

Making Rights Real

A Personal Guide to Your Rights



For too long, the narrative around psychosocial disability has been told through a medical lens. You've been seen as a "patient" or a "case," and your life has been defined by a mental health challenges. But a new story is emerging, one where you are the author. This guide is your personal tool for reclaiming your voice and understanding your rights as a person first.

What is the UN CRPD? Your North Star for Change

The **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)** is not a law that you can take to court. It's an international agreement, or a treaty, that Australia has agreed to uphold. Think of it as a **north star** for the government—a guiding light that points towards a more inclusive society. When Australia ratified the UN CRPD, it committed to making sure the principles in the Convention are reflected in our laws, policies, and practices.

Understanding this difference is key to understanding its power. The UN CRPD is a tool for **systemic change**. This isn't about changing you; it's about changing the system around you. Systemic change means transforming the rules, attitudes, and structures that might be holding you back—whether that's in mental health services, community life, or government policy. It's the slow, steady work of making sure society as a whole is built for everyone, not just some people.

Our Story, Our Rights

The common experiences of people with psychosocial disability feeling unheard, controlled, or alone can be reframed not as personal failings but as **rights that have been overlooked**.

As a co-designer with lived experience of mental health challenges noted, the CRPD is an "*access point for people in community*"—it's a way for you to connect your personal experience to a broader human rights story. Another co-designer noted that the language "isn't as intense" as legal jargon, making it an accessible entry point to a deeper understanding.

This resource is designed to be your **practical toolkit for empowerment**.

This guide will show you **how to use the UN CRPD as your personal access point to understanding your fundamental human rights**. More specifically, the guide helps you **develop the precise language necessary to advocate for yourself and others in daily life**, from navigating meetings with your GP to conversations with your family.

Finding Your Article

A truly good life is about dignity, autonomy, and belonging. The articles of the CRPD are not just abstract ideas—they are the building blocks of this good life. Here's how they connect to your life and the everyday choices you make.

For Mental Health Services

Mental health is not a separate or linear part of our lives; it is an interconnected whole. The services that support us, therefore, include everything from our clinical care to our housing and employment. This section highlights how our rights apply across this integrated system.

- **Article 3: General Principles:** At the heart of the CRPD is the principle that your dignity, autonomy, and independence must be respected. This is the foundation of a more holistic approach to care that goes beyond just clinical treatment.
- **Article 5: Equality and Non-discrimination:** You have the right to be treated with the same respect and dignity as anyone else, without discrimination because of your mental health challenges.
- **Article 8: Awareness-raising:** This article says that the burden of education about psychosocial disability should not fall on you. Instead, it is the responsibility of service providers and society to learn about the CRPD and its implications for how they interact with you.
- **Article 10: Right to Life:** You have the right to a life free from violence, abuse, and neglect. This means you are safe in all mental health service settings.
- **Article 14: Liberty and Security of the Person:** You have the right to live freely and securely, and cannot be detained just because of your mental health challenges.
- **Article 15: Freedom from Torture or Degrading Treatment:** This is a powerful article that connects directly to the need for emotional safety. As one person with lived experience noted, if they experience degrading treatment, they "don't want to participate in community because it doesn't feel safe." This article protects you from forced treatments and from environments that are "over-managed" or judgemental. Your right is to a space that feels "warm," "colourful," and "like home."

- **Article 17: Protecting the Integrity of the Person:** This article is a central pillar of this guide. It is your right to be treated as a "whole human being". It emphasises your personal autonomy and the transformative power of being treated with respect. You have the right to be fully informed and give your consent for any treatment.
- **Article 18: Liberty of Movement and Nationality:** You have the right to move freely and to choose where you live. If you are in a hospital, you should not be prevented from leaving without a valid reason.
- **Article 19: Independent Living and Community Inclusion:** This right is about services that go beyond clinical care and support you in living a full and engaged life. The focus is on giving you the choice and control to live in the community, not in a facility.
- **Article 21: Freedom of Expression and Information:** You have the right to receive and share information in accessible formats and to express yourself freely.
- **Article 22: Respect for Privacy:** Your personal information, including your medical records, must be kept private.
- **Article 23: Respect for Home and the Family:** You have the right to a family life, to marry, and to have children.

- **Article 26: Habilitation and Rehabilitation:** This right is about holistic support. It ensures you have access to services that help you develop skills and independence. "**Connecting in community**" is an essential part of this process.
- **Article 27: Work and Employment:** This right is crucial because employment support services and the ability to find and keep a job are deeply interconnected with your mental health and sense of purpose. It ensures that employers cannot discriminate against you because of your mental health challenges.
- **Article 28: Adequate Standard of Living:** This is vital for your well-being. It is a reminder that access to things like income support and stable housing, which are often provided by government and community services, are fundamental human rights that impact your mental health.
- **Article 29: Participation in Public Life:** This right is about the power of lived experience. It ensures you have the right to participate in political life, which includes government funding initiatives like the NDIS that are designed to support your participation.

For Community Life

Community life is not limited to socialising; it's about general living within a community, which in turn gives us the capacity to engage with it. These articles help realise a good life for people with psychosocial disability by ensuring that the world around us is accessible and respectful.

- **Article 3: General Principles:** These principles apply to all parts of society and ensure that everyone is included.
- **Article 5: Equality and Non-discrimination:** You should not be discriminated against in public spaces like shops, restaurants, or community centres because of your mental health challenges.
- **Article 8: Awareness-raising:** Your presence and participation in community activities help change public attitudes about psychosocial disability. This article also highlights the "importance of training and education for community leaders and peers (in order) to create and hold these kinds of safe and diverse spaces," as one person with lived experience noted.
- **Article 9: Accessibility:** Public spaces and services must be accessible to you. This includes physical accessibility, as well as adapting to diverse sensory and communication needs, ensuring everyone can participate comfortably.

- **Article 12: Equal Recognition Before the Law:** This article is about **unconditional legal capacity**. People in our co-design group felt this was fundamental—policies and funding, like the NDIS, should assume that every person has the right to make their own choices, regardless of their mental health challenges.
- **Article 14: Liberty and Security of the Person:** Your freedom is a precondition for everything else. As one person with lived experience noted, "If I don't have freedom, I can't participate" in community life. This article ensures your right to move freely and not be unjustly restricted.
- **Article 15: Freedom from Torture or Degrading Treatment:** This protects you from bullying or degrading treatment in the community.
- **Article 16: Freedom from Exploitation, Violence, and Abuse:** This is a crucial right, as the co-design group highlighted how certain policies can create power imbalances that lead to financial exploitation. This right protects you from all forms of abuse, including financial.
- **Article 19: Independent Living and Community Inclusion:** This is a very popular article because it's about genuine belonging and the freedom to live where you want, with who you want. This right helps you to feel part of the community and not segregated from it.
- **Article 20: Personal Mobility:** You have the right to move freely and to have access to mobility aids. For many, this means being able to get out and participate in community life.
- **Article 21: Freedom of Expression and Information:** You have the right to communicate in the way you choose. As one person with lived experience noted, this includes "access to information on how organisations can adapt or help you without you having to share your whole story first."

- **Article 22: Respect for Privacy:** Your personal business is your own. As one person with lived experience noted, "If they make adjustments for you, you don't want everyone else to know." This right ensures that your accommodations can be made without broadcasting your personal history to everyone.
- **Article 23: Respect for Home and the Family:** This protects your right to choose your living situation and to have a family.
- **Article 24: Education:** Education is a cornerstone of an engaged life. This right is about more than just schools; it's about having the opportunity to learn and grow throughout your life, which is essential for your participation in the community.
- **Article 25: Health:** This article ensures you have access to a full range of health services, including mental health, on an equal basis with others in the community. As one person with lived experience noted, "If I don't have health (care), I can't participate." This speaks to a fundamental truth: proper healthcare is the very foundation that gives you the capacity to be well enough to engage in community life.
- **Article 26: Habilitation and Rehabilitation:** This applies to services in the community that help you build skills and develop your independence.

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- **Article 27: Work and Employment:** You have the right to find, keep, and advance in a job.
 - **Article 28: Adequate Standard of Living:** This right extends to having access to food banks, secure housing, and other community supports.
 - **Article 29: Participation in Public Life:** This is about the power of lived experience. It ensures you have the right to participate in all political and public activities in your community.
 - **Article 30: Participation in Cultural Life:** This is a very popular article because it speaks to the desire for authentic connection and a shared identity. It gives you the right to be a part of cultural activities and to find "third spaces"—places that are not home or work—where you can build a sense of belonging.

Speaking Up: A Guide to Open Dialogue

The UN CRPD is not a legal document we can use to demand a specific outcome. Instead, think of it as a powerful resource from the United Nations that shares the practices and philosophies that should be embedded across all systems for people with psychosocial disability to live a good life. Using its language can create an open dialogue with doctors, support workers, carers, family or friends.

Scenario 1: With a doctor

- **The situation:** A doctor proposes a new medication, and you feel pressured to agree without fully understanding the side effects.
- **What you could say:** "I appreciate you explaining this. I've been learning about the CRPD, and I understand the principle of '**protecting the integrity of my person**' is so important. It means I need to feel fully informed and give my consent. Could you please give me more details about the side effects, and perhaps we can schedule a follow-up appointment to discuss it?"

Scenario 2: With a support worker

- **The situation:** Your support worker only helps with tasks like cleaning but doesn't encourage you to join a community activity you're interested in, like a local art class.
- **What you could say:** "Thanks for helping with the cleaning. I was thinking about my goals for the week, and I'd really like to explore my right to '**independent living and community inclusion**' under Article 19 of the CRPD. Can we shift our focus next week to helping me find and get to that art class?"

Scenario 3: With family or friends

- **The situation:** A family member dismisses your perspective on a decision because of your mental health challenges, saying, "You're not thinking clearly."
- **What you could say:** "I know you're trying to help, but I'm learning to advocate for myself. The CRPD reminds us of the importance of '**equal recognition before the law**' (Article 12), which means my voice and my decisions are just as important as anyone else's. I'd like to share my thoughts on this and be heard."

Moving Forward: Your Ongoing Journey

This guide is just the beginning of your journey from a person living with mental health challenges to a person who also has a life beyond their challenges. The UN CRPD is a living document and its meaning is being shaped by people like us every day.

The most important takeaway is that our lived experience is valuable. It is a source of knowledge and a powerful tool for change. The insights shared by the co-designers with lived experience of mental health challenges in our co-design group demonstrate this perfectly. By understanding and speaking the language of our rights, we can become an active participant in building a more inclusive and respectful world for ourselves and others.

As you continue on this path, you have a vital role to play. Allow yourself to think about how your own experiences relate to these articles and use them to guide your conversations. This is not about confrontation; it's about opening a dialogue that builds empathy and understanding.

You are not alone in this journey. We have additional resources that can support your journey. The **UN CRPD Simple Guide** can help you go deeper into the articles, and the **Collective Good Life Vision** provides a shared narrative and a sense of community. Your rights are real, your voice is powerful, and your life is yours to live.