

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

SUB. 0002.0028.0501

## Name

[REDACTED]

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

"It is not the general Victorian community's understanding of mental illness that concerns me; it is the responsiveness of the Victorian mental health system that is of great concern, their inconsistent delivery, policy and practice has initiated my submission. Stigma and discrimination is not perpetuated by the ignorance of the broader Victorian community, it is the result of a broken and ineffective mental health system. The Victorian mental health system. My youngest son was stricken with mental illness at 19 years of age and as a result, it has put our family's life on hold for what has now been 22 months. In this time, my husband and I have experienced genuine care, empathy and support from our employers, colleagues, family and friends and this has sustained us to face each day. The Victorian mental health system and their inconsistent service delivery has NOT sustained my family in fact, we have been traumatised and left vulnerable and powerless. In my experience, the general Victorian community understand and are responsive to the mental health needs of fellow citizens, it is the current mental health system that is out of touch and unable to cope with the mental health care needs of their community. I have experienced a systemic problem over the past 22 months as my husband and I have had to seek medical attention from [REDACTED] hospital 8 times to treat my son's mental illness. Reflecting on the past 22 months and the unnecessary distress my husband, son and I have endured, I am saddened and extremely disappointed to say, it is the system and its inability to cope and respond effectively that is the problem and solely responsible for perpetuating stigma and discrimination, NOT the ignorance of the wider Victorian community. I feel qualified to make this statement because of the traumatic experiences my family have endured for nearly two years at the emergency department, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] wards at [REDACTED] hospital and more recently, the abuse of process by a member of Victoria Police. As a result of stigma and discrimination, from [REDACTED] hospital and [REDACTED] police station my husband and I feel powerless and are terrified to ever seek assistance from emergency services again. It is a systemic problem not a societal problem. Fix the system and the attitudes of society will respond in spades. I would like an opportunity to explain this in more detail. "

### **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?**

"Reflecting on my experience to prevent mental illness and to support people to get early treatment and support a responsive and consistent triage at public hospitals is critical and our following experience highlights why! My son turned 21 in hospital January 2019 and was his eighth hospital admission since November 2017, two of which were failed discharges. My husband, son and I presented twice at [REDACTED] hospital within 48 hours of both discharges in 2018 and were treated with mistrust by the triage department. This was particularly hard to comprehend as on both occasions my son had been at home for little more than a day when we realised he was still seriously ill and required medical attention. The mistrust and suspicion of the triage nurse resulted

in me pleading and crying in desperation, as I knew my son was very ill. I urged this nurse to read his file as I thought it must be at hand, he was only discharged the day before. There was no file accessible and as I cried and wailed for help, my son walked out of the emergency department and disappeared. Two hours later Victoria police found him in the CBD. The sheer terror my husband and I experienced during this time I would not wish on any human being. I would also like to point out here that the other people who had to endure my distress in the emergency department on this day were also unwell and should not have been subject to this kind of incident. This was the day that my son's rights as a young man seeking medical assistance were not only NOT supported BUT denied AND he was an inpatient the previous day. [REDACTED] hospital's poor policies and processes compromised my son's life at 19 years of age. It was also the day as a mother I lost my own dignity, as I had to wail to have my voice heard by a failing mental health system. I feel some comfort and satisfaction in communicating that my husband, son and I have benefitted from the services of the Early Psychosis Team (EPT) at Eastern Health and have felt mostly supported by the team of professionals from this service. However, a transparent and continuous improvement plan that responds to input and feedback from patients/clients would be beneficial in providing ongoing personalised care and attention. The level of care should not be determined by the length of time a young person has been accessing the service, it should be assessed on the individual needs of the patient. If a person requires further time and treatment from health care practitioners than initially allocated then rigorous assessments should be conducted and if further treatment is required then their care should be extended. Continuity and trusting relationships have been pivotal for my son's ongoing recovery. He is still undergoing treatment and we as a family are feeling unnerved that his two years with the EPT is nearly up. My son is a young 21 year old and we have feelings of dread that his full potential will not be realised if his continuity of care is disrupted and he is transferred to an adult system where he may become a number and a young casualty of an unfortunate mental illness. Please do not let this happen. Please provide my son with continuity and consistent care as long as he needs it. To support people to seek early treatment to support their general health and wellbeing should be at the core of early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education and be at the forefront of curriculum decision making. If children, adolescents and young adults have opportunities to discuss and engage in open discussions about their culture, backgrounds and experiences I am sure it will contribute to their sense of self-worth, being and identity. I am sure these initiatives could promote better mental health outcomes. "

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

"Initiatives such as Beyond Blue and Be You are fantastic but I think we as a society have to be open, honest and transparent about suicide. This means people need to feel they can talk openly and seek support if they feel suicidal. Unfortunately this does not happen. We as Victorians fail everyday in preventing suicide. Enough is enough. It is time to be proactive and this involves strengthening health services that work and sustain their clients/patients recovery in a less restrictive way and in a more flexible manner such as the EPT at Eastern Health. I am willing to discuss further."

### **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.**

"Unfortunately some people are genetically predisposed to mental health illness . Person's from vulnerable families, low socio economic backgrounds and marginalised communities. To promote

better outcomes we need a fairer and more equitable society that promotes tolerance to adults and teaches children resilience. I am happy to discuss further. "

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

" I think that it is every Victorian's responsibility to support our fellow citizens mental health well being. It begins with government, agencies and health services leading by example core values that empower people's rights, upholds their dignity and gives them equity and access to supportive mental health services. Build trust within the community and this will promote improved mental health outcomes for everyone. In my experience the care my son has received over the past 22 months at [REDACTED] hospital has been inconsistent across each of his eight admissions and the lack of empathy, care and compassion we have encountered from hospital management and some doctors, nurses and staff has affected my own and my husband's well-being. I have so many examples that I could write down but I would rather talk face to face with a human being. Please afford me an opportunity."

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

"To be actively listened to, believed and taken seriously. To be trusted as a person who knows the loved one and can communicate their needs when they cant. To be treated kindly by hospital staff when visiting their loved ones in a psychiatric ward. I honestly believe hardened criminals in prison could possibly be treated in a more respectful way than some families loved ones. I would dearly like to elaborate in person."

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

"I have the benefit of 22 months of experience in the system as a parent who has endured her son being admitted to hospital on 8 occasions from the age of 19 to 21. My son was in hospital for Christmas 2017, 2018 and for his 21st birthday in January 2019 It was the inconsistent practice of triage in the emergency department at [REDACTED] hospital and the care of patients in the psychiatric wards, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] that made me question the attributes and qualities needs critical attention. The nurses were completely disengaged from patients and in 15 days I visited my son they were mostly in an office on computers or talking to each other. How about less paper work and more care and relationship building with patients. Please afford me opportunity to elaborate."

**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?**

"I think it is influenced by the ability of mental health practitioners to build trust, compassion and consistent care that will help people living with mental illness realise their opportunities."

**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?**

"The culture of apathy, disengagement and inconsistent policy and practice in hospitals. It is utterly dehumanising. "

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

A Regulatory Authority. Victorian core values Clear and transparent policy and procedures A code of conduct and professional standards Performance management and ongoing professional development Open discussions about mental illness and suicide Education from early childhood to adulthood parenting courses to build resilience and confidence to speak out

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

Please listen to and talk to people who inform the commission. I am a willing advocate for my son and the improvement of Victorian mental health system. Thank you for the opportunity to participate and I trust you will use information from participants to inform the reforms to the mental health system.