



Ensuring the well-being of people with disabilities

September 2023

In accordance with the Uniting Church Basis of Union, the Church is a fellowship of reconciliation, “a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work, and bear witness to himself” (Paragraph 3). In light of this, the Uniting Church affirms that:

- (a) 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;*
- (b) along with all members, the faith, gifts, hopes and dreams of people with disability are to be valued and honoured; and*
- (c) God is a God of justice and peace, who seeks reconciliation amongst all people.*

Part of a resolution passed by the 15th Triennial National Assembly meeting of the Uniting Church in 2018.

While across Australia, progress has been made to provide better support and services to people with disabilities, the experience of such people indicates there is more that is needed. There is a need to recognise the human rights of people with disabilities so they are treated with dignity and respect within our society.

The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities articulates minimum measures and processes required to recognise the dignity of all people with disability. The Convention underpins 'Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2030' released jointly between the Commonwealth Government and State and Territory Governments December 2021.

In the last term of Parliament, the Victorian Government consulted on a *Disability Inclusion Bill*. However, it has not so far brought the Bill to the Parliament in the current term of Parliament.

The Bill would ensure that Victorian disability laws would have the objectives of:

- Supporting and furthering the purpose and principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- Promoting the right to equality set out in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and in the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities;
- Promoting, encouraging and facilitating,
 - disability inclusion;
 - improvement in the status of people with disability;
 - representation of people with disability in leadership positions and advisory roles across the Victorian community; and,
 - achievement of the full potential of people with disability as equal members of the Victorian community.

- Providing a framework for whole of government and defined entity accountability and transparency in relation to progress made in disability inclusion in Victoria; and
- Promoting the involvement of people with disability in the design of government and government-funded programs, services and policies that affect people with disability.

The Bill also would require that Victorian Government bodies in developing policies and programs and in delivering services that are provided to the public, or have a direct and significant impact on the public must:

- consider and promote disability inclusion;
- consult with persons with disability;
- foster good relations between persons with disability and other members of the Victorian community; and,
- take necessary and proportionate action to advance disability inclusion.

The Bill would also create a Commissioner for Disability Inclusion to ensure that Victorian Government bodies implement the measures contained within the Bill and assist them in doing so.

Community Visitors Program

In May 2023, a report found that people living with disability were at extreme risk across a range of boarding houses in Victoria. The report found horrific examples of daily life in these types of accommodation.

The Victorian Government has a Community Visitors program, where trained volunteers visit people with disabilities or mental illness to check on how they are being treated. They also check on the quality of the accommodation and services the person with the disability receives. Currently, Community Visitors can check on most forms of accommodation provided to people with disabilities. They produce an annual report of their findings through the Office of the Public Advocate. However, the National Disability Insurance Agency has introduced new forms of accommodation. Community Visitors need to be given the ability to visit these new forms of accommodation. A central register of disability accommodation would assist in the effectiveness of the Community Visitors Program.

What you can do

Write polite and respectful letters to:

The Hon Lizzie Blandthorn
Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers
Level 22, 50 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne, VIC 3000

The Hon Daniel Andrews
The Premier of Victoria
Level 1, 1 Treasury Place,
East Melbourne VIC 3002

Salutation: Dear Minister

Salutation: Dear Premier

Points to make in your letters:

- Welcome the Victorian Government's consultation on a *Disability Inclusion Bill* with the exposure draft containing important elements to promote the rights and inclusion of people with disability.
- Ask that the Victorian Government bring the Bill to Parliament as soon as possible.
- In addition, ask that the Victorian Government:
 - establish a Disability Deaths Registrar modelled on the State Coroner's Victorian Suicide Register and accompanying review;
 - create an offence to hinder, obstruct, intimidate or threaten a Community Visitor carrying out their functions; and
 - establish a central register of disability residential properties that Community Visitors can inspect.