



Disability Royal Commission final report

This month, the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability will make important recommendations on reform, policy, and practice.

The Royal Commission has completed a comprehensive and independent review. Importantly, it has provided an opportunity for the voices and experiences of people with disability and their loved ones to be heard.

As a human rights-based organisation, Melba Support Services has strongly supported the work of the Disability Royal Commission.

Research compiled for the Royal Commission showed that over the course of their lifetime, about two-thirds of people with disability have reported some kind of violence - physical, sexual, intimate partner violence, emotional abuse and/or stalking by any perpetrator, which is significantly greater than just under half of people without disability.

The most recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare People with Disability in Australia report (2022) indicates:

- **1 in 4 (25% or 748,000) women with disability** have **experienced sexual violence** after the age of 15, compared with 15% (or 978,000) without disability.
- **1 in 14 (6.6% or 187,000) men with disability** have **experienced sexual violence** after the age of 15, compared with 3.9% (or 241,000) without disability.
- 2 in 5 (40% or 1.2 million) women with disability have experienced physical violence after the age of 15, compared with 26% (or 1.7 million) without disability.
- Almost half of men (47% or 1.3 million) with disability have experienced physical violence after the age of 15, compared with 38% (or 2.4 million) without disability.

This is an issue that impacts people with disability across the entire community – in homes, public places and institutions, and within disability services. As a society we need to stamp it out. At Melba Support Services we work hard to stamp out abuse where we find it.

The abuse and neglect of people with disability is completely shameful and totally unacceptable. We all have a responsibility to speak up and act! Melba has zero tolerance for any form of violence, abuse, neglect, or exploitation. This includes any violation of a person's human rights.

Melba and the Commission

In February, Melba CEO Hayley Dean participated in a public hearing of the Royal Commission. Hayley shared how we operationalise human rights across our governance, service delivery, organisational culture, and through our zero-tolerance approach to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of people with disability.

Melba has long operated from the basis that people's human rights are paramount and must be the foundation for all service provision. We must be ever-vigilant and continue to work hard to uphold people's human rights and prevent all forms of abuse. This has been further strengthened through the Royal Commission and its work.

Zero tolerance of abuse

Our human rights practice through *The Melba Way* embeds our human rights approaches, such as Positive Behaviour Support and Person-Centred Active Support. Critical to these approaches is zero tolerance of violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation. We work hard to ensure a positive speaking up culture and to educate in human rights. Our practice also includes:

- Cyclical use of a Human rights checklist to ensure that our practice is consistently focused on upholding people's human rights
- Planning with people to ensure that their rights are translated to practice and that we support them to achieve their personal outcomes
- A team of practice coaches who work alongside support workers
- Our Positive Behaviour Support practice, which is trauma-informed and of the highest standard in supporting people who use behaviours of protest to communicate an unmet need or want
- A 24/7 practice hotline for support staff

Importantly, Melba actively promotes a speaking-up culture. Wherever and whenever incidents are reported or uncovered, we act quickly and decisively to ensure people are safe and to investigate. We have a strong after-hours response service that enables us to respond 24/7, 365 days of the year. We actively support people to speak up, providing a raft of mechanisms. This can be through:

- Our online incident reporting system, with direct reporting to the CEO for any incidents that abuse a person's rights
- Engagement of a third-party protective disclosure (whistleblower) service
- A welcoming of complaints approach whereby any member of the Melba Community is supported in making a complaint to whomever they are most comfortable. This can be directly to the CEO.
- Provision of independent advocacy to support a complaint

Our approach is underpinned by the Victorian Charter of Human Rights. We are accountable to the people we support who purchase our services – including through the Board’s Practice Quality and Safeguards Committee which is attended by people we support who are members of our human rights/self-advocacy group at Melba, ARROW

Melba has monitored the Royal Commission throughout the past four years. Our Royal Commission Working Group discusses the Public Hearings and interim reports. We have been reviewing the recommendations throughout to ensure we are aligned. Learnings have been actioned to further strengthen our approach in upholding people's rights and preventing all forms of abuse.

We look forward to the Royal Commission’s final report and hope that its recommendations also assist the wider sector to implement a human rights approach to service delivery and governance.

September 2023

For media enquiries, contact communications@melbasupport.com.au