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NGO in Special Consultative Status with the  
Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

9 November 2017

Dear NSW Sentencing Council,

**Re: Victims' involvement in sentencing**

**People with Disability Australia (PWDA)** welcomes the opportunity to provide a disability perspective to the NSW Sentencing Council regarding the involvement of victims in sentencing. Time constraints unfortunately limit the depth of response available at this point in time, however, PWDA welcomes further opportunities to discuss the involvement of people with disability in sentencing.

About PWDA

PWDA is a leading disability rights, advocacy and representative organisation of and for all people with disability. We are the only national, cross-disability organisation - we represent the interests of people with all kinds of disability. We are a non-profit, non-government organisation.

PWDA's primary membership is made up of people with disability and organisations primarily constituted by people with disability. PWDA also has a large associate membership of other individuals and organisations committed to the disability rights movement.

We have a vision of a socially just, accessible, and inclusive community, in which the human rights, citizenship, contribution, potential and diversity of all people with disability are recognised, respected and celebrated. PWDA was founded in 1981, the International Year of Disabled Persons, to provide people with disability with a voice of our own.

PWDA is also a founding member of Disabled People's Organisations Australia ([DPO Australia](#)) along with Women With Disabilities Australia, First Peoples Disability Network Australia, and National Ethnic Disability Alliance. DPO's are organisations that are led by, and constituted of, people with disability.

The key purpose of DPO Australia is to promote, protect and advance the human rights and freedoms of people with disability in Australia by working collaboratively on areas of shared interests, purposes, strategic priorities and opportunities. DPO Australia is made up of four national peak DPOs that have been funded by the Australian Government to represent the views of people with disability and provide advice to Government/s and other stakeholders.

### People with disability and access to justice<sup>1</sup>

People with disability experience crime, including violent crime, at much higher rates than people without disability.<sup>2</sup> Despite this increased risk of experiencing crime, people with disability frequently encounter barriers to accessing justice. People with disability may not know that what they've experienced is a crime, and that they are able to report or seek support; they may not be believed or taken seriously when they do make reports; they may be unable to physically attend a police station to make a report; and police may not have sufficient training or skills in accessible interviewing techniques to support people with disability to give their best evidence.

Many of these barriers to justice are founded upon some key discriminatory beliefs and frameworks regarding disability. Among others, these include the denial of legal capacity,<sup>3</sup> which prevents or limits the participation of people with disability in police and/or legal proceedings and enduring negative assumptions and discriminatory stereotypes about the reliability or credibility of people with disability to make police reports or give evidence as defendants or witnesses.

In addition to being overrepresented as victims of (often violent) crimes, people with disability are significantly overrepresented in prison systems and justice processes.<sup>4</sup> Studies have shown that a large proportion of female prisoners (at least 12%-50% of female prisoners) have some form of disability, and that disability is also likely to be a significant factor for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in prison.<sup>5</sup> Data from NSW also shows that 50% of all young people in juvenile detention centres have an intellectual disability, and that 39% of these are young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The information in the following section has been drawn from PWDA's May 2017 submission to the NSW Disability Justice Strategy (provided as an attachment to this submission).

<sup>2</sup> Frohmader, C., & Sands, T. 2015. *Australian Cross Disability Alliance (ACDA) Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Violence, abuse and neglect against people with disability in institutional and residential settings*. Australian Cross Disability Alliance (ACDA); Sydney, Australia. p35. Available: [http://pwd.org.au/documents/Submissions/ACDA\\_Sub\\_Sen\\_Inquiry\\_Violence\\_Institutions.pdf](http://pwd.org.au/documents/Submissions/ACDA_Sub_Sen_Inquiry_Violence_Institutions.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> For comprehensive discussion on legal capacity, see: People with Disability Australia (PWDA), the Australian Centre for Disability Law (ACDL) and the Australian Human Rights Centre (AHRCentre). 2014 *Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC): Equality, Capacity and Disability in Commonwealth Laws Discussion Paper*, p 6. Available: <http://www.pwd.org.au/documents/pubs/SB14-ALRC-Submission-PWDA-ACDL-AHRCentre.doc>; and UPR Disability Coordination Group, 'Equality before the law and supported decision-making', Australia's Universal Periodic Review 2015, Factsheet, Australian Cross Disability Alliance, Advocacy for Inclusion, Australian Centre for Disability Law. Available: <http://www.pwd.org.au/issues/periodicreview.html>

<sup>4</sup> Baldry, E. *Disability at the Margins: Limits of the Law*. Griffith Law Review, 2014 Vol. 23, No. 3, 370-388.

<sup>5</sup> Kilroy, D. 2016. *Women in Prison in Australia: Current Issues in Sentencing Conference*, 6-7 February 2016, Australian National University, Canberra. Available: <https://njca.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Kilroy-Debbie-Women-in-Prison-in-Australia-paper.pdf> p2

<sup>6</sup> Devon Indig et al. '2009 NSW Young People in Custody Health Survey: Full Report' (Report, Justice Health, NSW Health and Human Services Juvenile Justice, NSW Government, 2011) 15.

There are many reasons why people with disability are overrepresented in the justice system, and many of these relate to barriers to accessing justice and denial or limitation of legal capacity. Due to the increased risk of violence, yet limited access to justice experienced by people with disability, it is therefore vital that they be afforded straightforward and accessible involvement with sentencing. This would give an avenue through which they could be heard, and the impact of the crime could be understood, potentially getting them a step closer to the justice to which they are entitled.

### Sentencing of crimes against people with disability<sup>7</sup>

Sentences for individuals who have perpetrated crimes against people with disability are often influenced by enduring discriminatory attitudes and ableism within the community. This results in people working with or caring for people with disability being viewed as inherently moral and virtuous, with these beliefs often resulting in leniency for perpetrators who have committed crimes against people with disability.

Enduring ableist community attitudes, including the notion of ‘carer sacrifice’, and media representations of disability<sup>8</sup> can influence the willingness of police or services to acknowledge (and therefore pursue) violence being perpetrated by carers and/or disability service workers.<sup>9</sup> For instance, in cases (including homicides) involving people with disability, the provision of care is often understood as a mitigating factor to the perpetration of violence. This can result in lower sentences for relatives or support workers who have killed people with disability under their care.<sup>10</sup>

### Disability awareness training

All professionals involved with the justice process must receive regular disability awareness training to support them in their roles. This would also help them provide survivors with disability with appropriate information, referrals and support, particularly around their involvement with sentencing. This training could, for instance, emphasise the importance of clear communication, using plain English and allowing sufficient time when engaging with people with disability, particularly for those with communication support needs or with intellectual disability.

### Victim impact statements

Information about victim impact statements should be made freely available in a number of accessible formats, including Easy Read, Plain English, Braille, Auslan, audio and video. For the written documents, in addition to being provided in a booklet

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<sup>7</sup> This section has been pulled from PWDA’s 2017 submission to the NSW Disability Justice Strategy.

<sup>8</sup> Sherry, Mark. 2000. *Hate Crimes Against People with Disabilities*, Women With Disabilities Australia. Available: <http://wwda.org.au/issues/viol/viol1995/hate/>; Guest, Annie. 2010. ‘Disabled Australians subjected to hate crimes’, *ABC News*. Available: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2010-08-07/disabled-australians-subjected-to-hate-crimes/935662?pfmredir=sm>; Young, Stella. 2013. ‘Disability is no justification for murder’, *The Drum*, 3 September 2013. Available: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-09-03/young-kyla-puhle-death/4930742>.

<sup>9</sup> Frohmader, C., & Sands, T. 2015, op cit. p19.

<sup>10</sup> Young, Stella. 2013. ‘Disability is no justification for murder’, *The Drum*, 3 September 2013. Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-09-03/young-kyla-puhle-death/4930742>.

format with other information for victim of crimes, this information must also be easily accessible in a stand-alone format. The development of this information in these formats requires consulting with people with disability, disability access consultants or disability organisations to test, for instance, whether the information provided in various formats is appropriate and compatible with assistive technologies.

These resources must also be readily available in non-digital formats, as many people with disability have limited access to the internet. Hard copy versions should be distributed to disability advocacy organisations and a wide range of disability services, to increase the likelihood of people with disability receiving this information. These resources should not only provide clear and accessible information about what a victim impact statement is, and how to make one, but also provide details about how decisions are made, what the process may involve, and what supports are available. This may help to manage the expectations of survivors with disability regarding making a victim impact statement and their overall involvement in sentencing.

People with disability who may be eligible to make victim impact statements must be adequately supported. While Victims Services may provide people with disability assistance in writing or reading out their victim impact statement, additional supports may also be required. As noted in the consultation paper,<sup>11</sup> this could include the involvement and support of witness intermediaries. PWDA has long advocated for registered witness intermediaries to provide supports not only to children with and without disability, but also to adults with disability, and those who have experienced sexual violence more broadly.<sup>12</sup>

As making a victim impact statement is voluntary, it is vital that people with disability are not only provided accessible information, but are also able to draw on a wide range of supports, including independent individual advocates, interpreters, augmentative or alternative communication devices, or other decision-making supports. This is vital to ensuring that they can participate on their own terms, with the support they need, and will not be unfairly discriminated against on the basis of their style of communication, the support they receive from others, or their limited literacy.

Providing appropriate and accessible supports, including decision-making support where required, is vital to ensuring people with disability can participate in justice proceedings. As mentioned above, the legal capacity of people with disability is often denied and/or limited, which can serve to prevent their participation in police or legal proceedings.

Furthermore, people with disability must be adequately protected while reading their victim impact statement in court. In addition to the current protections afforded people

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<sup>11</sup> Page 28 of consultation paper

<sup>12</sup> For additional comments on the witness intermediary scheme, see PWDA's submission to the NSW Disability Justice Strategy

with disability, this should also include prohibiting cross-examination on the content of victim impact statements.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, we note that in cases in which the accused person is being dealt with under the *Mental Health (Forensic Provisions) Act 1990*, as there are no convictions in these cases, there is no opportunity to give a victim impact statement. PWDA is aware of the concerns that have been raised for victims to access victim impact statements in these cases, however, this is one of many procedural concerns we have in relation to legislation and policy around legal capacity and diversionary measures.

### Diversionary measures<sup>14</sup>

People with disability who are accused of committing a crime can be diverted from criminal proceedings through legislative provisions that can find a person 'unfit' to stand trial or not guilty by reason of 'mental impairment'. These diversionary provisions lead to people with disability being detained indefinitely in forensic services without conviction, often for periods longer than the maximum custodial sentence for the offence.<sup>15</sup>

There is an immediate need for all Australian Governments to end indefinite detention of people with disability without conviction. DPO Australia has provided specific recommendations around the required legislative and policy reform required in this area in their submission to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee Inquiry into Indefinite Detention of People with Cognitive and Psychiatric Impairment in Australia.<sup>16</sup> We provide this submission as an appendix and strongly endorse and commend its recommendations.

PWDA thanks the NSW Sentencing Council for the opportunity to respond to this consultation process. We welcome further discussion regarding any of the matters we have raised.

Yours sincerely,



**MEREDITH LEA**

Senior Policy Officer

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<sup>13</sup> Although we note that cross-examination of victim impact statements is rarely happening in practice, the potential for cross-examination may be sufficient to deter people from making a victim impact statement and thus being involved in the sentencing process.

<sup>14</sup> Drawn from PWDA's submission to the NSW Disability Justice Strategy

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Available: [http://dpoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/ACDA\\_IndefiniteDetention\\_Submission\\_April2016.pdf](http://dpoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/ACDA_IndefiniteDetention_Submission_April2016.pdf)



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## People with Disability Australia (PWDA)

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### Submission to the NSW Department of Justice Disability Justice Strategy

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**Submission  
May 2017**

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Disabled  
People's  
Organisations  
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## **About People with Disability Australia**

1. **People with Disability Australia (PWDA)** is a leading disability rights, advocacy and representative organisation of and for all people with disability. We are the only national, cross-disability organisation - we represent the interests of people with all kinds of disability. We are a non-profit, non-government organisation.
2. PWDA's primary membership is made up of people with disability and organisations primarily constituted by people with disability. PWDA also has a large associate membership of other individuals and organisations committed to the disability rights movement.
3. We have a vision of a socially just, accessible, and inclusive community, in which the human rights, citizenship, contribution, potential and diversity of all people with disability are recognised, respected and celebrated. PWDA was founded in 1981, the International Year of Disabled Persons, to provide people with disability with a voice of our own.
4. PWDA is also a founding member of Disabled People's Organisations Australia (**DPO Australia**) along with Women With Disabilities Australia, First Peoples Disability Network Australia, and National Ethnic Disability Alliance. DPO's are organisations that are led by, and constituted of, people with disability.
5. The key purpose of DPO Australia is to promote, protect and advance the human rights and freedoms of people with disability in Australia by working collaboratively on areas of shared interests, purposes, strategic priorities and opportunities. DPO Australia has been funded by the Australian Government to be the recognised coordinating point between Government/s and other stakeholders, for consultation and engagement with people with disability in Australia.

## **Introduction**

6. PWDA welcomes the opportunity to be involved in consultations regarding NSW's Disability Justice Strategy. The following submission builds on our long history of advocacy on access to justice issues, and our extensive expertise in the area of violence, including domestic and family violence, against people with disability. PWDA provides individual advocacy support to many people with disability who have experienced various forms of violence, including those affected by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (the Royal Commission).
7. In addition, we have also provided disability specific policy advice to the Royal Commission<sup>1</sup> and a number of other inquiries, such as the Senate Inquiry into

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<sup>1</sup> PWDA submissions to the Royal Commission which may be of particular interest include: PWDA, 2015a. 'Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse: Issues Paper 8 – Experiences of Police and Prosecution Responses'. Available: <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/getattachment/5d0dcca4-9166-442f-a8ac-e6f76821e005/17-People-With-Disability-Australia-Inc> and PWDA, 2016a. 'Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse: Submission regarding Criminal Justice' April 2016. Available:



Violence, Abuse and Neglect of People with Disability in Institutional and Residential Settings<sup>2</sup> and the 2014-15 Senate Inquiry into Domestic Violence.<sup>3</sup> We have also made submissions to the Australian Law Reform Commission's 2014 *Equality, Capacity and Disability in Commonwealth Laws* investigation,<sup>4</sup> as well as to the 2014 Disability Discrimination Commissioner's *Equality Before the Law: Towards Disability Justice Strategies*<sup>5</sup> report.

8. Equality before the law is a non-derogable human right.<sup>6</sup> All people are entitled to, and should receive, equal protection and benefit of the law, whether they are perpetrator, witness, or victim. NSW legislation and policy must recognise that all people, equally, have legal capacity, have the right to exercise this capacity (legal agency) and to have their acts respected and upheld in legislation and practice.<sup>7</sup>
9. This universal presumption of capacity must be an overarching principle in the development and implementation of the NSW Disability Justice Strategy. From this premise of legal capacity as an inherent human right, the emphasis shifts to ensuring that all people have the support they require to navigate and benefit from all aspects of the justice system. This could range from support required for a person with hearing impairment to participate in jury duty, to decision making support for an individual with cognitive disability who may come into contact with police, to the provision of witness intermediary support for a person with disability who may be a victim of crime. The priority is whether or not the person is adequately supported through these processes.<sup>8</sup>
10. It is widely recognised that people with disability are not treated equally across the full spectrum of the justice system in Australia. In 2013, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities expressed its concern that people with disability are overrepresented in the Australian justice system.<sup>9</sup> Available research indicates that adults with intellectual disability are overrepresented in prisons, with between 12-30% of the prison population having some form of

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[http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/getattachment/e7f22c43-46d2-4dbf-8e32-6fd70792549a/People-with-Disability-Australia-\(PWDA\)](http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/getattachment/e7f22c43-46d2-4dbf-8e32-6fd70792549a/People-with-Disability-Australia-(PWDA))

<sup>2</sup> Frohmader, C. and Sands, T. 2015 *Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Violence, abuse and neglect against people with disability in institutional and residential settings*. Australian Cross Disability Alliance (ACDA) Sydney, Australia. Available: <http://pwd.org.au/documents/Submissions/ACDASubSenInquiryViolenceInstitutions.doc>

<sup>3</sup> DPO Australia, 2014. *Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration: Inquiry into Domestic Violence in Australia. Joint Submission from National Cross-Disability Disabled People's Organisations (DPO's)*, p23. Available: <http://www.pwd.org.au/documents/Submissions/SubDVSenate2014.doc>

<sup>4</sup> People with Disability Australia (PWDA), the Australian Centre for Disability Law (ACDL) and the Australian Human Rights Centre (AHRCentre). 2014 'Submission to Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC): Equality, Capacity and Disability in Commonwealth Laws Discussion Paper,' Available:

<http://www.pwd.org.au/documents/pubs/SB14-ALRC-Submission-PWDA-ACDL-AHRCentre.doc>

<sup>5</sup> PWDA, 2013. 'Access to Justice and YOU'. Available: <http://pwd.org.au/documents/pubs/SB13-AcesstoJusticeSubmission.doc>

<sup>6</sup> The NSW Disability Justice Strategy must therefore be based upon all of the rights outlined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), in addition to all other human rights instruments to which Australia is a party.

<sup>7</sup> Article 12 of the CRPD.

<sup>8</sup> Article 13 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) clearly outlines the need for 'the provision of procedural and age-appropriate accommodations, in order to facilitate their effective role as direct and indirect participants, including as witnesses, in all legal proceedings, including at investigative and other preliminary stages.'

<sup>9</sup> Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 'Concluding Observations on the Initial Report of Australia, Adopted by the Committee at its Tenth Session (2-13 September 2013)', UN Doc CRPD/C/AUS/CO/1 (4 October 2013), [31]

intellectual disability (despite comprising 2-3% of the general population).<sup>10</sup> In addition, 46-78% of prisoners experience a 'psychiatric disorder', compared to 11% of the general population.<sup>11</sup> However, these estimates are approximate, as disability is often under-recognised in the correctional system, and also by police.<sup>12</sup> Data from New South Wales shows that 50% of all young people in juvenile detention centres have intellectual disability,<sup>13</sup> and that 39% of these are young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.<sup>14</sup> Further data illustrates that 85% of young people in juvenile detention centres in NSW have a 'psychological condition', with 73% reporting two or more 'psychological conditions'.<sup>15</sup>

11. The over-representation of people with disability in the criminal justice system is, in large part, a consequence of the prevailing legal capacity framework in NSW. Not only are people with disability routinely denied the support to which they are entitled to navigate the criminal justice system, they are also excluded from prevention interventions and court proceedings because of perceptions of individual 'capacity'. For example, people with disability can not participate as jurors despite their rights as community members, and the benefit that may come from this alternative perspective in court; and school children with disability are excluded from classes focussed on healthy and respectful relationships, despite the preventative nature of these classes in skilling all children to recognise abuse.
12. The NSW Disability Justice Strategy must therefore investigate the extent to which people with disability are currently excluded from mainstream services, including crime prevention and diversionary programs, as well as education and other supports, and put in place mechanisms and pathways to enhance this access.
13. Furthermore, the NSW Disability Justice Strategy needs to recognise the intersectional issues, including multiple forms of discrimination and marginalisation that face many people with disability, subsequently making them more vulnerable to the criminal justice system. Crime prevention and response initiatives under the Strategy need to be grounded in an understanding of the intersectional challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people with disability, women with disability, people with disability from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with multiple disabilities (including psychosocial disability arising from mental illness).

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<sup>10</sup> Baldry E., Clarence M., Dowse L. & Trollor J., 2013. 'Reducing vulnerability to harm in adults with cognitive disabilities in the Australian criminal justice system.' *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disability* 10:222-9; NSW Law Reform Commission, 2010. 'People with Cognitive and Mental Health Impairments in the Criminal Justice System: An Overview' (Consultation Paper No 5, January 2010), pp13-15.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> PWDA, 2015b. 'Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Issues Paper 10: Advocacy and Support and Therapeutic Treatment Services', p12. Available: <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/getattachment/ac1328d3-fe86-485c-9d9b-511e030d6b1e/99-People-with-Disability-Australia>

<sup>13</sup> Horin, A. 2010. 'Report Finds Disability and Disadvantage Common in Young Offenders', *Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney) 27 February 2010. [www.smh.com.au/nsw/report-finds-disability-and-disadvantage-common-in-young-offenders-20100226-p95r.html](http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/report-finds-disability-and-disadvantage-common-in-young-offenders-20100226-p95r.html)

<sup>14</sup> Devon Indig et al. 2011. '2009 NSW Young People in Custody Health Survey: Full Report' (Report, Justice Health, NSW Health and Human Services Juvenile Justice, NSW Government, 2011) 15.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

14. To understand and address these issues, a comprehensive, holistic Strategy is required that reaches across Government, recognising the multiple factors that lead to greater risk, including poverty, homelessness, ill-health, poor education and so on. We acknowledge that these areas fall outside the remit and responsibility of the justice system, but ultimately the Strategy will in large part depend on a concerted effort across government to overcome the current risks and barriers facing people with disability in NSW. The economic rationale for investment across Government is clear. The cost of ensuring that people with disability can access appropriate disability supports, social supports, inclusive prevention and diversionary programs and inclusive education and training that diverts them from the justice system (both as victims and as offenders) is far less than the cost of these individuals engaging with justice proceedings.
15. The NSW Government has obligations to fulfil the rights of people with disability as defined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and other human rights instruments to which Australia is a party. The National Disability Strategy (NDS) is the mechanism through which the Australian Government is implementing the CRPD, and in NSW the Inclusion Plan lays out priority areas of focus. Unfortunately, the NSW Inclusion Plan has a notable lack of focus on rights and justice initiatives. It is therefore essential that this NSW Disability Justice Strategy fill the policy gaps in the Inclusion Plan, with direct and transparent accountability and monitoring to the NDS.
16. There are a number of national protective initiatives that are closely related with the NSW Disability Justice Strategy, and it is important that the Strategy is integrated with these initiatives. In particular, the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children, the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Quality and Safeguarding Framework.

## Recommendations

In relation to the NSW Disability Justice Strategy, PWDA recommends:

1. That the NSW Disability Justice Strategy be informed by the recommendations of the following reports: The Australian Law Reform Commission's *Equality, Capacity and Disability in Commonwealth Laws*;<sup>16</sup> the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Equal Before the Law*;<sup>17</sup> and the Productivity Commission's *Access to Justice Arrangements*.<sup>18</sup>
  - a. In particular, the core principles of *Equal Before the Law* must be taken into consideration: appropriate communications; early intervention and diversion; increased service capacity; effective training; enhanced accountability and monitoring; and better policies and frameworks.
  - b. Furthermore, people with disability must be included in all aspects of policy development, implementation and monitoring.
2. That the NSW Government work alongside other jurisdictions to develop a nationally consistent framework to guide the processes and principles relevant to the full spectrum of ways to exercise legal agency, including the different ways a person may be provided with, or utilise support.<sup>19</sup>
3. That the Department of Justice take a holistic, cross-government approach, to the NSW Disability Justice Strategy, with direct accountability and monitoring of the Strategy linked to outcomes under the NSW Inclusion Plan and the National Disability Strategy
4. That the Disability Justice Strategy be aligned with initiatives under the NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework
5. That primary prevention and early intervention programs regarding violence be provided to all children and adults with disability in NSW.
6. That NSW police training in relation to domestic and family violence be upgraded to fully reflect the definition of this crime offered by the *Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007*.
7. That all definitions of domestic and family violence across NSW services and government agencies be amended to reflect the legal definition in the *Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007*, or to otherwise ensure the

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<sup>16</sup> Available: <https://www.alrc.gov.au/publications/equality-capacity-disability-report-124>

<sup>17</sup> Available: <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/publications/equal-law>

<sup>18</sup> Available: <http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/access-justice/report>

<sup>19</sup> As discussed in Bevan, N. 2016. *NSW Law Reform Commission Review of the Guardianship Act 1987*, People with Disability Australia, March 2016, p4. Available:

[http://pwd.org.au/documents/Submissions/SUB\\_180316\\_Law\\_Reform\\_Commission\\_Guardianship\\_Act\\_1987.pdf](http://pwd.org.au/documents/Submissions/SUB_180316_Law_Reform_Commission_Guardianship_Act_1987.pdf)  
; Finch, K. 2016. *NSW Law Reform Commission Review of the Guardianship Act 1987, Question Paper 1: Preconditions for Alternative Decision Making Arrangements*, People with Disability Australia, October 2016, p10;

and Lea, M. and Sands, T. 2017. 'Disabled People's Organisations Australia (DPO Australia) Submission to the Australian Law Reform Commission Discussion Paper: Protecting the Rights of Older Australians from Abuse', DPO Australia, Sydney, Australia. For more information, see: NGO Coalition, 2015, *Australia's UPR 2015: Fact Sheet Legal Capacity*, available:

<http://www.pwd.org.au/documents/Word/AusUPRFactSheetSupportedDecisionMaking.docx>;

inclusion of people with disability and the settings and relationships in which they experience domestic and family violence.

8. That the NSW government provide additional funding for the provision of attendant care for people with disability who are escaping domestic and family violence. The current Victorian *Disability and Family Violence Crisis Response Initiative*,<sup>20</sup> which provides short term funds of up to \$9,000 for disability related supports, should inform the creation of a NSW equivalent.
9. That the current NSW 'Children's Champion' pilot be broadened to a 'Witness Intermediary Scheme' that includes the provision of support for people with disability, in both police and court proceedings.
10. That the NSW government provide sufficient funding for independent individual advocacy, representation, information and advice for people with disability.
11. That mainstream advocacy, legal and support services be trained in disability awareness and delivering trauma-informed support, to enable these services to recognise disability, increase their accessibility and provide adequate service responses.
12. That disability awareness training, including information about working with people with disability and people experiencing trauma, be made mandatory for police, lawyers, judicial officers, court staff and prison staff in NSW.<sup>21</sup>
13. That the Department of Justice promote the inclusion of people with disability in jury service and dedicate resources to ensure support is made available for this participation.
14. That the Department of Justice work alongside other government agencies and the NDIA to develop a strategy to identify prisoners requiring disability and other social supports, and to develop a plan to provide these supports prior to their release into the community.
15. That 'good character' be excluded as a mitigating factor in sentencing for violent offences against people with disability.

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<sup>20</sup> See <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-service-providers/children,-youth-and-families/family-violence2/disability-and-family-violence-crisis-response> for more information.

<sup>21</sup> As outlined in additional detail in *Disability Rights Now: Civil Society Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, August 2012, p82. Available: <http://www.afdo.org.au/media/1210/crpd-civilsocietyreport2012-1.pdf>

## **Crime Prevention and Early Intervention**

17. Across Australia, people with disability who are at risk of coming into contact with the criminal justice system have historically been overlooked, or denied access to early intervention or prevention services, largely due to ill-informed and discriminatory beliefs about their needs and rights. This includes access to appropriate disability, health and other therapeutic services and supports, including those that are gender specific and culturally appropriate.<sup>22</sup>
18. In addition, the provision of disability support remains embedded in the medical model of disability, where people are found eligible for support based on a formal diagnosis, and where people with disability are treated in certain ways due to misunderstandings about disability and how it impacts people across different aspects of their lives. This can result in a failure to recognise disability, or to identify and address support needs. As such, people with disability may not have access to appropriate services, including a range of social support that respond to their personal circumstances.<sup>23</sup>
19. Furthermore, there remains limited understanding and consideration of the intersectional factors that lead to some people with disability being at higher risk of coming into contact with the criminal justice system, either as victim or perpetrator. These factors include, for example, intersectional discrimination and marginalisation, (such as for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability), poverty, homelessness, poor health, trauma, and dependence on social support.
20. The lack of understanding of disability, and the intersectional factors that impact communities and individuals, lead to inadequate policy and programmatic responses that result in people with disability having frequent and often multiple contacts with the criminal justice system.<sup>24</sup>
21. The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), with its focus on choice and control, will ensure increased access to tailored disability services and supports for some people with disability.<sup>25</sup> However, the NDIS, with its client, demand driven model is currently poorly equipped to respond to the needs of many people with disability who are marginalised, including those who are at increased risk of contact with the justice system.
22. Provision of adequate, timely and appropriate support for people with disability at risk is critical. The Department of Justice must develop a holistic and coherent strategy that works across Government, including integrating with the NDIS, to deliver community based early intervention and outreach

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<sup>22</sup> DPO Australia, 2017. 'Re: Resolution 30/7 "Human Rights in the administration of justice, including juvenile justice."'

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. An example of this situation is the story of Dylan Voller, an Aboriginal teenager with disability whose treatment in the Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre in the Northern Territory triggered the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory, see ABC 7:30, Dylan Voller's troubled past, <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2016/s4514995.htm>; see also *Disability Rights Now*, op cit. p77.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



strategies to prevent people with disability being at high risk of coming into contact with the criminal justice system.

## **Justice diversionary provisions**

23. People with disability who are accused of committing a crime can be diverted from criminal proceedings through legislative provisions that can find a person 'unfit' to stand trial or not guilty by reason of 'mental impairment'. These diversionary provisions lead to people with disability being detained indefinitely in forensic services without conviction, often for periods longer than the maximum custodial sentence for the offence.<sup>26</sup>
24. There is an immediate need for all Australian Governments to end indefinite detention of people with disability without conviction. DPO Australia has provided specific recommendations around the required legislative and policy reform required in this area in their submission to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee Inquiry into Indefinite Detention of People with Cognitive and Psychiatric Impairment in Australia.<sup>27</sup> We provide this submission as an appendix and strongly endorse and commend the recommendations in this regard to the NSW Department of Justice to inform the development of this Disability Justice Strategy.

## **Primary prevention**

25. In NSW, as is the case in many other states and territories, there are currently very limited primary prevention efforts targeted at people with disability.<sup>28</sup> This can contribute to people with disability being unaware that what they've experienced is a crime, or that there is a way to report these incidents.
26. Prevention education regarding violence, in particular, should be made accessible to all people with disability in NSW, including children and young people with disability in all school settings (including those in segregated units of mainstream schools). Such education should include information about sex and relationships, domestic and family violence, human rights, and how to make complaints or reports.
27. Prevention education, targeting both adults and children, should be delivered by independent organisations, preferably in partnership with a disability rights organisation, to ensure a level of independence from the services that participants receiving the training may attend or rely on for support.<sup>29</sup> This neutrality allows participants the opportunity to speak openly, and possibly disclose violence they've experienced in these settings. In PWDA's experience delivering sex and respectful relationships training to people with disability, numerous disclosures happen in these training sessions, as

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Available: [http://dpoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/ACDA\\_IndefiniteDetention\\_Submission\\_April2016.pdf](http://dpoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/ACDA_IndefiniteDetention_Submission_April2016.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> PWDA, 2016b. 'Re. A Blueprint for Family and Domestic Violence Response in NSW', pp4-5. Available: [http://pwd.org.au/documents/Submissions/SB\\_NSW\\_Blueprint\\_PWDA\\_050216.doc](http://pwd.org.au/documents/Submissions/SB_NSW_Blueprint_PWDA_050216.doc)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

participants come to realise that their previous experiences actually constitute violence. This new recognition of their experiences provides them with the opportunity to pursue justice, or to access a range of support services, if they so choose.

28. Finally, another key element of crime prevention for people with disability is ensuring that perpetrators are held to account. In PWDA's recent work in relation to the Royal Commission, it has become clear that perpetrators frequently move from workplace to workplace, and sector to sector, as often allegations do not result in formal convictions.<sup>30</sup> This ability to maintain employment with children, people with disability, and older people is often facilitated by the barriers to reporting experienced by these cohorts, and the barriers to justice experienced by people with disability in particular.<sup>31</sup> The barriers are elaborated on further below.
29. The failure to adequately investigate or prosecute allegations of violence against people with disability puts this cohort at greater risk.<sup>32</sup> While the NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework outlines that the development of a nationally consistent screening process will help to strengthen protections offered to people with disability, it is important to note that these screening processes will only apply to individuals engaged by NDIS providers and the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA).<sup>33</sup> As such, people with disability receiving support services from unregistered providers, those who are ineligible for the NDIS, or those receiving supports from mainstream services, will not benefit from the protections offered by this tool.
30. Protections must be available for all people with disability, regardless of where they receive supports. People with disability must therefore be provided with adequate and accessible supports to engage with criminal justice processes to prevent perpetrators from moving onto another sector or institution and continuing to perpetrate. The Department of Justice Disability Strategy must be fully and actively integrated with the NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework to ensure consistent safeguards are in place for all people with disability.

## **Barriers to Justice**

31. People with disability experience numerous barriers to justice, many of which have been clearly articulated in previous reports and inquiries.<sup>34</sup> These

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<sup>30</sup> PWDA, 2016c. 'Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Submission to Consultation Paper: Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Out of Home Care', p18. Available: <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/getattachment/02170c97-5bc7-4b34-8252-cb0fe822186f/40-People-With-Disability-Australia>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> See also PWDA, 2016a, op cit.

<sup>33</sup> With regards to the NDIA, the risk-based screening will only apply to individuals who will have significant contact with people with disability as part of their work. In addition, those who have already been checked through equivalent systems will be exempted from screening through this national process.

<sup>34</sup> For further discussion of these barriers, see: *Disability Rights Now*, op cit.; French, P. 2007. 'Disabled Justice: The barriers to justice for persons with disability in Queensland', Queensland Advocacy Incorporated; and Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, 2014. 'Beyond Doubt: the experiences of people with disabilities reporting crime', Available: <http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/index.php/our->



include, for instance, people with disability not being believed, being unaware that what they've experienced is a crime, feeling like their experiences haven't been taken seriously, being made to feel like they brought the crime on themselves, being reliant on the perpetrator of the crime (or the service or institution for which they work) to contact police or complaint bodies or being unable to physically attend a police station (or unable to access support to allow them to do so).

32. Reporting or complaints mechanisms may also be inaccessible, with automated telephone systems, centralised intake systems and form based complaints posing particular accessibility concerns. All complaint systems should be flexible, accessible and provide support for people to use the service if required. In addition, all justice system processes and complaints mechanisms should readily provide information in Easy English, Pictorial, Braille or audio formats.

33. The inaccessibility of justice processes can lead people with disability to believe that no one cares about them or their experiences, or understands the personal impacts and/or trauma that their experience of crime may have caused. This can compound trauma impacts, and can lead them to distrust the justice system, making them less likely to report future crimes.<sup>35</sup>

34. Another key barrier to reporting crime experienced by people with disability is a fear of having their children removed from their care. Children of parents with disability are removed at 10 times the rate of other children.<sup>36</sup> In particular, women with disability who have experienced domestic and family violence may have their children removed, despite not being the perpetrator, as they are deemed 'inadequately protective' of their children's welfare.<sup>37</sup> This not only places blame on the victim for the violence they are experiencing, but understandably increases the hesitance of people with disability to contact the police or access support services in these cases.<sup>38</sup> As previously mentioned, the NSW Disability Justice Strategy must be integrated across Government, with an emphasis on the provision of support required by people with disability. Through a holistic approach, women in these circumstances should be supported to pursue justice whilst receiving appropriate parenting and family support to ensure their children are not removed unnecessarily.

## Recognising Crimes<sup>39</sup>

35. An essential element of receiving an adequate response to a crime is having that crime recognised as such. Statistics from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR), for instance, indicate that violence occurring in residential institutional settings, such as psychiatric facilities and aged care facilities, is frequently not identified as domestic and family violence

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[resources-and-publications/reports/item/894-beyond-doubt-the-experiences-of-people-with-disabilities-reporting-crime](#)

<sup>35</sup> PWDA, 2015b, op cit.

<sup>36</sup> DPO Australia, 2014, op cit.

<sup>37</sup> PWDA, 2015a, op cit., p7.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> The following information has been drawn from PWDA, 2016b, op cit.

(despite being included within the definition provided in the *Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007*).<sup>40</sup>

36. This therefore means that the rate of domestic and family violence in NSW is higher than is currently reported, based on this exclusion of people in residential institutions. In addition, it also means that people with disability and other people experiencing domestic and family violence in these settings are not provided with the same types of support, or appropriate justice response, as other people who experience domestic and family violence.
37. Indeed, violence against people with disability in residential institutions and other such settings are often dealt with as service incidents that require an internal response.<sup>41</sup> These internal processes can hamper the future gathering of evidence, and can undermine police investigations. This is despite the fact that many, if not all, of these cases should in fact be referred to the police in the first instance.
38. The failure to appropriately recognise domestic and family violence in all settings in which it occurs can result in people with disability, and others experiencing domestic and family violence in these settings being denied access to processes specific to this crime, such as the video collection of evidence in Domestic Violence Evidence in Chief, or the Domestic Violence Forensic Unit collection of physical evidence.<sup>42</sup> These processes of physical evidence collection are all the more relevant for people with disability, who are often excluded from participation in court proceeding, due to inadequate or inappropriate support provision or because of the inadmissibility of certain kinds of evidence provided by them (in some cases including evidence given through Auslan interpreters).<sup>43</sup> This leads to a double standard in accessing justice, with reduced likelihood that domestic and family violence perpetrated against people with disability will be prosecuted.
39. It is therefore vital that the definition of domestic and family violence used by police, services and government agencies be amended, to ensure that the needs of people with disability experiencing domestic and family violence at the hands of a carer, or in an institutional setting, are covered by all services, approaches and responses.
40. This includes amendments to the NSW *It Stops Here* reform definition of domestic and family violence. Changes are also required to the Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool (DVSAT) to broaden its understanding of domestic and family violence, and to include a consideration of the experiences of people with disability. This would help prompt police to consider how the relationship between the perpetrator and the person experiencing violence may be characterised by atypical forms of dependence that exacerbate risk. Indeed, situations in which a person with disability is dependent on a perpetrator of violence for disability support places them at

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<sup>40</sup> PWDA, 2016b, op cit., p5.

<sup>41</sup> Frohmader and Sands, 2015, op cit.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> PWDA, 2016b, op cit., p5.

higher risk, as they may be denied food, water or medication, may have their mobility aids removed or may be denied access to the community by the perpetrator.<sup>44</sup>

41. All forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability must be appropriately defined, recognised and addressed. For instance, the role of the Department of Justice must be analysed, with respect to recognising and responding to financial abuse. This would involve, for instance, liaising with state and national government agencies, such as the Department of Social Services, as well as guardianship and trustee bodies and the private sector (including banks and superannuation funds), to identify financial abuse against people with disability.

## **Victims Support<sup>45</sup>**

42. Victim Services funding is strictly limited and does not reflect the cost of disability support provision. Additionally, these funds are supposed to cover all of a victim's immediate needs, including items such as clothing and/or furniture for those who have had to leave their home. That people with disability are forced to choose between these immediate needs and disability support needs is inappropriate and discriminatory. It also forces people with disability to remain in violent homes to access the support they need, putting them at far greater risk of violence and death.
43. There are sometimes assumptions made about the NDIS, particularly the belief that it will provide all services to all people with disability. This is not the case. The processes involved in amending a plan for an existing participant, or for a new participant to enter the scheme, are lengthy, and are likely to remain so. For this reason, the NDIA has outlined that it is not a crisis response service, and should not be understood as a violence response for people with disability.
44. Discrete additional funding must therefore be allocated to provide disability support for people with disability who need it upon leaving domestic and family violence.<sup>46</sup> The current Victorian *Disability and Family Violence Crisis Response Initiative*<sup>47</sup> should be used as a model for the NSW equivalent.
45. This Victorian initiative provides short term funds of up to \$9,000 for women with disability experiencing domestic and family violence, to use towards immediate disability related supports. These women can use those funds for attendant care support for disability related needs, such as personal care or shopping assistance, as well as the hire of equipment, Auslan interpreting where required, and transport costs related to their disability. This process

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> This section has been drawn from PWDA, 2016b, op cit.

<sup>46</sup> For more information about the additional costs associated with disability supports, see: Saunders, P. 2006. 'The Costs of Disability and the Incidence of Poverty', Social Policy Research Centre Discussion Paper No. 147, August 2006. Available: <https://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/SPRCFile/DP147.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> See <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-service-providers/children,-youth-and-families/family-violence2/disability-and-family-violence-crisis-response> for more information.

could prompt an NDIS application, beyond the crisis response, where a woman with disability is identified to have ongoing unmet disability needs.

46. Importantly, the *Disability and Family Violence Crisis Response Initiative* is based upon strong collaborations between the domestic and family violence sector and the disability sector, based on the mutual recognition of these sectors of their shared responsibility to support women with disability.
47. In the Victorian scheme, however, the woman must be identified as requiring immediate protection under the Victorian safety assessment tool (the CRAF). In addition, the woman must be supported or referred to the initiative by a domestic and family violence specialist service. There are obvious barriers to this occurring, such as those discussed above, in addition to cases in which police don't recognise that a woman has disability, or a woman is unable to access a domestic and family violence service (due to a lack of physical accessibility, or perhaps a lack of accessible information about the supports offered).

### **Witness Intermediaries<sup>48</sup>**

48. Witness intermediaries are currently being used across the UK to assist children and people with disability to participate in criminal processes. They are usually highly skilled and experienced professionals in the area of communication, and are typically available from the beginning of the investigative process. Ideally, the intermediary would be called in before a first interview to conduct an assessment of any communication needs, including the person's differentiation between truth and untruth.
49. The intermediary then provides advice to the police, and helps them plan the interview, from the set-up of the room, to rapport building and how to pose questions. The intermediary is then present for the police interview to assist if communication breaks down. Prior to the case reaching court, the intermediary produces an extensive report outlining their findings, assessment and any recommendations. The judge, on the basis of that report, develops a sense of what is required in the courtroom to enable a witness to give their best possible evidence. In most circumstances, the intermediary is present at the ground rules hearing, in which the judge decides which of the intermediary's recommendations are to be followed. Counsel will be given direction in regard to their questioning. Intermediaries are also allowed, during the trial, to alert the judge to potential communication breakdowns if they feel a certain question is beyond the comprehension of the witness.<sup>49</sup>
50. The use of witness intermediaries in the UK has been highly effective in facilitating access for children and people with disability in the justice system

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<sup>48</sup> This section has been drawn from PWDA, 2016d. 'Australian Law Reform Commission Issues Paper: Protecting the Rights of Older Australians from Abuse', available:

[https://www.alrc.gov.au/sites/default/files/subs/167\\_people\\_with\\_disability\\_australia.docx](https://www.alrc.gov.au/sites/default/files/subs/167_people_with_disability_australia.docx)

<sup>49</sup> For more information, see evidence provided to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> March 2016, Case Study 38. Transcript (days 177 and 179) available: <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/case-study/1c1a2449-93cd-4268-86da-7dd7e3272797/case-study-38,-march-2016,-sydney>

and processes. The introduction of witness intermediaries in all Australian jurisdictions would significantly improve the support that is available for people with disability throughout court processes, and would ultimately improve justice outcomes.

51. While the current NSW 'Children's Champion (Witness Intermediary)' pilot is a positive step, this trial currently only applies to child complainants and child prosecution witnesses in cases of child sexual assault.<sup>50</sup> This pilot must be extended to include the provision of support by witness intermediaries for people with disability across the board. Other elements of the trial, including the pre-recording of a child's evidence in chief, cross-examination and re-examination,<sup>51</sup> must also be afforded to people with disability where required, as these provisions would likely support people with disability to provide the best possible evidence.<sup>52</sup>

52. In the UK, witness intermediary schemes have seen similar numbers of children and adults with disability accessing the assistance of witness intermediaries. This illustrates the need for this support to be extended to all children, people with disability and other vulnerable witnesses in NSW, as well as in all other states and territories.<sup>53</sup>

## **Independent Individual Advocacy**

53. Independent individual advocates play a key role in supporting people with disability in a range of areas, including in accessing justice. People with disability may have experienced multiple crimes against them throughout their lifetime, may struggle to advocate for themselves and may be unaware of the supports and services available to them.<sup>54</sup>

54. With respect to access to justice, individual advocates can assist people with disability to access the services to which they are entitled (including legal representation), negotiate with these services, and facilitate communication. Individual advocates can also help people with disability attend police stations, make statements, make complaints, attend court, apply for services (such as housing) and apply for victim supports payments.<sup>55</sup>

55. Independent individual advocacy is crucial for many people with disability avoiding the criminal justice system, in terms of identifying gaps in disability and social support and linking these individuals in with other services. In addition, independent individual advocacy is also critical for people with disability coming into contact with the criminal justice system. These

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<sup>50</sup> Victims Services, NSW Department of Justice, 2016. 'Children's Champion (Witness Intermediary): Procedural Guidance Manual (2016)', available: [http://www.victimsservices.justice.nsw.gov.au/Documents/child-champ\\_manual.pdf](http://www.victimsservices.justice.nsw.gov.au/Documents/child-champ_manual.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, pp8-9.

<sup>52</sup> PWDA, 2016a, op cit., p11.

<sup>53</sup> PWDA, 2016a, op cit., p12.

<sup>54</sup> PWDA, 2015b, op cit., pp4-5

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

individuals should be offered and/or provided in all instances whereby a person with disability is seeking to report violence they have experienced.<sup>56</sup>

56. However, due to the transition to the NDIS, individual advocacy funding is currently at risk in NSW. It is worthwhile noting that the advocacy undertaken by independent, individual advocates is primarily not in relation to disability support, but is rather about accessing mainstream services, including justice.

57. Individual advocacy and information organisations will play a role in preventative and support initiatives across the Disability Justice Strategy. This needs to be recognised, with adequate funding across NSW, to ensure equitable access to advocacy and supports for all people with disability.

### **Disability Awareness and Trauma-Informed Support**

58. In some cases, mainstream and disability-specific advocacy, legal and support services do not have the internal capacity or knowledge to respond appropriately to a disclosure of violence by a person with disability, or the associated impacts of trauma experienced by these individuals.

59. Inadequate service system responses can mean that people with disability have never been supported to access psychological or other support services they need as a result of their experience of crime.<sup>57</sup> Some people with disability may avoid accessing support services because their initial contact was so poor.<sup>58</sup>

60. It is therefore vital that these services be trained not only in disability awareness, but also in delivering trauma-informed support to all clients. This would contribute to the ability of these services to provide appropriate and supportive responses to disclosure of violence, and to provide suitable referrals where required.

### **Police and Court Responses**

61. People with disability are often denied support when seeking to report or in interviews, both as perpetrators and as victims.<sup>59</sup> In addition, police may decline to take reports from people with disability due to difficulties in understanding them, or because they are inadequately equipped or trained to take statements from people with disability, particularly those who use alternative or augmentative communication.<sup>60</sup>

62. Failing to provide appropriate supports may be attributable to the fact that the NSW Police Force doesn't screen for disability, with police officers instead

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<sup>56</sup> PWDA, 2015a, op cit., p9.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Disability Rights Now, op cit., p79.

<sup>60</sup> See Australian Human Rights Commission (2014), op. cit. for more information.

being guided by ‘indicators’ of intellectual disability.<sup>61</sup> For instance, when the ‘impaired intellectual functioning’ of a person is suggested by these ‘indicators’, or the person’s disability is otherwise disclosed to the police, the police are required to contact a support person for that individual.<sup>62</sup>

63. Police officers may not even take a report or be as committed to the investigation of cases involving people with disability, due to a belief that these cases are unlikely to reach trial or conviction.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, in some cases, police perceptions of witness reliability may lead them to place greater weight on other sources of evidence. The police may therefore believe that the time and effort required to obtain this other evidence may be disproportionate.<sup>64</sup>

64. This clearly limits the reporting, prosecution and conviction of crimes against people with disability. Indeed, if the police choose not to investigate or refer the case for prosecution, this may completely shut down future disclosures by that individual, not only increasing their vulnerability to future or additional harm, but also allowing perpetrators to avoid any consequences for their crimes.<sup>65</sup>

65. Police in NSW must receive additional training (and regular refreshers), on how to recognise disability, how to appropriately engage with people with disability and how to access adequate and appropriate (disability and emotional) supports, including prior to interviews.<sup>66</sup> This must include information about witness intermediaries, and appropriate arrangements for communication aides (for instance, not requesting a family member to act as an Auslan interpreter for a witness/victim).

66. Although it is positive that the NSW Police Force Handbook outlines some suggestions for interviewing or speaking to someone with intellectual disability, this must be reinforced by practice. This could include involving people with disability in practical disability awareness training or role play exercises. This type of real-world disability awareness training would not only up-skill police officers, but may help increase the confidence of people with disability in accessing police support when required.

67. Prejudicial attitudes exist throughout the legal system, from the police, through to legal professionals, court staff, judges and juries. Therefore, lawyers, judicial officers, court staff and prison staff in NSW must also receive mandatory disability awareness training, including the recurrent provision of information about how to work with people with disability and people

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<sup>61</sup> New South Wales Police Force, 2016. ‘NSW Police Force Handbook’, p163. Available:

[http://www.police.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/197469/NSW\\_Police\\_Handbook.pdf](http://www.police.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/197469/NSW_Police_Handbook.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> In addition, not recognising someone’s disability also affects the supports available to someone in court. For example, if police do not recognise someone as having disability, they would not notify the Witness Assistance Service (as discussed in pp485-486 of the NSW Police Force Handbook) when the matter is to be prosecuted by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, thus meaning the witness/victim wouldn’t receive specialist support from this service.

<sup>63</sup> Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, 2014, op cit.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid; PWDA, 2015a, op cit., p10.

<sup>65</sup> Anti-Discrimination Commissioner (Tasmania), Submission 71 to the Australian Law Reform Commission’s Inquiry into Equality, Capacity and Disability Issues Paper.

<sup>66</sup> PWDA, 2016b, op cit.



experiencing trauma.<sup>67</sup> In addition, training must be provided on the supports available (as outlined in legislation) to people with disability when providing evidence, and how to access these.<sup>68</sup>

68. In March 2016, the Royal Commission heard evidence by Crown Prosecutors and Directors of Public Prosecutions that suggested an unwillingness to make use of certain parts of evidence legislation that would enable people with disability to access to supports they may require in court.<sup>69</sup> Further direction must therefore be provided to all legal professionals, including prosecutors, regarding how to make use of the available evidence legislation.<sup>70</sup>

69. The current iteration of the Equality before the Law Bench Book<sup>71</sup> outlines that people with disability have capacity to give evidence as long as they've been provided with appropriate adjustments and supports. This Bench Book therefore requires amendments to ensure it reflects a CRPD compliant view of legal capacity: that is, that all people have legal capacity, and it is rather the supports available to that person that may not be adequate or appropriate for them to exercise legal capacity.

70. While some examples of the adjustments available to people with disability are outlined in the Bench Book,<sup>72</sup> it is crucial that these written suggestions are reinforced by practical advice and training (such as that outlined in the NSW Disability Inclusion Action Plan<sup>73</sup>), to ensure that all court personnel across NSW are fully aware of the available supports, and their obligations to pursue such support. This would help alleviate the concern expressed by some people with disability that courts and tribunals may be inaccessible, and that supports will not be readily available to them in regional and remote areas.<sup>74</sup>

71. The NSW Disability Justice Strategy must be integrated with a host of other NSW and national policies and plans, including strong links to the NSW Disability Inclusion Action Plan. To enhance monitoring and accountability, these strategies and plans must be as interconnected, responsive and transparent as possible.

## Legal proceedings

72. Equal access to justice relies on access to legal representation. People with disability may be unable to pay for such legal services, due to their increased cost of living and rates of unemployment and other associated costs of

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<sup>67</sup> Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities op cit. [27].

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p5.

<sup>69</sup> PWDA, 2016a, op cit., p6; see also evidence provided to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2016, Case Study 38. Transcript (day 177) available:

<http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/case-study/1c1a2449-93cd-4268-86da-7dd7e3272797/case-study-38.-march-2016.-sydney>

<sup>70</sup> PWDA, 2016a, op cit., p9.

<sup>71</sup> Judicial Commission of NSW, 2016. 'Equality before the Law Bench Book', available:

[https://www.judcom.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Equality\\_before\\_the\\_Law\\_Bench\\_Book.pdf](https://www.judcom.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Equality_before_the_Law_Bench_Book.pdf)

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, section 5.4.1.

<sup>73</sup> NSW Department of Justice, 2015. 'Disability Inclusion Action Plan, 2015-18.'

<sup>74</sup> PWDA, 2013, op cit.



disability.<sup>75</sup> In addition, people with disability may be reliant on their partners, family members, carers or formal Guardians to access funds to pursue legal proceedings. These actors may refuse to pay legal fees, and may financially control or abuse people with disability in other ways.

73. In addition, long wait times for legal proceedings can cause further difficulties for some people with disability. This may be due to people fearing (or knowing) that their memory of the event will become less clear as time goes on. The impact of long wait times can also be distressing for people with psychosocial disability, particularly for those also experiencing the effects of trauma.<sup>76</sup> Appropriate support for people with disability in this process, including independent advocacy and decision-making support where required, is critical, particularly providing opportunities for people with disability to provide evidence in alternative formats, and for this evidence not to be required to be given on multiple occasions over the course of a trial.

### **Prison Experience**

74. If a person with disability is convicted of a crime and imprisoned, it is important that they have access to appropriate therapeutic and disability supports while in these settings. These supports should include, for instance, access to the right kinds of supports for their impairment/s (including relevant communication devices, sign language and community language interpreters), access to mental health services and supports, access to therapy and access to education and/or vocational training.<sup>77</sup> These services and supports should be offered to prisoners during incarceration and reassessed well in advance of their release.

75. As with early intervention strategies, the Department of Justice should work with other cross-government agencies such as the Department of Health, the Department of Housing, and the NDIA to develop a strategy for correctional facilities to identify prisoners who require support, including disability support, and a holistic reintegration plan be developed prior to their release into the community.<sup>78</sup> This will help to ensure that recently released prisoners with disability don't fall through the gaps in service provision, which may help to minimise their risk of further contact with the criminal justice system.

### **Sentencing of crimes against people with disability**

76. Sentences for individuals who have perpetrated crimes against people with disability are often influenced by enduring discriminatory attitudes and ableism within the community. This results in people working with or caring for people with disability being viewed as inherently moral and virtuous, with these

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<sup>75</sup> Disability Rights Now, op cit., p75

<sup>76</sup> PWDA, 2016a, op cit., p10.

<sup>77</sup> PWDA, 2015b, op cit., p12.

<sup>78</sup> Bevan, N. and Sands, T. 2016. *Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Indefinite Detention of People with Cognitive and Psychiatric Impairment in Australia*, Australian Cross Disability Alliance; Sydney, Australia.

Available: [http://dpoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/ACDA\\_IndefiniteDetention\\_Submission\\_April2016.pdf](http://dpoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/ACDA_IndefiniteDetention_Submission_April2016.pdf)

beliefs often resulting in leniency for perpetrators who have committed crimes against people with disability.

77. For instance, in cases (including homicides) involving people with disability, the provision of care is often understood as a mitigating factor to the perpetration of violence. This can result in lower sentences for relatives or support workers who have killed people with disability under their care.<sup>79</sup>

78. There must therefore be no provision in NSW legislation or policy for mitigating factors, including a perception of 'good character' that undermines the pursuit of justice for people with disability.

PWDA would like to thank the NSW Department of Justice for the opportunity to contribute to the development of the NSW Disability Justice Strategy, and welcomes any further consultation on this topic.

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<sup>79</sup> Young, Stella. 2013. 'Disability is no justification for murder', The Drum, 3 September 2013. Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-09-03/young-kyla-puhle-death/4930742> .