



Committee Secretary  
Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic  
and Family Violence Prevention Committee  
Parliament House  
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Brisbane Qld 4000  
Sent via: [health@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:health@parliament.qld.gov.au)

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Dear Committee

Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee's (the Committee) Inquiry into the Disability Services and Other Legislation (Worker Screening) Amendment Bill (the Bill) 2020.

QDN is an organisation of, for, and with people with disability with over 2,000 members and supporters across Queensland. QDN operates a state-wide network of members who provide information, feedback and views from the lived experience of people with disability to inform systemic policy feedback to government and peak bodies.

QDN acknowledges that the Bill's overarching purpose is to enact in legislation the *Intergovernmental Agreement on Nationally Consistent Worker Screening for the NDIS* (IGA). The IGA was negotiated by the Commonwealth Government and agreed to by all State and Territory Governments.

QDN broadly supports the objectives of the Bill, which are to:

1. Support nationally consistent worker screening for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and the IGA
2. Enable Queensland to operate a state disability worker screening system for certain disability services that it continues to fund, or deliver, outside of the jurisdiction of the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission
3. Streamline and strengthen the legislative framework for disability worker screening in Queensland
4. Ensure the blue card system operates effectively and efficiently alongside the disability worker screening system and the strongest possible safeguards are maintained in relation to persons working with children with disability

Whilst broadly supporting the Bill, QDN also acknowledges that worker screening is not a 'silver bullet' to protect people with disability. Testimony from the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Disability Royal Commission) has shown that the mistreatment of people with disability is a national crisis that needs addressing urgently by all levels of government. Worker screening is just one level of protection.

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Even with the NDIS fully rolled out across the country, QDN strongly believes State Governments have an important role to play to protect and support people with disability, including but not limited to a commitment to ongoing funding for independent individual, citizen and systemic advocacy. Independent advocacy is an invaluable tool to support people having a voice and being supported to speak out about issues that impact upon their rights and wellbeing.

QDN also acknowledges that during the development of the Bill, the Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors (the department) consulted directly with QDN and through QDeNGAGE, (QDN's business arm) with a small focus group of people with diverse physical, intellectual, sensory, cognitive, psychosocial disabilities organised to gain their insights into the proposed policy. QDeNgage links people with disability directly with government, business and community organisations looking to gain insight into the lived experiences of people with disability; to improve their policies or products. Importantly, the QDeNgage consultation included a mixture of people with disability who self-manage and plan-manage their NDIS plans.

The feedback from the consultation was provided to the department and aspects will also be addressed in this submission, which is also reflective of broader consultation with QDN members across Queensland.

Overall, QDN supports the State Government's decision to allow, but not mandate, screening for unregistered workers. Under the IGA, states and territories have discretion on whether to make screening mandatory for workers of unregistered NDIS providers and persons in non-risk assessed roles for registered NDIS providers.

QDN believes this decision aligns with the principle of 'choice and control' that is at the heart of the NDIS. People with disability who plan-manage or self-manage their NDIS funding have the choice to use unregistered providers and have been assessed as capable of managing the associated risks, as part of managing their overall NDIS plan implementation. This should extend to whether they require their workers to undertake worker screening.

QDN members in regional and remote parts of Queensland have reported a limited supply of disability support workers and have expressed concerns that mandatory worker screening would deter people from working in the disability sector.

Additionally, QDN members have raised examples where the criminal history of a person is valuable, as it links with the participant's lived experience. For example, someone who has overcome a drug dependency or previously relied on aggressive behaviour to deal with issues is often able to provide important peer support to people with disability who face similar challenges. If people have rehabilitated and want to share their learnings with people with disability, then QDN believes individuals should have the choice to hire them.

While QDN acknowledges the safety benefits of the 'no card, no start' provisions for registered providers in the legislation, we are concerned that the cost of applying for worker screening approval will create a financial barrier for those on income support who are looking to gain employment as a disability support worker. This includes people on Jobseeker and the Disability Support Pension. We strongly urge the State Government to keep the cost of worker screening applications low to help attract more people to work in the disability sector.

QDN members have also expressed concern at how long it will take to gain approval through the new worker screening process and whether long delays will result in them being left with reduced supports. QDN recommends the State Government ensures sufficient resources are allocated to this initiative to facilitate the processing of worker screening applications in an efficient and timely manner.

Given the Bill represents a significant overhaul of the current Yellow Card system, QDN believes there is a need for a clear and targeted communication strategy around what the changes mean for people with disability, their families and the disability sector.

QDN members have provided feedback around communications approaches they strongly recommend should be adopted by the State Government, including:

- All materials need to also be available in plain English, Easy Read and AUSLAN versions
- An alternative process for applying for people who don't have digital access or skills or have poor literacy skills. Suggestions included a phonenumber, paper process for applications and mail alerts if a worker's status changes
- Developing a resource with tips on how people with disability should approach having a conversation with their support workers about applying for worker screening
- All websites connected to the new worker screening process must be screen reader compatible
- Need to develop specific communications strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people with disability, their families and their providers
- Information sessions for NDIS participants in the lead up to the start of the new process
- Simple online videos explaining the new system, which include AUSLAN and captioning


QDN urges the State Government to publish resources on the changes to worker screening well before the 1 February 2021 start date to prevent confusion and the spread of misinformation.

Finally, QDN again reiterates that worker screening will never be a fail-safe solution for preventing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation against people with disability. All levels of government - indeed, all Queenslanders - need to work together to prevent, identify and stop the mistreatment of people with disability wherever it occurs in our community.

Every child, young person and adult with disability has a right to be safe. QDN will continue to advocate strongly for the voice of people with disability to be central to conversations about legislation, policies and services that impact their lives.

On behalf of QDN, I thank the committee for the opportunity to make a submission on the Bill.

Yours sincerely



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Queenslanders with Disability Network