

Royal Commission appointed to inquire into alleged cases of brutality at the Claremont Mental Hospital, State of Western Australia

20 March 1950 – 6 April 1950

Details

The 'Royal Commission appointed to inquire into alleged cases of brutality at the Claremont Mental Hospital' was appointed on 20 March 1950. It found children needed to be better segregated and recommended improvements to record-keeping, medical supervision and staffing.

The Royal Commission was chaired by Mr Justice Adrian H. Curlewis of the Supreme Court of New South Wales. It had been stimulated by articles in the *Sunday Times* newspaper and was specifically required to 'inquire into and report upon...alleged cases of brutality at the Claremont Mental Hospital, as published by the *Sunday Times* newspaper in its issues of the 12th and 19th February, 1950...'

The Royal Commissioner found that:

- 'Unkindness, roughness and violence had occurred' in the Claremont Mental Hospital
- Punitive measures against the attendants mentioned in the incidents 'would not be warranted'
- Remedial measures could be 'amply satisfied by proper instructions being given to attendants, by closer co-operation between the attendants and medical staff, and by a far greater supervision of the attendants ...had the Medical Superintendent and the Inspector General properly carried out the duties cast upon them by the Lunacy Act, many aspects of the present inquiry would not have arisen'
- If the evidence of the 'Chairman of the Board of Visitors', represented the views of his Board, then it is inescapable that the Board has also failed to carry out its duties under the Act.

These findings were hotly contested by the Inspector General and in large part were not accepted by the government of the day, who proceeded to prosecute (unsuccessfully) the attendants named in the incidents. The Royal Commission did, however, prompt the government to implement the changes to the *Lunacy Act 1903* that the Inspector General had recommended in 1949.

More info

Related Entries

Related Legislation

- [Lunacy Act 1903, Western Australia \(1903 - 1962\)](#)

The Royal Commission stimulated the government to implement the *Lunacy Act Amendment Act 1950*, which

had a greater impact on adults than on children in the mental health system. The amendments defined the terms 'restraint' and 'seclusion' and enhanced the role and responsibilities of the Board of Visitors, who were expected to be able to provide the Minister with detailed information about the operation of the Act within the State's mental health institutions.

Related Organisations

- [Claremont Mental Hospital \(1903 - 1972\)](#)

Resources

- [Boy mental patient has to live with killer](#), The Daily News, 28 March 1950
- [Said patients could complain to Board \[Claremont Mental Hospital\]](#), Sunday Times, 2 April 1950
- [Claremont Mental Hospital Royal Commission Ends](#), Sunday Times, 9 April 1950
- Turner, Laurence Ronald, [Sunday Times Reporter Works for 5 Weeks As Attendant At The Hospital For The Insane And Here Describes](#), Sunday Times, 12 February 1950
- Turner, Laurence Ronald, [Sequel To Our Reporter's Story Of Conditions At Asylum](#), Sunday Times, 19 February 1950
- [Asylum Inquiry Worry to Relatives of Patients](#), The West Australian, 8 April 1950
- Swain, Shurlee, [History of Australian inquiries reviewing institutions providing care for children](#), October 2014

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