

2021–22 At a glance



Summary of the 2021–22
Victorian Disability
Worker Commission and
Disability Registration Board
of Victoria Annual Report

Why we're here – working for a stronger, safer disability sector

We exist to protect one of Victoria's most vulnerable communities – people with disability.

We are a young organisation at just two years old. Our organisation started in unprecedented circumstances at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, we have seen significant movement and change in the disability sector, including ongoing social services regulation reforms. The environment has created uncertainty in the sector and the workforce. There are resulting challenges for a new organisation like the Commission.

Disability workers are passionate and proud of their work. Every day, disability workers provide diverse services to people with disability. This could be anything from high-level 24-hour personal care to ad hoc support when needed. Most disability workers are highly committed and give people with disability excellent care.

But we know there are times when there are concerns and when people with disability can be harmed. We, too, have heard the stories being told at the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. The stories reinforce how critical it is to protect vulnerable people from harm and neglect. People who pose a serious risk of harm must be stopped from providing disability services.

It is important that people with disability feel safe with their disability worker. We have made it easier for people to raise their concerns through our online complaints and notifications service. While the majority of disability workers are excellent, the Commission has also acted to prohibit workers who do not do the right thing.

A huge amount of trust is involved between a worker and a person with disability. Knowing upfront that the worker has been properly assessed can instil great confidence. Australia's first professional registration scheme for the disability workforce aims to give people that confidence. Registration forms part of the Victorian Government's zero tolerance approach to abuse of people with disability.

Workers who register are giving people with disability, their families and carers confidence that they are skilled, safe and professional. They are showing they want to be part of the change that ensures the right people are working with our loved ones.

We have come a long way in a short time. We have put in place safeguards to protect the community and the disability sector that have never existed in Victoria.

The Victorian disability sector is on a journey unlike any other state in Australia. It is showing its commitment to raising standards and supporting a quality workforce. It is doing the work to ensure people with disability have the choices and protections they should always have had.

Victoria is leading the way in building better safeguards for the sector.

We are proud to be part of creating a stronger, safer disability sector for Victoria.



Image used for illustrative purposes

About us

Victorian Disability Worker Commissioner

The Victorian Disability Worker Commissioner is the head of the Commission. The Commissioner regulates the conduct of unregistered disability workers and has the power to prohibit a worker from practising in Victoria. Dan Stubbs is the Victorian Disability Worker Commissioner.

Victorian Disability Worker Commission

The Victorian Disability Worker Commission supports the Commissioner and Board. The Commission deals with complaints and notifications about disability workers and can investigate their conduct.

The Commission also communicates to the public about disability workers. It maintains the Board's register of registered workers and the Commission's register of prohibited workers.

Figure 1 illustrates the interrelationship between the roles of the Commission, the Commissioner and the Board.

For more information on the Commission and Board, visit the Commission's website <<https://www.vdwc.vic.gov.au>>



Dan Stubbs, Commissioner

Disability Worker Registration Board of Victoria

The Disability Worker Registration Board of Victoria registers disability workers who meet certain standards set by the Board and regulates the conduct of these registered workers.

In future the Board may set accreditation standards, approve programs of study that provide a qualification for registration and register disability students. The Board, chaired by Melanie Eagle, formed in August 2019.



Melanie Eagle, Chairperson

Figure 1: Interrelationships between the Commission, the Commissioner and the Board



Front row l-r: Christian Astourian, Maryanne Diamond, Colleen Furlanetto
 Back row l-r: Alexandra Gunning, Geoff Southwell, Melanie Eagle (Chair), Jill Linklater
 Absent: Gobi Chandran, Christine Bigby

Disability Worker Regulation Scheme

The Scheme promotes the quality, safety, responsiveness and sustainability of the disability workforce in Victoria, and was established through the *Disability Service Safeguards Act 2018*.

The Scheme resulted from the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Abuse in Disability Services, which heard about the abuse and neglect of people with disability, particularly conduct by disability workers. The Parliamentary Inquiry found that Victoria needed safeguards to:

- protect people with disability
- ensure disability workers provide high-quality support.

The Scheme delivers this in two key ways:

- regulating and registering disability workers according to agreed standards
- strengthening safeguards through mechanisms to report concerns about the conduct of disability workers, ensuring they can be investigated and action taken.

The Scheme covers all disability workers in Victoria regardless of how they are funded or employed.

All disability workers must comply with the Code of Conduct, which outlines the obligations of disability workers to respect and uphold the right to safe and quality supports and services.

In a first across Australia, the Scheme also provides for voluntary registration of disability workers. Registration ensures disability workers meet rigorous standards for safety, skills and professionalism – no matter how they are employed or how their service is funded.



Image used for illustrative purposes

Our values

Diversity and inclusion

- We have inclusive recruitment and employment practices that foster diversity in our workforce.
- We ensure that diverse communities see themselves in who we are and what we do.
- We are committed to being an accessible workplace and an accessible regulator for our diverse stakeholders.

Trust and respect

- We are respectful and professional with colleagues and the community.
- We foster trust by assessing matters impartially.
- We have confidence in and are respectful of each other's skills and capabilities.

Independent and fair

- We treat everyone with respect, listening to all parties involved.
- We do what we say we will do and take proportionate action.
- The community sees our processes and decisions as independent and transparent



Empathy and dignity

- We take a person-centred approach to everything we do.
- We ask people what they need from us and how we can work with them.
- We are responsive and flexible to support the diverse communities and people we serve.

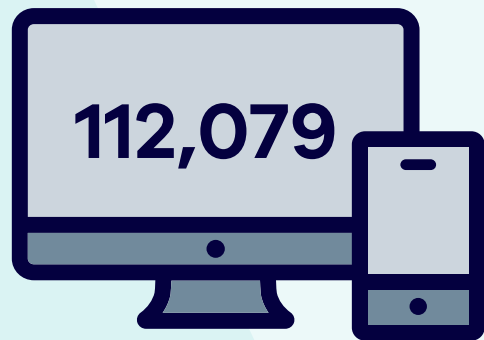
Fearless and accountable

- We use our powers to hold others accountable for their actions.
- We are responsible for our actions and are open to scrutiny and feedback.
- We continually evaluate and improve our operations.

Year in review 2021–22

Creating a safer, stronger disability sector

Awareness and education



Total website page views

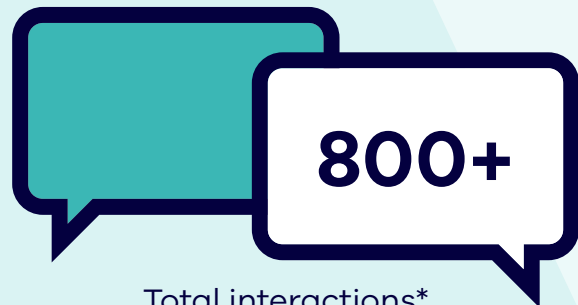
35,384

Total visits to education tools and resources on website



1.3 million

Facebook page reach



Total interactions*

*includes events, stakeholder meetings, enquiries and making of complaints and notifications.



13,073

Total number of documents downloaded from website



60+

Met with over 60 stakeholders to raise awareness of the scheme, the Commission and the Board

Interactions with the Scheme

Registering disability workers



610

applications for disability worker registration



83%

of registered workers are disability support workers

17%

of registered workers are disability practitioners

Responding to concerns about disability workers' conduct

70

notifications received, **68** closed

46

complaints received, **43** closed



56%

of complaints and notifications resolved by counselling (includes education about a worker's obligations to provide safe services)

16

active investigations into the conduct of unregistered disability workers






2

interim prohibition orders made to stop workers from practising

Our Scheme strategic plan

In 2022, the Commission and Board worked together to create a Scheme strategic plan based on five pillars that encompass the strategic goals and outcomes. From this plan came the following vision, purpose and guiding principle.

Figure 3: Our strategic plan 2022–24

The Victorian Disability Worker Regulation Scheme Strategic Plan 2022/23–2023/24					
Vision	People with disability can choose services that best meet their needs and supports their quality of life, free from abuse and neglect				
Purpose	We regulate all workers providing disability services in Victoria, regardless of how they are funded, setting standards for registration and training, resolving complaints and prohibiting unsafe workers				
Guiding principle	People with disability who use disability services have the same rights as other members of the community				
Pillars	 1. Safety and compliance	 2. Registration	 3. Workforce standards	 4. Engagement and communications	 5. Enablers
By mid 2024	We have an accessible responsive and balanced notifications, complaints and assessment system	The percentage of the disability workforce that is registered is growing steadily	Our standards for registration and training improve the knowledge and capability of the workforce	People with disability, their families, advocates and service providers understand and have confidence in the Scheme and its processes	The Board, Commissioner and Commission work collaboratively and are well supported to develop and operate the Scheme
2022–24 priorities	<p>1.1 Develop and implement a compliance framework for the conduct of registered and unregistered workers</p> <p>1.2 Establish and implement procedures for receiving, assessing and actioning notifications and complaints</p> <p>1.3 Implement monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement processes in relation to complaints and notification</p> <p>1.4 Raise awareness of the Scheme's complaints and notifications process</p>	<p>2.1 Build knowledge of the benefits of registration for disability support workers, their employers, and for people with disability, their families, carers and advocates</p> <p>2.2 Ensure the registration process is simple quick and easy to use</p> <p>2.3 Promote registration to disability support workers</p> <p>2.4 Build demand for registered disability support workers from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – people with disability, their families, carers and advocates – service providers 	<p>3.1 Develop a roadmap to guide the development of guidelines, standards and accreditation</p> <p>3.2 Prioritise standards for registration of disability support workers</p> <p>3.3 Collaborate with organisations including employers who develop the workforce through curricula, qualifications and training</p> <p>3.4 Strengthen the Commissions capability, capacity and resources to develop standards</p>	<p>4.1 Work with other regulators and agencies in Victoria and nationally to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – achieve quality and safety outcomes for people with disability – avoid unnecessary duplication of effort <p>4.2 Build awareness of the role of the Board and Commission</p> <p>4.3 Further strengthen our relationships with the community, sector and our stakeholders</p> <p>4.4 Build our capability to engage and consult</p>	<p>5.1 The Board, Commissioner and Commission have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) shared values and principles b) a complementary partnership, underpinned by a respectful empowering and learning culture c) high performing teams that draw on each other's strengths d) the necessary resources, capacity and capability e) supporting technology hardware systems and applications <p>5.2 The Board, Commissioner and Commission collaboratively develop a regulatory approach that, is evidence-informed, risk-based, responsive and balanced</p> <p>5.3 Progressively build an evidence-based understanding of the Scheme's impact, strengths and shortcomings, and ways these may be addressed</p>

Case study

Yunus, registered disability worker

Yunus is 18 years old and based in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. He has been working with people with disabilities for over two years.

Coming from a family with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) speakers, Yunus has focused his career on working with clients from CALD backgrounds.

He is now a proud support coordinator. He liaises with various organisations to ensure that people with disabilities are being supported regardless of who they are or what their disability is.

Having both family and friends with cognitive and physical disabilities, Yunus was familiar with the needs of people with disability in the community even before starting a career in the disability sector. He also knew the gaps where these needs were not being met.

Yunus' long-term plan is to finish his Bachelor of Nursing and become a specialist support coordinator.

For Yunus, being registered gives him an extra layer of confidence in his skills that he can demonstrate to both clients and employers.

"Being registered means I am able to show clients that I am trusted a qualified. I can also show potential employers I am willing to take that extra step for my career."

Yunus, NDIS support coordinator and registered disability worker



Image used for illustrative purposes

Case study

Karyn, support coordinator and registered disability worker

Karyn is a 49-year-old disability worker in central Victoria. She works as a direct care support worker for someone with complex disability. She is also a support coordinator who helps people with their NDIS plans.

Employed as a support worker for eight years and an unpaid carer for 15 years, Karyn has seen big changes in the sector.

One of the biggest changes was the introduction of the NDIS and the difficulties navigating plans. Seeing that support was needed in this area, Karyn moved into the disability workforce.

Karyn sees disability worker registration as a way to ensure the right people are entering the workforce.

"Registration is so important as it means professionalism is being recognised and brought to the sector."

Karyn, support coordinator and registered disability worker



Image used for illustrative purposes

Case study

Notification about an unregistered disability worker's conduct

Please note: This case study shows a type of matter the Commission responded to in 2021–22. This case study uses pseudonyms, and some details have been changed to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Notification

We received a mandatory notification from an employer about the conduct of unregistered disability worker, Samuel.

Samuel was providing services to Rosie, who lives in supported accommodation and has a neurological disability.

The notification alleged Samuel pushed Rosie and used a loud voice during the day after she had displayed disruptive behaviours.

What we did

We contacted Samuel about the notification. Samuel acknowledged using a loud voice to redirect Rosie. He denied using physical force to push her out of the room.

We reviewed Rosie's behaviour support plan. It stated that support workers are only to use a firm voice at bedtime to manage challenging behaviour. At other times, workers are to adopt a calmer tone.

We reviewed the service provider's investigation report. It found that the two support workers who reported the alleged conduct had not observed the incident. They heard the loud voice and had inferred that Samuel had pushed her.

Outcome

We assessed that Samuel's conduct was not consistent with the following clauses in the Code of Conduct:

- Clause 3: Provide support and service in a safe and competent manner with care and skill
- Clause 5: Promptly take steps to raise and act on concerns about matters that may impact the quality and safety of supports and services provided to people with disability



Image used for illustrative purposes

