

Media Release

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RIAC condemns changes to Victoria's disability regulators

Rights Information and Advocacy Centre (RIAC) has urged the Victorian Government to rethink its plan to abolish Victoria's disability regulators and fold their functions into the new Social Services Regulator (SSR).

RIAC, which supports people with disability across Geelong, Bendigo, Shepparton and Mildura, has joined major disability advocacy organisations in calling for the Government to revisit the legislation introduced last week.

The proposal would dissolve the Victorian Disability Worker Commissioner, the Disability Worker Registration Board and the Disability Services Commissioner, with their responsibilities absorbed into the SSR.

RIAC CEO Dr Sandy Ross said the move "strips away specialist regulators capable of dealing with unique risks faced by people with disability relying on support services," adding, "these regulators exist because people with disability fought for them, and many inquiries, including the recent Disability Royal Commission, have demonstrated the need for them. Replacing them with a generic model of social service regulation is a step backwards in ensuring people with disability can access safe and effective support services."

The Government has claimed it has "consulted" with the disability community, but Dr Ross said the claims do not satisfy the pub test: "There has been some limited communication but no meaningful consultation, and that was only *after* the Government developed and announced the model as decided. People with disability through their representative organisations have been clear and consistent that they do not support the changes. What we're seeing is not the product of consultation, but a predetermined outcome pushed through despite strong opposition."

Recent findings from the Public Advocate, identifying thousands of cases of exploitation, coercion and fraud by disability services, reinforce the need for a strong, specialist disability regulator. "People with disability need to trust that when they speak up about the way a service they rely on is treating them, they're being heard by experts who understand disability and have the authority to act decisively to hold the service to account," Dr Ross said.

RIAC has raised particular concerns about the impacts of these proposals on people in regional Victoria, where fewer service providers increase vulnerability for people with disability to a poorly regulated service sector.

RIAC believes Victoria should move to having a single, specialist disability regulator rather than bury disability oversight within the SSR. "We need a regulator designed with, not imposed on, the disability community," Dr Ross said. "Anything less weakens safeguards and erodes trust."

RIAC is calling on the Government to:

- Separate disability regulation from unrelated reforms and allow proper scrutiny
- Engage in genuine consultation with disabled people's organisations and peak bodies about options for developing a dedicated, specialist disability regulator and complaints authority
- Retain a dedicated, specialist disability regulator and complaints authority

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