

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

Organisation Name

N/A

Name

Mr Benjamin Cronshaw

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

N/A

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 are many good programs working in our community to support mental health and prevent or treat mental illness. These programs could be given more support and funding. Community aged care programs provide support, including mental health support, to elderly people. The elderly is one group particularly prone to mental illness. They may suffer from sickness, grief over the loss of family and friends (particularly their spouse), feelings of being a burden on their family and loneliness. These can all contribute to mental illness. Elderly people are not always able to seek the support they need, as they may be socially isolated or less able to find mental health services using the internet, for example. My mother Jennifer Cronshaw worked as an aged care chaplain with Bapcare for eight and a half years. Chaplains working in these programs can provide support and friendship to the elderly, as well as connecting them to local community groups or support services. Stay at home aged care recipients can thus remain in their homes, while getting the support they need, without having to move to a nursing home. Another good program are mental health first aid courses. These provide practical tips to address mental illness. They can also help carers to empathise with people suffering from mental illness, which can reduce the stigma around the problem. These programs were highly valued by my mother in her aged care chaplaincy work, but they can also work in other areas. "

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

"One program that works to prevent suicide are the Crisis Assessment and Treatment (CAT) Teams. These teams can provide frontline support and assistance to people experiencing a psychiatric crisis, including contemplating or attempting suicide. These services can work better at responding to psychiatric incidents than the police, for example, who might cause unnecessary disruption or anguish. Responding to these incidents may also put undue strain on the police personnel themselves. CAT teams are specially trained to provide an appropriate response to people with mental illness, which might include in-home care rather than being taken to hospital. More funding and support could be given to the CAT programs to respond to psychiatric incidents. "

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?

N/A

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?

"I believe that mental illness should be targeted at a community level, by the people closest to the affected individuals, with adequate professional support where needed. I believe there should be more mental health training programs targeted at training family members, friends, work colleagues and community leaders across the community. These programs could be specifically targeted to people in proximity to at risk groups, such as young people, the elderly, indigenous people and others. This could include programs such as the mental health first aid courses. Having a loving and caring family, for example, is the best way to provide an environment conducive to good mental health. One's parents, siblings and extended family are usually the people who know someone best. As people grow older, they may come to rely more on their friends, community groups and work colleagues. Having strong ties with family, friends and community can help reduce the incidence of mental illness in the first place, while also providing a system of support where mental illness does occur. In my experience, being part of a community in a local church was critical for my mental health during periods of mental stress. If people in the community are trained to recognise warning signs and provide adequate support to people suffering mental illness, this would help address the problem of mental illness. It would also take pressure off hospitals and other medical professionals. Receiving mental health training should not be mistaken for a professional qualification, but it can be a simple and effective way of dealing with mental illness on a local, personal level. Some people may not want to reach out to mental health professionals, whether out of stigma, lack of time, fear of cost or other reasons. Training family members and friends to respond to mental health would enable mental health services to reach these people, even if indirectly. "

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?

I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts and experiences on the issue of mental health. It

is an important issue facing the Australian community and I welcome the attention that is being directed to this matter. I appreciate the Commissioners for considering my submission and I hope that the Commission will lead to better mental health outcomes in Australia.