



# ADA Australia

*Your aged and disability advocates*



## *The Advocate*

April / May 2020



### CEO'S MESSAGE



Welcome to this special edition of The Advocate. It is an understatement to say that the start of 2020 has been a challenging time for us all. Fire, devastation and flooding to large parts of the country have been closely followed by an even greater threat to vulnerable people around the globe, from COVID-19.

With strict social distancing rules in place to protect Queenslanders from the pandemic, how does ADA Australia continue to support people? How are we helping at a time when, more than ever, the option to speak to an independent advocate about accessing aged care and disability advocacy and support is critical?

Fortunately, our team is well connected and resourced technologically. This means all incoming calls, reception and intake are continuing to operate

normally. Staff are supporting clients remotely, where possible. Where this is not possible, they are following current COVID-19 safety protocols, and I am reviewing these arrangements daily.

For the most part, it is 'business as usual' for our advocates, with some adaptations. In this edition of The Advocate, we explain the modified advocacy practice model we've implemented to allow us to fulfil our mandate while complying with social distancing.

You can also read about the response of the Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN), and key member agencies, to ensure older people have access to the right information at this crucial time. We also provide an update on the two Royal Commissions and how they have adapted their processes in the face of COVID-19.

During this time, it is important to be as compassionate to yourself as we are to our family and friends, and care enough about your own mental health to seek support when needed. Similarly, where we see those around us struggling, we should reach out in ways that make a difference.

Listed at the end of this newsletter are those agencies available to offer phone support during periods of personal struggle. They also have extensive information on their websites about their services during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as a range of useful coping strategies.

Up to date information about the various government support measures available to those affected by COVID-19 can be found at the [Department of Social Services website](#). For general health information and advice on COVID-19, please visit the [Department of Health's webpage](#).

Till next time, heed all health advice and stay safe.

**Geoff Rowe**  
ADA Australia CEO

## ACCESSING ADA AUSTRALIA SUPPORT

ADA Australia is continuing its advocacy support services during the COVID-19 pandemic but has modified practices in line with social distancing and constraints around non-essential visits.

CEO Geoff Rowe said social distancing and isolation measures meant some older people and people with disability were feeling more vulnerable than usual, particularly in the face of changes to their support and care services.

“It is a challenging and uncertain time for many in our community,” Mr Rowe said.

“My team is committed to supporting older Australians and those with disability and will continue to do so while respecting all COVID-19 restrictions.”

Where advocates might have typically arranged face to face meetings, they are using platforms such as phone, Skype or telehealth to communicate with clients.

ADA Australia staff will all be vaccinated against influenza. While this won't protect staff from the COVID-19 virus, it will help protect them from the heightened risk of winter flu, thereby reducing transmission of other infections, once face-to-face visits are once again deemed safe.

Many of the events that ADA Australia advocates had registered to participate in over coming months, including our free education sessions, have been cancelled. Be assured that ADA Australia will resume its vital educational sessions as soon as it is safe to do so and we will be in contact with care providers to make new arrangements for later in the year.

As an alternative to face to face sessions, please refer to the [ADA Australia website](#) for useful information, videos and fact sheets on aged care, disability, human rights and other issues.

ADA Australia's 1800 818 338 or 07 3637 6000 phone lines will continue to operate during normal business hours with voicemail facility for anyone calling after hours.

*ADA Australia will continue to modify its services to meet changing circumstances and Australian Government health requirements. As a result, our core services may be subject to further restriction or modification at short notice.*



## OPAN'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Older people around Australia are deferring their in-home support services in response to COVID-19 social distancing rules.

Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) has responded to this trend, expanding its services to help older Australians make informed decisions and access the help they need. ADA Australia will be delivering these services in Queensland as the Queensland OPAN service delivery organisation.

OPAN member services are now offering a special call-back service for older people who have cancelled their services, or whose services have been stopped by their provider.



The call-back option involves an OPAN advocate calling the older person to undertake a 'well-being check.' The aim of the call is to confirm that the decision to cease or defer a service was:

- Based on factual information about virus transmission
- Following dialogue with the care provider about the infection control measures the agency has in place to reduce the risk of transmission
- Following a risk assessment by the individual of both the benefits and the risks of stopping services.

Service providers have to notify OPAN of anyone who has chosen to cease or defer their service because of COVID-19 concerns, via this [online form](#). The form requires a password that can be obtained by calling 1800 237 981.

ADA Australia CEO Geoff Rowe commended OPAN's new call-back facility. "It's important that all decisions to stop care are well informed and limit any risks to older people," Mr Rowe said.

"Cessation of services may carry significant risk to an older person. For example, missing therapy sessions may increase the risk of a fall, injury, and hospitalisation and, in the process, increased the risk of exposure to the virus."

OPAN respects the right of all older people to decide if a service is right for them and clients may decline the call-back if they wish.

For more information, call 1800 700 600 or visit at [www.opan.com.au](http://www.opan.com.au).

## DISABILITY ROYAL COMMISSION UPDATE

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability has suspended all planned public hearings to help stop the spread of COVID-19. This includes all scheduled activities in Tasmania, Queensland and the Northern Territory.

A media release issued on 16 March said, "The Commission has decided that these measures are necessary in view of the risks to health, especially to people with disability who are often particularly vulnerable to infections."

The Commission also said "there is a great deal of important work that can and will continue despite the postponement of some of the Royal Commission's activities. For example, Issues Papers will still be published and preparations for future hearings will progress."

In the meantime, the Disability Royal Commission has called for an urgent targeted strategy aimed at people with disability, to ensure they are being consulted with and responded to during this unprecedented time.

The Commission is [calling on Australian governments](#) to protect and support people with disability, particularly First Nations people with disability, who may be disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

There is concern over the unintended consequences of social distancing on people in residential facilities, including reduced access to vital health care, screening and treatment for COVID-19, and access to medications, therapeutic services and mental health support.



So too, there is increased risk of abuse toward people with disability, with fewer family and community visitors helping to keep residents safe.

People can continue to tell the Royal Commission about their experiences of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation – both pre-COVID-19 or as a result of the crisis. They can do this by phone, in writing or by making an audio or video recording.

For anyone needing help telling their story, support is available from a range of providers depending where in Queensland you live, including ADA Australia if you live in the Fitzroy or Gold Coast regions.

To find out more, contact ADA Australia on [info@adaaustralia.com.au](mailto:info@adaaustralia.com.au) or 1800 818 338. Our team is happy to help or to connect you with an agency in your local area.

## AGED CARE ROYAL COMMISSION UPDATE

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety has suspended all planned hearings, workshops and group consultations. The decision reflects the requirement for social distancing and the banning of non-essential gatherings.

The deadline for submissions to the Royal Commission has been extended by two months to 30 June 2020 and there are several ways you can make a submission that don't require having face to face contact with anyone including:



- Online
- Mail a printed submission form to GPO Box 1151, ADELAIDE SA 5001
- Call 1800 960 711 (between 8.30am – 5.30pm ACST, Monday-Friday except on public holidays. Interpreter service is available.)
- Email [ACRCenquiries@royalcommission.gov.au](mailto:ACRCenquiries@royalcommission.gov.au)
- Write to GPO Box 1151, ADELAIDE, SA 5001
- Send a video or audio recording - the recording must not be more than 25MB. If it is larger you can send it in several parts (in English or language)

At this stage, the due date for the Royal Commission's Final Report remains 12 November 2020, however this may change as a result of the current restrictions. To date the Commission has received 8,274 submissions, and 5,741 calls to the information line with common concerns being staffing issues and ratios.

Anyone wishing to make a submission is encouraged to visit the [Royal Commission in Aged Care Quality and Safety website](#) for more information.

If you require assistance to make a submission, an ADA Australia advocate can help. Even though our team is observing social distancing, we can still provide support over the phone or via email. Please contact us today on [info@adaaustralia.com.au](mailto:info@adaaustralia.com.au) or 1800 818 338.

## END OF LIFE RECOMMENDATIONS RELEASED

The Queensland Government Parliamentary Inquiry into Aged Care, End-of-Life and Palliative Care and Voluntary Assisted Dying has released its recommendations for reform.

In November 2018, the Queensland Legislative Assembly ordered the Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee (HCDSDFVPC) to undertake a major inquiry into the delivery of aged care, end-of-life and palliative care, and community and health practitioners' views on voluntary assisted dying.



Over the past 15 months this Committee has undertaken extensive consultation, culminating in comprehensive recommendations about the reforms needed to give older Australians access to quality services.

In late March 2020, the HCDSDFVPC tabled its reports to the Queensland Parliament and these are now available on the Queensland Parliament website.

The Committee reports on the overall poor state of aged care services echoes many of themes contained in an Interim Report, released at the end of October 2020, by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.

ADA Australia CEO Geoff Rowe said considerable legislative change was needed to implement the full recommendations, and it was likely that there would be future consultations to draft new legislation or amend existing legislation.

"The industry and community should be aware of what constitutes quality care, so we can be ready to actively participate in future consultations on aged care, end of life and palliative care and/or voluntary assisted dying reforms," Mr Rowe said.

"If we want systems of care that respond sensitively and appropriately to the needs of older Australians, then advocacy is required to persuade governments to commit the resources necessary for the creation of quality services."

To be informed to have your say when the opportunity is afforded, the following resources are available:

HCDSDFVPC Report on Aged Care, End of Life and Palliative Care:

<https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/Documents/TableOffice/TabledPapers/2020/5620T466.pdf>

HCDSDFVPC Report of Voluntary Assisted Dying

<https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/Documents/TableOffice/TabledPapers/2020/5620T490.pdf>

Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety – Interim Report

<https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/Documents/interim-report/interim-report-volume-1.pdf>

<https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/Documents/interim-report/interim-report-volume-2.pdf>

<https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/Documents/interim-report/interim-report-volume-3.pdf>

## Older Person's COVID-19 Support Line - 1800 171 866

With the changing regulations and recommendations for minimising the spread of COVID-19, it is essential older people can access the most up-to-date information and find support if they feel lonely or disconnected as a result of social isolation.

Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN), Council on the Ageing (COTA) Australia, National Seniors Australia, and Dementia Australia have banded together to offer support to older people amid the pandemic and created the Older Person's COVID-19 Support Line.



Seniors who are feeling isolated during this troubling time can call the Support Line anytime between 6am-10pm (AEST) 7 days a week to speak with a friendly person who is there to listen and help

The Support Line can be called for information about how COVID-19 affects older people and offers support for those who need it. The collaboration of these organisations means the line comprehensively covers different types of older Australians, including tailored information for people receiving aged care services and for those living with dementia.

For more information, call 1800 171 866 or visit <https://opan.com.au/covid/>.

## SUPPORT AGENCIES

If you or someone you know is struggling to cope, help is available. Please reach out to one or more of the following agencies.

**Lifeline Australia** - a national charity providing all Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to 24 hour, 7 days a week crisis support and suicide prevention services. **13 11 14**

**Beyond Blue** - All calls and chats are one-on-one with a trained mental health professional, and completely confidential. 24 hour, 7 days. **1300 22 4636**

People who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment can contact Beyond Blue by phone using the **National Relay Service. 1800 855 0511**

People who do not use English as their first language can get free translation support from the **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National). 131 450**

**MensLine Australia** - A telephone and online support, information and referral service, helping men to deal with relationship problems in a practical and effective way. **1300 78 99 78**

**Relationships Australia** - A provider of relationship support services for individuals, families and communities. **1300 364 277**

**Carers Australia** - Short-term counselling and emotional and psychological support services for carers and their families. **1800 242 636**

**1800RESPECT** - Confidential information, counselling and support service open 24 hours to support people impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse. **1800 737 732**

**SANE Australia** - Information about mental illness, treatments, where to go for support and help carers. Mon – Fri 10am - 10pm AEDT. **1800 18 7263**

**QLife** - Nationally-oriented counselling and referral service for LGBTI people. 3pm - 12am **1800 184 527**

**MindSpot Clinic** - An online and telephone clinic providing free assessment and treatment services for adults with anxiety or depression. 8am - 8 pm AEDT Mon - Fri, 8am - 6 pm AEDT Sat. **1800 61 44 34**

### Did you know *The Advocate* is printable?

If you would like a printable copy, please click here or email [info@adaaustralia.com.au](mailto:info@adaaustralia.com.au)

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