

Mental Health with a focus on Suicide / Self Harm

There is a massive hole in the Mental Health System as it currently stands and anyone that has attempted and / or is suicidal / self harming falls into that hole and no one wants to help or cares about them.

The Govt changed Private Insurance legislation so that anyone without health insurance can approach a Private Health Company, get insurance and serve no waiting periods and gain access immediately to a Private Health Facility. This then gives the Private Facilities the option to be able to pick and chose who they want to help and who they don't.

The public Psych Facilities are full of Ice Addicts which makes it dangerous for Public Mental Health Patients to be admitted safely. Have been told this by psychiatrists, psychologists and people who have been in hospital wards instead of Pyschiatric Wards, due to the dangers!

The Private Psych Facilities are even harder to get into.

You need to get a referral from a dr. (The dr at the [REDACTED] wrote such a terrible referral that my son was rejected from 3 private facilities and isn't able to re apply to them again)

A bed broker then tries to find you a bed in a Private Psych Facility.

Again, this Mental Health Patient is being rejected. They are at their absolute lowest point in life and they are being rejected by Public and Private Facilities.

Where do they go? Who cares?

People with Mental Health Issues who go to Public Hospitals shouldn't have to "join the queue". Normal people waiting at hospitals, get antsy and anxious after 6 hours or so in a hospital waiting to be seen. A person with a Mental Health Issue doesn't have the same mental capacity as a normal person and a waiting time of 6+ hours is just not satisfactory. They then get anxious / panic attacks happen and they then appear to become violent when the majority of the time they aren't. They just don't have the same patience or filters as normal people and act on what they feel. This making them appear to be angry and violent.

Hospitals should have a Mental Health Team that is on standby at the very least and able to see a Mental Health Patient within an hour of them attending an Emergency Department. They should not have to wait in line with every one else. The Mental Health Team should be able to see them and help them and this would cut back on a lot of the tension, anxiety and violence that is associated with Mental Health patients.

Once a person has attempted suicide / self harms things change.

The police attend to the call. An ambulance attends to the call. The family usually will attend as well. A convoy to the hospital then takes place. The Ambulance hand over to the police who then stay with the Mental Health Patient until they are seen by a doctor.

This is taking police resources from the streets that are already desperately under resourced. I don't blame the Mental Health person for this and neither do the police but there has to be a better way of handling this. Ie: A mental Health team available within an hour at the hospital that the police can do a hand over to and then get back to where they need to be.

It is also a terrible feeling for the Mental Health Patient to be sitting in a corridor of the Emergency Department waiting to be seen by someone with a police guard. People who have no idea what is happening "look " and "stare" at them strangely and of course think the worst as they have a police guard. This is another trigger for mental health patients. Being judged!

There are Services out there that will help people who are depressed, sad, had a bad day etc... but once you become suicidal / self harming they don't want to know them. This is Lifeline and Beyond Blue. My son was also under Orygen Youth Services when he was 15.

I found that his time at [REDACTED] to be incredibly frustrating. My son was 15. He was too young to vote, too young to smoke, too young to drink and too young to drive, YET he was old enough to make life changing medical decisions. I contacted [REDACTED] on several occasions to be told that my son didn't want me to be part of his sessions or treatment. I explained at the time that I could hold information that could help with his diagnosis etc. Again this comes back to communication. Once a Mental Health Issue is diagnosed the patient needs someone to be designated to help with decisions and to ensure that medications etc are taken correctly.

I have personal experience with Lifeline over 17 years ago, when I made a call to them and was told the I had my wits about me enough to call them, that I was to call my doctor in the morning and they hung up on me. I have started a page and every Christmas I offer my services to those who need them most. The stories and the people that I have met over the past 8 years has shown me that Lifeline hasn't changed at all.

Beyond Blue did respond to one of my emails and I spoke with them about their chat line service amongst other things. It closes at 11pm. The majority of people that I know that need help are usually from 11 – 6am, yes when the chat service is closed. They were going to review this but I don't know the outcome of it.

I was told by a psychologist that they did some training at [REDACTED] and they have a script and 20 minutes to deal with each call. If they aren't finished within 20 minutes they get wound up. Who can and should put a time on this?

I spoke with my sons doctor about this as well and he said "they won't talk to anyone suicidal as they may talk for an hour and they still go and kill themselves, so it's a waste of time". WHO THINKS LIKE THAT??? They could talk to someone who is sad and they could go and kill themselves.

People with Mental Health issues have no where to go when they need help the most.

Mental Health is not a 9 – 5 issue!

It doesn't have a schedule or a time slot that is convenient so you can make an appointment in advance. It hits when it hits and this is usually when most services have closed for the day..... and those that are open, don't want to hear from you.

My son recently found himself, the night after spending the previous night at Emergency, back in that black hole. He knew what the hospital would do, which is nothing.... He knew his family was tired and exhausted and he didn't want to worry them again... so he went to the local police station and asked them to lock him up for the night. In his mind, if he was locked in a prison cell then he couldn't harm himself and follow through on the thoughts that he was having. They wouldn't. Then he asked what crime he had to commit to get locked up. NOONE should have to do this!!

THIS BREAKS my HEART as a mother to know your child feels so desperate.

The Good, The Bad and The Ugly!

My son has been told on many occasions to call 000.

One of the first times he called, 2 police officers responded. They rang the doorbell and were fantastic in the way they dealt with my son. Compassionate, caring and understanding.

A week later he had to make the same call. He was sitting out on his verandah which overlooks their front garden and he looked down to find 6 police officers with guns drawn on his front lawn. The Officer in Charge, tried to hand cuff him, even though his wrists were cut and he was bleeding. The Ambulance Officer was the same one that had attended the week before and assured the Police Officer that he wasn't violent or threatening and that there was no need for handcuffs. He isn't a criminal, he wasn't threatening yet they treated him like a criminal instead of a sick person. Would they treat a cancer patient this way? My biggest fear with this night, was what if they looked up on the

verandah and he was vaping and they mistook it in the dark as a weapon and shot him??? This is just completely unacceptable behaviour!

A few weeks later he made that same call. This time he called us and we were there the entire time. The 2 officers that arrived the same time as us, were absolutely fantastic and a credit to the police force. Kind, caring, compassionate. Unfortunately this night, I got to see the both the amazing side and the incredibly ugly side of the Emergency Department. He was not placed in a cubicle for hours. He was sitting in a corridor under police guard. The triage nurse that was dealing with us, [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] was the most incredible man, who made a difficult situation, bearable. My husband had been out fighting fires all day and had only just got home when we got the call to go. He'd had no sleep. I sent him to the car to try and sleep around 5am as he still had work that day. My son messaged me, that there was a big pool of blood under the chair he was sitting in and no one would clean it up. I went and spoke with [REDACTED] about this. He went to check on it and he was apologetic about it happening and assured me that it would be cleaned up. The other Triage Nurse, walked into the room and was incredibly rude and basically snapped that it would be done when it gets done, to stop carrying on??? They wonder why people get aggravated at them. It is these attitudes that make people get upset, angry and even violent. If it hadn't been for [REDACTED] that night, keeping me updated and looking out for me and caring, I don't know how I would've got through it. My son sat in that corridor for at least 6 hours under police guard. We had to leave as my husband needed some sleep before going to work and I needed medication. My son "cut his wrists" at approximately 12:30am and he wasn't seen until 11:30am that morning. After they removed the bandages they realised that he had actually cut a major vein and he was still bleeding. There is video footage of this incident and how rough they were. How uncaring they were. How much it was still bleeding after approx 11 hours. They stitched him up and sent him home.

We have since found out that he lost so much blood that night, no tests were done, nothing, that his iron levels are so low he is currently on iron medication. This shouldn't have happened. The hospital under a duty of care should've checked to see if his levels were okay. If I had an accident at work, or in the kitchen and was bleeding the way he was, they would never have made me wait that long, and they would've done checks to make sure the incredible

amount of blood lost wasn't life threatening. Again as he was "self harming" they don't care!

The next time he was picked up under Section 351 he was at the hairdressers. He had reached out to [REDACTED] and getting no where so they called the police. They tracked him down and took him from the hair dressers direct to the hospital. The Police Officers on this occasion were also amazing and a credit to the Police Force. His car was left in the street. He had no medication. He had no charger for his phone. That was approximately 7pm. He was told that he would be the first one to see the Psych at 8am in the morning. He asked for some medication that he was due at 6:30am to give them time to arrange it. By 9:30am he still didn't have the medication, and he was suffering from severe anxiety and panic attacks by this time. They then told him that he would have to wait a few hours for the Psychiatrist as there was others before him. He asked for a charger for his phone and no one had one that he could use. Withholding medication on a Mental Health Patient is just plain cruel. It is going to send them into a spiral. I don't think that it is asking too much that hospitals have phone chargers available as these days they are an every day tool that people use. I called the hospital that morning on a number that I had been given by [REDACTED]. They were down right rude. Told me they were too busy to talk to me and to call another number. I called the other number only to be told if THEY NEEDED to talk to me they would call and they too hung up. I then called [REDACTED] to be put through to an answering machine. After being treated so disgustingly, I then proceeded to call the Chief Psychiatrists Office. Amazingly enough things did happen after that call. Why should I have to make that call?

We have built an amazing facility, Peter Mac, for patients with Cancer. Why can't we build a similar facility for those with Mental Health Issues? Somewhere that is supportive, caring, nurturing. Somewhere they can go and not be treated inhumanely. Not judged.

The sad fact is that we live in a world that suicide is happening so often that it isn't reported anymore. UNLESS you're a celebrity or a sports person, then everyone hears about it, and offers support to them and their family... They are no different to you and me. They bleed the same as we do. They hurt the same as we do. They are people the same as us, why should they get special treatment.

My husband is a CFA volunteer and he was paged to 3 "gassings in a week" a couple of weeks ago. Another heart breaking statistic. This is another side... the first responders are impacted by this epidemic.

There are some people who can't use / tolerate antidepressants or antipsychotics.

My son was using Xanax and was high functioning on it. For years he worked as an IT Manager for big companies and managed to function on a normal basis daily.

The Govt took Xanax off the prescription medication list and he had to go off it. This was the beginning of his downhill spiral. He can't take antidepressants or anti psychotics as he reacts badly to them.

By taking Xanax off the legal prescription list, they have destroyed lives. These drugs should be available to patients as long as they have a doctor prescribing them. Are we now saying that we can't trust doctors? If this is the case this problem is even bigger than anyone can imagine.

Xanax is still available! The govt hasn't made it not available. All they have done is to send it to the black market, where only the people who can afford it, can access it.

Isn't it better that people who need this medication get access to it via a doctor who is monitoring them, rather than go to the black market and pay a fortune for it and who knows how much they really are using.

Removing all of these kinds of medications isn't stopping people from accessing them, it is stopping those who are law abiding citizens who don't have the funds to access them on the black market, and those on the black market to profit massively.

This alone is also WRONG!

There should be a way that if your doctor knows that a medication works for a person that they should be able to prescribe it as long as they are monitoring the patient.

Who are we to say what is good and what is bad for someone.

I know it worked for my son and he was a high functioning member of society til this was taken away from him.

What is the substitute ???

Off the record.... Cannabis! Yep his psychiatrist has recommended that my son use Cannabis as it calms him and stops the black self harm thoughts.

The down side to this!

Its illegal.

He can't drive after using it. Thus his family is again picking up the pieces and becomes his driver and has to do / get anything that he may need.

So Cannabis unless it is going to made legal for Mental Health Issues, isn't a long term viable solution.

Then comes the "After Mental Health" Issues!

Applying for income protection, Centrelink!

There should be a different set of rules and regulations for Mental Health Patients.

Firstly they usually aren't capable of completing relevent forms and have to turn to Legal Advice which costs them a fortune! Yes we are on that hampster wheel again.

Centrelink just has no compassion AT ALL!!

If claims are accepted they then need to fill out forms repeatedly. Asking the same irrelevant questions over and over and making the patient anxious about

reliving it all again. These forms are relevant to people who have physical injuries or illnesses the majority of the time.

Different claim forms / supporting mechanisms should be in place to help Mental Health Patients, not hinder and make them worse.

Communication is also very important. Regardless of age, once a person is classified as having a Mental Health Issues then a family member should be designated as a contact person and the ER, DR's, Insurance Companies, anyone that deals with this person should have to contact the designated family member and discussions should be had with them. Especially before big decisions are made or they are discharged from hospitals.

What do I recommend?

1. Instead of Police being taken from the Streets that PSO's be trained in an additional module/course in Mental Health, Care and Compassion and they can attend with the ambulances. Allowing Police to stay on the streets.
2. Hospital Triage Staff shouldn't be working there if they don't know how to talk to people and show care and compassion in all situations. [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] Hospital could teach them all a thing or two on how to treat people. They are no different to us, and to get respect they need to show respect!

3. Hospitals should have a Mental Health Team that is on standby at the very least and able to see a Mental Health Patient within an hour of them attending an Emergency Department. They should not have to wait in line with every one else. The Mental Health Team should be able to see them and help them and this would cut back on a lot of the tension, anxiety and violence that is associated with Mental Health patients.

4. I want to get a foundation off the ground where we can build a facility for these people to go to.

It would be open 24/7.

It would have a Mental Health Nurse in attendance at all times.

A Psychiatrist would be available within a 1 hour time frame to anyone that attends the facility.

(This could be psychiatrists that are in later stages of training and need some clinic hours who report to a head psychiatrist)

It would have beds, so that if they are having a bad night and need help to get through it, they know they have somewhere to stay and be safe.

It will be safe, nurturing, caring, warm and welcoming.

It would be non judgmental.

The patients would be treated with respect, after all they are just like you and me, just at a low point in their life.

A safe place where they know they can go, be heard, be safe, be nurtured and be helped!!

If referrals to other places needs to be arranged the psychiatrists could arrange this as well and the Centre would work with different Community Resources to help the patient in whatever way is needed.

If anyone knows of any funding or grants that could help us get this Foundation / idea off the ground it would be incredibly appreciated if they could contact me.

5. People who are working with people with Mental Health Illness, whether it is a first responder, triage nurses, police, doctors, anyone at all, they need to be taught or reminded that they are people. They don't want to live like they are with Mental Illness, it chose them.
6. Care, Compassion, Nurturing, Feeling Safe, Being Heard, Not Judged are all incredibly important to Mental Health Patients and we all need to realise and respect this. (Maybe a media campaign highlighting these words for Mental Health)?
7. COMMUNICATION! This is incredibly important. A family member should be designated regardless whether or not the Mental Health Patient wants it, as they are usually not in a position to make this judgement call. The family member can then help with the care and management of this patient. They may also hold important information that the Mental Health Patient doesn't remember. Before being discharged from hospitals, ER's, Psychiatric Wards, etc, the designated family member should be contacted and agreeable to this action taking place. Any changes to medication also should be notified to the designated Family member so that it is followed through correctly as Mental Health Patients, don't always absorb information correctly.

I would like a face to face meeting with the Commissioners if this is at all possible.

I am happy to discuss this further and to elaborate more on any of the above points.

I can be contacted on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

Thank you for listening,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

██████████

Mental Health with a focus on suicide and self harm

The current mental health system has a massive hole in it. As the mother of a son who is suicidal and self harming, that no one wants to help or cares about, is absolutely heartbreaking and no one should have to go through this.

Private facilities pick and choose who, when and how they can help. They're difficult to get into, and will only treat people on their own strict terms. Bed brokers need to be engaged to try and get a Private Facility Bed for you. Public facilities can be dangerous, long waits, most have people addicted to ice in them, are understaffed and frustrating environments.

My son was rejected at the lowest point in his life, and this experience made it so much more difficult to manage his Mental Health Condition.

Mental Health isn't a 9-5 issue!

It doesn't run to a schedule or a time slot that is convenient so you can make an appointment in advance. It hits when it hits and this is usually when most services have closed for the day.... and those that are open, don't want to hear from you.

If you have a mental health issue, you shouldn't have to "join a queue" to receive treatment - particularly when it is an emergency. People are in crisis, and are forced to wait for hours, under police guard, just to be seen. The wait can lead to further heightening of symptoms such as panic attacks, and can make people appear to be angry and violent.

Hospitals need to have a mental health team on standby to ensure they are able to see a mental health patient within an hour of them arriving at ED, in order to reduce the anxiety and violence associated with mental health patients. The current system makes people worse.

There has to be a better way of handling someone attempting to take their own life.

Police, ambulance and the family rush to their side, and a convoy rushes the person to the hospital. And there they wait. Police watch the patient until they can be seen, which can take hours - often more than six hours. The police are doing a great job, however our community needs the police on the streets where the resources are already strained. Having a police guard makes the Mental

Health Patient feel even worse, as people being people stare at anyone with the police around them especially when covered in blood. This heightens people in distress' anxiety and propensity to violence.

These days, it seems there's a wide range of services for people with depression, but once you become suicidal, it seems as though no one wants to know you. My son was under [REDACTED] Services since he was 15 and then he has tried to work with [REDACTED], [REDACTED], which have no interest other than "Call 000". Sometimes they just need someone they don't know to talk to and have them listen.

Recently, my son found himself back in the black hole, after spending the previous night in the emergency department. He knew the hospital wouldn't do anything, he knew his family was tired after all the help they had given and he didn't want to disturb them and he felt he had no other options. So, he went to the local police station, and asked them to lock him up for the night. He thought if he was in a cell, he wouldn't be able to harm himself, but the police refused. He even asked what crime he would have to commit for them to lock him up.

No one should have to do this.

It's heartbreaking as his mother to know that your child feels so desperate.

On occasions, my son called 000 for help. One of the first times, two police officers responded. They rang the doorbell and were fantastic. A week later, he made the same call. This time, he looked down from the front verandah, to see six police officers, with guns drawn, on his front lawn. An officer tried to hand-cuff him, despite cut and bleeding wrists and protestations from the ambulance officer that he was known, and not violent. I am worried that one day he could be shot by police.

A few weeks later, he made the same call. The police were great this time. But the hospital was a disaster. He was not given a cubicle for hours, and was sat in a corridor under police guard. Some of the nurses were great, while others were incredibly rude. It took my son eleven hours to get seen. However, it still got worse. The staff roughly removed the bandages, and it was only then that they noticed that he had cut a major vein and was still bleeding. He was stitched up, and sent home. He lost so much blood that night that he now has low iron levels. If this was a person who cut themselves in the kitchen / or workplace, and had that amount of blood still coming out he would never have had to wait 11 hours and they would've done blood tests to make sure he was okay.

The next time he was picked up and taken to hospital, we had further challenges. The police were great, but the hospital withheld his medication, and forced him to wait hours to see a psychiatrist. He was unable to get a phone charger, so was unable to communicate, and it went into a spiral. It wasn't until I was able to get the Chief Psychiatrist on the phone that anything happened.

We have built an amazing facility, Peter Mac, for patients with cancer. Why can't we have something similar for people with mental health issues. Somewhere free of judgement, where people can get the treatment they need.

The sad fact is that we live in a world that suicide is happening so often that it isn't reported anymore. UNLESS you're a celebrity or a sports person, then everyone hears about it, and offers support to them and their family... They are no different to you and me. They bleed the same as we do. They hurt the same as we do. They are people the same as us, why should they get special treatment.

My husband is a CFA volunteer, and is regularly attending "gassings", first responders are also impacted by this epidemic.

My son's spiral downwards began when the government removed Xanax from the PBS list. Previously, he was an IT manager and high functioning. He is unable to take antidepressants or anti psychotics, as he reacts badly. This destroyed his life.

One thing that does help him is cannabis. His psychiatrist recommended its use, and it helps stop his self harming thoughts. The down side is that it is illegal and he is unable to drive after using it. Unless it becomes legal, it's not a long term solution.

There are other challenges too, particularly when applying for Income Protection/ TPD / Centrelink. People like my son now struggle with completing all the forms, and often require legal advice for some of these forms, which is expensive. There's no compassion at all within Centrelink. Right now, these processes make matters worse. There needs to be different forms that are relevant to Mental Health and not physical or work place injuries which make this process even harder for the patient.

Communication is also very important. Regardless of age, once someone has a mental health issue, they should have a family member designated as a contact person. The emergency department, doctors, insurance companies, whoever, should be required to also contact the designated family member. This is critical when big decisions are being made.

Recommendations:

- Train PSOs to be able to assist with mental health issues to free up police. They should be trained in an additional module / course on Mental Health and how to act with care and compassion so they can attend with the ambulance
- Ensure all hospital staff are able to treat people with care and compassion. In order to receive respect, they need to give respect!

- Hospitals need to have a mental health team on standby. People should be able to be seen within an hour. This would cut back on a lot of the tension, anxiety and violence that is associated with mental health patients. A separate area for Mental Health Patients should be available not just the general ED with other patients. This does not mean locking them in a room !
- There needs to be a 24/7, facility where people can go to get treatment. It must have mental health nurses available all the time, and a psychiatrist available within the hour. It would have beds people could stay in, and feel safe, secure, caring and warm.
- All people who are treating someone with a mental illness need to understand that having someone who cares and is compassionate is a critical part of their recovery.
- Care, Compassion, Nurturing, Feeling Safe, Being Heard, Not Judged are all incredibly important to Mental Health Patients and we all need to realise and respect this. I would love to see a media campaign highlighting this. They aren't just words!
- Communication with families. It's incredibly important. There should be a designated family member that can be a part of the care and management of the patient. They may also hold important information that the patient cannot remember, such as previous medications, admission details and effective strategies. With any changes in medication, families should be notified, and informed of what follow up is required and what side effects can be expected.

I would be happy to have a face to face meeting with the Commissioners if this is at all possible.

I can be contacted on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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

Organisation Name

N/A

Name

[REDACTED]

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

"A campaign using words.... Care, Compassion, Nurturing, Feeling Safe, Being Heard, Not Judged are all incredibly important to Mental Health Patients and we all need to realise and respect this. Showing that Mental Health isn't just violent people. It can happen to anyone, anytime. That Mental Health isn't a 9-5 issue! It doesn't run to a schedule. "

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?

N/A

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

"Nothing.... Beyond Blue, Lifeline don't want to know you if you are suicidal or self harming! "

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.

N/A

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

N/A

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

Someone to listen to the issues that is happening within the families struggles to help their family member trying to get help with Mental Health issues. Private and Public systems are both in shatters.

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?

"Help for Mental Health Patients when they need it! They can't wait days or weeks for appointments with psychiatrists. They don't know when an ""episode"" is going to happen and unfortunately it usually isn't between 9-5. More staff available 24/7. Not just ED where they are patched up and sent home. "

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

Train more Psychiatrists. Make medication that works for some available and don't judge everyone the same. If something works for someone then they should be able to access it. ie Xanax.

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

"It is good to look at the start where it all begins.... BUT the real problems start when a person has gone past the ""sad days"" ""bad weeks"" and they become suicidal and self harming. Once they reach this point they are pretty much on their own. Private Facilities don't want them. Public Facilities aren't safe for them. They are in a black hole and they are left their to fend for themselves along with their families. There is only so much a family can do. The patient then feels worse as they can see their family is wearing down and then they feel they have no one / anywhere to turn. Its the worst place in the world to be. We need to help these people before they go to the point of no return. It would also be helpful if medical staff didn't tell Mental Health Patients they ""are beyond help""! This makes them feel even more worthless than they were already feeling. Priorities should be given to those who are suicidal instead of other issues as if they go a step further then they won't be needing help and sadly I feel that this is what most places think these days.... we can't help them! :("