

2019 Submission - Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System

Organisation Name

N/A

Name

Miss Tiana Kollas

What are your suggestions to improve the Victorian community's understanding of mental illness and reduce stigma and discrimination?

"I believe the most simple way to do this would be to provide adequate beds and services to keep the mentally ill off the streets. This harsh environment is a breeding ground for violence and drug use, which should be treated as a health problem. Unfortunately, this is probably the most damaging representation for mental illness as these particular individuals are often experiencing loud and frightening episodes, which only adds to the stigma."

What is already working well and what can be done better to prevent mental illness and to support people to get early treatment and support?

"The subsidised mental healthcare sessions are a great initiative, but the Medicare freeze on the rebate needs to end for it to become more affordable for low income earners, who are proven to have higher rates of mental health issues. The amount of sessions also needs to be extended for people to place more trust in the psychology system; ten sessions per calendar year just simply isn't enough time to build a rapport and comprehensively work through issues, and then learn the skills to cope."

What is already working well and what can be done better to prevent suicide?

"Honestly, with the suicide rates steadily climbing, I don't think we can say that anything is working well. Suicide helplines are a start, but I know more people who have had negative experiences with the lines, as hapless workers recommend them to take vitamin B as completely inane advice. I think politicians need to realise that suicidality is a symptom of a much larger mental health problem. The people experiencing suicidal thoughts are beyond the point of any simple solutions, literally being at the end of their capabilities. I don't believe we can address suicide as a separate issue, rather, all mental healthcare planning must have more funding from the ground up in order to prevent this extreme."

What makes it hard for people to experience good mental health and what can be done to improve this? This may include how people find, access and experience mental health treatment and support and how services link with each other.

"Low wages, low socioeconomic stance, huge difficulties accessing housing and the rising cost of living all seem to contribute to bad mental health. This leads to people developing negative coping mechanisms as they look for something to "take the edge off." People experiencing bad mental health are going to be the least likely to have the energy/drive to look up how to get better. Access to mental healthcare needs to be heavily publicised. Perhaps this could start in school? Studies in European countries have shown that a "wellness" approach to mental health during school can provide more resilient children and teenagers. In regards to treatment and services linking to one another, these need to be made more apparent. There are special plans that people can access after the ten subsidised mental healthcare sessions but they are nearly impossible to find out

about, and not many GPs even know they exist. "

What are the drivers behind some communities in Victoria experiencing poorer mental health outcomes and what needs to be done to address this?

"Low wages, low socioeconomic stance, huge difficulties accessing housing and the rising cost of living all seem contribute to bad mental health. This leads to people developing negative coping mechanisms as they look for something to ""take the edge off."" The answer is funding. Without more funding, it's all just mindless babble."

What are the needs of family members and carers and what can be done better to support them?

"Respite, and better financial support. The last thing carers need is to be worrying about how to pay the bills when they have a suicidal or episodic family member literally taking every waking minute of every day."

What can be done to attract, retain and better support the mental health workforce, including peer support workers?

"Better pay, a raise on the Medicare freeze, adequate counselling for those who want it."

What are the opportunities in the Victorian community for people living with mental illness to improve their social and economic participation, and what needs to be done to realise these opportunities?

I don't even know. Support groups?

Thinking about what Victorias mental health system should ideally look like, tell us what areas and reform ideas you would like the Royal Commission to prioritise for change?

"Mental health needs to be addressed from the bottom up. Mental healthcare plans are the real first proper access to care that many people ever receive and the amount of sessions, plus the lack of affordability of the sessions means that so many people can't access this vital help. Removing chaplains from schools and placing appropriately-trained social workers on the ground should be a priority. More funding into the public mental health system should be one of the main priorities. These services are massively under-funded and screaming for help, but no one is listening."

What can be done now to prepare for changes to Victorias mental health system and support improvements to last?

"Funding to expand current services. They desperately need the money to be able to take in more people who are on the edge of being critically ill to support them through immediate help, instead of having to turn people away."

Is there anything else you would like to share with the Royal Commission?

"I come from a long line of family mental illness. I have cared for a suicidal [REDACTED] I have seen my family members succumb to drug use and death due to lack of treatment. I have seen people being turned away from the public health system because they're only on the verge of having a suicide attempt instead of having attempted at that exact moment. The answer to all mental health reform is funding. If you have money, you can access private healthcare, but if you're poor, your ability to access care is a joke. The public system needs money to expand, and

we need to find ways to address helping young and rural people to cope with the stresses our modern society is placing on them."