Talking Disability Royal Commission Podcast

Episode 1 Transcript

What is the Disability Royal Commission?

**Talia Roshan:** Hello, and welcome to Talking Disability Royal Commission, helping you make sense of the Royal Commission into violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of people with disability. I'm Talia Roshan. This episode is a Disability Royal commission FAQ frequently asked questions. For starters why are we in Australia holding this Royal Commission? Who runs it? How does it work? Why does the commission keep asking you to share your story? What have they done already? And how do you keep updated?

But first, a content warning. There might be some difficult listening. Blue Knot counselling offer free specialist counselling support for people with disability, their families, and carers, and anyone engaging with the Disability Royal Commission.

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I'm joined today by Tamara Weaver, director of community engagement at the disability Royal commission. Hi Tamara. Thank you so much for joining us today.

**Tamara Weaver:** Thank you so much Talia for having me.

**Talia Roshan:** So I guess a lot of people see the Royal Commission as a formal and daunting process, and I'm really hoping that you can try and break down a little bit of that for us today.

**Tamara Weaver:** Hopefully. So I'm looking forward to it.

**Talia Roshan:** Great. Well, I guess we'll start with the main question. What is the Disability Royal Commission?

**Tamara Weaver:** Thanks. So the Disability Royal Commission was established in April of 2019. And that was in response to community concern about widespread reports of violence against and neglect against and abuse of people with a disability.

And these incidents might've happened recently, or it could have happened a long time ago.

**Talia Roshan:** And in a nutshell, how does it work?

**Tamara Weaver:** Well, the Royal Commission, is an investigation it's independent of government, which is important to know into matters of great importance, which this I think we can agree is, the Royal Commission has broad powers to hold public hearings.

We call witnesses under oath and we can compel evidence. Each Royal Commission is different and has its own terms of reference, which define the issues that we'll look into at the end of the Royal Commission. That final report will be given to government recommendations for change

**Talia Roshan:** And violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation are important terms for the Disability Royal Commission.

What do they mean?

**Tamara Weaver:** Yeah, this is a good question. This might take me a little bit of time to answer Talia as I want to make sure I cover it quite well. So violence is when someone is hurting you physically and abuse is when someone is treating you badly. Violence and abuse, cover a range of behaviours towards people with disability.

These could include assault or sexual assault constraints, restrictive practices, physical or chemical, forced treatments, forced interventions, a humiliation and harassment and economic abuse and other significant violations of privacy and dignity on a systematic, or it could be an individual basis as well.

Neglect is when someone is not helping you in the way that they're supposed to help you. So neglect includes physical, or it could be emotional neglect, passive neglect, neglect, or wilful deprivation. And neglect can be a single significant incident, or it could be a systematic issue that involves depriving a person with a disability of the basic necessities of life, such as food drink, shelter, access mobility, clothing, education, medical care and or treatment.

Exploitation is when a person takes advantage of someone else. This could include improper use of another person or the improper use of withholding of another person's assets or labour; could be employment or resources, including taking physical sexual or financial or economic advantage of someone.

**Talia Roshan:** Thank you for talking us through all of those different definitions. That's good to know that it is really quite broad and it does cover a lot of different areas and a lot of different behaviours.

**Tamara Weaver:** Absolutely.

**Talia Roshan:** And who are the people in the Commission that we need to know about?

**Tamara Weaver:** Look, it is important to know six commissioners have been appointed to examine and expose violence towards or neglect, abuse or exploitation of people with a disability. We have our chair, Ronald Sackville and our commissioners, Barbara Bennett, Dr. Rhonda Galbally, Andrea Mason, Alistair McEwin, and John Ryan. To assist the commissioners in their work. The Commission has approximately 200 staff working to ensure that we hear from our community

**Talia Roshan:** And in terms of the commissioners they're really quite diverse as well. So they all come from different backgrounds and they all bring different things to the Commission, which is fantastic.

**Tamara Weaver:** Absolutely.

**Talia Roshan:** And I've heard people talk about terms of reference what are they and why are they important?

**Tamara Weaver:** Yes. Our terms of reference very important to the Royal Commission as they outline what the Commission will focus on. So far, some of the areas the Commission has been investigating include, but not limited to preventing and better protecting people with disabilities; achieving best practice and reporting; investigating and responding to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of people with a disability; and promoting a more inclusive society that supports people with disability to be independent and live free from violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. At the Disability Royal Commission, we've also been listening to experiences in all settings and contexts, not limited to, but some of the places we've heard from are schools and workplaces, jails and detention centres, secure disability and mental health facilities, group homes, boarding houses, family homes, hospitals, and day programs. So when we do that, we gather information as well through research, public hearings, the personal experiences that people tell us about, which come through our submissions, private sessions, and other forums as well.

**Talia Roshan:** And on that point is the Disability Royal Commission accessible to everyone?.

**Tamara Weaver:** Yes, we've worked very hard to ensure the Commission is accessible for everyone. When people engage with us, we ensure all reasonable adjustments are made to provide a safe space for people to share their stories. Because that's important.

For example, we have interpreters available for people to talk to us in their preferred language, including Auslan. We have many different ways you can connect with us here at the Royal Commission, which could be by phone in person or online.

**Talia Roshan:** That's really fantastic. So you don't just have to do something in writing.

It can be in lots of different formats and mediums that are really accessible to a lot of different people. So why do you need people to share their experiences?

**Tamara Weaver:** We would like to hear from as many voices as we can to help inform our work. So it's really important. We understand the areas of concern for people, as well as hearing where the community thinks things might be working well.

So sharing your experience with us can help us to understand the extent of the problem. Learn more about the context in which abuse is more likely to occur. We can also understand the impacts on people with a disability and their families support people in our community. And it helps gather information relevant to our investigations and research program as well.

**Talia Roshan:** So without people sharing their experiences, it's really difficult for you to get a proper understanding or not you specifically, but for the Commission to really understand what is going on for people with disability in Australia.

**Tamara Weaver:** Absolutely. It's important to hear each and every one unique experiences as well, cause no one experiences the same.

**Talia Roshan:** Yeah. And how does the Commission keep the community up to date with their work?

**Tamara Weaver:** Yes, there's a few different ways. The community can stay up to date with how the Commission's progressing. We're] active on social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Our website is also updated regularly and this is a great way to understand more about the Commission and you can access our progress reports to the rev website as well. We have our connect newsletter that comes out fortnightly, and it's also a fantastic way that you can stay connected to the work that we're doing here at the Disability Royal Commission.

**Talia Roshan:** Just a point on that as well. We had spoken to someone from the Commission this week who had also mentioned that if people are not on the internet or they, you know, can't access the newsletter online that you will also organize for that to be sent via post. So people can also access the newsletter in, in many different formats as well

**Tamara Weaver:** yes, that's correct.

**Talia Roshan:** Great. And the Disability Royal Commission will finish up at the end of next year after running for just over four years. So what happens once the Disability Royal Commission ends?

**Tamara Weaver:** Yeah. So when we come to an end, we'll deliver a final report to the Australian government. And this has to be done by the 29th of September in 2023.

So that September next year in this report, the Royal Commission will recommend how to improve laws, policies, structures, and practices to enhance a more inclusive and just society for all.

**Talia Roshan:** And, Tamara one final question. This podcast is for people with disability and their family members. So what would be a key message, helping someone to engage with the Disability Royal Commission?

**Tamara Weaver:** Change starts with hearing your story. You know, hearing from people with a disability, their families support people, organizations, and the broader community. It helps the Royal Commission understand the extent and the impact of violence abuse, neglect, and exploitation against people. This will really help us to make recommendations to prevent it happening again.

**Talia Roshan:** Really, really powerful.

Thank you so much, Tamara. I really appreciate your time.

**Tamara Weaver:** No worries. Thanks so much Talia.

**Talia Roshan:** That was Tamara Weaver, director of community engagement at the Disability Royal Commission. In the next episode, find out the different ways you can tell your story to the Commission from people who've already done it.

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