.



We have written some words in **bold**.  
We explain what these words mean.  
There is a list of these words on page 33.



This Easy Read document is a summary  
of another document.



You can find the other document on **our website**.



You can ask for help to read this document.  
A friend, family member or support person  
may be able to help you.

## What's in this document?

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## What is this Royal Commission about?



A **Royal Commission** is an official way of looking into an important problem.



This Royal Commission is called the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.



We usually call it the Royal Commission.

We need the Royal Commission because we know that people with disability experience:



- **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.

We also know that these things can happen to people with disability in different places, like:



- schools



- where they work



- jails and detention centres



- places where people with disability live and are cared for



- places where people who need support for their mental health live and are cared for



- group homes or boarding houses



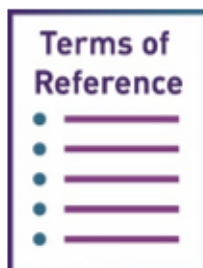
- their family home



- hospitals



- day programs.



The **Terms of Reference** is a list of the things a Royal Commission must look at.



You can find more information about the Terms of Reference on **our website**.

Our Terms of Reference tell us we must look at the experiences of people with disability so we:



- really understand what has happened



- use this information to make **recommendations** to the Australian Government.



Recommendations are ideas about what could be done to make things better.



We will write reports for the Australian Government.

Our final report will include our recommendations.



These will be based on the experiences of people with disability.

We want to hear from:



- people with disability
- their families
- their supporters
- support workers
- organisations
- the wider community.

## What is a public hearing?



During the Royal Commission, we will hold public **hearings** around Australia.



A hearing is a **formal, public** meeting we will hold.

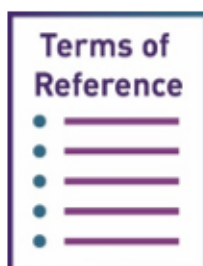


When something is formal, there are strict rules about how it should be done.



When something is public:

- anyone can watch
- we share the records of what happened so anyone can read them.



Public hearings are always about the Terms of Reference.

The Terms of Reference tell us we must look at how people with disability experience:



- violence
- abuse
- neglect
- exploitation.

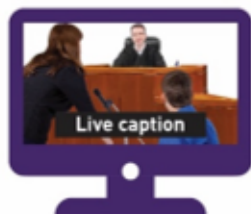


We record our public hearings.



We also stream our public hearings live on our website.

Every public hearing has:



- live captioning – text of what people have said appears on the screen right after they have said it



- **interpreters** who use Auslan.



An interpreter is someone who:

- speaks the language you understand
- can help you understand what someone says when they speak a different language.

## How do you take part in a public hearing?



We might ask you to take part in a public hearing as a **witness**.



A witness is a person who saw or knew that something happened.



We will contact people who we would like to be a witness at the Royal Commission.



We will decide which witnesses we will ask to give **evidence**.

When you give evidence, you tell your story.



We will tell you:

- which hearing we want you to take part in
- why we want you to take part in the hearing.



We will ask you if you want to give evidence.



You can get advice about giving evidence.



You can read information about how to get advice on page 26.



We will send you a **summons** if:

- we want to hear your evidence at a hearing
- you agree to give evidence.



A summons is a formal document asking you to take part.



We send a summons because it means you can be protected by the law.



You have to do what the summons says.

You can get support if you get a summons and you are not sure what to do.



You can ask your **lawyer** to support you when you take part in a hearing.



A lawyer is a person with experience in the law.



We will tell you what date you need to take part as early as we can.



If we send you a summons, you shouldn't talk to anyone about your evidence except:

- your lawyer
- a counsellor or support person.

## Leave to appear



Sometimes people ask to take part in a hearing.



We call this asking for **leave to appear**.



You can only ask for leave to appear for very special reasons.



The Chair decides if you can have leave to appear.



If we give you leave to appear, you can only do some things in a hearing.

## What does a witness need to do?



We will ask each witness to give their evidence in writing.

We call this your witness **statement**.



A statement is a formal description of something that:

- happened in the past
- is happening now.



You will need to give us a witness statement even if you have already made a **submission**.



A submission is a document that explains:

- your experience
- an idea you have.



If we ask you to give evidence at a hearing, we will support you to give your witness statement in the way that suits you best.



If you have a lawyer and we ask you to be a witness, we will tell you what goes into your witness statement.



If you don't have a lawyer and we ask you to be a witness, we will:

- contact you
- help you write your witness statement.



Not everyone who gives a witness statement will go to the hearing.



We can help people who take part in the Royal Commission get free:

- legal support
- **counselling support.**

Counselling support is when you:



- talk to someone about how you think and feel
- talk about ways to help you feel better.

You can read more about the counselling support we have on page 29.



You can still give us information if we haven't asked you to be a witness.

You might:



- make a submission



- ask for a **private session**.



A private session is a private meeting between:

- someone with a story to tell
- 1 of our Commissioners.



You can visit our website to find out how to share your experiences with us.

<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/brochure-sharing-your-experience-disability-royal-commission>

## What happens at a public hearing?



We ask witnesses to travel to public hearings.

Public hearings are held around Australia.

We hold public hearings in places that are **accessible**.



When something is accessible, everyone can use it.

This might be:

- a place or a building
- transport
- a service
- information
- a website.

## Who will be there?



The Commissioners will sit together at a table.



The **Counsel Assisting** will sit at another table facing the:



- Commissioners
- witness.



Counsel Assisting are lawyers who:

- work for the Royal Commission
- know and understand the important laws to do with this Royal Commission.



The witness sits at the side of the room.

This is so everyone can see them.



There are chairs at the back of the room.

These are for people who want to watch the hearing, like members of the public.



There might be other people in and around the hearing room, including:

- counsellors
- security staff
- interpreters
- people who record what is happening
- people to look after computers and electrical equipment
- people who work for the media.

People who work for the media can include:



- writers
- photographers
- news reporters.

If there are people who work for the media in the hearing room, they can't:



- record what is happening
- talk to people about the hearing.



It is your choice whether you speak to the media or not.

## What will happen at the hearing?

There are screens in the room that show people:



- documents that people are talking about
- witnesses who are giving evidence by video link
- people signing in Auslan.



If you take part in a public hearing, we will support you to give evidence in the way that suits you best.



When it is your turn to give your evidence, a Commissioner will ask you to make an **oath** or an **affirmation**.



When you make an oath, you make a promise on a religious book that is important to you.

You promise that you will tell the truth.



The religious book you promise on depends on your religion.

For example, it might be the Bible or the Qur'an.



If you are not religious, you can make an affirmation.

An affirmation is also a promise to tell the truth.



Our Counsel Assisting will ask you questions about your evidence.



The Commissioners might ask you questions about your evidence too.

## What happens after a public hearing?



After each public hearing we publish a **transcript** of what happened on our website.



A transcript is a written record of what people said.



We will share what you told us at the public hearing.



We might share it:

- on our website
- in a report
- in another document.



If you ask us to, we can keep what you tell us at the public hearing **confidential**.



If you ask us to keep your evidence confidential, we will not:

- share the information
- say who gave us the information.



We also call this a **non-publication direction**.

A non-publication direction means the media needs to keep what you tell us at the public hearing confidential too



If you have a non-publication direction, the media are not allowed to take photos of you.

## Getting legal support and advice



Our **Solicitors** and Counsel Assisting help us at public hearings.



Solicitors are lawyers who work for the Royal Commission and:

- take part in public hearings
- collect evidence.



Our Solicitors and Counsel Assisting can help you write your witness statement.



Our Solicitors and Counsel Assisting can't:

- give you legal advice
- speak for you at a public hearing.



If you need legal support and advice, we have a service you can use.



The service is run by Your Story Disability Legal Support.

You can call them:



- on **1800 771 800**



- Monday to Friday during work hours.



You can also visit their website.

[www.yourstorydisabilitylegal.org.au](http://www.yourstorydisabilitylegal.org.au)

This service can:



- help you understand how the Royal Commission works



- help you write a witness statement



- help you share your story in a:
  - submission
  - private session



- give you advice about legal matters that might affect you



- give you information about **financial assistance.**



Financial assistance is extra money you might be able to get to help you.

You might be able to get financial assistance if we ask you to take part in the Royal Commission:



- as a witness



- for an interview



- by giving us a written statement.

You might be able to get financial assistance to support:



- you if we ask you to take part



- an organisation you are part of, work for or belong to.



There is information on the Attorney-General's Department website about how you can apply for financial assistance.

[www.ag.gov.au/](http://www.ag.gov.au/)

## Counselling support



Seeing or hearing news about the Royal Commission will be hard for some people.



Sharing your story can be hard too.



You can get support to help you with any feelings you might have because of the Royal Commission.

We can offer you counselling support:



- before you take part in the Royal Commission
- while you are taking part in the Royal Commission
- after you have taken part in the Royal Commission.



We have counsellors who go to all our:

- public hearings
- private sessions
- community forums

Blue Knot Foundation offers free counselling support to anyone who takes part in the Royal Commission.

You can contact Blue Knot Foundation:



- by phone:

**1800 421 468**



They are open every day.



If you have a speech or hearing impairment, you can call the National Relay Service.

**133 677**



Tell them the number you want to call is

**(02) 6146 1468**



If you need to communicate in a different way, you can use:

- online chat
- email.



You can send Blue Knot Foundation an email

**[helpline@blueknot.org.au](mailto:helpline@blueknot.org.au)**

## Support for people who speak other languages

If you speak a language other than English,  
please contact:



- the National Counselling and Referral Service

**1800 421 468**

Ask them for an interpreter.



- TIS – Translating and Interpreting Service

**131 450**



If you would like a copy of any of our documents  
in Braille, please call us on

**1800 517 199**

## Word list



### Accessible

When something is accessible, everyone can use it.

This might be:

- a place or a building
- transport
- a service
- information
- a website.



### Confidential

If you ask us to keep your evidence confidential, we will not:

- share the information
- say who gave us the information.



### Counsel Assisting

Counsel Assisting are lawyers who:

- know and understand the important laws to do with this Royal Commission
- work for the Royal Commission.

## **Counselling support**



Counselling support is when you:

- talk to someone about how you think and feel
- talk about ways to help you feel better.



## **Evidence**

When you give evidence, you tell your story.



## **Financial assistance**

Financial assistance is extra money you might be able to get to help you.



## **Formal**

When something is formal, there are strict rules about how it should be done.



## **Hearing**

A hearing is a formal, public meeting we will hold.

## Interpreter



An interpreter is someone who:

- speaks the language you understand
- can help you understand what someone says when they speak a different language.



## Lawyer

A lawyer is a person with experience in the law.



## Leave to appear

Sometimes people ask to take part in a hearing.

We call this asking for leave to appear.



## Non-publication direction

A non-publication direction means the media needs to keep what you tell us at the public hearing confidential too



## Private session

A private session is a private meeting between:

- someone with a story to tell
- 1 of our Commissioners.



## Public

When something is public:

- anyone can watch
- we share the records of what happened so anyone can read them.



## Recommendations

Recommendations are ideas about what we could do to make things better.



## Royal Commission

A Royal Commission is an official way of looking into an important problem.



## Solicitor

Solicitors are lawyers who work for the Royal Commission and:

- take part in public hearings
- collect evidence.



## Statement

A statement is a formal description of something that:

- happened in the past
- is happening now.



## **Submission**

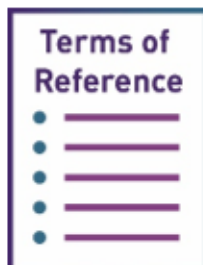
A submission is a document that explains:

- your experience
- an idea you have.



## **Summons**

A summons is a formal document asking you to take part.



## **Terms of Reference**

The Terms of Reference is a list of the things a Royal Commission should look at.



## **Transcript**

A transcript is a written record of what people said.



## **Witness**

A witness is a person who saw or knew that something happened.

## How to contact us



You can email us at

**[DRcenquiries@royalcommission.gov.au](mailto:DRcenquiries@royalcommission.gov.au)**



If you have a question, you can call us on

**1800 517 199.**



We are available on Monday to Friday between  
9 am and 5 pm.



We are not available on public holidays.



You can also call the National Relay Service  
on **133 677.**



You can write to us at:

GPO Box 1422

Brisbane

QLD 4001

You can follow us on:



Facebook

[www.facebook.com/disability.royalcommission.gov.au](https://www.facebook.com/disability.royalcommission.gov.au)



Twitter

[@DRC\\_AU](https://twitter.com/DRC_AU)



You can also subscribe to our newsletter

Connect by sending an email to:

[DRCmailinglist@royalcommission.gov.au](mailto:DRCmailinglist@royalcommission.gov.au)

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