

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

Organisation Name

N/A

Name

Mr Ben Day

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

"By normalising it. That it's not weird or you're crazy. That it's ok to have emotions and to feel and understand them. Put it out there on the tv or youtube that mental illness is just as common as the cold, or a bad back. For example, if I say to my boss I can't go to work/or have to be on restricted duties at work because I have a broken arm. No one really seems phased by it. But if I were to say I can't because I'm struggling/my head's not in it today/I'm so anxious or depressed, there's still a large feeling of you're either being a s**t or you belong in a nut house on crazy pills. It shouldn't be like this. The boss could respond with something like, "'not a problem. Do what you need to do at home and let us know when you're ready to back. We've got a lot of stuff you can do so you feel productive and not so pressured. Thanks for letting us know'" Or the ad could be as simple as someone talking to some mates at a bbq, dinner or (in my case) a construction site. The mates don't skip a beat and listen and help out."

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?

"I think people, particularly a lot of the younger generation, have a better understanding of how to access this area. Therefore, it's easier to get an understanding of being aware of the illness, which is the crucial point. Once people are aware of it, they can move forward to getting help. From this, things that used to be rather hush hush, become the norm. And that makes it easier to be accepted. Recently I've found the workplace to be more vocal about getting the word out on mental illness. At my work newsletters are sent out about awareness, managers have communicated about being approachable to talk and being open to making alternate arrangements to help people stay employed; and meetings have been held letting workers know that the company takes mental illness seriously and help is available. Communication, Acknowledgement and Allowing oneself to feel emotions and be ok with that. "

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

See previous

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'm lucky. I had/have a very good support network with my spouse, friends, family and work colleagues. Without this, I would struggle to make it through the day without feeling overwhelmed. Not having time for myself, I found I suffered greatly. I had to stop trying to please everyone else and really start taking care of myself first, to the point of being what I call 'good' or 'healthy selfish', which is really hard to begin with. But taking time out for hobbies, exercise, movies, simply focusing on breathing for a few quiet minutes can help. Not getting enough sleep played a huge

factor in my anxiety and stress. Being a tradie and a dad with young children and a new baby, bad sleep patterns just happen. Sure, it's easy to say people can function with just 5 ish hours sleep, but how well are they really functioning?"

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

"I'm not sure exactly, but I'd say a lack of education. mostly regarding Awareness and acceptance of mental health and then steps to helping people get treated."

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

"The confidence to be able to communicate with each other, but not just the token 'how ya doin?' or 'let me know if you want to chat.' and leaving it there. Being comfortable with asking when, and when not to, ask the hard/deeper questions. It's hard to really open up to close family and friends for a lot of people, and it doesn't usually happen until breaking point. By then, nothing constructive gets talked about, just emotional ramblings. Getting it out there that it's ok to have emotions and talk about them, I find, is really important."

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

"Being able to talk to others who are less fortunate about their mutual suffering. In my case, I've been lucky to be able to afford an excellent counsellor out of my own pocket. I know people and friends who simply can't afford that type of treatment which they very well may benefit from. So I feel I need to give them advise and encouragement to a level I'm comfortable with. A lot of my friends, my self included, are new to parenting. Getting to places is much harder with kids and new parents need to have access to to a reliable source of advise and help. Social media posts about self help and complaints DON'T count."

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?

"https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_1PNZdHq6Q Above is a link I found really helpful. As a sufferer of Anxiety and extreme stress, I've found what has helped out most are two main things. 1. Communication and awareness of the problem. From there we can better understand how it affects the people and their lives. This can be done by (again) making it part of everyday life. People complain about colds and bad backs, let's make it normal to complain about having a bad mental health. 2. We need a change in culture. There's still a stigma of the whole 'suck it up', or 'stop being a sook'. I feel that's largely due to the fact that people are responding that way because of lack of education of fear of the unknown."

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

"Get people/companies and investors/tv networks/ social media on board to (for lack of a better

term) showing it peoples faces that mental illness is very common, it's ok to have it and there are many ways to get the help they need."

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

N/A