

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

Organisation Name

N/A

Name

Miss Nicole James

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

"We need more open discussion and education about mental health and illness. When we are educated about health in school, there needs to be a mental health component. Growing up I had no understanding of mental health and illness and therefore had no understanding of those struggling, let alone how to help them. I especially had no understanding of my own mental health. Open discussion and education will make it an everyday part of life and form a pathway to reducing stigma. So many mental illnesses are only seen in entertainment (movies etc) which is a dramatised, exaggerated version. "

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 advertising being done by the Andrews government is a good start. The councillors in schools and in universities are great however they need to either have a better set of tools to identify mental illness or have a specialist on board who can do this. I lived with bipolar symptoms for 7 years, seeing various councillors, GPs and a psychologist and didn't even come close to being diagnosed/treated. A couple of times it was suggested I take antidepressants, thank god I didn't. It should also be mandatory for all teachers (especially high school/tertiary educators) to get basic mental health training. I know bipolar is difficult to diagnose, however there should be more emphasis on symptoms that could mean something. I was mostly ignored by the practitioners leading up to my diagnoses. I think if I wasn't so head strong and stubborn I wouldn't be alive today. "

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

I think the Andrews government's new initiative with the mental health nurse(?) coming in a car with the paramedic when someone is very distressed instead of an ambulance is a terrific idea. We need a structure in place that seriously distressed people can use to check themselves into a mental health facility. Now it's only if you're attempting/attempted which is ridiculous.

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.

I think the worst thing is finding mental health professionals who suit you and take you seriously. There could be a better system of cataloging mental health professionals so that you can look up a professional according to the categories and specialities that you're looking for. At the moment as someone who is starting their mental health journey it is very disconcerting and scary when you're trying to find a psychologist. Also I know of a lot of people including myself who went to a psychologist and had a really really bad experience and then was too scared to try and find another one so either stop seeing that psychologist or continue to see them but the feeling of guilt

and not actually getting anywhere. A website that collates all possible health professionals and what they specialise in could really help with this.

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

I know that I am extremely privileged and lucky to live in an area I'm in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne where there are plenty of mental health professionals and places in place for me to be able to get the best possible mental health care. The Melbourne clinic in Richmond for example is fantastic and I'm lucky that its only about a 20 minute drive from where I live. However I can imagine that in country towns specially or even just further out from the city from where I am they wouldn't be such places available to people. I am also lucky in that if I do not like the psychologist or GP or psychiatrist that I am seeing there are plenty for me to go and change to.

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

Honestly I'm lucky because my mental illness doesn't really need any extra support I am able to get the support I need from the mental health professionals I see. However it would be great when you're finding out and learning about your mental illness or disability if there was some kind of information package that you could bring home to your family. Even if it was just a brochure that outlined your mental illness and gave information on how people around them can help.

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

I think a great way to attract mental health workers is by widely educating the public about mental health and mental illness. I think those who work in mental health and actually in the health sector in general need to be paid more. I'm not very well educated in this area however I would assume that those are working in these areas may be physically assaulted so perhaps more security for them and also free mental health services for themselves to look after their own mental health.

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 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?

Needs to be an easier and more straightforward system in place for every Victorian to understand and better look after their mental health. At the moment there is still a stick man and its very scary to confront your mental health issues especially with a complete stranger. Before that even occurs most people don't even know how to find help for their mental health. Since I have Worked really hard to find out why I was struggling so hard with my mental health and how to go ahead in

Working towards better mental health I have had people speak more freely and openly to me about their own mental health struggles we would have never spoken about it before hand and asked me how to get help. These people are scared and embarrassed and will only talk to me and no one else because they know that I speak openly about my mental health. I had about seven years of struggling to have someone take me seriously. One of the major problems was not knowing where to start I went to multiple GPs trying to find out what was wrong with me and what I could do to make myself feel better. I then also went to multiple counsellors at my university and need none took me seriously either. Youre only reason I finally found a psychiatrist psychologist and dietician that suited me and actually took me seriously was because it got to the point where I was suicidal. I know that I have a lot more heads strong and stubborn compare to a lot of people especially people struggling with mental health issues. Therefore I also know that a lot of people arent reaching out and if they are they are receiving the treatment or the response that they need. I dont think GPs have enough mental health training and therefore they should not be making the call on whether someone should be seeing a psychologist or another mental health professional. It is also crazy that someone with a mental health issue or disability needs to go through the GP every few months to get a new referral. It was this extremely outdated system that almost stopped me from coming back for help again.

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

More mental health training for GPs and educational professionals. More education on mental health in schools and not just on the more common ones but a wide range of mental health issues.

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

There should be more publicly available programs in place not just for those with private insurance. I was doing a great program at the Melbourne health clinic in Richmond for eating disorders. However as I came off my parents health insurance and Im still a student so couldnt afford my own private health insurance I was no longer able to continue on that program. This made me realise how lucky I was and realise that those without private health insurance will not be able to have had the same amount of care and access to day programs as I had used. The referral system is also completely outdated. I had to go from GP to GP to take me seriously in order to be able to go to a mental health professional. It is then that GP that I have to go back to after six visits to my psychologist to have my referral updated. I heard stories within my day program about girls who are struggling with her mental health and also finances who didnt want to go back to the GP to get their referral update it time and time again. If someone is struggling with her mental health its Very difficult for them to ask for help let alone go back and get a referral time and time again.