

# Written Submission on the Draft Accessibility Strategy

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Submitted To:  
Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse,  
Neglect, and Exploitation of People with  
Disability

16 September 2019

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## About Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN)

QDN is an organisation of, for, and with people with disability and the organisation's motto is "nothing about us without us." QDN operates a state-wide network of members who provide information, feedback and views from a consumer perspective to inform systemic policy feedback to Government and peak bodies. QDN also provides information and referral support to people with disability.

QDN has over 2000 members and supporters across Queensland who provide QDN with the perspectives of people with disability.

## QDN Response

QDN welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (the Royal Commission) with regards to the Accessibility Strategy. QDN welcomed the establishment of the Royal Commission on 4 April 2019 to inquire into:

- what should be done to prevent and better protect people with disability from experiencing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation
- what should be done to encourage reporting of, and effective investigation of, this conduct
- what should be done to promote a more inclusive society that supports the independence of people with disability and their right to live free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Queenslanders with disability want to participate in the Royal Commission and are pleased to see the development of an Accessibility Strategy, and believe that people with disability should be part of the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategy if people are to be at the centre of this inquiry. QDN believes it is important that given the trauma and secondary victimization that people may experience in giving evidence and telling their story, that every person with disability who needs support to do so is afforded it, in a way that meets their individual needs. Given the diversity of people with disability, it is essential that this support is provided in a trauma informed approach that can work with each individual and their diverse needs.

For Queenslanders with disability, it is a time of transformational change that involves the introduction of a range of Commissions, the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, the Queensland Human Rights Commission, and the Royal Commission. QDN members have raised the challenges they are experiencing in navigating all of these new systems and Commissions. It is critical that for people with disability and the people in their lives either as informal or formal supports are provided with effective support in the process of gathering

the evidence or what they need to participate in the hearings. The hearings have commenced at the time of putting forward this submission, however it is unclear that the support mechanisms are for individuals who are wanting to prepare or give evidence. It is critical that this process does not deliver secondary victimisation to people with disability, and that there are clear pathways for people to access the support they need to gather evidence, prepare for providing their story and in giving evidence. To date, this information is not clear and the plan for how this will happen has not been shared.

QDN acknowledges the Accessibility Strategy and its approach to identifying key cohorts including people with disability from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, people with disability from Multicultural and Culturally Linguistically Diverse backgrounds and people with disability from LGBTIQ+ communities.

Research shows that women with disability experience higher rates of abuse, victimisation and exploitation and this strategy does not address women specifically and gendered bias of violence and abuse that women with disability experience. The strategy also does not mention sexual violence specifically, and given the again the higher rates of sexual violence and sexual abuse experienced by people with disability, it is critical that this is addressed in the strategy.

Additionally, there are many people with disability who experience additional barriers to their participation and engagement because of their disability, and particularly people with intellectual disability, people with psychosocial disability and people with impaired decision making capacity where they have a formally appointed guardian. There are also a cohort of people with disability who are disengaged from services and systems, and active targeted engagement needs to occur with vulnerable people who can often be hard for systems to engage with. This includes people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, exiting child safety, juvenile justice, and criminal justice systems. There are also people with disability who live in closed systems where it may be challenging for them to seek support, to know where to go for support and how they can speak up. Supported decision making is another important element for people throughout this process and how this will be implemented for people with disability will be critical in delivering success.

Aside from the issues for participation and engagement related to the places that people live in, there are people with disability who are marginalised because of geographically where they live and the lack of infrastructure available in their communities that will enable their participation. This will rely on access to technology and physical visits to broad range of communities. Queensland has a unique geography and it is important that no matter where someone lives, they are afforded the support they need and opportunity to know about the Royal Commission, what it is, how to access it and give their evidence.

Research shows that the digital literacy and digital access for people with disability is lower than the general population. Australians with disability (classified in the ADII as receiving disability support pensions) have a low level of digital inclusion compared to other Australians.<sup>1</sup> Queensland has challenges for digital access in rural and remote areas, and this needs to be specifically considered in the approaches that are in place for people with disability with regards to this Royal Commission. Similarly, people with disability's knowledge and skills to be able to engage with technology needs to be considered in how people are given support and how they can engage and participate.

QDN also acknowledges the importance of access to advocacy and support for people with disability in this process. Existing advocacy services have a strong capability and reach to work with people with disability, and long history of working alongside people about their rights and access to justice. QDN understands that advocacy services are 'at capacity' and it is important that targeted investment is made in funding to advocacy services to deliver this support through additional resources. It is also critical that advocacy organisations are not subsumed in demand for support for people for the Royal Commission at the expense of the services being able to deliver on advocacy to people with disability for issues that sit across NDIS and broader issues related to mainstream services like health, housing, transport, employment, education. From the experience when additional funding was provided to advocacy services to support people through the National Disability Insurance Scheme, because of the high demand for services, this resulted in advocacy services establishing waiting lists. It is important for people with disability to be able to access the support they need, and therefore the approach needs to be multifaceted, funded appropriately to meet demand, and delivered by professionals with experience in trauma informed practice and also gathering evidence available to support individuals.

QDN also acknowledges that there is a rich tapestry of organisations who are not funded through National Disability Advocacy Program across the country that have established relationships with people with disability, particularly people with disability who are vulnerable and marginalised who may not engage well with new workers or services who will need support to be able to tell their stories and prepare their evidence. It is important that people with disability can access the support for this process through trusted relationships, and it is important that the Accessibility Strategy can respond to this.

QDN acknowledges that engagement with a diverse range of people with disability needs to be built on the foundations of respect, and the importance of relationships are critical,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Australian-digital-inclusion-index-2018.pdf>

particularly how this is done respectfully with people with disability from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

Trauma informed practice is key to supporting people with disability and it is critical that this is delivered by skilled and practiced workers to ensure that people do not experience secondary victimisation and that the Royal Commission can deliver on the intended outcomes for people with disability.

QDN acknowledges the importance of this Royal Commission for people with disability, and the criticality of delivering an inclusive and accessible process, where individuals are well supported to tell their story and have their experiences heard. Key to this is the plan to deliver on accessibility. QDN appreciates the opportunity to put forward this submission, and will work to raise key issues to ensure QDN members and Queenslanders with disability have the information and support they need should they choose to participate in the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of people with disability.