

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

SUB: 0002.0029.0211

Name

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

" Firstly I think that we need and should be using the research and resources our own people have developed. There are amazing programs that have been developed by Community in South Australia and Western Australia that would be positive, stigma breaking and educational for our State if they were able to be funded. The 3 programs I think need to be flooded with support from our state; The Family Wellbeing Program which was developed by community in South Australia to have talks about hard topics amongst community members whilst dealing with generational trauma, mental health issues, family violence, Sexual abuse and addictions. The National Empowerment Program which was developed by Pat Dudgeon and other community members in Western Australia works on Mental health education for community and building resilience and empowering community to be able to support family and community members with mental health issues. Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid this needs to be more accessible to rural community and we should have more facilitators across the state. I feel if we roll these programs off each other they will be a great program for the state to tackle stigma and suicides within our mob. "

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?

"What is currently working is a combination of traditional methods of healing with western medicines. Community counselling in a program called Family Wellbeing Program has seen great progress in our communities by building knowledge, community strength and resilience. I feel there needs to be more community education around mental health illnesses. I feel we as a nation need to invest in creating localised, Indigenous specific counselling services that are the for-front of a person/family and communities path to a mentally, spiritually culturally healthier and more resilient future for our people and our next generation. We have a generation who is more disconnected from their culture than ever before. We as Aboriginal people have the answers we need the Government agencies to recognise these strengths and support us to heal our people our way. "

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

I feel we have all the services available for people struggling with suicide but we are still burying our young at an alarming rate. These services and practices are clearly not working for our people. The national Empowerment Program educates community about suicide and how to support someone at harm of suicide and as a community they are able to support their people in a way that is culturally safe for them. The Family Wellbeing program is a counselling program that heals people before they get the other end of the spectrum of self-harm. Seeing both of these programs in action I see great value in having these programs available to all communities across the country. Our hospitals don't have a specific unit for our youth and western treatment only puts

a band aid on the pain it doesn't fix the problems our people face.

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.

" We have intergenerational trauma, alarming numbers of child removal and we are constantly burying our young. We are fighting a losing battle to drugs. When we start the healing process we are faced with another death, another child being taken from family and more disconnection. When we connect to mental health services we are labelled and medicated and sent off to wait weeks for counselling sessions with a non-Indigenous person who could possibly understand the suffering we have endured. The strength in Indigenous specific counselling supports is that people are engaging with people they know have experienced the same as they have. When you add Western medication with cultural healing you will see improved mental health. "

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

"I have first had experience with suicide. In 2013 my pregnant cousin took her life, the following year my uncle took his life, they year after that another cousin took his life, then another cousin died by suspicious circumstances. Following the death of my cousin my 15 year old daughter took her life and then another one of my cousins took his life. In [REDACTED] the system is definitely failing our people. I have tried to reach out for support for my daughter and it was the most culturally unsafe, embarrassing, emotionally painful experience. We don't have the expertise in dealing with teenagers with mental health issues. Professionals don't take on parents' opinions in regards to their child's behaviour and needs. I can't get any of my other children to connect to Western mental health counselling because they witnesses fist had the failing of service. "

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

"There needs to be more education on how to identify, support and respond to suicide idealisation. There needs to be a partnership with Indigenous and non-Indigenous treatment for individuals and families. We need family healing for after suicide for these directly affected to connect with cultural healing and western healing. "

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

We need to be able to fund more Indigenous people to be qualified to be counsellors. We need to have cultural connection to counselling treatments and we need to have sufficient debrief and supports for those that are in these roles.

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?

"If we were supported in leading our mental health healing, we will build stronger community leaders that will prosper and change the patterns of our past for a more vibrant future. In supporting and delivering culturally connected and healed members of our communities we will see increased employment rate in our people. We will have less of our people in prisons and less of our people in care and less on drugs. Trauma is the pathway drug. If we can health people

health from their trauma and face future grief and loss in a healthier productive way we will see less of our people poisoned. "

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?

"Every Hospital in our state should have a children's team of child specialists Psychologists, Psychiatrists, Aboriginal Psychologists/Counsellors. We should have an onsite cultural connection centre whether it be a cultural healing space for yarning circles or art therapy. Externally we need to have in the community CULTURAL CAMPS for our people. Reconnecting back to country where they can in the community heal with their mob. We need to change the questioning about how we ask questions about mental health, this needs to be more cultural, for example, when was the last time you were on country, do you know your cultural history and so forth. We need to lead our healing so we can heal as a community. "

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

We need to merge Western medical treatment with cultural treatment. We need to support key community members to become qualified in counselling and psychology. We need to have community lead these initiatives and we need for treatment facilities to have more intensive cultural awareness especially around mental health.

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

I have travelled around our country and have met with community leaders who all want to fix our current crisis. We need to be supported by our Government agencies to test the programs that have already been tried and evaluated. We need to have more of our communities educated about mental illnesses and we need to start now. We are not going to have future leaders if we continue to lay dormant to the cries for help from our people. Thank you for taking the time to read my submission as you can see I am passionate because I have first hand experience. I hope that we see positive changes and a flourishing nation of strong leaders. Thank you [REDACTED]