



# **UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA**

## **Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability**

### **Communications Strategy**

May 2020

**Developed by the National Task Group**

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# 1. Introduction

The purpose of this Communications Strategy is to ensure a consistent and unified message and response from the Uniting Church to and during the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Disability Royal Commission).

It is incredibly important that we all work together and have strong internal communication throughout the Disability Royal Commission, given externally we may be viewed as one.

The Disability Royal Commission is required to deliver an interim report to the Governor-General no later than 30 October 2020 and a final report no later than 29 April 2022.

# 2. Communications Approach

The Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia (Assembly) together with UnitingCare Australia will take the lead for communications and responses relating to the Disability Royal Commission at a national level in consultation with the National Task Group.

The Assembly together with UnitingCare Australia may need to publicly respond to issues throughout the course of the Disability Royal Commission or may choose to proactively make public statements or release submissions.

The following approach will be adopted:

- Provide leadership in external and internal communications.
- Provide a single source of truth in matters relating to the Commission process, proceedings and progress.
- Be a primary point of contact for national media statements, enquiries and responses.
- Provide administration support for the operation of the National Task Group.
- Provide support, guidance and counsel, where required, if any part of the Uniting Church is called upon to participate in the Disability Royal Commission hearings.
- Be a single point of contact for the Disability Royal Commission and on the Disability Royal Commission.

At various times, requests for information or feedback may be sent around or advice may be sought. Timeframes for responses or the provision of advice will be set on a case by case basis and provided with the request.

## 3. Stakeholders

### Internal

In no particular order:

- People with disability
- Members of the Church
- Agencies and services – staff, members, clients, families, carers, advocates
- Schools, early learning services
- Congregations/Presbyteries/Synods/ Assembly
- Standing Committees
- Gen Secs/Moderators
- Synod Task Groups
- National Executive of Congress
- Regional Councils of Congress
- Chaplains (in prison system etc.), bush chaplains, volunteer pastoral carers
- Assembly, Synod and UnitingCare Australia communicators
- Communications teams within agencies
- Advocacy teams within agencies
- Historical related entities of the Church

### External

In no particular order:

- People with disability
- General public
- Funded advocacy organisations for the Disability Royal Commission and the National Disability Insurance Scheme
- Peak bodies and representative organisations
- The National Disability Insurance Agency
- The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission
- The Royal Commissioners
- Office of the Public Advocate – Community Visitors
- Partner organisations from agencies
- Media outlets
- Parliamentarians
- Church peaks – i.e. Anglicare Australia

## 4. Uniting Church Values Statement

On 19 September 2019, the Uniting Church released its Values Statement for the Disability Royal Commission. The Values Statement is set out below.

***In 2018 the 15th Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia affirmed that:***

*Christ is most fully present when all people in the Body are unconditionally accepted as people of worth. All people are created in the image of God, including people with disability; along with all members, the faith, gifts, hopes and dreams of people with disability are to be valued and honoured; and*

*God is a God of justice and peace, who seeks reconciliation amongst all people. In seeking to be a community of reconciliation, the Uniting Church acknowledges that for many people with disability its life and faith has not always borne witness to this vision.*

***The Uniting Church seeks:***

*To embody a community life that in its theology and practice is accessible to all people; to ensure that within its own life people with disability are treated justly and have their hopes and rights realised; and to advocate for justice and equality for people with disability in the wider community.*

*The Uniting Church welcomes the establishment of a Royal Commission to inquire into what governments, institutions and the community must do to build a society in which people with disability feel included, supported and have their human rights respected. We wholeheartedly endorse the focus as set out in the Letters Patent and pledge ourselves to cooperate fully and openly.*

*The Commission has been designed to maximise the participation and contribution of people with disabilities in this inquiry. The Uniting Church supports this approach, which will give voice to those who have suffered violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation and will call the rest of the community to listen.*

*The Uniting Church's values are founded on Jesus' witness to the love of God for all people and God's desire for us to live abundant lives, where we are valued and respected for who we are. Where people are prevented from flourishing, and are denied a voice, the Uniting Church is committed to advocacy and contributing to a just and inclusive society.*

*We strive to be a Church that welcomes and includes people with disabilities in our congregations, schools, services and communities. As providers of disability services, we strive always to provide high quality, compassionate*

*care in an environment of transparency, accountability and continuous improvement.*

*We regret those times when we have not shown the compassion and care of Christ and deeply apologise. Whatever challenges and issues arise, we are determined to meet them in order to better serve the needs of people and communities we serve.*

*We look forward to working alongside people with disability and their families and advocates in envisioning and realising a society where disability is no barrier to participation and in which the gifts, hopes and dreams of all people are valued and honoured.*

## **5. Communication Principles**

The Uniting Church will embed the following principles in all communications:

- Coordinated, consistent and considered.
- Trauma-informed and survivor focused.
- Open, authentic two-way exchange and feedback.
- Clarity and credibility in tone and language.
- Defined roles and responsibilities, including local and national responses.
- Proactive, responsive and timely.

## **6. Process for Responding to Media Inquiries**

We are committed to cooperating fully and openly in relation to the Disability Royal Commission.

The basic principle for Disability Royal Commission-related queries is that *“Only persons who carry the risk for the consequences of what is said should speak.”* The table below sets out who should respond to which requests.

The process for handling media inquiries is as follows:

- Be respectful.
- Ask politely for the name, publication, contact details and what the inquiry is about.
- Advise that the appropriate person will contact them as soon as possible.
- Do not answer any questions.
- Avoid being drawn into any discussions where a statement could be attributed to you.
- Immediately contact:

**Tenille Fricker**, Executive Officer, National Task Group  
[tenillef@nat.unitingcare.org.au](mailto:tenillef@nat.unitingcare.org.au)  
0433 888 418

\*\*In the below table 'national implications' means any matter that has the potential to affect the Church's reputation\*\*

<b>Media Inquiry</b>	<b>Action Needed</b>	<b>Who Responds</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matter with national implications</li> <li>• Whole of Church statements</li> <li>• Commentary/statements on the Royal Commission</li> <li>• Pastoral letters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact Tenille</li> <li>• Tenille to contact Assembly General Secretary and Matt Pulford and discuss next steps</li> </ul>	President/ Assembly General Secretary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matter of Synod responsibility with national implications</li> <li>• Pastoral letters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact Tenille</li> <li>• Tenille to contact Assembly General Secretary and Matt Pulford and discuss next steps</li> <li>• Inform Synod and discuss messages</li> </ul>	President/ Assembly General Secretary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matter of Synod responsibility with no national implications</li> <li>• Commentary/statements on the Royal Commission as it relates to Synods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact Tenille</li> <li>• Contact Moderator/Gen Sec</li> <li>• Tenille informs Assembly General Secretary and Matt Pulford</li> </ul>	Moderator/ Gen Sec
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agency or service-specific query with national implications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact Tenille</li> <li>• Tenille to contact Assembly General Secretary and Matt Pulford and discuss next steps</li> <li>• Inform Agency and discuss messages</li> </ul>	President/ Assembly General Secretary

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agency or service-specific query with no national implications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contact Tenille</li> <li>Contact Agency</li> <li>Tenille to inform Assembly General Secretary and Matt Pulford</li> </ul>	<p>Authorised spokesperson (e.g. CEO, Chair)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Matters with implication for First Peoples Church members/regional councils</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contact Tenille</li> <li>Tenille to contact Assembly General Secretary and Matt Pulford and discuss next steps</li> <li>Contact Congress</li> </ul>	<p>President/ Chairperson of Congress/ Assembly General Secretary</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presbytery/congregation query with national implications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contact Tenille</li> <li>Tenille to contact Assembly General Secretary and Matt Pulford and discuss next steps</li> <li>Inform Synod and discuss messages</li> </ul>	<p>President/ Assembly General Secretary</p>

Tenille will maintain a communications register.

## 7. Guidelines for Spokespeople

1. A general acknowledgement of pain and suffering
2. Condemnation of all violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation suffered
3. Statement of commitment to work with any investigators
4. Expression of hope that the Disability Royal Commission will provide an opportunity for healing, justice and reconciliation for those impacted in line with our Christian values and commitment as a Church
5. List of actions taken so far – e.g. Values Statement, setting up of task groups, communications undertaken
6. Reflection of our Christian principles by using any learnings to ensure equality of inclusion for people with disability in our Church and network services

## 8. Disability Royal Commission Key Messages

The key messages below should form the basis of any media response relating to the Disability Royal Commission. The person responding (from the table above) can determine which key messages are appropriate for the particular response. The simplicity of the response is vital and should be considered when preparing the response.

Responses should be trauma-informed, survivor focused and provided in Plain English.

The key messages may be updated over time. Any updates will be circulated to lead communicators.

### **Last Updated: 11 March 2020**

- The Uniting Church acknowledges the pain and suffering of all those who have experienced violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation at the hands of individuals or services.
- Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of people with disabilities is intolerable wherever it occurs.
- All people in Australia, of all ages, are to be treated justly, accorded dignity and have their basic rights protected.
- We strive to be a Church that welcomes and includes people with disabilities in our congregations, schools, services and communities.
- As providers of disability services, we strive always to provide high quality, compassionate care in an environment of transparency, accountability and continuous improvement.
- Our Church is committed to ensuring that within its own life, people with disability are treated justly and have their hopes and rights realised.
- We support the Disability Royal Commission and its purpose.
- We will respond openly and thoroughly to requests from the Disability Royal Commission.
- We have set up a National and Synod task groups.
- Our Church is committed to advocating for justice and equality for people with disability in the wider community.
- We are a Church that's committed to justice and reconciliation, and we hope the Disability Royal Commission will provide an opportunity for healing, justice and reconciliation for all those who have suffered.
- We will reflect our Christian principles by taking whatever learning comes out of the Disability Royal Commission to ensure our Church, agencies and network organisations are the safest possible for people with disabilities.
- We deeply regret and apologise to the people concerned for times when we haven't lived up to our mission to deliver high quality, compassionate care and to treat all people with respect and compassion.
- In our determination to meet our goal to provide disability care in harmony with community standards, we are always willing to receive feedback from residents,

clients, congregation members, their families and from members of the community. We will do our best to address any concerns.

- The Disability Royal Commission presents us with a new opportunity for a national conversation about the future of disability care.
- We look forward to contributing our expertise to propose and advocate for innovations and improvements to create a sustainable system that provides high-quality care.

## **9. Process when a Communication is Received from the Disability Royal Commission**

A Protocol on engaging with the Disability Royal Commission has been created. The purpose of the Protocol is to provide a single contact for the Commission and to outline the process to be taken when others within the life of the Church receive a communication from the Royal Commission.

This Protocol was sent to Synod Gen Secs, Synod Task Group Chairs (where known) and Synod Representatives on the National Task Group for circulating as outlined in the March 2020 Communique from the National Task Group. Specifically, it was requested that the Protocol be sent to Synod staff, the Synod's community service organisations, congregations, and missions, and to schools operated by or on behalf of the Church. It was also recommended that it be sent to associated schools.

A copy of the Protocol is included as an appendix to the Strategy. The Protocol is to be followed whenever a communication is received from the Disability Royal Commission. This includes the receipt of a Notice to Produce or Notice to Give Information.

NOTE: Responses to a Notice to Produce or a Notice to Give Information are to be provided directly to the Disability Royal Commission in the format specified by the Royal Commission on its website.

## **10. Proactive Communications**

The Assembly together with UnitingCare Australia may choose to proactively make public statements or release documents. This will only occur following consultation with the National Task Group.

If any Synod or their agencies are considering a proactive communication, they or their Synod representative should inform Tenille Fricker (Executive Officer, National Task Group).

Proactive communications can include such things as media releases, opinion pieces and submissions.

Any proactive communications should be trauma-informed, survivor focused and provided in Plain English. Proactive communications should utilise the key messages contained in the Strategy.

They should be in Arial and at least 12-point font.

Major statements should also be provided in Easy English format.

## 11. National Task Group Members Contact Details

Role	Name	Mobile	Email
Chair	Colleen Geyer	0411 333 167	ColleenG@nat.uca.org.au
ASC Rep	Elaine Ledgerwood	0412 143 498	Elaine.Ledgerwood@wa.uca.org.au
UAICC Rep	TBA	TBA	TBA
Schools Rep	Adrian Pyle	0408 550 491	Adrian.Pyle@victas.uca.org.au
Synod Rep WA	Melanie Kiely	0439 009 702	Melanie.Kiely@goodsammy.com.au
Synod Rep Northern	Semisi Kailahi	0431 647 832	Semisi.Kailahi@ns.uca.org.au
Synod Rep SA	Tim Hodgson	0468 517 269	thodgson@sa.uca.org.au
Synod Rep NSW.ACT	Brigid Trevaskis	0436 667 066	brigidt@nswact.uca.org.au
Synod Rep QLD	Laurie Schapel	0437 302 249	LSchapel@wmq.org.au
Synod Rep VicTas	Andy Calder	0417 562 556	Andy.Calder@victas.uca.org.au
UnitingCare network rep	Claerwen Little	0412 688 268	claerwenl@nat.unitingcare.org.au
UnitingCare network rep	Anita Le Lay	0403 054 951	alelay@uniting.org
UnitingCare network rep	Deborah Bampton	0439 926 944	Deborah.Bampton@somerville.org.au
Attendee	Deidre Palmer	0439 001 116	president@nat.uca.org.au

## 12. Additional Contact Details

Role	Name	Mobile	Email
Executive Officer, National Task Group	Tenille Fricker	0433 888 418	tenillef@nat.unitingcare.org.au
National Manager, Media and Communications	Matt Pulford	0408 634 373	Mattp@nat.uca.org.au
Director, Policy and Advocacy, UnitingCare Australia	Fay Mound	0406 977 114	faym@nat.unitingcare.org.au
Media and Communications Coordination, UnitingCare Australia	Anna Minson	0437 276 834	annam@nat.unitingcare.org.au

# APPENDIX ONE

## National Task Group – Disability Royal Commission

### Protocol on engaging with the Disability Royal Commission

#### Single point of contact for the Disability Royal Commission

It is intended that the Uniting Church have a single point of contact for the Disability Royal Commission. Tenille Fricker, Executive Officer, National Task Group will be the contact. Her contact details are as follows:

02 6181 1006

[tenillef@nat.unitingcare.org.au](mailto:tenillef@nat.unitingcare.org.au)

#### When a communication is received from the Disability Royal Commission

If a synod receives a communication from the Disability Royal Commission, the person receiving the communication shall immediately advise the General Secretary of the Synod and notify the General Secretary of the Assembly and the Executive Officer of the National Task Group of both the fact and contents of the communication.

If a UCA school or community service organisation receives a communication from the Disability Royal Commission, the school or community service organisation shall immediately advise the General Secretary of the relevant Synod and notify the General Secretary of the Assembly and the Executive Officer of the National Task Group of both the fact and contents of the communication.

If an Assembly agency receives a communication from the Disability Royal Commission, there shall be immediate advice to the General Secretary of the Assembly and the Executive Officer of the National Task Group, and if there are national implications the Executive Officer shall immediately notify the General Secretary of each Synod and the Chair of each Synod Task Group.

If a congregation or mission receives a communication from the Disability Royal Commission, the person receiving the communication shall immediately advise the General Secretary of the Synod and notify the General Secretary of the Assembly and the Executive Officer of the National Task Group of both the fact and contents of the communication.

The contact details for the General Secretary of the Assembly, Colleen Geyer, are:

02 8267 4202

[ColleenG@nat.uca.org.au](mailto:ColleenG@nat.uca.org.au)