

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?

"There needs to be a wide spread publicity campaign explaining that mental illness is not someone being a nutter/lunatic/loon but that people are simply unwell. It needs to be explained what bipolar, schizophrenia are and that they can affect professionals and all sorts of people just like any other ailment such as heart disease. There is so much shame and stigma. I'm too scared to tell my closest friends and even family. I'm too scared to tell employers. That's because I've experienced discrimination in the workplace and sacked after a bipolar episode. "

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?

There is nothing being done to prevent mental illness. There isn't enough being done. There are few support groups. I haven't found any special centres etc for on going support for bipolar. I would like a place I could go locally in bayside Melbourne for support. Important; I didn't know I had bipolar until it was too late and had a severe episode that ended in job loss and depression. If there had been more publicity or awareness of the early signs I may have not gone into full mania and sought help.

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

People are lonely. They are too afraid to share. To admit their problems and thoughts. A combatting loneliness campaign would be good. Firstly encouraging people to reach out and share their woes with friends and also for others to reach out to them. People are more connected than ever by social media but it's all fake. As a result people are so isolated and lonely

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 there isn't enough follow up support after a mental health crisis. There are CAT teams from hospitals but they are always different people. You need one personal person assigned to the client. Having had two bad psychotic episodes in Victoria and then been hospitalised I was very vulnerable in the months following. Reason being both episodes wrecked my health while I had to come off the high dose medication and I lost jobs due to my behaviour during the episodes. Those months are very high risk for depression and suicide afterwards. There needs to be special programmes people go on after severe episodes like mentoring, support groups etc "

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

"Unemployment, stress etc low income, broken families etc perhaps in country towns or poorer areas will trigger certain mental health conditions such as bipolar and depression. These people

need support. "

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

The two times I was an involuntary patient were very hard on my husband. He was dealing with a very unwell Wife in hospital in a psychotic episode and two young children at home. He then had to navigate the legal system To get me out inc briefing a lawyer. He should have been assigned an emergency case worker to help him and to help at home. In the same Way you provide a care worker for disabled people. He really struggled and would Often cry etc. he was scared and fearful.

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

"Mentoring, better pay and conditions. Well being benefits. These people are on the front line. They need help to do their jobs well. "

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?

Making sure they have support to improve their health and not be isolated. Loss of confidence is common plus loss of motivation and income. They need to be checked on regularly as part of a support ongoing programme I mentioned so they keep getting encouragement and don't feel alone.

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?

Better conditions in the mental health units. Better food. More holistic things to relax and nurture. These units are like prisons esp [REDACTED]. It was terrifying and horrible.

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?

"You need to; 1: normalise mental health through awareness campaigns 2: Offer long term support programmes inc groups, mentoring, etc to those discharged after a bad episode or involuntary admission. This will help prevent suicide and isolation and relapse 3: improve mental health units. Better food and conditions. They are like prisons and not conducive to recovery. "