

The Royal Commission yesterday announced the start of its witness hearings, with the first to begin on the 11th of February for three days, and continue the following week for five days from the 18th to the 22nd (you can view the details here <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/hearings/Pages/hearings/2018/adelaide-hearings-1.aspx>)

This announcement follows the first public hearing last month which outlined the direction and powers of the inquiry.

Importantly at the first hearing the Commission encouraged consumers, their family and friends, employees and aged care providers to actively participate in its processes, with Commissioner Lynelle Briggs stating 'We want to hear from as many people as possible during the Royal Commission.'

At the first hearing the Commission warned providers about the consequences of failing to respond to requests from the royal commission or moves to stop employees from speaking up at the inquiry. 'Providers who do not engage with our requests draw attention to themselves' Commission Briggs said. Commissioner Richard Tracey warned providers against stopping current or former employees from participating freely in the inquiry. He stated that the Commission:

'would be gravely concerned if any operators in the aged care sector or government bodies were to instruct their staff not to talk to the Royal Commission or to withhold information from us' 'It would be unlawful for an employer to take punitive action against an employee or former employee who has assisted us.'

The upcoming hearing

This first witness hearing will look at key issues affecting the functioning of the current system. This includes examining quality, safety and complaints systems, clinical issues and challenges, and how the changing demographics in Australia impacts the delivery of aged care services.

The Commission has invited various stakeholders to give evidence, including medical and nursing professional bodies, government, regulators, and workforce representative bodies. It has also asked that people receiving or seeking aged care services or their family members give evidence of their experiences.

All participants must seek leave (permission) to appear at the Commission, with leave granted to those who have a direct and substantial interest in each particular inquiry. Applications for leave to appear at the public hearing must be received by 5pm on Tuesday 5 February 2019.

You can watch the hearings here <http://webstreaming.lawinorder.com.au/acrc>

If you need assistance seeking leave to appear at any of the public hearings contact our lawyer, Kate Simpson.

