

Queensland Government submission to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability

December 2022



Queensland Government submission to the Disability Royal Commission

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1 Executive summary

The Queensland Government applauds the *Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability* (Disability Royal Commission) for its significant and valuable investigation, rigour and dedication to upholding and championing a better future and equitable rights for people with disability, their families, carers and communities. The work of the Disability Royal Commission will be historic, and lifechanging for all Australians, and Australian communities.

This submission outlines Queensland's vision for inclusive, thriving communities where people with disability can prosper, and provides insight into Queensland's unique geographical and social environment and the services and approaches taken to provide high-quality disability capable services that empower and support people with disability.

The submission includes a useful summary for the Disability Royal Commission's consideration of how Queensland is:

Promoting inclusivity and the rights of people with disability in Queensland through the implementation of a rights-based framework

The Queensland Government is committed to celebrating the value that people with disability bring to our community and to ensuring that people with disability can live their best lives. Collectively, *Queensland's Disability Plan 2022–27: Together, a better Queensland*, departmental Disability Service Plans that implement Queensland's commitment to the *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031* and a clear rights-based legislative framework, including Queensland's *Human Rights Act 2019*, provide the foundation for a human rights model of disability to thrive.

Ensuring people with disability can access safe and high-quality services that meet their needs, complemented by an efficient and fully funded NDIS

Access to disability capable mainstream services (as well as access to interface, connection and capacity building supports), that intersect effectively with specialist disability supports, are critical to people with disability, their families and carers educational attainment, economic participation, health and wellbeing and engagement in social and cultural pursuits. As evidenced by the Disability Royal Commission, barriers to these services have critical impacts for people with disability and this submission outlines key initiatives and programs that the Queensland Government has implemented, or is piloting, to strengthen the disability capability of mainstream services across the areas of education, justice, transport, housing and employment.

Providing contemporary safeguards to prevent the abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability

Noting the intersecting and co-regulatory approach between Queensland and the Commonwealth under the *NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework* and its implementation, this submission outlines the important role safeguards hold and examples of the range of forms safeguards take in Queensland, including from legislative mechanisms that provide a systemic framework for people with impaired decision-making capacity, through to targeted supports to assist people with disability utilise and navigate the health system.

Queensland recognises and values the findings and issues emerging from the Disability Royal Commission and confirms its commitment to work with the Commonwealth and other state and territory Governments on issues that require national leadership.

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2 Queensland context

As at 31 March 2022, Queensland's estimated resident population was 5,296,098 people, reflecting 20.5 per cent of the national population.¹

In Queensland, roughly 17 per cent of residents identify as living with a disability. In 2022, this equates to more than 900,000 people.² The prevalence of disability increases with age, with approximately 42.2 per cent of Queenslanders aged 65 years and over identifying as living with a disability.³

Currently, more than 110,000 Queenslanders (approximately 2 per cent) with disability are receiving National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) supports.⁴ Of these, 9.8 per cent identify as First Nations peoples⁵ and 5.4 per cent are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.⁶ Respectively, this compares to 7.2 per cent and 9 per cent, nationally.⁷ By June 2030, over 180,000 Queenslanders are anticipated to be participating in the NDIS.⁸

Queensland is a large, decentralised state and its rural and remote communities are not homogenous — they vary in population size, distance to major centres, accessibility, and in the range and quantity of services that are locally available. In terms of geographical area, the vast majority of Queensland is categorised as rural and remote. Over 115,000, or roughly 13 per cent of Queenslanders with disability, live in outer regional, remote and very remote areas.

As examined by the Queensland Productivity Commission inquiry into the NDIS market in Queensland,⁹ and numerous other reviews and environmental scans, there are significant and shared challenges in rural and remote markets affecting the ability of people with disability to access appropriate supports, including specialist NDIS supports, and providers' capacity to supply services. Challenges include, for example, limited service provision, limited transport options, and workforce attraction and retention issues.¹⁰ For NDIS participants, this contributes to low NDIS plan utilisation and reduced support options.

When planning, funding and delivering mainstream and specialist support services in Queensland, the diverse geographic and social characteristics of the Queensland landscape are a critical consideration in a human rights jurisdiction, and rights-based model of service delivery. Queensland's unique

¹ Queensland Government Statistician's Office, *Population growth, Queensland* (Report, March 2022).

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020). Table 1.1 Persons with disability, by age and sex-2012, 2015 and 2018, estimate. *44300D003_2018 Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Queensland, 2018*. Retrieved from <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release#data-download>

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020). Table 1.1 Persons with disability by age and sex-2012, 2015 and 2018, proportion of persons. *44300D003_2018 Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Queensland, 2018*. Retrieved from <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release#data-download>

⁴ National Disability Insurance Agency (2022). Queensland. *The NDIS in each state*. Retrieved from <https://www.ndis.gov.au/understanding/ndis-each-state/queensland>

⁵ National Disability Insurance Agency (2022). Data downloads. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants. *Data current as at: 31 March 2022*. Retrieved from <https://data.ndis.gov.au/data-downloads#participant>

⁶ National Disability Insurance Agency (2022). Data downloads. Culturally and linguistically diverse participants. *Data current as at: 31 March 2022*. Retrieved from <https://data.ndis.gov.au/data-downloads#participant>

⁷ National Disability Insurance Agency (2022) Quarterly Report, data current as at 31 March 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.ndis.gov.au/media/4465/download?attachment>

⁸ National Disability Insurance Agency (2021). *Annual Financial Sustainability Report 2020-21*. Date Accessed July 29, 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/publications/annual-financial-sustainability-reports>

⁹ Queensland Productivity Commission (2021). *The NDIS Market in Queensland Final Report*. Date Accessed 10 October 2022. Retrieved from <https://s3.treasury.qld.gov.au/files/NDIS-final-report-volume-1.pdf>

¹⁰ Queensland Productivity Commission (2021). *The NDIS Market in Queensland Final Report*. Date Accessed 10 October 2022. Retrieved from <https://s3.treasury.qld.gov.au/files/NDIS-final-report-volume-1.pdf> [page xliiv-xliv].

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characteristics are a driving force for the Queensland Government to be future-focused and innovative in order to create thriving and inclusive communities.

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3 Vision for people with disability in Queensland

The Queensland Government celebrates the unique aspects of Queensland's peoples, regions and diversity. We are committed to making sure each and every Queenslanders with disability has what they need to live their best lives as equal citizens.

Queensland aims to:

- foster inclusive communities where all Queenslanders have their rights protected and are enabled to thrive
- ensure Queenslanders living with disability can access safe and high-quality services that meet their needs
- put in place contemporary safeguards to prevent violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

The Queensland Government's programs and legislative and policy frameworks promote inclusive communities and provide access to a range of services and safeguards. We are committed to continuous improvement on the path to achieving these aims.

This submission provides a snapshot of the existing programs and legislative and policy frameworks, along with the work that is underway to improve services for people with disability.

Continuous improvement is also demonstrated through implementation of *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031*, *Queensland's Disability Plan 2022-27: Together, a better Queensland*¹¹ and Queensland Government departmental Disability Service Plans.

3.1 Queensland is committed to working in partnership with Commonwealth, state and territory governments to achieve an inclusive Australian society

The Queensland Government recognises that to achieve inclusive communities where people with disability reach their full potential as equal members of the community, all levels of government must work together.

Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 is the national disability policy framework that establishes all Australian governments' commitments to improving the lives of people with disability in Australia over the next 10 years. As a signatory, it affirms the Queensland Government's commitment to protecting and promoting the human rights of people with disability.

The Queensland Government is committed to furthering the objectives of Australia's Disability Strategy and is leading a range of actions across all the Australia's Disability Strategy Targeted Action Plans. The five initial Targeted Action Plans have a focus on improving outcomes in relation to community attitudes; safety; early childhood; emergency management; and employment.

¹¹ Further information is available at: [Queensland's Disability Plan - Queensland's Disability Plan \(dsdsatsip.qld.gov.au\)](https://www.qld.gov.au/disability/queensland-disability-plan)

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It is important to Queensland that, similar to the operation of the NDIS, there is a coordinated approach to the implementation of Australia's Disability Strategy so that all Australians living with disability, across all communities, are empowered as valuable and active members of society, supported by accessible high-quality supports and safeguards, where required.

It is anticipated that over the life of Australia's Disability Strategy, new Targeted Action Plans will be developed to ensure governments keep pace with best practice and innovative approaches to achieving the objectives of Australia's Disability Strategy. As outlined in Australia's Disability Strategy, future updates will be shaped by the expert findings of the historic Disability Royal Commission.

3.2 Queensland's Disability Plan 2022-27: Together, a better Queensland

Released on 30 November 2022, *Queensland's Disability Plan 2022–27: Together, a better Queensland* (Queensland's Disability Plan) is critical to achieving Queensland's vision for people with disability. It is a five-year plan to improve access to education, employment, appropriate housing for people with disability and advance a society without barrier or stigma. Queensland's Disability Plan is the primary mechanism to give effect to Queensland's commitments under Australia's Disability Strategy and reaffirms the Queensland Government's commitment to achieving an inclusive, thriving Queensland.

Implementation of Queensland's Disability Plan will occur through every Queensland Government department's individual Disability Service Plan. Disability Service Plans are required to be developed, implemented and published by all Queensland Government departments under the *Disability Services Act 2006* (Qld). This recognises the need for coordinated, but targeted approaches to ensuring that Queensland Government services, supports and infrastructure are accessible, and empowering all Queenslanders to live their best lives. Queensland Government departments produce and publish progress reports on actions taken under individual Disability Service Plans to ensure that Queensland is continuously improving and that mainstream services are disability capable.

The Queensland Disability Advisory Council,¹² established under the *Disability Services Act 2006* (Qld), will play an important role in guiding the delivery of actions under Queensland's Disability Plan by providing advice on real world implications of actions, policies and programs and understanding service gaps that need to be linked to better support people with disability in Queensland. The Queensland Disability Advisory Council comprises mainly people with lived experience of disability and is a valuable mechanism to elevate the views and experiences of people with disability.

Queensland's Disability Plan is a call to action across all Queensland Government departments. It also seeks to extend the commitment to an inclusive Queensland beyond government by encouraging and setting a clear direction for all levels of government, businesses, industries, organisations and communities to work collectively and with people with disability to improve access and inclusion.

¹² Further information is available at: <https://www.dsdsatsip.qld.gov.au/our-work/disability-services/disability-connect-queensland/queensland-disability-advisory-council>

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4 Inclusive communities: Queensland is committed to fostering inclusive communities where all Queenslanders have their rights protected and are enabled to thrive

The Queensland Government is committed to upholding and celebrating the value that people with disability bring to our community, ensuring that people with disability can live their best lives in an integrated and thriving Queensland, and understanding the unique needs of those who may experience intersectional barriers. In recognition of this, it is essential that the structures and practices of all governments are effective in facilitating the inclusive participation of all Queenslanders, including people with disability, no matter their location, age, gender, sexuality or cultural background.

The Queensland Government has demonstrated its commitment to promoting diversity and upholding the human rights of all people with disability by, along with all other states and territories, co-funding the NDIS, signing and implementing Australia's Disability Strategy, and effecting legislative, policy and service delivery frameworks that lay the foundations for an inclusive and accessible society through a human rights-based approach.

Outlined below are examples of initiatives undertaken by the Queensland Government that seek to ensure people with disability are empowered to participate as equal members of their communities and have their rights protected, promoted and upheld.

4.1 Queensland's Communities 2032 plan

*Communities 2032*¹³ is the Queensland Government's long-term plan to build the communities that will support all Queenslanders to connect, participate, contribute and thrive. The plan is founded on three key principles of: equity, access and participation; human rights and empowerment; and place-based and community leadership.

These principles recognise that no two communities are the same and that programs and services are most effective when designed and delivered in place. The principles ensure that the actions under *Communities 2032* are grounded in human rights-based approaches that recognise that people with disability are part of a diverse population and have the same rights as all Queenslanders. *Communities 2032* principles and actions will enable communities and individuals to recognise and harness existing strengths and expertise, and challenge barriers to full social, economic and cultural participation.

The destinations supported by *Communities 2032* include:

- *Vibrant, inclusive and cohesive communities* – including by supporting diversity in the workforce through targeted initiatives that encourage employers to increase workforce participation of under-represented groups; funding the Queensland Disability Peak and Representatives Bodies and implementing Australia's Disability Strategy.

¹³ Further information is available at: <https://www.chde.qld.gov.au/about/strategy/communities2032>

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- *Healthy, accessible and liveable communities* – including by delivering public infrastructure that promotes mobility, accessible and social inclusion; developing a Queensland Equity Framework to support Queensland Government and non-government structures to address the causes of inequity and embed person-centred responses to addressing social isolation and loneliness within mainstream services.
- *Safe and resilient communities* – including by strengthening the prevention of, and response to, domestic, family and sexual violence in Queensland and promoting safety in our communities by encouraging stronger social and community connections.
- *Supported and responsive communities* – including by strengthening the capacity and capability of the community and social services sector by providing greater funding certainty through longer-term contracts where possible; investigate opportunities to co-locate government and non-government services and for commissioning services in place.

Queensland's vision for the future is aspirational, and requires concerted commitment by all levels of government, community and business to be achieved. Queensland will build on the expert advice of the Disability Royal Commission, and the outcomes of Australia's Disability Strategy, *Communities 2032* and other initiatives to continuously review, adapt and prioritise people with disability to ensure that the Queensland of the future is built upon lessons of today.

4.2 Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games (*Brisbane 2032*)

Integral to providing inclusive, accessible communities, is ensuring that people with disability can fully participate in social, recreational, sporting, religious and cultural life. In order to achieve this, accessibility needs to be incorporated in the design of services, systems and infrastructure to avoid structural and social barriers arising, and potentially entrenching existing barriers.

The social, developmental and health benefits of sport for all people, including people with disability, are well evidenced, and participation in community activities such as sport, and presence in public spaces, promote inclusion of and positive community attitudes towards people with disability. *Brisbane 2032*¹⁴ affords Queensland a transformational platform to reinvigorate existing systems and infrastructure, and develop new infrastructure where required, to embrace inclusion, provide public spaces and precincts that are universally designed and promote a society that is inclusive for all, regardless of age, background, gender or ability.

2023 will be the 'Year of Accessible Tourism' in Queensland and is the foundation for improving the accessibility of travel and tourism in Queensland in the lead up to *Brisbane 2032*. The Year of Accessible Tourism is supported by a \$12 million investment to maximise the accessibility of Queensland for people of all abilities by investing in infrastructure accessibility, technology, tourism business capability and awareness of businesses to become more accessible.

As hosts of *Brisbane 2032*, the Queensland Government will work with Games Delivery Partners to leverage the unique social and economic opportunities *Brisbane 2032* presents to become global leaders

¹⁴ Further information is available at: <https://www.qld.gov.au/about/Brisbane2032>

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of vibrant, authentic and accessible visitor experiences, and drive improvements for all Queenslanders with disability, including through:

- Establishing community programs to encourage greater awareness and sport participation, with the aim of engaging another 500,000 people with disability in sport by 2032.
- Delivering the Brisbane Indoor Sport Centre, which will support people with disability to achieve life goals through active sport participation and community programs.
- Partnering with governments, human rights and anti-discrimination agencies to use *Brisbane 2032* to drive activities to break down societal stereotypes and biases.
- Working with governments to achieve ambitious employment goals, similar to those of London 2012, post-2032, by creating new and innovative jobs for people with disability and encouraging business owners to embrace inclusion.
- Partnering with Sport Australia and the Australian Institute of Sport to ensure more equitable funding for para-sports and para-athletes and establish Paralympic ambassadors and local champions in the community to enhance the *Brisbane 2032* experience for people with disability.
- Extending and accelerating Queensland's 40-year accessibility and inclusivity journey by continuing programmes to provide disability-compliant public transport facilities, while creating new public places and precincts universally designed for the whole community.
- Providing accessible and inclusive cultural programming that provides participation and engagement opportunities for people with disability.

4.3 Promoting and protecting the rights of all Queenslanders as a human rights jurisdiction

In 2020, Queensland implemented the *Human Rights Act 2019* (Qld) and commenced Queensland as a human rights jurisdiction. The development and implementation of the *Human Rights Act 2019* (Qld) was a historical turning point for Queensland, demonstrating Queensland's recognition and commitment to promoting the inherent dignity and rights of all persons in Queensland, including people with disability.

The *Human Rights Act 2019* (Qld) requires each arm of the Queensland Government, including Parliament, courts and tribunals and public entities, to uphold, act and make decisions that are compatible with 23 human rights. In effect, it provides certainty to all Queenslanders that their rights are to be limited only where it is reasonable and justifiable, based on the notions of equality, human dignity and freedom.

The *Human Rights Act 2019* (Qld) is also a practical legislative vehicle that gives effect locally to Australia's international obligations under, for example, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, and *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

The legislative framework provides the foundation for the operation of a human rights model of service delivery and inclusive communities, particularly through the establishment that every person in the Queensland community has a right to take part in public life without discrimination (section 23), and be free from torture and cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment (section 17).

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It also makes clear the distinct cultural rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (section 28) and the rights of all people, no matter their cultural, religious, racial or linguistic background, to enjoy their culture, declare and practise their religion, and use their language (section 27).

4.4 Ensuring Queenslanders are free from unfair discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity

The *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld) establishes Queensland's ongoing commitment to promoting equality of opportunity for all Queenslanders and provides protections from unfair discrimination, sexual harassment, and other objectionable conduct on the basis of disability.

The *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld) is in place to breakdown barriers that prevent the full participation of people with disability as equal members of the Queensland community by ensuring employment, education, and community settings are inclusive and accessible to all.

To strengthen human rights in Queensland and the application of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld), the Queensland Human Rights Commission is established under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld) and provides an expert dispute resolution service for discrimination, human rights, sexual harassment and vilification complaints.

Despite the existence of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld), discrimination against people with disability can still occur. To further ensure Queensland's anti-discrimination framework is effective in protecting and promoting equality and non-discrimination to the greatest extent possible, the Queensland Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence sought the Queensland Human Rights Commission to undertake a review of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld).

The Queensland Human Rights Commission's report, *Building belonging: Review of Queensland's Anti-Discrimination Act 1991*, was tabled in the Queensland Legislative Assembly on 1 September 2022 and sets out 122 recommendations for proposed reform. As outlined in its interim response to the report, the Queensland Government is committed to ensuring its anti-discrimination legislative framework reflects contemporary values, standards of behaviour and expectations of equality. The Queensland Government is carefully considering the report's findings and recommendations and will release a response to the report.

4.5 Supports to ensure people with disability and their representatives are empowered to advocate for the issues that are important to them, or are affecting their lives

The Queensland Government recognises and values the critical role that disability advocacy holds in safeguarding the rights and interests of people with disability. Advocacy, and a person's access to individual, systemic or self-advocacy, enables people to participate in decisions and processes which advance their wellbeing, wishes and ultimately, create an inclusive society where people with disability can participate equally in the community.

The Queensland Government administers the Queensland Disability Advocacy Program, which supports organisations to offer disability advocacy to Queenslanders with disability, their carers and families. Supports, funding and benefits of the Queensland Disability Advocacy Program include:

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- *Queensland Disability Advocacy Program*¹⁵: \$5.9 million provided over 1 January 2022 through to 30 June 2023, enabling 11 organisations, with a priority on tailored support for children, First Nations peoples and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The Queensland Disability Advocacy Program provides for services to assist a person with disability, their family members and carers to understand their rights and make informed decisions; navigate the NDIS and mainstream services and identify gaps in services or needs and identify and address discrimination and unfair treatment.
- *Pathways*¹⁶: In 2022, the Queensland Government's newly designed Disability Advocacy Program commenced with Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion appointed as the inaugural Principal Advocate. Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion operates a central hub, *Pathways*, to assess need, maintain a consistently high level of advocacy practice across Queensland and identify and escalate any systemic issues. In this role, Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion provides a leadership role and a new single point of contact for disability advocacy.
- *Queensland Disability Peak and Representative Bodies Program 2022–2025*: \$4.2 million funded over 3 years to 9 services to deliver statewide accessible and disability-specific information and referral services to people with disability, their families and carers and promote community awareness. These organisations also provide expert advice and feedback to government on a range of matters impacting people with disability and unpaid carers. At the centre of the Disability Peak and Representative Bodies Program is the Queensland executive disability peak body. The body provides an overarching governance and coordination role for all funded peak bodies. They also provide sector-wide advice and feedback to government on key systemic disability issues and other initiatives to support Queenslanders with disability and unpaid carers. Queenslanders with Disability Network is currently funded by the Queensland Government as the executive disability peak body. Further funding will be allocated for peak and representative bodies to support First Nations people with disability, psychosocial disability, employment and economic participation and disability sector capacity.

The Queensland Government recognises that advocacy is a shared responsibility between the Commonwealth and all states and territories. The operation of individual state and territory advocacy frameworks is insufficient to address need, and advocacy services across jurisdictions should complement each other and enable accessible, efficient advocacy supports. The Queensland Government is supporting the Commonwealth and other states and territories in the development of the National Disability Advocacy Framework to ensure there is access to advocacy services for all people with disability nation-wide. The National Disability Advocacy Framework will allow governments to work towards the alignment of advocacy services and standards to improve outcomes and access for people with disability.

Separately, and in addition to Queensland's Disability Advocacy Program, the Public Advocate (established under the *Guardianship and Administration Act 2000* (Qld)) advocates at a systemic level to influence the design, development, implementation and reform of legislation, policies, programs, and

¹⁵ Further information is available at: <https://www.qld.gov.au/disability/legal-and-rights/advocacy#:~:text=The%20Queensland%20Disability%20Advocacy%20Program,to%20understand%20their%20rights>

¹⁶ Further information is available at: <https://www.qld.gov.au/disability/legal-and-rights/advocacy#:~:text=The%20Queensland%20Disability%20Advocacy%20Program,to%20understand%20their%20rights>

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practices for adults with impaired capacity. In addition, the Public Guardian (established under the *Public Guardian Act 2014* (Qld)) promotes and protects the rights and interests of adults with impaired capacity and children and young people in the child protection system through its guardianship, investigations and community visiting services.

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5 Access to services: Ensuring Queenslanders with disability can access safe and high-quality services that meet their needs

The Queensland Government provides mainstream supports and services to all Queenslanders. These supports include hospital and health services, including mental health services; early childhood and education; transport; housing and community infrastructure; justice services; and child protection and family supports. Specialist disability supports are provided through the NDIS, and Queensland, as a co-funder, has committed to an ongoing fixed full scheme contribution. For 2022–23, this contribution will be \$2.3016 billion.

It is noted that the NDIS is not the only source of disability supports for people with disability in Queensland. Mainstream service systems deliver mainstream supports and services that are accessible to people with disability as well as some disability supports, for example, supports for children and young people with disability in schools.

In addition to Queensland's commitment to the NDIS and the delivery of disability capable mainstream services, the Queensland Government also delivers specific specialist disability supports through the Forensic Disability Service System and the Continuity of Support program. The Forensic Disability Service System supports adults with an intellectual disability subject to a forensic order made by the Mental Health Court. Adults subject to an order are supported in the community, or in a dedicated service, subject to a person's needs and conditions of the order. The Continuity of Support program is delivered by the Commonwealth and all states and territories. Queensland's Continuity of Support program provides specialist disability supports to people who received these supports prior to the NDIS, either funded or delivered by the Queensland Government, however, on commencement of the NDIS did not meet the access criteria of the scheme.

The Queensland Government recognises the importance of delivering safe, high-quality disability capable mainstream services to all Queenslanders, which complement where required, effective specialist disability services, including the NDIS. Mainstream services must be flexible, adaptable and targeted (where necessary) to the diverse needs of people with disability and be supported by an effective and appropriately resourced NDIS.

5.1 Working to implement and improve safe, high-quality disability capable mainstream services to ensure Queenslanders' needs are met and can thrive in our communities

As evidenced through the Disability Royal Commission, systemic challenges are often experienced in the delivery of mainstream supports, such as health, early education and development, housing and community infrastructure, and justice systems. The Queensland Government is committed to ensuring mainstream services are accessible, inclusive, and enable people with disability to participate as equal members of the Queensland community.

Outlined below are current examples of initiatives being implemented across Queensland mainstream service systems to ensure safe and high-quality services are delivered to all Queenslanders. The Queensland Government recognises that, while these initiatives provide valued services to many people with disability, continuous improvements must be made to strengthen their ability to respond to the needs of people who need them.

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5.1.1 Promoting inclusion and accessibility in Queensland's state education system

As part of Australia's Disability Strategy, all jurisdictions have committed to children with disability accessing and participating in high-quality early childhood education and care; building capability in the delivery of inclusive education to improve education outcomes; improving pathways and accessibility to further education and training for people with disability; and increasing opportunities to participate in accessible and inclusive lifelong learning.

Education Ministers have also set ambitious goals, through the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* that the Australian education system promotes excellence and equity and that all young Australians become confident and creative individuals; successful lifelong learners; and active and informed members of the community.

The Queensland Government is committed to ensuring all children in Queensland have a strong start, and that the state schooling system engages every child and young person through inclusive learning. In 2017, the Queensland Government commenced implementing the recommendations from the *Review of education for students with disability in Queensland state schools*,¹⁷ and has since been on a continuous journey of ensuring every student in Queensland succeeds through collaboration and capacity building. In response to the review's 17 recommendations, which are now all implemented, an *Inclusive education policy*¹⁸ setting out commitments to continue to work towards a more inclusive state education system, and *Every Student with Disability Succeeding plan* to support the success and wellbeing of students with disability through each stage of learning were introduced.

The Queensland Government recognises the challenges children and young people with disability face in obtaining a safe, inclusive and high-quality education and is driven by the understanding and commitment that positive educational experiences are central to students' engagement in learning and future social and economic participation. To ensure students with disability access and participate in education on the same basis as their peers, participate in rewarding, challenging and positive learning experiences, the Queensland Government has built on the learnings of the Disability Royal Commission and in July 2021, commenced the new *Every student with disability succeeding plan: 2021–2025*.

The new *Every student with disability succeeding plan 2021–2025* sets out the next phase of reform.¹⁹ The plan focuses on:

- *Setting expectations* — to foster an inclusive culture which respects diversity and acknowledges that with the right support, every student with disability can succeed
- *Building capability* — to support schools and build the confidence and capability of staff to provide the right support as children and young people transition through each stage of learning

¹⁷ Further information is available at: <https://education.qld.gov.au/student/Documents/disability-review-report.pdf>

¹⁸ Further information is available at: <https://ppr.qed.qld.gov.au/pp/inclusive-education-policy>

¹⁹ Further information is available at: <https://education.qld.gov.au/student/Documents/every-student-with-disability-succeeding-plan.pdf>

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- *Collaborating with students, parents and the community*— to ensure students with disability and their families are heard and are engaged as equal partners in improving outcomes.

To improve outcomes for students with disability and support the success and wellbeing of every student, the plan is supported by 45 measurable actions, including:

- Transitioning to the 'students with disability – reasonable adjustments funding model', supported by a \$80.6 million investment. The new model provides resources to schools based on the levels of adjustments needed by students with disability to access and participate in education. It streamlines processes for staff and parents and redirects staff efforts to supporting students. The new model recognises all disabilities, including where medical reports are not available, and is delivered consistently to all state primary, secondary and special schools and provides additional teachers and teacher aides for students with disability.
- Enhancing the capability of school staff to identify the early warning signs of students' wellbeing concerns and respond appropriately.
- Continuing to build the capability of staff to implement the Restrictive Practices procedure for all students and build systems to monitor practice.
- Implementing the All Kinds of Minds neurodiversity pilot centred on providing rewarding and productive careers for people of all abilities.
- Engaging non-government organisations to support families to understand inclusion and provide independent advocacy to students and parents with complex concerns.

These actions will be measured by improving the performance, engagement and wellbeing for students with disability; increasing the proportion of students with disability receiving a Queensland Certificate of Education and the proportion of students with disability completing Years 10 and 12; and decreasing the proportion of students with disability receiving a school disciplinary absence and the number of students with disability who may not be attending a full-time program in Queensland. The Queensland Government remains committed to continuing its journey towards a more inclusive education system and supporting all children and young people with disability to succeed. It also recognises work will need to continue to ensure students with disability are able to access an inclusive and equitable education with the same opportunities as other students.

5.1.2 A responsive justice system where people with disability are afforded equal access to justice services

The Disability Royal Commission has heard evidence of the overrepresentation of people with cognitive disability in the criminal justice system, with criminalisation of disability occurring when behaviours caused by cognitive disability are interpreted as criminal acts and the pervading gaps in legal protection against violence and abuse in family and domestic settings.

As committed by all jurisdictions under Australia's Disability Strategy, people with disability are experts in their own lives and have the same rights as people without disability. It is a priority for Queensland that the rights of people with disability are promoted, upheld and protected, and feel safe and enjoy equality before the law.

Queensland Government submission to the Disability Royal Commission

Key to protecting and promoting the rights of people with disability, and, providing a justice system that affords equitable supports and safeguards to all Queenslanders, is the recognition that people with disability are more likely to experience violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. Women, girls and their children with disability, experience heightened prevalence of gendered violence and abuse, and can lead to increased interactions with justice services and settings.

To improve the safety of people with disability, there is a need to take targeted actions in order to provide a responsive justice system that provides supports for all people. Access to relevant and timely information, disability awareness within the structure of the justice system and appropriate provision of tailored supports and interventions, where and as required, are essential to achieving a navigable, equitable and sound justice system.

The Queensland Government has introduced several initiatives to enhance service responses to meet the specific needs and challenges of people with disability, including those experiencing sexual, domestic and family violence, to ensure communication and supports are trauma-informed and accessible. The initiatives focus on raising awareness of the impact of domestic and family violence against people with disability; building sector capacity and capability to identify and respond to domestic and family violence; implementing practical trauma-informed responses; and improving data about people with disability within these systems.

- *Domestic, Family Violence and Vulnerable Persons Units:* The establishment of the Domestic, Family Violence and Vulnerable Persons Units in Queensland is designed to enhance the ability of police to respond to and support the needs of vulnerable people within the community, including those with disability, with a focus on promoting victim-centric and trauma informed policing practices, case management and identification of support options. To support the operation of these specialist units, frontline Queensland justice officers, including police, corrections, and court services, undertake disability awareness training.
- *Queensland's plan to respond to domestic and family violence against people with disability:* The delivery of *Queensland's plan to respond to domestic and family violence against people with disability* aimed to enhance service responses to meet the specific needs and challenges of people with disability experiencing domestic and family violence, and ensure communication and support services and responses are trauma-informed and accessible. All actions have been delivered including a community awareness campaign and free accessible domestic and family violence training and resources for the disability sector workforce (non-government and government).²⁰
- *Victim Services Funding Program 2022–27²¹ and Equal Access Project:* The Queensland Government funds WWILD — Sexual Violence Prevention Association Inc. to provide trauma-informed support for young and adult victims of violent crime who have an intellectual disability and to improve access to justice. The Queensland Government is also funding a time-limited project where people with intellectual disability and a project mentor work together to build ongoing

²⁰ Further information is available at: <https://www.publications.qld.gov.au/dataset/domestic-and-family-violence-prevention/resource/0204cf2c-c9a3-49a3-803f-2cbe6cb8399e>

²¹ Further information is available at: <https://www.qld.gov.au/law/crime-and-police/victims-and-witnesses-of-crime/agency-training-funding-and-research/funding-for-support-agencies>

Queensland Government submission to the Disability Royal Commission

relationships with specialist domestic and family violence services to improve accessibility of these services and their ability to respond to the needs of women who have an intellectual disability.

- *Lived Experience Research — Disability Data Project*: The Queensland Government in collaboration with the University of Queensland is leading a research project to gather insights of lived experience and understand the challenges faced by people with disability and intersections with the criminal justice system. Expected outcomes of the research include qualitative findings on the challenges experienced by people with disability in contact with the criminal justice system, and recommendations for criminal justice agencies on how data can be collected, used and shared.
- *Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce*: The taskforce was established as an independent consultative body to examine the experiences of women across Queensland criminal justice systems, the use, prevalence and effects of coercive control and the need for a specific offence for domestic violence. To date, the taskforce has examined a range of issues and delivered two reports. Relevantly, the taskforce has considered: improving integrated service responses to make them more accessible and responsive to people with disability; methods to involve people with disability in the creation of training and education programs across all parts of the domestic and family violence and justice systems; and most recently, the experience of women and girls across the criminal justice system as both victims of sexual violence and as accused persons and offenders. The taskforce has carefully considered the increased representation of people with disability within the criminal justice systems as a result of disability, and the additional barriers for people with disability to reporting sexual violence and abuse. The Queensland Government is actively considering the findings of the taskforce.²²
- *The First Nations Justice Office*: This office is being established to lead the development of a co-designed, whole-of-government and community (justice) strategy to reduce the overrepresentation of First Nations peoples in the criminal justice system. The office, supported by \$9.4 million over 4 years, will work across government and with institutions, community-controlled organisations and the community to ensure all aspects of quality and safety of services reduces the disadvantage experienced by First Nations people, including those with disability. The office and its operations will be co-designed to support key justice elements of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap targets, the NDIS and the *NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework*.
- *Queensland Intermediary Scheme*: The scheme is an initiative arising out of recommendations from the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*. It aims to overcome communication barriers that may arise for a range of reasons, including aged, trauma, disability, including ADHD, autism and intellectual and cognitive disability and mental illness. Through the use of intermediaries, the scheme assists witnesses in child sex offence matters who have communication needs to give their best evidence and create a more accessible justice system by facilitating the communication of evidence that may not otherwise be heard. The scheme, which commenced in July 2021, is currently operating as a two-year pilot program in Brisbane and Cairns.²³

²² Further information is available at: <https://www.womenstaskforce.qld.gov.au/>

²³ Further information is available at: <https://www.courts.qld.gov.au/services/queensland-intermediary-scheme>

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The Queensland Government also continues to work to ensure prisoners and offenders with disability are identified early, treated with dignity and respect, and have access to the supports and services they require to both navigate the justice system, and receive specialist disability and/or mainstream services. Supports for prisoners and offenders with disability include exploring options for safer admissions to custody, including early identification of individual needs, and collaborating with key stakeholders to improve coordination of supports for NDIS participants exiting custody.

5.1.3 Increasing the accessibility of Queensland public transport to ensure mobility, agency and participation of all Queenslanders

The Disability Royal Commission has heard evidence that people with disability can confront barriers that prevent full and equal participation in the community. These barriers can be attitudinal, institutional, environmental and communicative.

Affordable and accessible transport is a building block for ensuring equitable social and economic participation and mobility of all Queenslanders, including people with disability. A person's agency is intrinsically linked with an ability to readily access all essential services, including education, employment, healthcare, and social and recreational activities.

The Queensland Government is actively implementing its vision of creating a single integrated transport network, accessible to all Queenslanders, through the Department of Transport and Main Roads' *Disability Action Plan 2018–2022* (to be renewed by the end of 2022).²⁴ Queensland is committed to the implementation and ongoing provision of an innovative public transport system that is journey focused, achieving an integrated passenger experience that promotes independence, dignity and inclusivity, through:

- *more informed journey planning* — providing customers with accessible information at all phases of their journey, enabling informed decisions and capacity to predict and manage travel obstacles with confidence
- *easier boarding of passenger transport vehicles* — building and providing accessible, customised infrastructure, and trained customer support staff with the skills to recognise and understand the needs of people with disability to create an ease of experience
- *delivering better customer experiences while travelling on the Queensland passenger transport network* — where customers feel safe, secure and empowered on their journey.

The customer journey is supported by key achievements and milestones to date, including:

- *Passenger Transport Infrastructure Investment Program*: The Queensland Government continues to upgrade passenger transport infrastructure to meet the *Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002*. From 2019–20 to 2021–22, the Queensland Government invested \$260 million to upgrade existing, and provide new, accessible passenger transport infrastructure across Queensland. This investment included the Passenger Transport Accessible Infrastructure Program,

²⁴ Further information is available at: <https://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/Travel-and-transport/Disability-access-and-mobility/Disability-Action-Plan>

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and Bus Stops Shelter Program which provided grants to upgrade over 1400 existing assets and built over 900 new assets.

- *Disability awareness training:* In recognition that a key part of the journey also includes a human services component (in addition to physical access), the Queensland Government has implemented disability awareness training for passenger transport frontline staff so they are better equipped to recognise and understand the needs of people with disability.
- *Move Together:* The Queensland Government has implemented a social media campaign designed to enable general public transport users to understand the need for priority seating, allocated spaces and other accommodations to meet the diversity of needs of people with disability. Phase One of the *Move Together* social media campaign was released in June 2022, with an overwhelmingly positive response from the community. Phases Two and Three are scheduled for release in 2023.
- *Subsidised travel:* The Queensland Government provides numerous subsidised or free public transport, private or collective transport options for people with disability. The travel programs include:
 - concession fares for people with disability for travel on Translink services, equating to 50 per cent of the cost of an adult fare and free public transport for participating services for eligible people with vision impairment
 - companion card for free travel for the carer of a person with disability
 - Community Transport Program which provides door-to-door transport through funded service providers, enabling eligible people to access and stay connected with their local community, resulting in increased social and economic participation and wellbeing.

In recognition that transport infrastructure, the social environment, and the technology and user experiences that underpin transport services are constantly evolving, the Queensland Government established the Queensland Accessible Transport Advisory Council to ensure genuine engagement is undertaken with the disability sector in the development of all Queensland's major transport projects.

The Queensland Accessible Transport Advisory Council has become a key part of the transport infrastructure planning model, requiring the council be formally consulted before the finalisation of any project plans, making Queensland a leader in co-design and universal design principles.

5.1.4 Working to provide Queenslanders with disability safe and inclusive housing options

As evidenced at the Disability Royal Commission, people with disability face numerous challenges in finding and accessing safe, secure and accessible housing. People with disability face a significant lack of choice and control about where and with whom they live, increasing the risk of experiencing instances of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

The Queensland Government is working in collaboration with all states, territories and the Commonwealth to ensure inclusive, accessible and well-designed homes are available for all communities. Australia's Disability Strategy recognises there is a need to increase availability of affordable housing across all jurisdictions. Housing should be accessible and people with disability should have choice and control about where and with whom they live, and how they interact and engage within their local communities.

Queensland Government submission to the Disability Royal Commission

The Queensland Government has a vision to create and support thriving communities where all Queenslanders can have a safe and stable place to live and enjoy social and economic wellbeing. Supported by the *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027*,²⁵ the Queensland Government is working to ensure Queenslanders with disability have the same opportunities as Queenslanders without disability in accessing housing and community services.

Under the *Queensland Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021–2025*,²⁶ the second action plan to deliver on the Queensland Housing Strategy, Queensland has committed \$1.813 billion to the Queensland Housing Investment Growth Initiative to create 6365 new social housing homes across Queensland. As part of this investment, Queensland will develop and encourage social housing that upholds accessible living. Through this initiative, housing providers are encouraged to include NDIS Specialist Disability Accommodation and affordable housing in development proposals to be delivered alongside social housing, but fully funded by providers. The provider is also responsible for determining the viability and cost/benefit of the inclusion of Specialist Disability Accommodation into any developments.

Under the Housing and Homelessness Action Plan, the Queensland Government has committed to develop a formalised service delivery framework to prevent people exiting government services into homelessness; working with the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) to support Queenslanders to access and maximise NDIS packages and Specialist Disability Accommodation; co-designing housing responses with people with disability and peak and expert organisations; and deliver integrated responses that increase the diversity and supply of housing for people with disability.

- *Housing with Shared Support program phase out:* With full implementation of the NDIS, and in line with its principles of choice and control, the Queensland Government is phasing out the Housing with Shared Support program so that no new group home arrangements in public housing are created or trialled and instead empowering customers with disability to make informed choices about their housing options and living arrangements.
- *Livable Housing Design:* The Queensland Government has committed to a target of 50 per cent of new social housing to be developed commensurate with the intent of the Livable Housing Design Guidelines gold and platinum levels, tailored to the needs of social housing customers. In 2021–22, 60.8 per cent of new social housing dwellings were delivered within scope of the gold and/or platinum level. The 6,635 houses proposed under the \$1.813 billion Housing Investment Growth Initiative will also be constructed in accordance with the guidelines and target rate.
- *Home modifications to ensure people can live independently:* In 2021–22, the Queensland Government provided \$11.9 million to deliver 2,916 disability modifications, and committed a further \$14.1 million in 2022–23 to deliver a target of 3,500 disability modifications, to promote independence for people with disability and ensure homes are safe and well maintained. Through Housing Service Centres, occupational therapists are also employed to provide specialist assessment and advice on

²⁵ Further information is available at: <https://www.chde.qld.gov.au/about/strategy/housing/about>

²⁶ Further information is available at: https://www.chde.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/17429/QldHousingStrategyActionPlan2021-25.pdf

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the technical aspects of building design and home modifications for customers, including people with disability.

In addition to housing supports, the Queensland Government operates the *Queensland Community Support Scheme*, providing \$38.9 million in 2022–23 for the scheme, which will provide in-home and community access support to people with disability (who are not eligible for the NDIS, or who live with a chronic illness, mental health or other condition) to ensure people live as independently and safely as possible in their homes. The Queensland Community Support Scheme provides Queenslanders with access to opportunities for participation in their community; alternative or complementary supports and/or services to ensure a person's support needs are met in the most appropriate way, minimising the requirement for high-intensity specialist services and aims to work with Queenslanders to increase physical and emotional wellbeing and encourage personal independence, empowerment and autonomy.

The provision of housing that is accessible, affordable and upholds the dignity of all Queenslanders is a joint responsibility across all levels of government, and Queensland is committed to encouraging and investing in inclusive places, spaces and communities.

5.1.5 Increasing employment opportunities for people with disability in Queensland

The Disability Royal Commission has highlighted that people with disability experience high levels of socio-economic disadvantage and are more likely than people without disability to experience poverty, financial hardship and unemployment, with lower incomes and higher costs associated with living with disability. The Queensland Government recognises that employment and financial security are essential to ensuring independence, increasing choice and control, and strengthening health and wellbeing of all Queenslanders.

Alongside other states and territories, Queensland has committed to ensuring people with disability have economic security, enabling them to plan for the future and exercise choice and control over their lives as part of the commitments outlined in the Australia's Disability Strategy.

The Queensland Government recognises that skill development and learning is critical in order to participate in the workforce. The new *Good People. Good Jobs: Queensland Workforce Strategy 2022–2032* demonstrates Queensland's overarching focus on maximising workforce participation and building workforce diversity, including in relation to addressing current and future challenges for Queenslanders with disability in relation to the NDIS. The Queensland Government has also developed programs and initiatives that seek to develop skills, create pathways — both traditional and innovative, to provide students, prospective employees and employers with the confidence and skills to work collaboratively to develop productive economic and training relationships.

- *Supporting skilling and training pathways*: The Queensland Government's \$1.2 billion investment in vocational education and training for eligible Queenslanders, including those with a disability, is to support skilling and training pathways including from school, as well as employment outcomes, career development and jobs growth. Under vocational education and training investment, a higher subsidy is paid to support participation by concessional students to reflect the additional barriers that may be faced by a particular cohort, including people with a disability.
- *NDIS Training and Skills Support Strategy*: The NDIS Training and Skills Support Strategy is an industry-led, multifaceted approach to developing a quality workforce, and represents an additional

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\$5 million investment from the Queensland Government over 3 to 4 years for targeted training, support and workforce development activities.

- *Skilling Queenslanders for Work: Skilling Queenslanders for Work* focuses on developing the participant's skills, supporting them to begin a learning pathway to a Certificate III level qualification, and providing direct assistance to those Queenslanders that need extra support to enter and stay in the workforce. Since 2015, \$578 million has been committed statewide in the program, and as at 31 July 2022, 58.1 per cent of participants with disability that have exited the program have achieved a positive outcome as a result of their participation in *Skilling Queenslanders for Work*.
- *Back to Work: Back to Work* provides financial and non-financial support to encourage and support the employment of individuals who identify as living with disability; First Nations peoples; young people aged 15 to 24 years; and long-term unemployed persons. The program operates throughout regional Queensland, and since 2016, more than 2,974 people with disability have been supported into employment with over 1,947 businesses as at 31 July 2022. In addition to providing supports to assist people seeking employment (skill identification, training opportunity and career mentoring), it also develops short courses for businesses (including access and equity and effective communication).
- *All Kinds of Minds neurodiversity pilot*: This pilot will be delivered over five years and aims to establish recruitment pathways that target the strengths and talent of a diverse workforce, focusing on people who are neurodiverse. Phase 1 of the pilot included a co-design process to identify strategies that would assist shift organisational cultures with a medical model of neurodiversity to a social model. Stages 2 and 3 of the pilot included a rigorous assessment centre to support Queensland Government employment of neurodiverse applications.

While the Queensland Government recognises that more needs to be done to support people with disability to fully participate in the economy and the community, the above demonstrates the policies and initiatives of the Queensland Government to strengthen mainstream services across the areas of education, justice, transport, housing, training and employment. Together with an effective NDIS, these policies and initiatives seek to create thriving and inclusive communities.

5.2 The provision of high-quality disability capable mainstream services is dependent on the efficient operation of the NDIS and specialist disability supports

The development and implementation of the NDIS is a significant social reform, spanning the breadth of Australia's health and social services landscape, transforming the funding, regulation and delivery of specialist disability supports for people living with permanent disability. It provides participants with dignity, choice and control to access specialist disability supports and services tailored to individual need, so that participants are supported and empowered to live the life they want.

Over 110,000 Queenslanders are receiving NDIS supports, and by June 2030, over 180,000 Queenslanders are anticipated to be participating in the NDIS. The Queensland Government contributes approximately \$2.3 billion each year to the NDIS (increasing annually) as part of its bilateral funding agreement with the Commonwealth. As a co-funder of the scheme, the Queensland Government has a vested interest in the NDIS operating effectively and providing all eligible participants with the disability supports they need to live active, healthy and dignified lives.

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Despite the historic transformation of the disability support landscape provided by the NDIS, and the achievements to date, there are significant and ongoing issues with implementation of the scheme. These issues are well documented and include scheme access and support planning, thin markets, and interfaces between the NDIS and mainstream services. Delays in resolving these issues have day-to-day impacts on Queensland participants and their families. These issues also impact mainstream service resources and have flow on impacts on the funding, regulation and enhancement of disability capable mainstream supports.

On 18 October 2022, an Independent Review of the NDIS was announced and will be a two-part review, to be run concurrently: Part 1 —examine the design, operations and sustainability of the NDIS; and Part 2 — examine ways to build a more responsive, supportive and sustainable market and workforce.

The Queensland Government will be an active contributor to the NDIS review, including through the Disability Reform Ministers meetings and through other opportunities to express the key priorities of Queenslanders with disability, disability stakeholders and the Queensland Government. Priority issues for Queensland include:

- reducing unnecessary barriers that prevent eligible people from accessing the scheme and placing additional focus on supporting under-represented cohorts into the scheme (also see 5.2.1)
- improving the quality of the planning process to get plans right the first time and providing greater transparency in decision-making
- resolving issues with home and living supports, particularly regarding unexpected reductions in plan budgets; providing better market data to inform provider decisions, particularly in relation to disability housing needs; and setting appropriate Specialist Disability Accommodation policy and pricing to reflect how people live
- exploring scheme governance arrangements and the extent they support effective operation of the scheme
- addressing thin markets and plan underutilisation, particularly in rural and remote areas and for First Nations participants.

Queensland is also actively participating in activities occurring outside the review to ensure that, where appropriate, improvements to the participant experience are happening now rather than waiting until the review is completed.

5.2.1 Supporting eligible Queenslanders to access the NDIS

Queensland has also been taking action to address specific issues for Queenslanders with disability, including supporting eligible Queenslanders to access the NDIS.

The (former) Queensland Productivity Commission, in its inquiry into the NDIS market in Queensland, identified that certain cohorts face additional barriers to accessing the NDIS and using their plan, including people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people living in rural and remote areas, First Nations peoples and people with psychosocial disabilities.

To support equitable access to the NDIS for Queenslanders, and to achieve maximum outcomes, the Queensland Government secured a Commonwealth Government investment to establish the Disability

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Connect and Outreach Program, including the Assessment and Referral Team project.²⁷ The Assessment and Referral Team improves access to disability support for people with disability across rural, regional and remote parts of the state by providing free, individualised, one-on-one NDIS application assistance.

Since February 2020, the Assessment and Referral Team has supported 3,070 Queenslanders to transition to the NDIS. Given the success of the project, the Queensland Government has continued to fund the Assessment and Referral Team for 2022–23 with a focus on children and young people aged 7 to 25 years who identify as First Nations, LGBTQIA+ and culturally or linguistically diverse; are engaged in or at risk of entering the justice or child protection systems; disengaged from education or transitioning from school; experiencing, or at risk of, domestic and family violence, harm, homelessness or social isolation; are young carers; or living in regional, rural and remote communities.

5.2.2 NDIS interface with Queensland mainstream services impacting on service provision

The Queensland Government is committed to working collaboratively with the NDIA on NDIS operation and implementation, including the scheme's interface with other government and non-government service systems and supports.

While substantial progress has been made since the NDIS commenced in Queensland, some outstanding interface issues remain between Queensland's mainstream services and the NDIS that require resolution. Key issues include: differing interpretations of the Applied Principles and Tables of Support for the NDIS, which sets out roles and responsibilities between the Commonwealth Government and jurisdictions; NDIS pricing arrangements not meeting the needs of participants transitioning between service systems; and incompatibilities in operational processes and policies between the Commonwealth and states and territories. These issues span the transport, education, child protection, justice, health, forensic disability and mental health systems.

A challenge experienced by all states and territories is ensuring patients with disability can safely leave hospital in a timely manner, with delays experienced often due to inadequate NDIS community supports. While options to address this issue are currently being developed by Health and Disability Ministers, in April 2021 the Queensland Government committed \$5.4 million to establish the Long Stay Rapid Response program.

The Long Stay Rapid Response program provides an escalation pathway for Queensland Hospital and Health Services to enable long stay patients to leave hospital, and address the service delivery gaps in the aged care and disability systems. The recent Queensland Health budget announced a further \$16 million in funding over the next 4 years to continue the Long Stay Rapid Response program. As at 21 October 2022, 300 patients have been approved for funding from the program and have been able to transition out of the hospital into more suitable environments.

NDIS interface issues are also impacting, for example, statutory child protection service delivery due to delays in the development of a long-term solution to enable child protection agencies to access the NDIS Portal. Without access to the NDIS Portal, the Queensland child protection system is not able to view the

²⁷ Further information is available at: <https://gchub.dsdsatsip.qld.gov.au/art>

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supports included in a child's NDIS plan and monitor the utilisation of funding, impacting plan implementation and creating significant delay and further disadvantages for children with disability who are under the care of the Queensland Government. This interface issue has been ongoing since 2017, with interim solutions delayed by years, and impacts to service delivery continuing.

The NDIS is intended to sit within a broader system of mainstream and community supports responsive to the needs of people with disability, comprising: reasonably adjusted mainstream and community supports; interface, connection and capacity building supports (such as Information, Linkages and Capacity Building and Local Area Coordination); and specialist disability supports.

A well-managed NDIS that is supported across this broader system of supports is essential to ensuring Queenslanders get the supports they need, in the right place and at the right time. The Queensland Government is committed to working with the Commonwealth to deliver practical solutions to ensure the NDIS and mainstream services operate in an efficient and sustainable manner that upholds the dignity, wellbeing and aspirations of all Queenslanders.

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6 Safeguards: Contemporary safeguards to prevent violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation

As the Disability Royal Commission has assessed, despite the major social reform of the NDIS, there are significant inconsistencies between the experiences of people with disability and the supports, services and safeguards that are built into our communities to ensure that all persons with disability, regardless of age, sex, location or support requirement, are protected from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

The Queensland Government is committed to strengthening safeguards for Queenslanders with disability. Queensland is effecting this commitment by working with the Commonwealth Government to ensure the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission is supported to properly execute its functions; providing high-quality safeguards to Queenslanders under the *NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework* and *Bilateral Agreement between the Commonwealth of Australia and State of Queensland on the National Disability Insurance Scheme* (Full Scheme Agreement); and actively developing and maintaining mainstream services to provide contemporary rights-based accessible protections to ensure people with disability have their rights protected. A preventative approach that targets the drivers of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation requires systemic and attitudinal change to ensure that people with disability have choice and control to the most active extent possible over decisions that impact their lives.

Outlined below are initiatives undertaken by the Queensland Government that seek to protect and safeguard people with disability through formal and informal approaches. The Queensland Government notes that the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission is continuing to undertake long-term foundational work to embed an entirely new quality and safeguarding framework within the disability support ecosystem. As such, the development of state and territory supports through the mainstream system, that complement and intersect with the NDIS, will be iterative, with constant consultation and review required to support the implementation and development of contemporary safeguards. The Queensland Government is committed to strengthening responses, informed by the experiences and perspectives of people with disability, their families and the disability community.

6.1 Establishing frameworks so that Queensland disability services are safe, responsible and accountable for the needs of people with disability

Queensland's *Disability Services Act 2006* (Qld) provides a framework for safeguarding the rights of people with disability in the Queensland community. This framework recognises that, to provide for equality of access and opportunity in Queensland, all services, and particularly disability services that are funded or operated by the Queensland Government, must be accountable, safe, responsive, and support the operation of the NDIS in Queensland.

In addition to affirming that people with disability have the same human rights as other members of society, the *Disability Services Act 2006* (Qld) includes specific rights for people with disability when using state-funded or operated disability or NDIS supports. These include receiving services that actively support and help the person achieve full participation in society, in a way that is the least restrictive, confidential and in an accessible and safely built environment.

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The *Disability Services Act 2006* (Qld) also places a legislative obligation on all Queensland Government departments to develop a Disability Service Plan. The Disability Service Plan applies to all the operations of the department and ensures every Queensland Government department takes specific and dedicated actions to improve outcomes for people with disability relevant to the portfolio and services it provides.

The Queensland Government provides a *Guideline on Creating and Keeping Records for the Proactive Protection of Vulnerable Persons* for government bodies. With the establishment of the Disability Royal Commission, the Queensland Government broadened the scope of the guideline to provide coverage for relevant records relating to the Terms of Reference of the Disability Royal Commission.²⁸ The guideline helps government bodies in Queensland to identify, keep and manage records about their interactions with vulnerable people. The records are kept for agreed time periods in case they are needed to prove an incident or allegation of abuse of a vulnerable person.

6.2 Substituted decision-making for people with impaired decision-making capacity

Queensland has a long-standing guardianship system, providing a formal safeguarding framework under which individuals may be appointed to make personal, health and financial decisions on behalf of adults who no longer have capacity to make decisions about certain matters themselves. The system, to the greatest extent possible, encourages supported decision-making and active participation of the person with disability and their family and carers. It also provides a scheme where adults can plan ahead and appoint individuals of their choice to make personal, health and financial decisions and give directions about their future health care.

The *Guardianship and Administration Act 2000* (Qld), *Powers of Attorney Act 1998* (Qld), *Public Guardian Act 2014* (Qld) and *Public Trustee Act 1978* (Qld) provide the legislative basis for Queensland's guardianship and administration system. The Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (QCAT), Public Guardian, Public Trustee and Public Advocate provide the operational basis for Queensland's guardianship system.

The general principles and the health care principles set out within the *Guardianship and Administration Act 2000* (Qld) and *Powers of Attorney Act 1998* (Qld) underpin Queensland's guardianship framework and are consistent with the underlying principles in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* through references to non-discrimination and the respect for difference, including the acceptance of persons with impaired decision-making capacity as part of human diversity. Contemporary language such as 'safeguards' is used in this legislation, and it is the adult's 'rights, interests and opportunities' that are promoted and safeguarded, rather than their 'best interests'. General Principle 10 provides for a structured approach to decision-making. The approach emphasises recognising the adult's (expressed or demonstrated) current views, wishes, and preferences rather than simply relying on substituted decision-making.

²⁸ Further information is available at : https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/245615/Approved-FINAL-Guideline-on-creating-and-keeping-records-for-the-proactive-protection-of-vulnerable-persons.PDF

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6.2.1 Queensland Public Guardian

The Queensland Public Guardian has an overarching function to promote and protect the rights and interests of adults with impaired decision-making capacity, including protecting adults with impaired capacity from neglect, exploitation or abuse. The Public Guardian can also act as an adult's guardian (if appointed by QCAT or an attorney (if appointed by the adult or QCAT) in relation to personal, health care and legal matters (excluding property and finance matters). When acting as guardian or attorney, the Public Guardian undertakes structured (supported and substituted) decision-making, supporting adults to participate in decisions about their lives and acknowledging their right to live as a valued member of society. The Public Guardian has extensive powers to investigate and respond to allegations of neglect, exploitation or abuse of adults with impaired capacity. Under the *Public Guardian Act 2014* (Qld), the Public Guardian has strong protective powers to intervene in cases of suspected neglect, exploitation or abuse, including the ability to:

- exercise rights to access all information necessary to investigate a complaint or allegation, including the power to require an attorney or administrator to file a summary of receipts and expenditure, or more detailed accounts of dealings and transactions for an adult for a specified period
- exercise rights to apply for warrants for entry and removal where the Public Guardian considers there are reasonable grounds for suspecting immediate risk of harm to an adult
- require the attendance of a person before the Public Guardian to give information and answer questions, or produce stated documents or things
- suspend any current power of attorney while an investigation is underway
- refer a matter to the QCAT for the suspension or revocation of an enduring power of attorney and the appointment of a more appropriate guardian and/or administrator
- suspend the operation of an attorney's power and the power to apply for an entry and removal warrant to remove a person who is at immediate risk of harm.

The Public Guardian has a community education function and undertakes education initiatives to highlight its investigation function and role in combating elder abuse, where the adult has impaired decision-making capacity. The Office of the Public Guardian engages with the banking and health sectors to enhance knowledge about the Public Guardian's investigation function, including one-on-one engagement with individual banks and Hospital and Health Services in relation to their internal staff training.

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6.2.2 Community Visitor Program

Queensland established a Community Visitor Program²⁹ (adult) to protect the rights and interests of consumers, staying at visitable sites. Visitable sites are defined under the *Public Guardian Act 2014* (Qld) and *Public Guardian Regulation 2014* and include residential accommodation settings.

Community visitors have a range of independent inquiry and complaints functions. The inquiry functions relate to the adequacy and accessibility of information available to adults about their rights and complaint mechanisms and the appropriateness and standard of the services they need. For example, the adequacy of their treatment and support, that services are provided in a way that is least restrictive of rights, and there is appropriate standards of accommodation and wellbeing. The complaints functions relate to inquiring into and seeking to resolve complaints and making referrals including to external agencies, such as the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, where appropriate.

The *Public Guardian Act 2014* (Qld) also establishes a Community Visitor Program (child). Community visitors inspect and report on the appropriateness of accommodation in visitable sites (for example, residential care facilities, youth detention centres, Authorised Mental Health Services and some disability services) and visitable homes (foster care and kinship care)). Community visitors also advocate for children and young people's access to information, their rights and access to the services they need; and provide information and support regarding, for example, family contact issues, issues with government or child safety officers and financial matters.

With over 100 community visitors, covering a geographic area of 1.7 million kilometers, Queensland's adult and child community visitor program is the most comprehensive in Australia. In 2020–21, Queensland's Office of the Public Guardian conducted 5,167 visits to 7,422 adults in 1,696 visitable locations; and 38,466 visits to 10,203 children in 5,026 visitable locations.³⁰

6.2.3 Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal

The QCAT is an independent tribunal that can appoint people as guardian or administrator for an adult with impaired capacity for a matter and can make a formal declaration or finding about an adult's capacity. QCAT can also:

- consent to health care and special health care for adults with impaired capacity
- make various orders about attorneys and enduring documents (Enduring Powers of Attorney) and Advance Health Directives, this jurisdiction is shared with the Supreme Court.

In Queensland, a variety of remedies are available for QCAT or the Supreme Court to exercise where a guardian, administrator or attorney has failed to comply with their duties and obligations including:

- QCAT can order current or former attorneys or administrators to file QCAT records and audited accounts of the administrator's or attorney's dealings

²⁹ Further information is available at: <https://www.publicguardian.qld.gov.au/about-us/community-visitor-program>

³⁰ Further information is available at: https://www.publicguardian.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/709350/opg-annual-report-2020-21-final.pdf

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- QCAT or the Court can order current or former guardian, administrator or attorney, including former appointees, to pay compensation for a loss to the adult or the adult's estate due to the attorney's, administrator's or guardian's failure to comply with his or her duties (even after the adult has died)
- QCAT or the Court can order current or former guardian, administrator or attorney an account of profit in circumstances where the administrator or attorney has acted in breach of the duty to avoid a conflict transaction (or some other duty) (even after the adult has died).

6.2.4 Queensland Public Trustee

The Public Trustee also forms a central role in the guardianship system in Queensland, including by providing administration services to more than 10,000 Queenslanders each year. The Public Trustee may be appointed by QCAT under the *Guardianship and Administration Act 2000* (Qld) as an administrator and as an attorney under an enduring power of attorney to make decisions about financial matters or legal matters.

On 11 May 2022, the Queensland Parliament passed the *Public Trustee (Advisory and Monitoring Board) Amendment Act 2022* to establish the Public Trustee Advisory and Monitoring Board. The board will provide an effective oversight mechanism over the performance of the Public Trustee's functions to improve the Public Trustee's performance, transparency and public accountability.

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6.2.5 Queensland Public Advocate

The Public Advocate is established under the *Guardianship and Administration Act 2000* (Qld) to promote and protect the rights and interests of Queensland adults with impaired decision-making capacity through systemic advocacy. Systemic advocacy plays an integral role in supporting system-level awareness, review and change, while also encouraging and bringing individual and self-advocacy to the forefront for decision-makers.

The Public Advocate can promote and protect the rights of adults with impaired capacity for a matter, including protection from neglect, exploitation or abuse. The Public Advocate also holds a systemic role, encouraging the development of programs to help adults with impaired capacity to reach the greatest practicable degree of autonomy and exercise supported decision-making; promoting the provision of services and facilities and monitoring and reviewing the delivery of services and facilities.

To support these functions, the Public Advocate has the power to do all things necessary or convenient to perform the Public Advocate's functions; intervene in a proceeding before a court or tribunal, or in an official inquiry (involving the protection of the rights or interests of adults with impaired decision-making capacity); and has access to all information necessary to monitor and review the delivery of services and facilities, make arrangements for the provision of services or input on the policies and procedures of a service or facility relating to the adults with impaired capacity for a matter.

6.2.6 Queensland Adult Safeguarding Project

Queensland is committed to reviewing, and constantly building on learnings and lived experience, to identify opportunities to increase safeguards. In 2021, the Public Advocate established the Queensland Adult Safeguarding Project to assist in identifying current safeguarding issues and gaps in Queensland for 'at-risk adults' in the community. The aim of the project is to explore, enliven and expand on the Australian Law Reform Commission's adult safeguarding recommendations insofar as the recommendations relate to Queensland, taking account of the particular features of Queensland's geographically diverse social and health services sectors, and the diverse characteristics of the state, while also considering recent state and national regulatory developments.

The results of the project have been published as two volumes, with Volume One published on 11 August 2022³¹, describing safeguarding themes and issues. Volume Two was published in November 2022 and outlines recommendations for government consideration regarding options for the reform of adult safeguarding laws and approaches.³² The Queensland Government is considering the recommendations of this report and will respond in due course.

6.3 Safeguards to ensure people with disability are supported when receiving specialist disability supports and mainstream services

The Queensland Government recognises that no two individuals are identical, and similarly, no one experience or characteristic places a person at risk; nor is a risk factor for one person necessarily a risk

³¹ Further information is available at: https://www.justice.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/726599/202207-adult-safeguarding-issues-paper-volume-one-final-.pdf

³² Further information is available at: <adult-safeguarding-vol-2-final.pdf> ([justice.qld.gov.au](https://www.justice.qld.gov.au))

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for another. Specialist disability and mainstream support services need to be flexible and adapt to the needs of each person with disability and work to ensure quality safeguards are embedded across the service system.

6.3.1 Nationally consistent worker screening

In collaboration, and as a result of concerted efforts with the Commonwealth and all states and territories, Queensland implemented a nationally consistent NDIS worker screening system on 1 February 2021.

A key tenet of the NDIS is the nationally consistent delivery of safe, accessible and high-quality disability support services to persons with disability. Nationally consistent worker screening is an important safeguard to support the delivery of safe services, and the operation of the broader scheme. Queensland delivers the NDIS worker screening system as part of Queensland's commitments under the *NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework* and Full Scheme Agreement. Queensland also provides a complementary worker screening system for workers engaged in the provision of disability services by the department or a departmentally funded service provider.

The new worker screening framework has strengthened safeguards for people with disability by introducing the 'no card, no start' policy; a contemporary identity checking process; a stronger framework for disqualifying people charged with, or convicted of, certain nationally consistent offences; and a decision-making framework that focuses on risk and considers a broader range of criminal, investigative, domestic violence and disciplinary information when deciding applications for clearances. Once issued, a clearance is supported by ongoing monitoring of a screened worker's national criminal history, and, for the first time, worker screening clearances and exclusions are portable across risk-assessed NDIS roles and employers in all states and territories.

During 2021–22, the Queensland Government has completed 86,852 worker screening checks, and prevented 289 high-risk individuals from working with people with a disability through screening processes in Queensland.

6.3.2 The authorisation of restrictive practices and Queensland's Positive Behaviour Supports and Restrictive Practices Review

As evidenced before the Disability Royal Commission, restrictive practices are highly complex and sensitive practices, involving a range of restrictions on the rights and free movement of people to manage risk of harm to a person with disability and others. The use of restrictive practices can constitute a significant infringement on the human rights of people to whom they are applied. Sometimes the use of regulated restrictive practices can be justified when a person's behaviour places the person or others at risk of harm, where the least restrictive practice is used as a last resort and in accordance with a tailored plan prepared by a positive behaviour support practitioner.

Unfortunately, restrictive practices can be used inappropriately, without sufficient clinical support or oversight, and can involve violence, abuse and neglect against people with disability. The use of restrictive practices should be in a planned way, documented in a positive behaviour support plan, with a clear focus on preventing or reducing the occurrence of behaviours causing harm, developing skills and improving quality of life.

Queensland has a well-established framework for authorising the use of restrictive practices with adults with an intellectual or cognitive disability receiving disability supports from a NDIS provider (or disability supports funded or provided by the department). The authorisation function is delivered as part of

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Queensland's commitments under the *NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework* and Full Scheme Agreement. Under the framework, three decision-makers can authorise or consent to the use of restrictive practices, depending on the type of practice to be used. Decision-making is shared between guardians (private or public), the Queensland Government Department of Seniors, Disability Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, and QCAT within a guardianship framework. In the case of seclusion and containment, only QCAT may authorise the use of these practices. The framework has been in place since 2008.

In consultation with the disability sector and providers, the Queensland Government is working to determine how Queensland's authorisation framework for the use of restrictive practices with NDIS participants could better align with the new roles and responsibilities under the *NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework*, NDIS legislation and the draft principles for nationally consistent authorisation processes developed for jurisdictions by the NDIS Commission. The Queensland Government is committed to considering how to minimise harm, encourage best practice and continuing to have strong safeguards as provided by the current framework, while, in recognition of the findings of the Disability Royal Commission, working towards more streamlined and nationally consistent approaches wherever possible.

6.3.3 Interventions and safeguards to support people to navigate the health system

The Disability Royal Commission has heard that people with disability can experience barriers to accessing and receiving the care and support they need from the health system, including insufficient communication, collaboration and information sharing. Access to health services without discrimination is a protected right under the *Human Rights Act 2019* (Qld) and article 25 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* recognises all state and territories commitment to provide the highest attainable standard of healthcare to people with disability.

Navigating the health service system can be challenging for many consumers, families and carers, particularly during times of illness and heightened stress. Outlined below are examples of initiatives specifically designed to support and empower patients and their families to raise concerns and improve communication regarding their care needs within the Queensland health system.

6.3.3.1 Ryan's Rule

The Ryan's Rule initiative is a three-step escalation process to support patients of any age, their families and carers, to raise concerns if a patient's health condition is getting worse or not improving as well as expected. Ryan's Rule applies to all patients admitted to any Queensland public hospital, including the emergency department, and in some Hospital in the Home services, in line with the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards. Communication materials, including fact sheets and short video, have been developed to specifically increase awareness of Ryan's Rule among people with disability and their families and carers.

To activate Ryan's Rule, (i) a patient, family member or carer raise the issue with any nurse or doctor. If the response is unsatisfactory, (ii) the patient, carer or family member can communicate the concern to the nurse in charge of the shift, and if required, (iii) contact 13 HEALTH and request a Ryan's Rule Clinical Review. A dedicated Ryan's Rule nurse or doctor will review the patient within 72 hours and provide assistance.

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6.3.3.2 Julian's Key Health Passport

Julian's Key Health passport is a patient/carer-controlled tool designed to improve communication and empower people with disability, their families and carers to be as actively involved in their healthcare and decisions as possible.³³ As the Disability Royal Commission has investigated, poor communication and information sharing; insufficient advocacy supports and pervasive societal attitudes can lead to diagnostic overshadowing and poor health outcomes for people with disability. This can lead to people with disability disengaging, or not seeking health supports, when required.

Julian's Key Health Passport is able to assist in the communication of care needs, to guide referral and handover, and deliver better informed person-centred care. The personalised aspects of the passport are empowering to the consumer and encourage ownership and self-advocacy.

6.4 Strengthening emergency preparedness responses to safeguard people with disability

As evidenced before the Disability Royal Commission and its consideration of emergency planning and the COVID-19 pandemic, including preparedness and responses, pre-existing inequalities and exclusion experienced by people with disability, can be deepened during emergency situations. Closely entwined with the delivery of emergency services is the consideration that some people with disability, seniors and people living with long-term health conditions, require a range of specialist supports in their everyday life. The removal of essential daily care supports, food and nutrition, health care and accessible information, even temporarily, can have life-altering repercussions.

The Queensland Government has committed to ensuring disaster and emergency planning processes are inclusive of people with disability and that these preparedness and recovery processes support the health and wellbeing of people with disability before, during and after emergencies. This commitment is evidenced through Queensland's commitments under the Australia's Disability Strategy Emergency Management Targeted Action Plan:

- Implement the recommendations out of the *Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements* in recognition of the work of the Disability Royal Commission and its findings.
- Raise awareness of, and promote access to, *Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction Queensland Framework Toolkit* and Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness tool to facilitate greater inclusion of people with disability in planning and assessment processes³⁴. Queensland partnered with the University of Sydney, the Queenslanders with Disability Network and Community Services Industry Alliance to work with people with disability, community services and disability support providers and disaster management practitioners to collaboratively identify how to reduce the risks before, during and after disasters.
- Design and deliver disaster and emergency management services according to local risk and community need. Lead locally trusted networks to prioritise risk reduction, preparedness and

³³ Further information is available at: <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/public-health/groups/disability>

³⁴ Further information is available at: <https://collaborating4inclusion.org/disability-inclusive-disaster-risk-reduction/>

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information sharing across all services to ensure a consistent and integrated recovery plan that incorporates disability and health responses.

- Oversee the development and implementation of a new whole-of-person, community and Queensland Government strategy for addressing social isolation and loneliness, as a result of the Queensland Parliamentary Inquiry into Social Isolation and Loneliness in Queensland.
- Maintain the District Human and Social Recovery Group³⁵ within each Disaster District to support Queenslanders' emotional, physical and social wellbeing after a disaster. Supports provided through these groups include assistance to reconnect to family, social and community networks; providing access to financial assistance; and providing access to psychosocial supports. To ensure the initiative is effective in supporting the needs of all people with disability, during the 2021–22 disaster season, 100 per cent of the District Human and Social Recovery Groups included a person with disability, a representative of people with disability or had mechanisms to engage representatives of people with disability.

6.4.1 Accessibility, Affordability, Ability Digital Inclusion Project

The Queensland Government recognises the importance of people with disability remaining connected to their community and supports before, during and after emergency events. In recent natural disasters, including the COVID-19 health emergency, the ability to access the digital world has been key to enabling people with disability to have accurate and timely information, as well as access to essential goods and services to support their health, emotional wellbeing and continued social connection, to ensure natural safeguards are maintained.

The Queensland Government has committed \$0.5 million to fund a pilot program that connects people with disability with Care Army volunteers.³⁶ The initiative seeks to ensure all people with disability are able to make full use of digital technologies to manage their health and wellbeing, access education and services, organise their finances, and connect with friends, family, and the community. In addition to improving access for people with disability to digital devices, affordable data, digital awareness and skills, and the inherent connection to community and supports, before, during and after disasters, the pilot will also build the capacity of volunteers in the Queensland Care Army and Neighbourhood Centres to partner with people with disability and build networks.

While Queensland as a state, and more individual Queenslanders, are becoming well-versed in disaster preparation and responses, the findings of the Disability Royal Commission reinforce that no state can ever be too prepared. Queensland is committed to continuing to learn from the expert findings of the numerous inquiry and review processes into natural and health emergency events and continually adapting in an accessible and inclusive manner, maximising the use of digital technologies as an agent for connection and resilience to ensure Queenslanders, and people with disability, are safeguarded during these events.

³⁵ Further information is available at : <https://www.qra.qld.gov.au/recovery/recovery-governance/functional-recovery-groups/human-and-social-recovery-group>

³⁶ Further Information is available at: <https://www.chde.qld.gov.au/about/initiatives/care-army>