

Submission to State Disability Plan and Victorian Autism Plan 2027 to 2031

Support for the plans and connection to the purpose and responsibilities of the Victorian Disability Worker Commission and the Disability Worker Registration Board of Victoria

Overview

The Victorian Disability Worker Commission (the Commission) and the Disability Worker Registration Board of Victoria (the Board) welcome the opportunity to contribute to consultation on the Victorian State Disability Plan and Victorian Autism Plan 2027–2031 (the plans).

The Commission and Board strongly support the vision and objectives of the Victorian State Disability Plan and Victorian Autism Plan 2027–2031, and the plans' commitment to inclusion, accessibility, dignity, safety, choice and equal opportunity for people with disability. These principles reflect the fundamental right of people with disability to participate fully in all aspects of community life and to exercise choice and control over the supports they receive. The Commission and Board support the 4 pillars of the plans. This submission focuses on the role of safe, quality disability support as a fundamental foundation of delivering on the goals of the plans.

A genuinely inclusive Victoria requires not only accessible communities and opportunities for participation, but should be underpinned by a safe, high quality disability workforce with strong safeguards that uphold the rights, dignity, safety and wellbeing of people with disability. The Scheme, Commission and Board contribute to these outcomes by strengthening workforce quality, providing accessible complaints and safeguarding mechanisms, supporting systemic reform and promoting public confidence in disability services.

The Commission and Board encourage the Victorian Government to consider including the following actions in its next State Disability Plan and Victorian Autism Plan 2027 to 2031:

- Explore the training needs of the Victorian disability workforce to respond to the needs of people with disability, noting the changes and reforms in the disability sector.
- Explore the options to transition from voluntary disability worker registration to mandatory disability worker registration for Victorian disability workers.

Consistency and alignment with the Disability Worker Regulation Scheme

The Disability Worker Regulation Scheme (the Scheme), which is administered by the Commission and Board, was created in response to the 2016 Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Abuse in Disability Services (the Inquiry), which found a long history of widespread abuse and neglect of people with disability in Victoria (Family and Community Development Committee, Parliament of Victoria, *Inquiry into abuse in disability services: Final Report*, May 2016). The Inquiry determined that more effective safeguards and oversight measures were needed to ensure disability workers deliver high-quality care.

The Scheme was established under the *Disability Service Safeguards Act 2018* (the DSS Act) for the purpose of ensuring that disability workers across Victoria provide safe and high-quality disability services to people with disability (Sections 1(a)(1) and 1(a)(v) of the DSS Act). By improving the quality and safety of the disability workforce, the Scheme directly contributes to the plans' objective that greater inclusion and participation of people

with disability within the community decreases the likelihood that people with disability will be subjected to harm and abuse. Quality disability supports are essential to achieving these outcomes. When people with disability have access to safe, skilled and responsive disability workers, they are better able to participate in education, employment, recreation, relationships and community life. Greater participation strengthens inclusion, promotes independence and supports the realisation of human rights. It also contributes to safety, as people with disability who are visible, connected and actively participating in their communities are less vulnerable to abuse, neglect, exploitation and social isolation.

The Scheme plays a significant role in protecting and promoting these rights. Through regulating disability worker conduct, providing for disability worker registration and accessible complaint and notification mechanisms, the Scheme directly contributes to the State Disability Plan's objectives of fairness and safety of people with disability. The Scheme helps ensure people with disability are treated with dignity and respect, are protected from harm, and can have confidence in the quality and safety of the disability workforce that supports them.

The Commission and Board contribute to systems that strengthen inclusion, participation and safeguards for people with disability. Through the Commission's 'no wrong door' approach, people with disability, families, carers and advocates are supported to access the most appropriate regulatory or safeguarding response regardless of where they first raise a concern. The Commission works closely with Victorian and national regulators, government agencies and safeguarding bodies to improve information sharing, regulatory coherence and coordinated responses to risks. This collaborative approach strengthens protections for people with disability and contributes to a more accessible, responsive and person-centred safeguarding system.

Pillar 1: Inclusive communities

The Scheme contributes to greater inclusion of people with disability by 'promoting the quality, safety, responsiveness and sustainability of the disability workforce' (section 6 of the DSS Act). Disability workers have a crucial role in supporting a person with a disability to participate fully in society in a way that aligns with their interests and identity.

When people with disability can access safe, quality disability supports and have confidence in the workers who assist them, they are better able to participate in education, employment, social activities and community life. The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Disability Royal Commission) found that people with disability are at greater risk of violence, abuse and neglect when they are isolated, segregated, or dependent on poor quality services. The Disability Royal Commission's vision was that disability services should facilitate inclusion and belonging rather than operate as a separate system that keep people with disability separate from the broader community. Both the Disability Royal Commission and NDIS Review recognised that inclusion does not simply occur because people with disability are present in the community. Both argued that community inclusion of people with disability depends on both quality disability supports and accessible communities. Inclusion is more likely to be achieved when people with disability receive high quality, person-centred and rights-based supports that enable them to participate in ordinary community life, while mainstream settings and communities are equipped to welcome and include them.

The Scheme, Commission and Board contribute to the plans' objectives of promoting inclusion, participation, fairness and safety of people with disability by:

- providing a voluntary registration scheme that promotes workforce capability, professionalism and continuous learning
- managing and resolving complaints, referrals and mandatory notifications about disability worker conduct
- monitoring and enforcing compliance with the Disability Service Safeguards Code of Conduct and registration standards
- maintaining strong partnerships with co-regulators and safeguarding agencies to support coordinated responses to risk.
- ensuring all resources are accessible and provided in a wide range of languages, as well as Easy English. The Commission also ensures all events are accessible by using Auslan interpreters and live captioning for webinars and videos. The Commission considers it necessary standard practice to support inclusion.

Pillar 3: Fairness and safety

The Scheme, Commission and Board directly contribute to achieving the fairness and safety objectives of the State disability plan and Victorian autism plan. The Scheme was developed in response to the 2016 Victorian Parliamentary inquiry into abuse in disability services, which found a long history of widespread abuse and neglect of people with disability in Victoria (Family and Community Development Committee, Parliament of Victoria, *Inquiry into abuse in disability services: Final Report*, May 2016). The Disability Royal Commission's final report released in 2023 also described systemic rates of violence and discrimination that people with disability face. As institutions created to ensure people with disability are safe and receive quality disability supports, the Commission and Board's work is closely linked to achieving the plans' goals of every person living 'a life without violence, abuse, neglect and discrimination' and being 'treated with dignity and respect.' The Commission undertook a stakeholder survey on the Scheme in 2025 which included people with disability, their families and advocates. Over 70 per cent of people with disability surveyed agreed that "Scheme helps to protect vulnerable people from harm and neglect" and over two-thirds agreed that "registration of workers helps people with disability to receive high quality services."

The Commission and Board's work towards achieving the Safety and Fairness Pillar include:

- providing independent regulatory oversight of a diverse disability service system with multiple service models. The Commission regulates all disability workers that provide support to people with disability, irrespective of how their supports may be funded
- educating disability workers about the Disability Service Safeguards Code of Conduct and enforcing compliance through complaints, investigations and mandatory notifications
- providing accessible pathways for people with disability, families, carers and advocates to raise concerns about worker conduct
- appropriate responses to risks to the safety and wellbeing of people with disability through appropriate responses including counselling workers, settling complaints by agreement, investigating conduct and issuing interim prohibition orders or prohibition orders to prevent a disability worker practising [Prohibition Orders](#).| [Victorian Disability Worker Commission](#). Prohibition orders stop unsafe workers from providing disability services in Victoria, regardless of the funding source of those services.
- maintaining public registers of registered disability workers [Register of Victorian disability workers](#) to support informed decision-making by people with disability and service providers on quality supports. The register includes a function to enable searching for a worker based on languages spoken and postcode.

The Scheme provides important safeguards for people with disability by ensuring concerns about worker conduct can be independently assessed and addressed. These safeguards contribute to improving the quality and safety of disability services and support greater inclusion and participation of people with disability in the community. Importantly, safety and inclusion are intricately connected. People with disability are most empowered when they can participate confidently in community life supported by safe, skilled and quality disability workers. The Scheme contributes to this outcome by strengthening workforce quality and providing effective safeguards when concerns arise.

The Commission is committed to ensuring that people with disability can safely, confidently and easily raise concerns about disability workers. The Commission's complaints process is person-centred, accessible and disability informed. The Commission recognise the importance of trauma informed and disability informed practices, with all Commission staff trained to engage respectfully and sensitively with all people who contact the Commission to raise concerns by:

- helping the complainant put the complaint in writing
- assisting the complainant to clarify the nature and particulars of their complaint and any outcomes they seek (section 35, DSS Act)
- arranging in-language interpreters or being contacted via the National Relay service
- arranging to meet the complainant face-to-face
- having a support person assist the complainant.

By reducing barriers to reporting concerns, the Commission ensures that Victorians with disability can exercise their rights, have their voices heard and participate in the safeguarding of all people with disability in Victoria.

Systemic reforms – making government services and programs better

The Commission and Board are undertaking a range of activities that contribute to the systemic reforms identified in the plans. In relation to co-design, the Commission is committed to “engagement that is person-centred, honest, transparent, and empowering is required to build trust in the Scheme and what it does. Without trust, people will not engage with the Scheme and its functions” (Victorian Disability Worker Commission, [Stakeholder Engagement Framework](#), p. 3). The Commission has partnered with disability advocacy organisations to deliver targeted education to people with disability. In relation to Aboriginal self-determination, the Commission has made it a priority to create a strategy and plan to support greater cultural safety and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Victorian Disability Worker Commission and Disability Worker Registration Board of Victoria, [Corporate Plan 2025-2026](#), p. 8).

The Commission and Board contend that interconnected systems are a key feature of systemic reform and making government services and programs better. The Commission and Board support systemic reform through a contemporary co-regulatory approach that promotes collaboration and information sharing across service systems. The Scheme was deliberately designed to operate across funding streams and service settings and to address regulatory fragmentation that can arise between disability, health, aged care, education and social services systems. The Scheme applies to all disability workers in Victoria regardless of the source of funding for the service or the setting in which the service is provided. This broad jurisdiction helps ensure concerns about worker conduct do not fall through gaps between regulators and regulatory schemes.

The Commission supports a no wrong door approach to complaints and enquiries. Through referral pathways, information-sharing arrangements and coordination with other oversight bodies, the Commission seeks to ensure people with disability can access the most appropriate support and regulatory response regardless of where they first raise a concern.

The Commission's Code of Conduct is the same Code that is applied by the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, minimising confusion across the sector on expectations and requirements when providing disability supports. These approaches to regulation:

- reduce barriers to reporting concerns
- improve access to justice and safeguards
- support timely and coordinated responses to risks
- promote a more person-centred regulatory system
- strengthen confidence in oversight and accountability mechanisms.

Victoria's safeguarding regulatory ecosystem

The Commission and Board work constructively and collaboratively across the regulatory ecosystem at the state and national levels to safeguard people with disability. This includes within Victoria, the Disability Services Commissioner, Social Services Regulator, Victorian Institute of Teaching, Office of the Public Advocate, the Victorian Senior Practitioner, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Department of Education and Victoria Police. National regulators including the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency and the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission. Through lawful information sharing and coordinated regulatory responses, these partnerships strengthen protections for people with disability and support a more professional and accountable workforce.

Disability worker registration

Recognition is growing across Australia of the value of disability worker registration as a workforce quality and safeguarding mechanism. The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability and the NDIS Provider and Worker Registration Taskforce recognised that worker registration can support improved workforce quality and safety while maintaining the principles of choice and control that are central

to contemporary disability policy (recommendations 10.8 of the *Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability* and Wade, N; Borowick, W; O'Halloran, V; Fels, A (2024), [NDIS Provider and Worker Registration Taskforce Advice](https://www.ndis.gov.au/ndis-provider-and-worker-registration-taskforce-advice)). Most recently in early July 2026 the Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme's report on the Integrity of the NDIS recommended that the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission implement an NDIS worker registration scheme (https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/National_Disability_Insurance_Scheme/NDISIntegrity/Report).

HumanAbility, the Jobs and Skills Council funded by the Australian Government, concluded that workforce registration and accreditation schemes have the potential to improve career pathways, safety and safeguards, workforce data and role clarity across care and support sectors. (HumanAbility and Professor Shereen Hussain, *Registering Care and Support Workers in Australia: International and Local Learnings*, April 2026).

Victoria's Scheme provides a solid foundation for these national reforms and demonstrates the significant role worker registration can play in protecting people with disability from abuse and harm and strengthening workforce quality.

Registration of disability workers in Victoria supports quality improvement and the professionalisation of the disability workforce. A safe, skilled and capable workforce is one of the most important safeguards against violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability. It is also fundamental to supporting inclusion and participation. People with disability are better able to pursue education, employment, social participation and independent living goals when supported by competent and professional workers.

Registration involves an assessment of a worker's qualifications, experience and suitability (safety) to practise as a disability worker. It provides assurance that registered workers meet recognised standards and maintain their professional capability through ongoing professional development. Registration also assists people with disability and their families to identify workers who have demonstrated a commitment to professional practice and workforce excellence.

Over the last 5 years, the Commission and Board have operated the first disability worker registration approach in Australia and consider disability worker registration has been an important mechanism for strengthening workforce quality, improving public confidence and supporting better outcomes for people with disability. The Board and Commission would welcome the Victorian Government exploring options to transition the voluntary disability worker registration to mandatory, and the training needs of the disability workforce to support people with disability. These commitments would further support and strengthen the inclusion and participation of people with disability in the community, particularly given the current reform environment both nationally and the future implementation in Victoria of foundational supports for people with disability, commencing with Thriving Kids on 1 October 2026.