

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

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

"More media attention, slogans like "'it's ok not to be ok'" would perhaps persuade sufferers to seek help instead of feeling like there is something wrong with them they are not normal & feeling stigmatised. Changes to insurance policies for example mental illness is not covered in a lot of income protection policies. "

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?

"Prevention of mental illness needs to start in secondary schools, programs to teach children to be more resilient & bullying needs to be taken far more seriously. The 5 free sessions should be extended."

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

N/A

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.

"In regional areas particularly, there are not enough mental health professionals, appointment waiting times are very long. Drug & alcohol services need to be better linked with mental health services."

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

"Lack of services, lack of community groups, increased homelessness, some areas have a larger problem with alcohol & drug abuse."

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

"Family members need to be involved in decisions about assessment, treatment & recovery, educate family on how to recognise changes in mental state. Privacy laws need to be relaxed to allow family to attend sessions with their family member & should be kept up to date on their progress. Some form of respite or support for family members, dealing with a loved ones mental issues is very tiring."

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

N/A

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?

"Provide more mental health beds in hospitals, more counsellors, re educate GPs with the over prescribing of anti depressants. Improve services within the justice system, prisoners are being released having very little help whilst incarcerated. Counselling services need to change, mental illness isn't being diagnosed or wrongly diagnosed, depression can also mean an undiagnosed mental illness & far too many GPs are prescribing anti depressants when in fact good psychotherapy is what is needed."

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

N/A

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

"My son's journey of mental health issues started in 2009, he moved back into the family home after a break up with the mother of his daughter (Dec 2008) he lost everything he owned which was stored in our shed in the Black Saturday bushfires, we were under insured (as most people realised) so he wasn't able to claim on our policy, although he still had insurance on his house, a clause on his policy stated that ""we must be informed of contents being re-located within 30 days"" (who reads the fine print on insurance policies!) he then had to jump many hurdles in the family court, lies after lies by the mother against my son & our family made it extremely difficult for my son, I understand that children need to be protected, but the family court overwhelmingly favour the custodial parent, which in the majority of cases is the mother, even without substantiation. this is when his depression started. He went to a counsellor who did not diagnose any mental illness, he started on anti depressants. Fast forward to 2011 he had a relationship with another girl which resulted in Nov 2012 the birth of his second child, a son. In June 2013 he had a breakdown believing that his second partner would do the same to him as his first one, he started using drugs which was very out of character, a little bit of a background. [REDACTED] & his siblings attended a private school was a qualified electrician owned his own home & was running a business, He left his second partner & was travelling aimlessly between my house, his sisters & just driving between Vic & NSW, mostly funded by my husband & myself. In Oct 2013 I told him I am not paying for anything else, you need to come home, which he did. I took him to our GP who (wrongly) diagnosed him with Bipolar & accordingly prescribed anti psychotic medication & anti depressants. I also got a referral for [REDACTED] to see a psychiatrist in our area which cost me around \$170 per visit, he never diagnosed him with anything just prescribed medication. I subsequently made an appointment with a psychologist in Melbourne who actually diagnoses people, after 1 1/2 hrs he diagnosed him with BPD which I had never heard of, I came home & googled it & bingo, that was him. Our next visit with the psychiatrist I presented him with the report & he said ""I'll look over it & we'll discuss next visit"" next visit was 12th March 2014, my son took his life 11th March 2014, 32 years old one moth shy of his 33rd birthday. Our family have also lost

My niece 35 yrs old a mother of 3 young children in April 2018, she was suffering mental health issues for many years, she presented herself to the [REDACTED] Hospital the day before & told them ""if you don't admit me I will take my life"" she wasn't admitted & she took her the following day. My Nephew was struggling with drug abuse & mental health issues, my sister tried to get him into a private drug rehab centre in Australia which she couldn't so decided to take him to drug rehab in Thailand (this is so ridiculous) he took his life in September 2018 in Thailand aged 25 he was a qualified plumber. I read last week that if a family member takes their life there's a 60% chance that another family member will, I don't know if my son hadn't then they may not have. I hope who is reading this is still engaged because I would like to fill you in on how our family has tried to cope since my son made that terrible decision. I was running my own business, I employed 4 people I struggled & my eldest daughter took 3 months leave from work to try & help me (luckily she was working with a community health organisation & they had a bit more understanding) my head wasn't with it, I didn't want to be there, I made some terrible business decisions & as a consequence my business shut down. A strain was put on her marriage & after 7 yrs the marriage broke down, my other 2 children have made life decisions which may or may not have an impact later on. My marriage of 40yrs has been strained, I don't know if that will ever rectify we are just going through the motions at the moment. Me at a personal level, I am a shell of the person I was, I will never be the contributing member of society that I once was, I volunteered all my life, kids schools, kinder, little aths, football & netball clubs, now I have trouble sleeping, some days I don't get out of bed until lunchtime other days & I have to force myself to do so. I will never be able to hold down a job again. This is a consequence of suicide. Thank You for listening."