

Media Release – 4 February 2021

Education jurisdictions let off the hook by the Disability Royal Commission during COVID-19 after neglect of students with a disability

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) says the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with a Disability (DRC) has failed to give sufficient weight to the needs of students with a disability during the pandemic.

The Commission made [22 recommendations in its report](#) on the Australia Government's response to the pandemic for people with disability across areas like health and advocacy funding, but failed to make recommendations on the systemic neglect of students with disability.

While evidence was presented at the COVID hearing based on research by CYDA and eminent researchers from the University of New South Wales Canberra and the University of Melbourne on the neglect of students with disability during the COVID pandemic, no recommendations were made.

*This evidence showed there were few formal mechanisms across the Australian, state and territory governments to stop disadvantage in education during the pandemic.

Mary Sayers, CEO of CYDA said education jurisdictions seem to have been let off the hook for this discrimination and neglect by the Disability Royal Commission, [in a new submission](#) in response to its COVID hearing report endorsed by disability advocacy organisations from around Australia.

“Other sectors such as health, which is jointly overseen by the Australian and state and territory governments, have been directed into action,” said Ms Sayers.

“The rights and needs of these students were routinely ignored by education jurisdictions during the pandemic and while the DRC knew about this discrimination and neglect the issue seems to have been swept under the carpet by the Commission.

“There has been an epic failure to provide national planning for students with a disability despite their well-known experiences of disadvantage in education, which was likely to be exacerbated during the global pandemic.

“The only national forum that brought the Australian, state and territory education jurisdictions together to plan for the COVID response was wound up in July last year which is indicative of this failure.”

CYDA is urgently calling on the DRC to make strong recommendations about the systemic neglect and discrimination against students with disability in its future work.

For interviews with Mary Sayers, CYDA CEO contact: Sarah Priest 0407 367 026 sarahpriest@cyda.org.au

***Summary of evidence provided by CYDA to the COVID-19 Hearing**

During the first wave of the pandemic:

- 61% of students with disability had not received adequate education support
- more than half of students did not have regular contact with the education provider to ensure their continuing access to learning or have curriculum and learning that was given in an accessible format
- there were significant reductions in the usual supports for students with disability including supervision (down 38 %) individual support workers (down 44%) and specific aides and equipment (down 30%)
- there were adverse mental health issues for more than half of students with disability.

Summary Report: [Not even remotely fair: Experiences of students with disability during COVID-19](#)

Full Report: [Not even remotely fair: Experiences of students with disability during COVID-19](#)

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