

# Royal Commission

into violence, abuse, neglect  
and exploitation of people  
with disability

Information Sheet 3 | January 2020

## Communicating well during the Royal Commission

Below is a series of considerations to help maintain appropriate communication across internal and external audiences during the Disability Royal Commission. The content is not intended to be exhaustive or a replacement for existing communication strategies.

### General considerations

- Royal Commissions are difficult proceedings which may cause some people to behave defensively. Defensive or combative behaviour during Royal Commissions does not reflect well on witnesses or their organisations.
- Be aware that all communications including internal emails can be requested in a Notice to Produce and read by the Royal Commission.
- Severe penalties under the *Royal Commissions Act 1902* may apply for preventing someone from engaging with the Royal Commission. This [article](#) by law firm, Hall & Wilcox, provides detail.

### Supporting clients

Supporting people with disability is what our sector does. This may mean supporting people to contribute to the Royal Commission, or referring them to other services to support their contribution. Obstructing a contribution is an offence punishable by fines and/or imprisonment.

### Supporting staff

Royal Commissions can be difficult for staff: accounts at hearings as well as negative stories in the media can take an emotional toll, even for staff in organisations not directly involved. Consider how your organisation will support staff – for example, via an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

### Media

How organisations respond to negative press can impact their reputation. You may need to seek legal and/or crisis media advice. However, an overly legalistic, impersonal or scripted response could negatively impact public opinion.

# Royal Commission

into violence, abuse, neglect  
and exploitation of people  
with disability

Information Sheet 3 | January 2020

## Communicating within your organisation

- Organise regular briefings to keep staff at all levels informed about proceedings and help them understand news relating to the Royal Commission.
- Include the Royal Commission as a standing item on Board agendas — covering what you have learned during proceedings, your organisation's preparedness, potential risks and opportunities.
- Ensure you have a clear media policy setting out how media enquiries should be handled, and who has authority to speak to media.
- Staff may encounter negative social media comments on their personal accounts as well as being drawn to defend comments made about your organisation. Have clear guidelines on who can respond on behalf of your organisation and how staff should handle unwanted comments. Staff should also understand risks to client privacy.
- Create a Royal Commission guide for staff covering:
  - key messages, including how to respond to questions from clients and their families, or in conversation at a social setting
  - an internal point of contact for queries
  - where to find information about the Royal Commission, including how to participate
  - your organisation's media and social media policies
  - access to personal support (e.g. EAP or if called to appear as a witness)
- You may have staff who want to contribute to the Royal Commission – obstructing them is an offence; you should encourage them to use the [legal and advocacy services](#) available for them to do so.
- Ensure staff know that clients can contribute to the Royal Commission, know where to locate the supports available for clients to do so, and understand the penalties for impeding someone from doing so (*Royal Commissions Act 1902*).
- Implement training aimed at continuous learning and service quality improvement – such as NDS's [Zero Tolerance](#). An [interactive PDF](#) with easy access to the resources is also now available.

## Communicating with clients and families

- Regularly update clients and their families in plain English about the Royal Commission proceedings. Send regular plain-English updates, assisting them to understand Royal Commission news and implications, if any, for them.
- Explain how you will be communicating with clients and families, and what actions are available to them.

# Royal Commission

into violence, abuse, neglect  
and exploitation of people  
with disability

## Information Sheet 3 | January 2020

- Appoint a person to be the point of contact for any Royal Commission queries from clients and their families.
- Provide clients and families with information about how they can contribute to the Royal Commission and the supports available for them to do so.

### External communications

- As well as staff and clients, consider your organisation's external stakeholders when responding publicly. These may include corporate partners as well as government and the NDIA.
- Consider communicating directly with commercial partners about issues emerging from the Royal Commission and how your organisation is responding.
- Establish clear guidance about the roles and responsibilities of spokespeople in your organisation and how staff can refer questions they might receive from media.
- Appoint a single point of contact to communicate with the Royal Commission.
- Monitor Royal Commission related news, and follow NDS's Royal Commission alerts and hearing updates which provide overviews of themes as they emerge.
- If negative media exposure is anticipated, a crisis management plan may be required. Determine decision makers, spokespeople and their specific roles. Consider which professionals your organisation may contact for crisis media advice (see [NDS's expert panel](#)) and how you will communicate to stakeholders including clients, their families and staff.
- Ensure you understand the rules governing the hearings. There are instances where information revealed during a hearing cannot be published from proceedings – including for witnesses appearing anonymously and/or details subject to non-publication orders.
- Be aware of obligations to maintain individuals' privacy.
- Some service providers have publicly stated support for the Royal Commission on their website.

# Royal Commission

into violence, abuse, neglect  
and exploitation of people  
with disability

Information Sheet 3 | January 2020

## Royal Commission Assistance

Advocacy, counselling and legal services through external agencies are being funded for those engaging with the Royal Commission. NDS members may need to refer clients to these organisations for support in participating in the Royal Commission.

### Advocacy and counselling services

The Department of Social Services is providing free counselling and referral services, delivered by Blue Knot Foundation. The National Counselling and Referral Service can be contacted on **1800 421 468**, Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm AEDT and Saturday to Sunday 9am to 5pm AEDT. Further information on support services is available on the [DSS website](#).

Alternatively, 24/7 support services are also available through:

[Beyond Blue](#) – **1300 224 636**

[Lifeline](#) – **13 11 14**

### DRC Legal Service

The [DRC legal service](#) is a joint agency formed by National Legal Aid (NLA) and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) to provide information and advice to people who want to share their experiences with the Disability Royal Commission.

To receive legal information, assistance and referrals, free call **1800 771 800** between 9.15am and 5.15pm AEDT, Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays).

### Expert support

- Most legal firms on [NDS's Royal Commission panel](#) offer free, time-limited consultation.
- Media and crisis management firms on [NDS's Royal Commission panel](#) can assist in the preparation of key messages, media training and crisis management.

---

This information is provided as general information to members only. It does not take the place of formal legal advice and any member with concerns about any issue arising out of or related to the Royal Commission is encouraged to seek their own independent legal advice.