

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

Organisation Name

N/A

Name

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

"Mental illness affects all walks of life and does not discriminate on background, wealth, age, culture, etc, and so affects so many people. I work with children and young people and they struggle to find a voice to ask for help, for fear of being judged or bullied by their peers. For this reason many children and young people suffer in silence, so instead avoid everyday situations like attending school or accessing the community, and often help is only provided when the situation becomes a crisis. In small communities the fear of discrimination can affect thinking patterns around making and developing relationships, employability, fearing judgement when accessing community centres. Mental health issues can affect every family but by starting these conversations from a young age, by addressing these issues in schools, we can bring about change to support people in accessing help and support earlier to reduce the impact that mental health can have on individuals and families, and ultimately communities."

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?

One area that I have noticed improving is that of awareness of potential problems in children and young people. Those adults that work with young people are becoming better aware of the potential for mental health issues and will encourage families to seek help when they feel that professional input is needed. Professionals in my local area are keen to improve their knowledge of mental health problems and want to find ways to assist children in their own organisation and/or role.

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

"Our local area now has a Headspace centre for young people to access however its geographical location and the issue of stigmatisation are some of the factors preventing access. Better referral routes are needed to ensure that high risk children and young people can access support sooner. Those young people in my local area who are going through a crisis situation, like suicidal ideation, find it hard to access local crisis services, and even if they manage to navigate the complex intake system and gain access, they will find a service limited in professional input and availability. Our crisis service for children currently consists of one local worker and our area has no dedicated child psychiatrist. Psychiatric input that is specialist for children and young people is urgently needed to help prevent suicide risk. "

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.

"As a mental health professional working in a rural area I usually find that families have often sought help from me because they have heard about my therapy work from a friend or family.

Internet and sometimes phone services are poor in remote areas, especially the further someone lives from a rural centre. When I have accessed very remote towns I have found that families have a sense of helplessness in that they do not expect services to exist so often don't even go looking. Seeking mental health treatment often involves hours and hours of travel, and with no funding for travel costs and rising fuel costs, the geography is a huge barrier for getting to a service, if a family has the financial ability to access a service. I have noticed that recent funding changes to disability services, like NDIS, is beginning to address these types of barriers to accessing services, however mental health funding needs to catch up, and make urgent changes that will improve the ability for all families, regardless of financial status, to be able to access services."

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

"The drivers include: Being geographically remote, financial hardship, knowledge of services, lack of professionals available for rural areas, restrictive funding schemes that do not provide enough sessions to match mental health severity, lack of jobs and education opportunities, rural families have to split up to access city-based placements, local health and mental health services are under-funded and under-resourced, This can all be helped by ensuring that funding reaches all communities, not just regional centres. Crisis services need to be better funded and more incentives needed to attract professionals to rural areas."

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

"Parents and carers need access to more information and guidance as to how to help people with mental illness. Medicare currently actively prevents this in the area of child and youth mental health. The better access scheme states that rebates for sessions can only be available when the child is seen face-to-face, there is no recognition that parents need to have their own sessions so they can better support their children at home. More support for engaging fathers in the support network for their children."

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

"We need to have training centres in rural areas to help newly graduated professionals make connections with the rural communities and want to continue their career in the area. To continue this in the long-term there needs to be ways to keep updated and have cpd opportunities in rural areas too. I have to travel over four hours to access most of my training opportunities, as they are all located in Melbourne. Financial incentives and more career advancing opportunities for professionals working in a rural area when newly graduated. Victoria needs to think about models to incentivise rural work, and boost career opportunities to keep professionals in the local area. "

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?

N/A

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

"The white paper that has just been released by the Australian Psychological Society has some

great ideas for how to improve some sectors of the mental health system, but ultimately it comes down to putting more funding into all areas of the system. Crisis services in rural and regional areas are a shambles and should be looked at urgently as things seem to be getting worse as time goes on. Not a week goes by without me hearing of how someone in my community has been let down by the state mental health services that they have attempted to access due to a person being in a crisis situation. I only hope that this problem is isolated to our region because if not, then the commission will need to start from scratch and build a whole new system that can be replicated and delivered efficiently in all areas of Victoria, no matter how rural or remote. "

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

"Look for certain services (internationally) that would be recognised for providing the best standards of care and then try to replicate these achievements. I guess what I am suggesting is, rather than try to start from scratch, look around the world for outstanding models of mental health state care, then allocate not just enough funding to replicate these standards, but aim to better them. Create infrastructure to train and educate staff, then involve them in training and research to find ways to improve everyday practices. Aim for Outstanding Care in mental health and create a service that other countries would want to replicate in the future."

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

"Fix the mental health system in Victoria before it breaks completely. Fund it properly, make it outstanding, and create an efficient mental health system that puts the service user at the heart of its functioning. Don't forget about the clients who struggle to access the system due to their age, disability, culture, etc, as improving the mental health services will all be in vain if clients are unable to access them."