

Nationally Consistent Approaches to Community Visitor Schemes

**Discussion paper 2: Strengthening
disability safeguards through CVS**

Recommendations

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May 2026

Acknowledgment

The University of Melbourne acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the unceded land on which we work, learn and live: the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong peoples (Burnley, Fishermans Bend, Parkville, Southbank and Werribee campuses), the Yorta Yorta Nation (Dookie and Shepparton campuses), and the Dja Dja Wurrung people (Creswick campus). |

The University acknowledges and is grateful to the Traditional Owners, Elders and Knowledge Holders of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations and clans who have been instrumental in our reconciliation journey. |

We recognise the unique place held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original owners and custodians of the lands and waterways across the Australian continent, with histories of continuous connection dating back more than 60,000 years. We acknowledge their enduring cultural practices of caring for Country. |

We pay respect to Elders past, present and future, and acknowledge the importance of Indigenous knowledge in the Academy. As a community of researchers, teachers, professional staff and students we are privileged to work and learn every day with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues and partners.

Nationally Consistent Approaches to Community Visitor Schemes

Discussion paper 2: Strengthening disability safeguards through CVS

Recommendations

The Melbourne Disability Institute recommends the following changes to Discussion paper to: Strengthening disability safeguards through CVS:

Additional Principle/Principle 6

The principles of ‘Opt out’ with strict criteria and unannounced visits by CVS should be included as key operating principles to ensure the maximum effectiveness of all CVS schemes and so implying an additional Principle/ Principle 6.

Principle 5

This Principle should be amended to:

Transparency, accountability, **timely** shared intelligence **and continuous improvement**: CVS seeks to operate transparency, contributing to shared system learning and improvement and use consistent data **and timely data sharing** to strengthen the sitting function across within and across jurisdictions.

The Intent of Principle 5 should be amended and supplemented to:

5.4 (amended) Enable lawful, ethical, culturally appropriate, responsible **and timely** 2-way information sharing within relevant data governments frameworks, with relevant agencies (including the NDIS Commission, NDIA and disability service providers) in each jurisdiction to support proportionate and timely safeguarding responses.

5.6 (additional) Engage in evaluation and continuous knowledge sharing and improvements within and across jurisdictions.

Introduction and Background

The Melbourne Disability Institute (MDI) was established at the University of Melbourne in 2018 with the aim of facilitating and supporting interdisciplinary research to address the complex and systemic challenges facing people with disability in Australia and beyond.

Since that time, MDI has become firmly established as a national leader in public policy and disability research. MDI brings together people with disability, families, government and non-government organisations to collaborate on research that has real world impact on disability policy and practice and helps to build a more inclusive and equitable society. Effective Community Visitor Schemes can have a significant impact on the quality of life of people with disability – particularly people with disability who live in closed systems. As a result, researchers from MDI have made a number of significant policy submissions in relation to community visitors and have undertaken significant research on CVS, as part of an effective quality and safeguards system:

- In 2021, MDI made a submission to the Review of the Disability Act in Victoria highlighting the need to build on and enhance the Victorian Community Visitor Scheme¹.
- In 2023, MDI Senior Research Fellow, Dr Raelene West, led a research team which wrote a report *Where is the risk and what is the risk? The visiting remit of Community Visitor Schemes within the NDIS and OPCAT landscapes in safeguarding the rights of Australians with disability*².

The NDIS Review, which included Professor Bruce Bonyhady as Co-Chair and Professor Kirsten Deane as a Member of the Independent Panel, made important recommendations in support of a nationally consistent approach to community visitor schemes.

Specifically, the NDIS Review recommended as part of *Recommendations 16, Deliver safeguarding that is empowering and tailored to individuals, their service needs and environments*:

Action 16.4 State and territory governments, with support from the Department of Social Services, should ensure participants can access high-quality, nationally consistent Community Visitor Scheme offerings that interface with the NDIS.

¹ Melbourne Disability Institute, Submission to the Review of the Victorian Disability Act, October 2021

² West, R., Hargrave, J., & Gooding, P. (2023). *‘Where is the risk and what is the risk?’: The visiting remit of Community Visitor Schemes in the NDIS and OPCAT landscapes in safeguarding the rights of Australians with disabilities*. Melbourne Disability Institute, University of Melbourne

The NDIS Review also produced an additional report called the Supporting Analysis which provided greater analysis and implementation detail than provided in the final published report. In the Supporting Analysis report, the Review further recommended that State and territory governments should establish a National Community of Practice in order to give effect to the need for continuous knowledge sharing, system improvements and to contribute to best-practice and national consistency³.

In addition, for Community Visitor Schemes to be effective, there must be timely data sharing. *Recommendation 23: Measure what matters, build an evidence base of what works, and create a learning system*, the NDIS Review recommended:

Action 23.4 All Australian governments should agree to jointly invest in action to improve data quality and sharing.

Responses to the Discussion Paper

In relation to the proposed five guiding principles, we are supportive. However, we recommend an additional Principle and changes to Principle 5.

Additional Principle

As highlighted in the research led by Dr West *et al*, evidence provided to the NDIS Review and as is clearly stated in Discussion Paper 2, Community Visitor Schemes form a core element of an effective safeguarding system for people with disability. Therefore, we would recommend that once the coverage of the Schemes is agreed they should operate on an 'Opt out' rather than 'Opt in' basis, with very strict criteria/protections when opting out.

It is also essential that the principles support maximum effectiveness. Community Visitor Schemes are most effective when the community visitors can make unannounced visits.

The principles of 'Opt out' with strict criteria and unannounced visits by CVS should be included as core operational principles to ensure the maximum effectiveness of all CVS schemes.

Principle 5

We suggest that this Principle should be changed to:

Transparency, accountability, **timely** shared intelligence **and continuous improvement**: CVS seeks to operate transparency, contributing to shared system learning and improvement and use consistent data **and timely data sharing** to strengthen the sitting function across within and across jurisdictions.

³ NDIS Review, Working together to deliver the NDIS, Supporting Analysis, p904

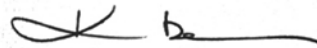
We suggest that the Intent should be amended and supplemented as follows:

5.4 (amended) Enable lawful, ethical, culturally appropriate, responsible **and timely** 2-way information sharing within relevant data governments frameworks, with relevant agencies (including the NDIS Commission, NDIA and disability service providers) in each jurisdiction to support proportionate and timely safeguarding responses.

5.6 (additional) Engage in evaluation and continuous knowledge sharing and improvements within and across jurisdictions.



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