

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

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

"There needs to be more understanding and support of PTSD, especially for children and teens. The assumptions of uselessness or faking need to be stopped. It needs to be known that mental illness doesn't stop you being functional. It needs to be known that there are good days and bad days. It needs to be known that there is treatment to lessen the impact."

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?

"I have seen billboards about how anxiety and other illnesses feel and where to get help. This is good. This should be more varied and widespread. I've mainly seen anxiety, depression, and addiction but early signs of schizophrenia, PTSD, BPD for example, would be good, to minimise the impact of those illnesses."

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

"R U OK has really taken off in the last few years, with it not being just confined to the single day. There have been more campaigns about men being vulnerable and talking to people - being that they are one of the largest groups at risk of suicide. More the same would be good. There needs to be more about how men are allowed to show emotions - because all men I know are convinced right now that they aren't allowed to show ANY emotions because all their lives they have been told not to show anything but anger and now they are being told not to show anger. I think constructive outlets should be endorsed. More should also be done to rally acceptance of gender and sexual diverse groups, who are at risk of suicide due to being dismissed, bullied, and abused."

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.

"Stigma is number one. Anytime anyone has a bad day it is assumed that this is what they are always like. Anytime someone has a good day, it is assumed that they were faking the bad days. People offer advice out of nowhere as if we like being sick and if we just TRIED we'd be all better. Treatment that we can get is limited or expensive (or both) and I have never heard anything good about mental health hospitals. They are more like prisons and make you worse."

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

"The accessibility and cost of treatment is the biggest hurdle standing in the way of those with poorer mental health getting treatment. For example, 10 subsidised sessions a year will get you through 10 months (not even a full year), if you can last a month between sessions. Those with

poorer health can barely go a fortnight, By the time a month between sessions has past, those with poorer health are back to where they started or even worse off."

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

"If you are caring for a family member outside of work hours, and have a full time job, from what I know, you aren't considered a carer. There needs to be support for those who can't afford to be full time carers - financially or emotionally. There needs to be therapy afforded to family who care, so that they are not impacted by the actions of their loved one. It's so easy to take the actions of the person with the mental illness personally"

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

"Better, more open management - from the mental health care workers I have as friends have all mentioned feeling unsupported at work and knowing that anyone who tries to bring up issues with management will have a worse time and work and fear for their job security. Better pay would also be helpful, considering the hours they keep and the stress of the job, especially on the weekend as there will ALWAYS be a Friday night incident."

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?

"People with mental illnesses need to feel valued. Meaningful work can help this, but trying to get a job, trying to keep a job, and trying to do the job without fear of losing the job due to have a bad mental health day are extremely hard. "

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 hospitals are in dire need of a reform. Noone I know who has been in one has felt safe, and it has more often than not made them worse. But they are needed. I myself have tried to get in one in the past and I was held in the emergency room for 6 hours, asked loudly what I was there for - I did not want to inform everyone in the waiting room that I had just attempted to kill myself but had been stopped by my partner - and then held in a bed for 6 hours, to be told to go home and talk to my therapist when I saw them in 3 days. "

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

"Require any healthcare worker to update their training around mental health and take training on reducing stigma. Require owners and managers of businesses to be aware of mental health issues, removing stigma. and how work can contribute to making it better or worse."

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

"As a person who grew up in the foster care system, I was failed. But I was one of the lucky ones. I didn't fall into drugs. I didn't commit crimes to pass the time. I stayed with one family. But that was all on me. I had the strength to get through it. It is something my therapists, my doctor, my partners, and multiple friends have remarked on, that they are astounded by my inner strength and tenacity and don't think that they would have faired as well in my situation. One therapist even

remarked that it was a huge wonder that I was so mentally together, given all I've been through."