

National Mental Health Consumer Alliance



National Mental Health Consumer Alliance Calls for Action on DRC Recommendations on Restrictive Practices

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We commend the Disability Royal Commission (DRC) on its Research Report 'Restrictive Practices: A Pathway to Elimination.' For a long time, Alliance member organisations have raised concerns about restrictive practices. We note the DRC found that restrictive practices breach human rights - a point with which we all agree – and we welcome the DRC recommendations to end their use. We urge the DRC to include this recommendation in its Final Report to ensure meaningful action is taken.

We also welcome the definition of 'restrictive practices' which, as well as including the practices of seclusion, chemical and physical restraint, also includes involuntary mental health treatment and describes these as 'a significant form of violence'.¹ This is in keeping with what we have heard from many mental health consumers who have experienced restrictive practices, and describe their use as violent, traumatic, and fearful.²

Similarly, the report's findings that restrictive practices occur within an environment of 'violence, coercion and control'³ has been echoed by consumers. This adds more weight to our position that involuntary treatment, as well as other forms of restrictive practices, must end. We know restrictive practices are more likely to occur unchecked where there is insufficient scrutiny, in circumstances where the public is unaware of their use, and where the people subject to them have little to no control over their situation.

Consumers have spoken to the Alliance of the need for a restorative justice process to acknowledge the harm caused by restrictive practices and for the Government to apologise for wrongdoing. The Alliance is pleased to see that the DRC report echoed this sentiment with recommendations for a similar process within its 8-point action plan.⁴

While the report includes many positive elements, we would like to see real action on its recommendations which we believe is overdue. We urge Governments to take immediate steps to realise the vision of this important Report.

As member-based organisations representing people with personal lived experience of mental health issues around Australia, we call upon the Governments to take immediate steps to realise the vision of the important Report.

¹ Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Research Report – Restrictive Practices, a Pathway to Elimination, July 2023) 1.

² Hannah Butterworth, Lisa Wood and Sarah Rowe, 'Patients and staff members' experiences of restrictive practices in acute mental health inpatient settings: systematic review and thematic synthesis' (2022) 8(178) *BJPsych Open* 1, 4.

³ Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Research Report – Restrictive Practices, a Pathway to Elimination, July 2023) 5.

⁴ Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Research Report – Restrictive Practices, a Pathway to Elimination, July 2023) 11.

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