

FAQ on sharing with the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability

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.

What is a “submission”?

A “Submission” is what you give (submit) to the Disability Royal Commission. When you share your experience with the Commission that is what they call a “submission”. There are lots of different ways to “make a submission”. You can make a submission by emailing the Commission your experience. You can also make a submission over the phone using the Commission’s 1800 number and talking about your experience. You can also ask to share your experience with a Commissioner in a Private Session. This is also a submission. You can share your experience in any language and you can add photos, pictures or other things that can help the Commission understand your experience.

Am I a “witness”?

Sharing your experience with the Disability Royal Commission does not automatically mean you are a “witness”. At the Disability Royal Commission, the word “witness” means the people who are asked (summoned) to speak at a Public Hearing. You can’t choose to be a witness. You can say you are interested in being a witness at a Public Hearing when you share your experience. The Commission will decide who will speak, and they will ask the witness questions. The Public Hearings are very formal, and might feel like a courtroom. You are more likely to be asked to speak if you give more details when you share your experience (you don’t have to name names).

I'm interested in being considered as a witness for a hearing. Where do I start?

The Disability Royal Commission recommend you make a submission and say you are interested in speaking at a Public Hearing. The Commission will decide whether they will ask you to speak. All submissions and experiences shared with the Disability Royal Commission will inform the work of the Commission.

What if my experiences relate to a Public Hearing in another state?

You can still ask to speak at a Public Hearing even if it is in another state. The location of the hearing does not mean that witnesses from other places will not be considered. The approach may vary in different hearings.

Can I share my experience anonymously? Will it carry less weight if I do?

Yes, you can choose to share your experience without giving your details. You can do this by giving no name (anonymously) or using a pseudonym (using a different name or a number). Your experience will be treated the same way as any other and has equal weight.

Some things to consider before you do this: If you want to give extra information on your story later you will have to start again from the beginning. If the Commission wants to ask you questions to clarify anything or to summon you to speak at a Public Hearing then they won't have your contact details. You could also consider putting a submission through an advocacy organisation.

Does my experience have to be recent?

No. There are no time limits on when your experience may have occurred.

Will the Disability Royal Commission publish my story?

If you share your story with the Royal Commission in writing, online or in audio-visual format, they will not publish your information unless you want them to. With your permission, they can also publish it without naming or identifying you.

What privacy protocols are in place for people who make submissions?

If you do not want your information or your identity to be shared with anyone outside of the Royal Commission, the Commission can protect your identity and the information you share with them until the Royal Commission ends in April 2022 (when its final report is due).

This is because under the current law, the Royal Commission can only guarantee confidentiality while the Royal Commission exists. However, the Royal Commission intends to ask the Government to amend the law so that your information is protected indefinitely, even after the Royal Commission ends. This, however, is a matter for the Australian Parliament to decide.

If you are worried about your identity or the information you have provided being disclosed after the Royal Commission has ended, you could consider asking for a Private Session.

Can I have a Private Session?

If you are worried about your identity or the information you have provided being disclosed after the Royal Commission has ended, you may be able to share your experience with a Commissioner in a Private Session.

Anything you tell the Royal Commission in connection with, or during, a Private Session can be kept confidential even after the Royal commission ends. It is protected from disclosure by law and cannot be subpoenaed or disclosed under Freedom of Information legislation.

At this stage, the Royal Commission does not know how many people might want a Private Session, so they cannot promise that everyone wanting a Private Session will be able to get one. More information about Private Sessions is not yet available.

Can I name names?

If you are thinking of naming names, it may be worth getting some free legal advice from the Disability Royal Commission legal service. They can be contacted on 1800 771 800 (free call). There is also a free factsheet on their webpage <https://drclegalservice.org.au/Get-legal-help>.

If you are writing your story, you can use a random letter, like “X” instead of the name of the organisation or person. For example: I was working at X when it happened.

I still have questions. Where do I go next?

Find out more by looking at the page on [Submissions](#), call the Royal Commission help line on 1800 517 199 or [contact us](#) for more information.