

WINE NEWS

Intellectually disabled people 'unsafe' in hospitals, disability royal commission hears

By Michelle Brown

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The disability royal commission has heard people with intellectual disabilities cannot be left alone in hospital safely.

Jaqueline Mills, who has an intellectually disabled son, said other families felt the same due to mistakes with medication, misdiagnoses and poor understanding of the needs of patients with an intellectual disability.

"There's no way that we'd leave our loved ones in hospital unsupported, because we don't experience hospital settings as safe places," she said.

Ms Mills, who works as an advocate for people with intellectual disabilities, gave evidence about a man she was helping.

The man, given the identity "A", had bouts of screaming then laughing which were misinterpreted as behavioural, instead of an attempt to communicate a health problem.

"A" had had problems eating for a year when he was finally admitted to hospital weak and dehydrated.

When Ms Mills visited him, she found he was dehydrated.

"The hospital wasn't monitoring what he was eating either and they'd not done anything about getting nutrients into him, even though he'd not been eating for two-and-a-half weeks by that time."

'National disgrace'

A NSW Council for Intellectual Disability senior advocate, Jim Simpson, told the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability in Sydney that research since the 1990s showed a lack of adequate diagnosis of health conditions in people with an intellectual disability.

Mr Simpson said he hoped that was about to change.

"The fact that it has taken so long to get to that point, and the fact that there is so much more that needs to happen if we are going to address those preventable deaths, has been and continues to be a 'national disgrace'," he said.

The inquiry has already heard that people with intellectual disability have a much higher mortality rate compared with the general population.

Mr Simpson said there needed to be a fundamental change in values and attitudes towards intellectual disability throughout the health system.

He also called for specialist services to diagnose and treat people with disabilities.

He said a pilot of specialist intellectual disability health services in New South Wales had "undoubtedly" resulted in much better treatment.

Topics: law-crime-and-justice, royal-commissions, health, disabilities, education, nsw

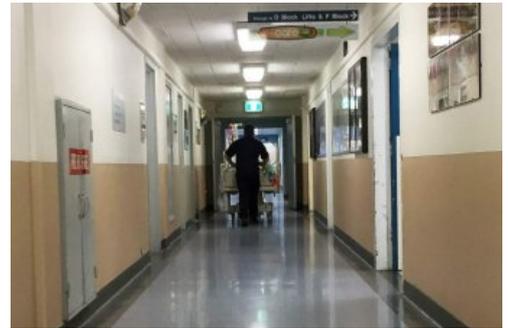


PHOTO: The inquiry has heard families with intellectually disabled people have concerns. (ABC News)

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Key points:

- Patient who had trouble eating was found to be dehydrated in hospital, the commission was told
- Commission told there needs to be a change in attitudes towards intellectual disability throughout the health system
- Hospitals are not a safe place for patients with an intellectual disability, the commission heard

