

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

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Name

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

"I think having more diverse spokespeople who have survived their fight would work really well. I know I didn't really start to understand until my heroes, mostly comedians, started talking about their own illnesses on stage. That then framed it in the if they can recover from suicidal thoughts to you the world, then I'm going to be okay. Also might be helpful if funding isn't given to tv/film projects that romanticise/glamorise mental illnesses, and instead priorities realistic portrayals, with advisors onsite to make sure it is realistic. Ensure characters with mental illnesses are shown to still have depth and be people, just with extra struggles."

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?

"Improve teacher training to identify at-risk students. I know none of my teachers picked up on my issues, and at the time I perceived that as them not caring. I know that isn't the case, but at the time it was very isolating. Also, maybe reevaluate whether a GP is necessary to get a mental health plan? It's just a survey, and having to justify your illness, when you don't understand what's going on, is incredibly daunting regardless of how respectful the doctor is "

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

"Identifying then Addressing all the underlying factors. Suicide doesn't just happen, it is built up to, victims end up in this place where they can't see any other option. Reform and fix how we approach trans people and their transitioning, ensuring they can get access to therapy to ensure it is the correct way forward, without having to resort to buying drugs online. Social security seriously needs to be fixed. Condescending pre-recorded messages, intentionally poor quality irritating music, unjustifiable wait times, dealing with Centrelink is always stressful. When you consider the people who need the assistance, spending 13 hours (collectively) on hold just to get told the application will be processed in x amounts of weeks, isn't beneficial to their mental health. And then there's the fact it is often not enough to actually support them, the robo calls, chasing dead people's fees, our welfare system is good, but the way it's structured is obviously to try and push people away from it, than support them so they no longer need it. Address Men's issues in a similar way to women's. Yes, it's okay to not be a sports model bodywise, it's okay to have diverse interests, it's okay to explore out and find these things. I think the focus on telling young women they can be successful and all of that, while incredibly needed and important, meant the boys were neglected and feel lost. Part of this could be funding more social things, besides scouts and sports teams, to get them away from technology and into groups"

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.

"The constant barrage of negative information certainly can't help. News is just people attacking other people, Facebook is the same, radio is substanceless. Being told constantly that this is going to ruin the economy, or the world, or your town, just builds that mindset. To address that, a journalistic standards reform could help, or government campaign to promote positive socialising in terms of services, I don't know what else could be done to promote services and access. There's still the stigma, but that's probably a generational thing that will be phased out over time "

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

"Clearly, education opportunities. The more educated you are, the better you will do. The fact that government funding goes to private schools is disgusting, it defeats the point of private. High quality teachers need to be spread out to rural communities, to give those kids the best chance for a good life, so they won't experience strongly detractive factors like homelessness, Bill stress, unemployment, etc. Increased focus on physical socialisation, rather than digital, at a young age, to build networks and friendships. Make some funding for councils dependant on engaging young people in these programs, make them fun and interesting, and not exclusively sporting. Group crafts, reading, teaching them how to make things with raspberry pi. Make them feel safer. A/TL Australians have such a higher incarceration rate, maybe because they're unfairly targeted by police. If these groups, including immigrants, LGBT, even people with disabilities, are seeing their community so over policed then they aren't going to feel like their government supports them. Do away with predictive policing to address this, it only perpetuates outdated beliefs through the belief that AI is infallible"

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

"Realise that parents can, and do, have breakdowns, and that often it falls on the children to care for them. Services are rarely advertised for this scenario, they're usually individual, or parents caring for children. A recognition of this, and a way to access support. It doesn't have to be massive, but just a day or two off work or school for the children could really help with this, or minor financial assistance to help them out. Maybe an advisor at school who is clearly identified as able to help with stuff like this "

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

"Incentivise rural community engagement, through heavily subsidised rent or similar. Have ongoing communication with the ground workers, what do they notice is and isn't working. I don't know how these things operate, but if it's anything like any business, the lowest tier staff are the ones who see everything, and probably have the best ideas of how to address problems. Listen to the workers, they are the best asset you've got to fix this."

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?

"Honestly, the only opportunity is to just get over it. People are sympathetic at first, but they expect you to bury it and put on a happy face, so they feel comfortable and like they've done a good thing. People don't want to see others upset, it makes them uncomfortable and feel like they're guilty. The best way to improve this, I feel, is to improve access to mental health

professionals. Medicare gives us a paltry 6+4 sessions, the Victorian government could match that. 20 sessions a year, thats just under 1 a fortnight. Investing in the states mental health is on par with the infrastructure projects this government loves so much. Consider it removing the level crossings of mental health, better access will result in more productivity, and a return on that investment."

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?

"Addressing key factors in childhood. We know that exposure to certain things increases chances of mental illness. By educating kids, getting them involved in communities, and general emotional literacy, youre putting them in a better position than any generation before them. Better support for trans people. Ensuring that transitioning is the best thing for them, without placing financial stress on them, will help improve the mental health of the community. This sort of extends out to LGBT as a whole, just better support. Have parents nights at schools, where theyre told how to look after their kid if they are LGBT, enforced no tolerance for discrimination based on gender/sexuality. Too many schools/organisations say they dont tolerate it, but then actively tolerate it. This makes members of the community feel lied to, and just reveals that we are only pawns that organisations can freely use to appear righteous and virtuous"

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

"Further subsidising of low income victorians mental health treatments. Reach out to schools and community groups and see what kids today want out of a community group. Start planning funding based on this Move funding out of private schools and into public. This should be a no brainer. Start addressing mens issues the way we do womens, let men know they should be proud to be a man, that no matter what they look like they are beautiful, that they can be victims of violence too, all of that"

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

"I think youll be very surprised if you sent a survey out to school aged children, asking questions around how much responsibility they feel they alone shoulder. Not just mental health, but in general. Kids have so much expected of them these days, and then when you start to add mental health, and physical health, they are drowning silently. When I was in year 12, I had the stress of VCE, and VTAC applications. For the majority of that year, I was in a very unhealthy relationship, that left me feeling worthless and unlovable, and I spent a few months at Headspace working through this. I had a casual job at McDonalds, that I was pretty good at so I was being rostered on for busy shifts in mini-manager roles (shifty we called it, chaser on side 1). One day, mum came home and she wasnt mum. She started staying away until the family had gone to bed, treating us suspiciously, as if she was scared of us. It was effectively just my 15 year old sister and I around, we didnt know what to do. I had to balance the school stress, work stress, relationship stress, mums breakdown, as well as looking after my sister. I didnt know what to do, none of the services I could think of were advertised to me as being able to help with this. I still dont know if I did a good job, Im 21 now and my family is getting better. But that definitely affected me, possibly permanently. The ideal VMHS, to me, would mean no 17 year old would have to go through that ever again. That was too much for me to take on, but I felt like I had no choice, and I hate to think about how many other kids, many probably younger, have gone through that."