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## **For Immediate Release 14 February 2018**

### **Human Rights Watch report highlights the abuse and neglect of prisoners with disabilities in Australia**

Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (**ALHR**) calls for immediate steps to be taken to end the torture, violence and abuse against prisoners with disabilities following the release of the report by Human Rights Watch: *I Needed Help, Instead I was Punished: Abuse and Neglect of Prisoners with Disabilities in Australia*.

“The report is very powerful and finally brings to light the abuse and violence inflicted on prisoners with disabilities in Australian prisons – ALHR is deeply distressed at these conditions, especially the use of solitary confinement and lack of services for prisons with disabilities. The report describes severe, and multiple violations of their human rights on a daily basis, including the rights to equality and non-discrimination, freedom from violence, exploitation and abuse, liberty and security of the person, bodily integrity, health, reasonable accommodation and an accessible environment,” Susan Peukert, Co-chair of ALHR’s Disability Rights Subcommittee, said today.

“Being locked up in prison in Australia can be extraordinarily stressful for anyone, but is particularly traumatic for prisoners with disabilities,” said Kriti Sharma, disability rights researcher at Human Rights Watch and author of the report. “The services to support a prisoner with a disability just aren’t there. And worse, having a disability puts you at high risk of violence and abuse.”

One of the most disturbing findings of the report pertains to the use of solitary confinement in Australian prisons. Human Rights Watch found that prisoners with a psychosocial or cognitive disability can spend weeks or months locked in solitary confinement for 22 hours or more a day, with significant detrimental effects on their mental health. Prisoners in Maximum Security Units can spend years in prolonged solitary confinement. “The use of solitary confinement against prisoners with disabilities is a violation of the human rights of people with disabilities and must be stopped by all State and Territory governments immediately”.

ALHR commends Human Rights Watch for this investigation and calls upon the recommendations to be actioned immediately, and a Royal Commission be established to examine the treatment of prisoners with disabilities in all correctional facilities across Australia.

The report is available here: [I Needed Help, Instead I Was Punished: Abuse and Neglect of Prisoners with Disabilities in Australia](#).

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*ALHR was established in 1993 and is a national association of Australian solicitors, barristers, academics, judicial officers and law students who practise and promote international human rights law in Australia. ALHR has active and engaged National, State and Territory committees and specialist thematic committees. Through advocacy, media engagement, education, networking, research and training, ALHR promotes, practices and protects universally accepted standards of human rights throughout Australia and overseas.*