

# Senate hearing on the draft religious discrimination bills

## PWDA opening statement from Senior Manager of Policy

Mx Giancarlo de Vera

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people on whose unceded land I am currently speaking from.

I would like to pay respect to elders past and present, and traditional owners across this continent. In particular, I would like to pay my respect to First Nations colleagues who join us here today.

People with Disability Australia is pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the potential negative effects of **the draft religious discrimination bills you have the opportunity to discard.**

At PWDA, **we believe this draft legislation is a threat to people with disability and would represent a major step backwards for equality and human rights in this country.**

PWDA is both the peak disability organisation in NSW and in Australia, that represents the **1 in 6 Australians with disability** in this country, and **we are asking you not to pass this legislation in any form.**

There's much to be concerned about with the proposed legislative changes for members of the LGBTIQ+ community, of which many people with disability are a member of. However, the proposed changes will **allow people to discriminate against all people with disability regardless of whether they are a member of the LGBTIQ+ or a religious community.**

**In addition, the proposed changes will rob us of hard-fought legal protections that we use to fight discrimination based on our disability.**

This is unacceptable.

People with disability across this country are subject to daily and dangerous ridicule, assumptions, bias and negative attitudes in places of learning, in workplaces, when we access the supports we need to fully participate in society, and well as the community.

**In fact, community attitudes are one of the biggest – if not the biggest barrier – people with disability face to be free and equal.** So, let me ask a question: why are we allowing subjective religious beliefs to potentially give licence to discriminate against all people with disability, while also removing legal protections we use every day to fight this discrimination?

The **statement of beliefs clauses** will allow people to say, once again, that we are a punishment from God. That we need to repent to be cured. That we should feel bad about who we are, and not proud. That our rights don't matter and we're a curse.

People will be able to say these things about us, and to us ... AGAIN ... like they did in years past. Like they COULD in years past. There is good reason why these attitudes and statements are outdated, and that's because they belong in the past – and that is where they belong!

We should not be subject to these demeaning attitudes. We should not allow the **religious model of disability** to be reintroduced. We don't want to be pitied. We don't want to be cured. We don't want to be seen as charity. We deserve to be valued as equal.

Instead, the **religious exemptions clauses in the proposed changes** will see people able to discriminate against us in hiring decisions, and in the places where we live

and go to school and university, as well as deny us the supports we need to be included. This is not okay. It will never be okay.

This will lead to **worrying standards and practices being set, that will dictate the behaviour of individuals and organisations that want to exclude us.** What happens when these standards and practices prevent us accessing the supports we need to be free and equal in society, because a faith-based provider can decide to not provide us support on their subjective religious belief?

**Are we prepared – and do we want this to happen? The potential is real if the legislative package before us is passed.**

It's time the Parliament recognises these bills breaches the spirit of Australia's anti-discrimination laws, and belong to an era we're no longer a part of.

**1 in 6 Australians with disability can be discriminated against.  
Do we want to allow that to happen?**