

Article Information

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Royal Commissions in light of COVID-19: Finding alternative ways to proceed

As in practically all other aspects of life, COVID-19 has had a significant effect on Royal Commissions in Australia. We also note that the Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements (Bushfires Royal Commission) has suspended its face to face work but has indicated it will examine options for digital engagement.

Aged Care Royal Commission

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety has suspended all hearings and workshops for the time being, subject to ongoing review. This decision is a consequence of the evolving coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and based on information available from the Australian Government and affects all hearings and workshops scheduled until at least the end of May 2020.

The suspension also applies to all group consultations which have been part of the engagement work conducted by Royal Commission staff. The Commission made a further announcement on 27 March 2020 – read the full media release [here](#).

Disability Royal Commission

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability announced on 16 March 2020 that it was suspending all public hearings and other public events (such as community forums) until further notice, due to concerns about the spread of COVID-19 coronavirus. This will of course impact upon the timetable of the Royal Commission and may require the Commission to seek an extension of time for the delivery of an interim report (presently due in October 2020) and the final report (presently due in April 2022).

However, Ronald Sackville AO QC has made it clear that “there is a great deal of important work that can and will continue despite the postponement of some of the Royal Commission’s activities. For example, Issues Papers will still be published and preparations for future hearings will progress”.

Further, on 26 March 2020, the Royal Commission issued a [Statement of Concern](#) to State and Federal Governments about the impact of COVID-19 on people with disability. In particular the statement highlights the vulnerability of those living in residential or other care facilities currently in ‘lockdown’ to incidents of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation and their increased risk of infection.

We are acutely aware of the increased vulnerability of people with disability and older Australians during the COVID-19 pandemic. We appreciate that this is an extremely challenging time for organisations to provide support to people with disability and to older Australians.

If you would like to speak to us about the impact of COVID-19 on your organisation in light of the statements by the Royal Commissions, please do not hesitate to contact us.