

Discussion paper 1: Nationally consistent approaches to CVS

Discussion Paper: Strengthening Community Visitor Schemes in Australia

Summary paper: Community Visitor Schemes

What this paper is about

This paper explains what Community Visitor Schemes (CVS) are and asks for your thoughts on how to make them more consistent. The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (the DRC) has recommended making CVS more consistent across the country. In response, the Australian Government is working with state and territory governments to find opportunities to align the different schemes.

We want to hear from people and organisations who are involved with or affected by CVS. Your feedback will help governments understand what should be thought about in CVS and what is good.

What are Community Visitor Schemes?

CVS are independent programs that exist in most states and territories. They are designed to help protect the rights of people with disability. Community visitors check in on people living in group settings like group homes, supported residential services and psychiatric facilities.

Community visitors can arrive without warning. They talk to residents, check how people are being treated and look at important documents. They can raise issues if they see something wrong and help make sure people's rights are respected. Their role is both to prevent problems and respond when concerns come up.

These schemes were set up before the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) started. Since the NDIS was introduced, people with disability have more choice in where and how they live. But this has also made the system more complex. It's now more important than ever to make sure there are strong and fair ways to check on people's safety and wellbeing.

CVS operate in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria. Western Australia and Tasmania do not currently run a CVS for disability services. Each state and territory runs its CVS differently. Some use volunteers, while others use paid staff. The rules, powers and how often places are visited can all vary.

What we've learned so far

Since March 2025, the Australian Government and a research group called Where to have been talking to governments and disability groups about how CVS work. They've found 6 key areas that shape how CVS operate.

Key CVS components

Function	Important considerations
Who community visitors can visit	Each state and territory sets rules about where visitors can go. These settings are often places where people are more at risk of harm or abuse.
Access and powers	Community visitors need to be able to enter places without notice, talk to people privately and look at documents to do their jobs properly.
Skills and training	Visitors need to be able to talk with people with complex needs, understand their rights and know when and how to report concerns.
Risk-based planning	Some places are visited more often based on risk or how long it's been since the last visit.
Processes and rules	Sharing information, handling complaints and following up properly are key to making the schemes work well. These systems need to be improved across the country.
How often places are visited	Some schemes visit more often than others. This depends on the risk of harm and available resources.

How the NDIS has changed things

Since the NDIS began in 2013, most disability services are now run by private providers. People can choose where they live, including in smaller, more individualised settings. But this shift has also created challenges for CVS.

Here are some of the main challenges:

- **Different rules in each state:** Not all people can access CVS. For example, some schemes visit NDIS accommodation, others visit government-run housing and others visit only specialist settings.
- **Unclear roles:** CVS and the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (NDIS Commission) both deal with safeguarding, but in different ways. The NDIS Commission is a regulator, it handles complaints and makes sure services meet standards. CVS focus on listening to people and raising concerns when needed. Their role is more personal and rights-based.
- **Trouble sharing information:** Community visitors say it's hard to share concerns with the NDIS Commission or the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) (the agency that runs the NDIS). Sometimes they have to label issues as formal complaints, even when that's not the best approach and the community visitors don't always get told what happens next.
- **Limited resources:** As more people live in more places, it's harder for community visitors to keep up. Some need to choose who they visit and how often they visit.

- **Not formally recognised:** CVS are run by states and territories, but they aren't included in national NDIS laws or frameworks. This creates confusion and means CVS aren't always seen as an official safeguard.

Why your feedback matters

We want to consider options to make CVS more consistent across Australia. Your feedback will help guide future decisions and work towards better protecting people with disability.

There have already been many reviews and reports about how to improve CVS. Some of the most important ones include:

- **Westwood Spice CVS Review (2018)** – this said that CVS should stay state/territory-based but work more closely together. It called for shared definitions, better training, clearer roles and stronger information-sharing.
- **Robertson Review (2020)** – this suggested a national CVS that could visit people who may be at risk in private homes.
- **South Australian Safeguarding Task Force Report (2020)** – this said CVS should have better access to NDIS services and clearer laws and roles.
- **Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS Inquiry (2021)** – this recommended writing CVS into the NDIS Act and creating a national scheme.
- **Disability Royal Commission Final Report (2023)** – this said CVS are vital for people with few other supports. It called for better funding, stronger laws and shared systems across Australia.
- **NDIS Review Final Report (2023)** – this supported state/territory-run CVS working closely with the NDIS and helping people to manage risks and speak up.
- **Melbourne Disability Institute Study (2023)** – this highlighted the need for more funding, especially with rising NDIS participant numbers. It suggested expanding CVS to visit more places, including private homes, if people agree.

These reviews all agree that CVS are important. But for them to work well, they need proper support, clear laws and a consistent approaches across Australia.

Have your say

We want to hear from the public, people with disability, their families, carers and disability service providers about CVS. Your feedback will help governments understand your views on what the options are for more consistent CVS across Australia.

Please consider the following:

1. What aspects of CVS do you find most supportive or beneficial?
2. Have there been any challenges or barriers you've faced when engaging with community visitors?
If so, how were they addressed?
3. How effectively do community visitors communicate on behalf of people with disability within the broader community or service systems?
4. What qualities or skills should community visitors have to best meet the needs of people with disability needs?

5. Can you suggest any changes that would make CVS more accessible or responsive to the needs of people with disability?
6. What do you believe are the most important functions of CVS?
7. What types of accommodation settings should community visitors be able to attend? What settings should be prioritised?
8. Should community visitors be able to enter a private home? What considerations are needed to ensure the safety of people with disability in these settings? (Such as consent, privacy and or opt in restrictions)

You can give feedback by:

- completing our [online survey](#)
- attending a virtual public consultation workshop
- send a written document submission to: CVSproject@wheretoresearch.com.au
- record an audio file or video file [submission](#).