

MEDIA RELEASE

AUSTRALIAN HEALTHCARE STILL FAILING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY, DOCTOR WARNS

Health advocates say workers still aren't adequately trained to support Australians with disability

Despite the findings of the Disability Royal Commission, Australians with disability are still facing significant barriers when accessing healthcare, with growing concern the healthcare system is still failing to adequately prepare workers to provide proper support.

Around one in five Australians live with disability¹, yet many continue to experience poorer health outcomes and greater barriers when accessing care. Adults with disability are 12 times more likely to rate their health as 'fair' or 'poor'², while people under 65 using disability services are almost five times more likely to die compared to the general population³.

Doctor, lawyer and disability advocate Dr Dinesh Palipana OAM lives with quadriplegia following a spinal cord injury, and chaired the advisory group for CheckUP's *Access for All* disability awareness training course.

He said progress across the healthcare system had been "incremental", with many healthcare professionals still receiving little to no disability-specific training despite regularly caring for patients.

"The Disability Royal Commission highlighted serious issues across the healthcare system, yet only a fraction of the recommendations were accepted by the federal government. It's a sobering note," Dr Palipana said.

Dr Palipana said one of the biggest challenges was that many healthcare professionals still lacked understanding around both the practical and physiological realities of living with disability.

"For someone with a spinal cord injury, you have to think about examining them differently because they may not be able to feel parts of their body. This is not taught in medical school," he noted.

"Yet healthcare professionals are expected to care for people with disability every single day.

"There are also the broader social challenges – organising appointments, travelling to clinics, navigating inaccessible spaces – that many healthcare workers simply don't see."

Dr Palipana recalled one particularly confronting example involving a person with quadriplegia searching for an accessible radiology clinic.

"Within a 150-kilometre radius covering millions of people, they could only find one clinic willing and able to accommodate them, and it was over an hour away," he said.

"Since then, my own mum has been affected by breast cancer, so the importance of accessible radiological screening has become even more personal."

Dr Palipana said improving disability awareness across the healthcare workforce was critical to creating meaningful long-term change, with initiatives like *Access for All* helping close the training and awareness gap across the sector.

¹ [Australian Bureau of Statistics – 5.5 million Australians have disability](#)

² [Australian Institute of Health & Welfare – Australia's Health: Health of people with disability](#)

³ [Australian Institute of Health & Welfare – Mortality patterns among people using disability support service](#)

“We have to start from the ground up. Students and early-career healthcare professionals need this education because that’s what will shift culture over time,” he said.

“People with disability are more dependent on the healthcare system, experience worse outcomes and are often more vulnerable. Improving disability awareness isn’t just the right thing to do – it makes healthcare more equitable, efficient and safe.”

Developed by CheckUP Australia, *Access for All* is an online disability awareness course designed to help healthcare providers better understand and support people across a range of healthcare settings. Access for All is eligible for continuing professional development points for 35+ professions.

CheckUP Australia CEO Tony de Ambrosis said improving disability awareness across the healthcare workforce was critical to creating safer and more inclusive healthcare experiences.

“Access for All was designed to create awareness of the barriers people with disability experience when accessing healthcare and to provide practical solutions to reducing them,” Mr Tony de Ambrosis said.

“We know small changes in knowledge and understanding can have a significant impact on patient experience and outcomes, which in turn leads to more equitable access to health services for people with disability.”

The course has already shown promising results, with a statistically significant improvement in disability awareness among those who completed the course, and 97 percent of participants saying they intended to improve the accessibility of the services they provide.⁴

“Healthcare needs to put the humanity back into health,” Dr Palipana continued. “Because often, it’s the human factors that make the biggest difference for people with disability.”

The *Access For All* course is currently available free of charge until 30 June 2026. For more information and to register, visit checkup.org.au/what-we-do/online-training/access-for-all/.

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About Access For All

Access for All is online disability awareness course developed by CheckUP Australia to help healthcare providers better understand and support people with disability. Designed for healthcare professionals, administrators, reception staff and students, the course focuses on improving disability awareness, reducing barriers to care and creating more inclusive healthcare experiences.

About CheckUP Australia

CheckUP is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of people in rural, regional, and remote communities across Queensland. Since 1998, we’ve worked with over 150 service provider organisations to deliver innovative programs that reduce health disparities and ensure everyone, regardless of background or location, has access to quality healthcare.

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⁴ University of Melbourne – [Evaluation of Access for All – Disability Awareness for Mainstream Health Providers](#)