

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

Organisation Name

N/A

Name

Mrs Estelle Furness

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

"I think there have been great strides in the last few years in making mental health a priority in Victorian communities - I believe continuing along that path with providing more education into mental health conditions, communicating publicly about what services are available and also general knowledge of the different tiers of mental health facilities."

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?

"Working well: - The increasing awareness of mental health concerns in a public domain, which is reducing the stigma attached to it. Could be better: - Communicating what to do when you suspect mental health concerns. Eg. Go see your GP because it's better to be treated than to just ""deal with it"" - Increasing awareness of mental health conditions at a younger age, alongside sexual education for example. - Educating the public on what can trigger mental health conditions. Eg. Trauma, violence, abuse etc. - Educating the public on the tangible nature of mental health conditions. My father-in-law, for example, doesn't ""believe in mental illness"" and thinks people need to get over it and harden up. - Research the contributing factors that causes people to go on without treatment. For me personally, I received plenty of help from my GP who first diagnosed me, however because of the severity of my depression at the time I couldn't work, and subsequently couldn't pay to see a psychologist, meaning my condition was left untreated beyond my GP. I was offered a mental health plan, but the list of service providers was so little that I had to wait 6 months to see one in my area. "

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

"Hands down, the crisis hotline is amazing and has saved me countless times from the edge of taking my own life. What can be done better: - Funding for crisis hotlines to perform follow ups. - Again researching the contributing factors that lead to suicidal tendencies. "

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.

"When life deals you a difficult hand, for me it was growing up in a violent home, being sexually assaulted as a child, having Leukemia at age 9, being bullied throughout school, being homeless at age 21, and now struggling to find stable work, it is so difficult to experience good mental health. Firstly, because the services available are limited to what the individual can afford. While there are mental health plans, very few psychologists accept them and the ones that do, don't really care (I had one who played Sudoku on their phone throughout the ""consultation""). Secondly, I have spent a lot of my life dealing with medical professionals for Leukemia. I have participated in SO MANY trials and donated countless litres of blood and other body parts - but not once have I been

referred to mental health services as an adult. "

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

"1. Unemployment. One of the greatest difficulties in life is finding the courage to find employment while dealing with a mental health condition, so that you can afford to pay for the treatment of your mental health condition. What can be done: - Encourage and back employment agencies that seek employment for individuals with mental health conditions - Provide financial support for people diagnosed with severe cases of mental health conditions 2. Lack of high-quality mental health practitioners in the public sector What can be done: - Allocate resources and funding to encourage mental health practitioners to accept mental health plans 3. Lack of public education "

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

Education - provide educational resources on mental health conditions. Community engagement - Provide community services and support systems for families and carers of people with mental health conditions.

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?

"To be honest, I have dealing with my severe mental health condition for the majority of my life. As I turn 30 in July, I'm still struggling to maintain a stable job while maintaining my mental health needs. Most employers I've interacted with show such stigma to the fact that I've had cancer and have mental health issues, that I'm often looked over for positions. I think there needs to be a point where severe mental health conditions are declared a disability and is entitled to disability support services, including disability employment services."

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?

I the most ideal mental health system would look something like: 1. Person sees GP regarding mental health and referred to specialist. There should be a public sector database of mental health practitioners who will accept mental health plans. 2. Person sees specialist who works alongside the GP to care for their mental health.

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

"1. A database for mental health practitioners who accept mental health plans 2. An online presence for mental health services - perhaps a website that provides education, support/crisis line information, and mental hospitalization services if needed. 3. Mental health conditions need to be treated with the same campaigns and presence as any other disease eg. cancer. With its own representation and campaigns to tackle it. 4. We need more public testimonies of people who are overcoming mental health conditions and succeeding in areas of their life. I think the lack of 'role

models' only adds to the stigma that is associated with mental health."

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

I'm looking forward to the day that I can live without my mental health conditions holding me back and with confidence that I am receiving the relevant support I need.