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Media Release

Shocking abuse highlights urgent need for government action to implement Disability Royal Commission recommendations

Inclusion Australia is utterly appalled by the footage from last night's ABC Four Corners program which highlighted the horrific abuse of people with an intellectual disability and autism. This included shocking acts of control and coercion, and use of unauthorised restrictive practices.

Catherine McAlpine, CEO of Inclusion Australian said "our immediate thoughts are with the people with disability and families featured in the show. Such inhumane actions are soul-destroying and have no place in our society. We also stand with the broader disability community for whom this footage is particularly distressing. Many people will have experienced or witnessed similar acts in their own lives."

Such images, whilst always devastating, are sadly not surprising to our community. Stories of this kind were at the heart of calls for the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of people with disability.

Over the past 4 years the Disability Royal Commission has heard firsthand about the historic failure of our systems and institutions to support the rights of people with disabilities from across Australia. Thanks to the strength and courage of people with disability, families, and advocates, we have a clear understanding of what has happened behind closed doors where people with disability are segregated from the rest of society.

Yet the pain for our community is that the stories featured on Four Corners are not historic, but a reminder that the abuse of people with disability continues despite the evidence presented to the Royal Commission.

The rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and establishment of the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission promised a new approach where people with disability have more choice and control and are empowered to speak up when things go wrong. Last night we repeatedly saw that the new systems have a long way to go before this promise becomes reality.

Ms McAlpine said "The program shows that the NDIS needs to work for and be designed with people with complex support needs at the centre. It is not enough that people with complex needs are an add-on or an after-thought. This includes people with communication support needs. The current NDIS Review must prioritise this change."

Other key issues highlighted by the show include:

- The need for stronger consequences for providers who do the wrong thing with proportionate compliance penalties, not just a focus on 'educating' providers
- Responsibility should not rest with people with disabilities to make a complaint - the Commission itself has identified and should address gaps for better communication with participants in group homes
- the crucial role of independent advocates - especially for people without family connections or families who have the resources to advocate for them

Today, the broader Australian community is rightly outraged by what was shown on Four Corners. Our concern is that these stories will be quickly forgotten until the next news cycle. People with disabilities and their families cannot wait for the next scandal or expose.

With the imminent release of the Disability Royal Commission recommendations, the government has a clear opportunity to take decisive action and make the systemic changes needed.

After four years of painful but courageous testimony to the Disability Royal Commission, it is time to end the segregation and abuse of people with disability and make existing discriminatory systems more accessible and inclusive. It is time for those with responsibility for the quality and safety of disability supports to step up and ensure that services are not just compliant, but inclusive and empowering for the people they support.

All people with disability have the right to be safe and to get the supports they need, from workers who provide professional, dignified care.

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Inclusion Australia is the national voice for people with intellectual disability and their families.