

Disability Royal Commission: Summary of second public hearing

Daily summary from the Disability Royal Commission hearings

The second round of hearings in Melbourne, focused on homes and living for people with disability in Victoria, particularly people in group homes.

The Royal Commission explored topics such as choice of where and with whom people live, how the group home model emerged, causes of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of residents of Victorian group homes and the effectiveness of laws, policies and government agencies to prevent these, and alternatives to the group home model.

The Commissioners heard from a variety of witnesses including people with disability who access services and family members, human rights lawyers, doctors and academics, service providers and advocacy and policy workers.

Day 1 The Royal Commissioner began by hearing experiences from four people who are living (or had lived) in group homes. Each witness related incidents of violence, abuse, neglect and/or exploitation. Strong themes included a lack of individualisation of support and experiences of struggling against an unresponsive system.

Day 2 The Royal Commission heard from several academics with a focus on the theoretical frameworks surrounding group homes, as well as monitoring of their operations.

Topics explored included the history of deinstitutionalisation in Australia and overseas, the pros and cons of the group home model, affordable housing, restrictive practices on people with disability, a framework for what being safe means to people with disability.

Day 3 The Royal Commission today focused on incident reporting, and the effectiveness of the group home model and its relationship with abuse as well as themes of advocacy, governance and policy. Giving evidence today were advocates from VALID, Disability Services Commissioner and DHHS Executive Director.

Day 4 The Royal Commission heard from Yooralla CEO, Dr Sherene Devanesen whom provided evidence on questions related to governance of disability organisations.

The Commission explored organisational responses to incidents and complaints, using the crimes of ex-Yooralla staff as example case studies. The discussion raised questions relevant to all service providers including how organisations respond to incidents and complaints, response to unsubstantiated incidents and how people with disability, families and carers are included in assessments of the quality and suitability of supports being provided.

Day 5 The Royal Commission explored group homes through the lens of individual experiences, research and the UN Convention. A panel made up of advocates and doctors discussed their concerns about the group home model and the need for a greater range and quantity of affordable and accessible housing options.