



## Media Statement

---

### **Multiple strategies required to combat violence, abuse and neglect**

Developmental Disability WA and People with disabilities WA were surprised and disappointed at today's announcement by WA Labor that it will be pursuing legislation to mandate pre-employment checks as their immediate response to violence, abuse and neglect of people with disabilities.

“We were aware that pre-employment screening had been flagged as one safeguarding option, but WA Labor failed to consult with advocacy organisations and peak bodies representing people with disabilities and their families before making this decision” stated Ms Taryn Harvey, Executive Officer of Developmental Disability WA.

“At the Senate Inquiry, and through our own inquiry, a number of other safeguarding strategies were identified which we believe could be more effective in preventing violence, abuse and neglect; assisting people to make complaints where it occurs; and supporting people to make use of the justice system.”

Developmental Disability WA and People with disabilities WA have invested in a dedicated project to gather WA stories of violence, abuse and neglect of people with disabilities and to analyse those to identify what safeguarding options would be the most effective and should be the highest priority for advocacy.

“The report from our inquiry will be published in early June,” said Ms Samantha Jenkinson, Executive Director of People with disabilities WA. “Our analysis of the experiences we have heard to date indicates that pre-employment checks were unlikely to have been effective in preventing violence, abuse and neglect in the majority of cases. We are also concerned that there are significant practical limitations to successfully implementing pre-employment checks.”

“It is clear from the experience of people with disabilities that multiple strategies are required to combat violence, abuse and neglect. Possible examples include:

- the extension of whistleblowing legislation to workers in non-government organisations;
- the introduction of stronger accountability and governance provisions in organisations;
- access to and awareness of independent advocacy;
- strong investment in individual and systemic advocacy; and
- changes to the justice system so that the evidence of witnesses with disability can be taken and used to make prosecutions.

“We have clearly heard that where people with disabilities had access to formal or informal advocacy, they felt more able to speak up. We also know that the best safeguard for people with disabilities is to have a range of people in our lives and not just paid staff.”

Both organisations were also gravely concerned at comments by the CSA/CPSU on Saturday that the evidence of the Senate Inquiry supported their calls for the State government to cease its transition of accommodation services to the non-government sector.

Ms Samantha Connor, project officer for the WA Disability Inquiry said “We are finding through our work that a significant number of cases of violence, abuse and neglect have occurred across government services - public hospitals and psychiatric hospitals, hostels, schools, disability services - where safeguarding is said to be stronger, as well as within the non-government sector”.

Violence, abuse and neglect of people with disabilities occurs across a wide range of institutional settings and is not limited to the disability services system. This is why a more holistic response is required to combat violence abuse and neglect of people with disabilities. Pre-employment checks are not emerging as the highest priority, and we believe WA Labor and the government should take the time to let us complete our important project so that the voice and experience from people with disability, families and advocacy organisations can be heard.

We are confident that as an outcome of our work we will be able to recommend some concrete actions that will be effective in addressing this issue. It is critical that those whose lives are most impacted by this have a lead role in designing and prioritising the solutions.

Primary Contacts: Taryn Harvey on [Taryn.Harvey@ddc.org.au](mailto:Taryn.Harvey@ddc.org.au) 0488661277; or  
Samantha Jenkinson on [Samantha@pwdwa.org](mailto:Samantha@pwdwa.org) 0412887674.

19 April 2015