



Abundant
Grace
Liberating
Hope

Uniting Church in Australia
Assembly

President: Dr Deidre Palmer

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Pastoral Letter – Sharing your stories with the Disability Royal Commission

To all congregations and faith communities

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In April 2019, the Commonwealth Government established the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, often referred to as the Disability Royal Commission.

The Uniting Church welcomed the establishment of the Disability Royal Commission and expressed hope that it would shine a light on inappropriate treatment of people with disability and lay out a path to help prevent violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation against people with disability.

The 15th Assembly of the Uniting Church affirmed that all people are created in the image of God and along with all members, the faith, gifts, hopes and dreams of people with disability are to be valued and honoured. The Uniting Church seeks to ensure that people with disability have their hopes and rights realised.

To understand the prevalence and toll of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability, it is essential the Disability Royal Commission hear directly from people with disability, their families, and support people. There are numerous ways individuals can share their experiences with the Commission. They can [make a submission](#) to the Commission, [request a private session](#) with a Commissioner or respond to the Commission's [issues papers](#) on specific topics. Responses and submissions can be made in writing, over the phone, or via a recording. Details for contacting the Commission can be found at <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/contact>

Legal, emotional and advocacy support services are available to people engaging with the Disability Royal Commission. More information about these support services can be found at <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/counselling-and-support>

The current global pandemic has disproportionately affected people with disability in our communities. It has exacerbated existing inequalities and highlighted the continued exclusion of people with disability from matters that affect their lives.

During the pandemic, the Disability Royal Commission released its [Issues Paper on Emergency planning and response](#). The Issues Paper is available in multiple formats, including Easy Read and an Auslan video. The Commission is seeking information on how people with disability can be included in emergency planning and response in Australia and how to eliminate the risk of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation

of people with disability during an emergency. The Uniting Church's National Task Group for the Disability Royal Commission recently met and agreed to prepare a national response to the Issues Paper. If you would like to contribute information for the Church's response, you can email ucaremail@nat.unitingcare.org.au with *Emergency planning and response issues paper* as the subject line.

The summer bushfires and pandemic are provided as examples of recent emergencies in the Issues Paper. Experiences of assisting people with disability during and after the fires as well as during the pandemic are welcomed. Examples of additional assistance that could be provided to keep people with disability safe and well and free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation during emergencies are also sought.

As restrictions begin to ease around the country, the Uniting Church continues in its commitment to shape and advocate for a world in which all people can flourish. Our recovery must include a significant focus on those who have suffered the most. Our success will be measured by the ways we become a society in which no one is left behind.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to reflect on our past practices and contemplate how we can faithfully embody a community life that is accessible to all people in its theology and ministry praxis. This could include the ongoing offering of virtual Church services for people isolated from physical places of worship, and the offering of pastoral support and assistance to those who are most vulnerable.

People with disability, their families and carers know the best ways to ensure people with disability are included and their input should be sought on how we can best approach recovery together.

The Uniting Church is committed to ensuring that within its own life people with disability are valued and respected for who they are and is committed to contributing to a just and inclusive society for all God's people.

Yours in Christ,

Deidre Palmer



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