



Uniting Church in Australia
ASSEMBLY

Assembly Standing Committee

15-17 July 2022

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Type of Paper (Information/Decision)	Update from Disability Royal Commission National Task Group
Title	For Information
Assembly or ASC Minute	
Consultation	N/A
Purpose	To provide an update on the work of the Disability Royal Commission National Task Group to the Assembly Standing Committee.
Rationale & Findings Summary	The Disability Royal Commission National Task Group is required to provide regular updates on the work of UnitingCare Australia.
Attachments	Nil
Recommendations	That the Assembly Standing Committee: 1. Receive the Report
Submitted by	Claerwen Little, National Director UnitingCare Australia

Disability Royal Commission National Task Group Report

Summary of Disability Royal Commission Activities

The Disability Royal Commission has a very full program of activity for this year with 15 public hearings having occurred or scheduled including

- **23 to 25 February:** public hearing 21 – which focused on the experience of people with disability engaging with Disability Employment Services and working in Australian Disability Enterprises
- **10 March:** public hearing 19 – additional hearing day which focused on the measures taken by employers and regulators to respond to the systemic barriers to open employment for people with disability
- **28 March to 1 April:** public hearing 17 (continuation) – which investigated the nature and extent of violence and abuse of women and girls with disability in family and domestic settings
- **11 to 13 April:** public hearing 22 – which focused on employees working in Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs). Unlike most other public hearings, public hearing 22 generated considerable TV, radio and print media interest
- **28 April:** public hearing 20 – additional hearing day where Senior Counsel Assisting, outlined proposed findings that could be considered by the Royal Commission in relation to two case studies which involved recent experiences of people with disability in homes run by Life Without Barriers (LWB).
- **16 to 20 May:** public hearing 23, Sydney – Preventing and responding to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation in disability services
- **6 to 10 June:** public hearing 24, TBC – The experience of children and young people with disability of segregated education settings and the ‘polished pathway’
- **11 to 15 July:** public hearing 25, Alice Springs – The operation of the NDIS for First Nations people with disability in regional and remote communities
- **29 August to 2 September:** public hearing 26, TBC – Homelessness, including experience in boarding houses, hostels and other arrangements
- **19 to 23 September:** public hearing 27, TBC – Police responses and conditions in detention
- **10 to 14 October:** public hearing 28, TBC – Violence against, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability in public places
- **24 to 28 October:** public hearing 29, TBC – The experiences of violence against, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability from culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- **21 to 25 November:** public hearing 30, TBC – Guardianship, substituted and supported decision making
- **5 to 9 December:** public hearing 31, TBC – Service providers
- **12 to 16 December:** public hearing 32, TBC – Vision for an inclusive Australia

The Commission released the following documents:

- Fifth Progress Report covering the period from 1 July to 31 December 2021

- statement of ongoing concern following reports of the significant impact the Omicron wave of the COVID-19 pandemic is having on people with disability
- Commissioner's report on Public Hearing 10 Report - Education and training of health professionals in relation to people with cognitive disability
- Overview of responses to the violence and abuse of people with a disability at home issues paper
- the impact of and responses to the Omicron wave of the COVID-19 pandemic for people with disability Issues paper
- Commissioner's report on Report - Public hearing 13 - Preventing and responding to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation in disability services (a Case Study).

Of particular relevance to the Church and its agencies are the findings of public hearing 13 where the report made 24 findings about Sunnyfield, including its employees and board of directors, as well as the NSW Ombudsman. The key findings of the report include:

- Sunnyfield's responses to complaints and feedback from the families of the residents were inappropriately defensive and often hostile
- Sunnyfield's Board did not include any directors with lived experience of disability, nor did it have any arrangements in place to meet with residents of the home and their families. This adversely affected the Board's understanding and oversight of the issues affecting the home

Key recommendations in the report include:

- Sunnyfield should apologise to Melissa, Carl and Chen, and their families for failing to prevent the violence and abuse they endured
- Sunnyfield should discuss appropriate redress and what ongoing additional support and assistance it can provide the three residents and their families

National Task Group (NTG)

People with Disability Overarching Principles

The NTG established the People with Disability Overarching Principles Working Group in February 2022.

The Working Group consists of 20 participants and includes people from across the Church and its agencies, six people with a range of disability types, a broad range of roles and experience, all diversity groups, three Synod representatives and eight NTG members. A facilitator with appropriate academic and industry experience has been engaged.

Four 2½ hour Zoom workshops have been organised as follows:

- workshop 1 – introduction – Wednesday, 13 July
- workshop 2 – first issue – governance and decision-making, for example the composition of governance bodies including councils, boards and committees, input from people with disability, oversight of service delivery, people with disability in senior and decision-making roles and employers of people with disability (including, potentially, targets) – Wednesday, 17 August
- workshop 3 – second issue – access to and adequate complaints resolution processes and institutional safety, especially in relation to access for people who are non-verbal, deaf, have sight impairment, have low literacy or a cognitive disability – Wednesday, 14 September

- workshop 4 – third issue – awareness and use of supported decision-making and choice and control – Wednesday, 12 October.

The Working Group is to consider and include workforce issues while developing the overarching principles.

It is proposed that following finalisation by the Working Group and NTG, the People with Disability Overarching Principles will be put forward for consideration for adoption by the Assembly and Synod Standing Committees.

National Task Group Meetings

The National Task Group (NTG) held its second and third meetings for 2022 on 19 April and 29 June.

The NTG noted that the disability landscape is continuing to change, for example:

- the appointment of a Minister for the NDIA – The Hon Bill Shorten
- the appointment of Dr Denis Napthine AO as Chair of the NDIA Board
- resignation of the NDIA Chief Executive, Martin Hoffman effective 2 July
- three levels of government are working together through Australia’s Disability Strategy, which has never happened before
- people with disability peak bodies actively participated to develop the Strategy; a large number of those bodies have publicly strongly supported it; and people with disability are involved in reviewing its implementation through the outcomes framework
- Federal funding announcements in the Budget including
 - \$2.6m to develop and implement the disability best practice guide and action plan which will be co-designed with people with disability
 - \$9m to support women and girls with disability experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence – to develop an evidence-based framework to inform practical actions for addressing violence;
 - \$2.1b for winter preparedness health measures to protect against COVID-19 and flu in residential aged care and disability care sectors
 - \$6m to fund a national advertising program for The Field, an online job platform
 - \$2.43m for the RecruitAble pilot through Coles, Bendigo Bank, Tennis Australia, Hydro Tasmania, RACQ and Ranstad Australia