



Abuses Against People with Disabilities in Prisons in Australia



Who we are

HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

We are called Human Rights Watch.



We work to make sure everyone in the world is treated fairly and gets their rights.

What is this report about?



This report is about people with disabilities who are in prison in Australia.



Everyone can find prison hard.

But people with disabilities can find prison even harder.



In 2016 and 2017 we went to 14 prisons in Australia.

We spoke to many people with disabilities who are in prison.



We also spoke to other people, like:

- prison staff
- nurses
- mental health staff
- groups that support people with disabilities
- government staff

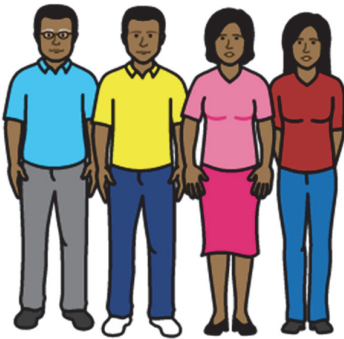


This report tells you what we found out.

What we found out



There are many people with disabilities in prison in Australia.



Many people with disabilities in prison are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the first groups of people who lived in Australia.



Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been treated badly.

And they are sent to prison more than other people in Australia.

Support for people with disabilities in prison



Many people with disabilities in prison are left without the support they need.

This is because:



- Many prison staff do not know how to support people with disabilities
- There is not much support for people with disabilities in prison



- Many prison staff do not find out if people have a disability when they come to prison



- People with disabilities may not tell prison staff about their disability.

They may not think they have a disability.

Or they may think that people will treat them badly because of their disability

Violence, bullying and other problems



We found that many people with disabilities in prison are treated very badly.

For example, other people in prison may:

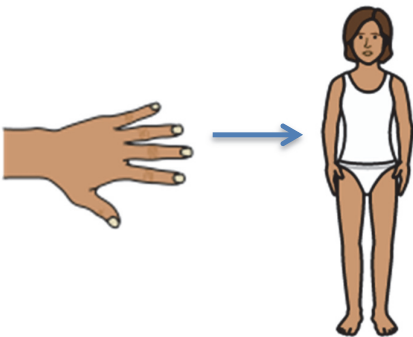


- hurt people with disabilities or say they will hurt them

- pick on them and say nasty things



- try to steal things from them, like cigarettes, food and medicine



- try to force them to have sex or do sexual things



Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities are treated badly in prison because:

- they have a disability
- and because people think Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not as good as them



People with disabilities may be hurt or treated badly by:

- other prisoners
- prison staff
- prisoner carers. They are prisoners who are paid to support people with disabilities in prison



Many people with disabilities are too scared to speak up if something bad happens to them.



And prison staff may not believe what people with disabilities say, because of their disability.



Punishing people with disabilities

Many people with disabilities in prison may get upset or worried a lot or find it hard to understand what is happening.



Many prison staff do not know how to support people with disabilities when this happens.



For example, prison staff may not know what to do if someone is very upset or scared.



Prison staff may think the person is behaving badly.

They may keep the person in a room on their own for days, months, and even years.

This can make the person even more upset and scared.

What Australia should do next



This work is for all governments in Australia and some other groups to do.



1. Make sure all people with disabilities in prison get the support they need.

Make sure prisons have enough money for this.



2. Find out what life is like for all people with disabilities in prison.

For example, find out how many people in prison have a disability and what support they need.

3. Make life better for people with disabilities in prison.

This means making sure that:



- There is better support for people with disabilities in prison if they need it.

For example, people with disabilities should get help from someone if they are upset or scared



- The police, courts and prison staff know how to find out who has a disability



- Prison staff, police and lawyers get training about how to support all people with disabilities



- People with disabilities can complain if they don't get their rights in prison



4. Keep checking prisons in Australia to make sure they meet the needs of people with disabilities.

People who do not work for the Government should do these checks.



5. Make sure people with disabilities are not kept in a room on their own, away from other people.

Prison staff sometimes do this to punish people in prison.



6. Find better ways to support people with disabilities instead of sending them to prison.

For example, make sure there is:

- better support for people with disabilities and mental health conditions in the community
- other support that helps people stay out of prison

One woman's story



We spoke to a woman with a mental health condition who is Aboriginal.

We found out what life in prison is like for her.



She told us that she gets bullied by some people in prison.

They ask her for cigarettes. If she says no they fight her.

She said people pick on her because of her mental health condition.



Sometimes prison staff see her and other people fighting.



The other people blame her for the fighting. They tell prison staff that she hits them because of her mental health condition.