



Wednesday 5 June 2019

COMMUNITY VOICES HEARD ON MENTAL HEALTH

More than 1,600 Victorians attended community consultation sessions across the state to share their experience and ideas as part of the Royal Commission into Victoria's mental health system.

During April and May, the Royal Commission ran more than 60 consultation sessions in more than 20 regional, rural and metropolitan areas.

Commission Chair Penny Armytage said it has been a great start to the Royal Commission, with the community showing a high level of interest and generous engagement everywhere they visited.

"This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity has enabled us to hear so many individual reflections and insights. The courage people have shown in sharing their often heart-breaking personal stories has been very powerful," Ms Armytage said.

"People also came with a strong commitment to contribute to improving the system and there was this warm, collective humanity at the sessions, which was very heartening."

Ms Armytage said there was great representation at the sessions from all areas of the community including people with lived experience, carers and families, mental health professionals, GPs, emergency service personnel and service providers.

Several common themes were shared at the sessions including there being little or no services in the gap between GPs and crisis support.

The ongoing stigma and discrimination for those experiencing mental illness also came through as a major concern as did the inequity of treatment between different locations, but also the differences in the way mental health and physical health are treated.

Ms Armytage said one of the consistent challenges was about people being told they weren't sick enough to get help.

"There is this incredible frustration in not being able to get their mental health needs responded to," Ms Armytage said.

"Many people also shared stories about a highly committed workforce doing its best to provide services and support, often under difficult circumstances.

"These community consultations underlined the incredible responsibility of the Commission – to listen and hear these personal stories, to understand and think deeply about the issues and to use this information to make the necessary changes.

"Our job is to come up with recommendations that are practical, implementable and will make real improvements to the future mental health system and hearing from the community has been an important first step."

Victorians still have an opportunity to have their say and it's easy to get involved by making an online submission. Submissions can be brief or more formal written submissions that allow people to share an image, audio or video content.

Submissions are open until **5 July 2019** and can be made at www.rcvmhs.vic.gov.au.

If you need help to make a submission or have any questions, please call **1800 00 11 34** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm) or email contact@rcvmhs.vic.gov.au.

The Commission can also be contacted using a phone interpreter service on **03 7005 3010**.

A summary consultation report detailing some of the key themes and local issues will be published soon.

The Commission will start its public hearings in the first week of July at the Melbourne Town Hall. More details will be released in the coming weeks, and the hearings will be streamed live on our website.

The Commission's interim report will be delivered in November this year and the final report will be delivered in October 2020.

If you or a family member has immediate concerns or requires assistance, contact beyondblue on 1300 224 636 or Lifeline on 13 11 14.