**June 2015**

**Inquiry into Violence, Abuse and Neglect against People with Disabilities in Institutional and Residential Settings**

Disability Advocacy Victoria Inc. (DAV) is the state peak agency for independent disability advocacy in the state of Victoria with membership of fourteen disability advocacy agencies funded through both state and national programs.

These funding streams are independent of disability service delivery, providing independent disability advocacy. This includes individual advocacy, systemic advocacy, self advocacy, legal advocacy and self advocacy.

Member agencies, **Communication Rights Australia** and the **Disability Discrimination Legal Service** have made submission to the Inquiry and Disability Advocacy Victoria fully endorse the submission. Please see recommendations made below.

**Recommendation1:** A commitment by government to compulsory formal speech pathology/language assessments every two years for people with disabilities who have complex communication needs throughout their schooling. Such assessments should be accompanied by speech pathology/language programs which have measurable outcomes and are monitored and evaluated every term.

**Recommendation 2:** A commitment by government to fund all communication devices necessary throughout the life of a person with a disability who has complex communication needs, and ongoing training for staff to work with that person.

**Recommendation 3:** The funding of Communication Support Workers to enable people with complex communication needs to use such workers to communicate to independent bodies, modelled on the funding for Auslan Interpreters available to the Deaf Community. Intermediary services available to people with disabilities in the United Kingdom for legal matters could inform this model.

**Recommendation 4:** Counselling services for victims of crime receive training to work with people who have complex disabilities, communication or speech difficulties.

**Recommendation 5:** Resources allocated to research best practice strategies to protect the rights of people who are vulnerable, marginalised and isolated.

**Recommendation 6:**

Governments to commit to upholding the rights of people with disabilities by ensuring complaints handling processes are independent of service provision and government influence.

**Recommendation 7:**

Governments commit to the adequate funding of independent advocacy organisations and community capacity building programs to assist individuals who are isolated, marginalised and vulnerable.

**Recommendation 8:** A national registration to be established to register and monitor staff who have undertaken the highest level of scrutiny, and as a consequence are permitted to work with vulnerable and marginalised people. Such a system should also include international criminal checks when necessary.

**Recommendation 9:** In Victoria, the dismantling of the Office of the Disability Services Commissioner and replacement with an independent statutory authority that has powers to investigate and direct.

**Recommendation 10:** The widespread adoption of the South Australian Attorney-General’s Department Guidelines of ‘Supporting vulnerable witnesses in the giving of evidence’ throughout Australia as best practice.

**Recommendation 11:** Increased funding (as per the recommendations of the Productivity Commission) for specialised disability Community Legal Centres.

**Recommendation 12:** Minimum qualifications required for those working with people with disabilities across all areas of education and service provision.

**Recommendation 13:** Independent Schools Commissioner established with powers to investigate and direct.

**Recommendation 14:** All government schools require to prohibit the seclusion of students with disabilities.

**Recommendation 15:** Regulation of all restrictive practices in schools (Victoria only) through the Office of Professional Practice.

**Recommendation 16:** Office of Professional Practice given statutory independence and removed from the Department Of Health and Human Services.

Melanie Muir

Chairperson

Disability Advocacy Victoria Inc.