

# Communique

## National Task Group – Disability Royal Commission

On 15 June 2021, the National Task Group (NTG) for the Disability Royal Commission met via video conference. This Communique contains information about matters and decisions from the meeting that are relevant to the Synod Task Groups/Synods and their work and provides a general update on the work of the NTG. This Communique also contains important information about the work of the Disability Royal Commission and related updates. This Communique can be circulated to Synod Task Group members and Synod staff but should not be circulated further.

If you have any questions about this Communique or would like to discuss it further, please contact Tenille Fricker, Executive Officer, National Task Group on 02 6181 1006 or [tenillef@nat.unitingcare.org.au](mailto:tenillef@nat.unitingcare.org.au).

### NTG membership

Following the 16<sup>th</sup> Assembly, and the election of the Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) membership, Elaine Ledgerwood has vacated her role as ASC Rep on the NTG. A new ASC Rep will be determined in the coming weeks from the current ASC membership.

President Rev Hollis also joins the NTG as an attendee, following her installation as the 16<sup>th</sup> President of the Uniting Church.

### Reports from each Synod

Written reports from five Synods were circulated with the meeting papers. These reports were taken as read. The Synod Representative for Northern Synod provided a verbal update.

### Mapping of disability services and activities across the Uniting Church

Following the closure of the survey, Tenille, with the support of a colleague at UnitingCare Australia, reviewed the responses received and prepared a Survey summary.

The document provides a summary of the survey responses received from the major services, schools and residential colleges, and Presbyteries and congregations

across the Church.

Tenille presented a high-level overview of the Survey summary at the June NTG meeting and made general observations about the survey responses received and information provided. The gaps in the data were acknowledged, as was the difficulty faced in obtaining data on this scale.

The possibility of the survey being repeated before the completion of the Royal Commission was raised. No decision was made. The NTG will discuss this at its next meeting.

A revised version of the Survey summary is enclosed with this Communique. **The enclosed Survey summary can be shared with members of Synod Standing Committees and Synod Task Groups, as well as Synod staff. The Survey summary cannot be shared further than this or published in any way.**

The NTG hopes the Survey summary demonstrates the value of the information collected through survey responses and assists Synods to contextualise the information provided in survey responses they received.

Tenille will also confidentially share the Introduction and Major services sections of the Survey summary with members of UnitingCare Australia's Disability Network in the coming weeks. (The Disability Network comprises representatives from UnitingCare network organisations providing disability services across Australia.)

### **People with Disability Advisory Group**

Tenille provided an update on the People with Disability Advisory Group at the June NTG meeting. Tenille indicated that Uniting Communities had reviewed the People with Disability Advisory Group Application Form and provided suggestions to further simplify the language and improve the flow of the document.

The People with Disability Advisory Group Application Form is in the process of being remediated to ensure it is fully accessible.

The next step is for the small advisory group to review any changes and/or suggestions and agree on a final version. Once finalised, the form will then be sent to the NTG for approval.

Further information will be provided in the next Communique.

## **Public hearing 14 and the Commission's Hearings schedule**

The Commission held its second hearing on preventing and responding to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation in disability services in June.

The case studies presented at the five-day hearing held in Adelaide examined the experiences of two people with disability receiving accommodation services provided by the South Australian Department of Human Services (DHS). The Commission also examined the responses of the South Australian and Commonwealth governments to recommendations made in the two major reports regarding the circumstances surrounding Ann-Marie Smith's death in April 2020.

The hearing considered, among other things, communication between DHS and the family members of the two residents, implied threat of harm to a resident and the response from DHS, risk categorisation of incidents and incident management processes, community visitor schemes, conflicts of interest, the meaning of 'vulnerability', and in-kind contributions to NDIS participants and the scope of the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission.

The [transcripts for Public hearing 14](#) are available from the Commission's website.

The Commission's Hearings schedule has been repeatedly updated over the past few months to take account of COVID-19 restrictions across the country. Tenille provides information on the changes to the schedule in her fortnightly Update on the work of the Disability Royal Commission. If you are not currently receiving the Update, please contact Tenille at [tenillef@nat.unitingcare.org.au](mailto:tenillef@nat.unitingcare.org.au) to add yourself to the distribution list.

## **Issues papers**

Since the last Communique, no new issues papers have been published.

Please remember to let Tenille know if a Synod or its agencies decide to provide a response to an issues paper or make a submission and to include Colleen and Tenille in the feedback processes for any responses/submissions so there is the opportunity for national input.

## **Confidentiality protections**

The [Royal Commissions Amendment \(Protection of Information\) Bill 2021](#) remains in the Senate. It is yet to be debated.

### **Meeting dates for 2021**

The next meeting of the NTG is scheduled to take place on 5 August via video conference. Penelope Eden, Partner, MinterEllison will be presenting to members of the NTG and other invitees from across the Church and services about the risks, implications and lessons arising from the Royal Commission to date.