

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?

" General Practitioners need to receive training in dealing with people with mental health issues, because they are the first point of contact. They should also outline the risks when prescribing antidepressants. My GP ruined my life, because I had an adverse reaction to an SSRI, and she was not aware of the "rare", risks associated with antidepressants use. If someone has anxiety, doctors should not just push pills. It has taken 5 years for my brain to recover and I am still not 100%. On top of that, I have a genetic mutation and I am a slow metaboliser of the drugs. The genetic test should be compulsory before prescribing any antidepressants to patients by a GP or a psychiatrist. Stigma can be reduced by people having access to psychologists, mental health retreats that are covered by Medicare. When I experienced an adverse reaction to an SSRI after taking only 3 pills, I became extremely depressed and suicidal. My GP did nothing to help me, when I returned to see her. She kept saying that the symptoms will go away in 2 weeks time, but the discontinuation syndrome continued for years. I became suicidal because not one doctor understood what happened to me. I felt completely alone and marginalized. I had anxiety when I saw my "trusted", GP of 10 years, and walked out of her office a complete mess and I have never been the same. There was nowhere to turn to get help. I was not your typical depressed patient, that suffered depression for years. I never had depression until I was given an SSRI. The sheer ignorance I faced by medical practitioners was extremely frustrating and isolating. Not being believed led me to sheer desperation. I felt discriminated because I was not the "norm". Trying to find help was a sheer waste of money and time. The most laughable part is when I went to [REDACTED] Clinic and the person who assessed me, put in my file that I was of "average" intelligence without doing an IQ test. It is comical that assumptions can be made about a patient without scientific evidence and that sums up the discrimination and stigma someone with mental health issues faces."

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?

"Easier access to mental health services at minimal cost to the patient. I have no positive experience to report, therefore I can not comment on what is already "working well". "

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

" I don't believe that anything is working well when trying to access mental health services. No one cares if you are feeling suicidal. Community Health services offer very little support and the private sector is only interested in pushing pills. My GP did not care that I was feeling low, and had to wait almost 1 month to see a psychiatrist, but luckily through another doctor, I managed to see someone else earlier. Accessibility and accountability on the part of the medical practitioner is crucial and having a mental health retreat is crucial. "

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.

"In my own experience, finances play a big factor how easily a person can access treatment for mental health. I spent thousands of dollars trying to get help after I had an adverse reaction to an antidepressant. I was faced with ignorance by my GP and at least 5 psychiatrists. Not only that at one clinic, the receptionist treated me extremely poorly because of the stigma attached to seeing a "psychiatrist". I became frustrated by the ignorance I faced when trying to find help, and only one psychiatrist was willing to admit that the symptoms I was experiencing was the result of the neuro-toxicity from an SSRI. I feel that there are a lot of people in my position, but we don't have a voice. Psychiatrists and GP's only know how to push pills and when someone like me comes along, they don't know what to do. They don't offer any other long term help and there is zero help for people like myself who have been damaged by the medication and no way of suing doctors in question, because they did not know about the "rare" side effects of the medication. No one cares when you end up with an acquired brain injury from the so called "treatment". There should be better treatments available for people with anxiety, rather than just pushing pills and causing addiction. I ended up addicted to another antidepressant that my psychiatrist prescribed after an adverse reaction. It took 4 and a bit years to taper off the drug. No one warns you about this. Doctors are so damn ignorant about this, it makes me extremely angry. The commission needs to also look at how antidepressants, can cause greater damage than good, when it comes to mental health treatment. It is being prescribed by the doctors carelessly and in my case absolutely life changing. Please make genetic test compulsory before prescribing antidepressants to patients. This could help so many people from being damaged by the very treatment that is supposed to help."

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

" Financial Issues. To see a medical practitioner, psychiatrist, psychologists costs money. Not much is covered by medicare and psychiatrists charge different rates for the same consultation. Different medical rebate applies for different psychiatrists. Charges should be standardized across the board and greater rebate should apply through Medicare when seeing mental health practitioners. There should be a mental health retreat available through medicare, where people can go and get all the help they need in a holistic setting. There is nothing like that currently available, only if the person can afford to pay \$10,000-\$40,000 for a private retreat. Only people with drug and alcohol problems can access rehabs, but people with mental health issues can not, especially if the person has an anxiety disorder. It is not taken seriously. Accessing a psychologist is also difficult because of the cost involved. The current mental health plan does not cover much, and the 10 sessions that are currently covered through Medicare, barely scratch the surface. The problem with that is that you still have to pay and lot of people don't bother seeking help for that reason. The government needs to put more financial resources into mental health for wider accessibility by the communities in need. Access to mental health services should be free. "

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

" Access to psychologists, some one to talk to. "

What can be done to attract, retain and better support the mental health workforce,

including peer support workers?

"Not sure, irrelevant question to my experience. "

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?

" Create jobs that support people with mental health issues. If someone is prone to stress /anxiety they are still cable of doing the job, but need regular breaks. Employers should learn to accommodate that. "

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?

" Easier access to mental health services. You should not have to wait one month to see someone for help. By that time it coul be too late. There should be a Royal Commission into how antidepressants are prescribed by GP's and Psychiatrists and patients like me should be heard loud and clear. I am a victim of unnecessary drug pushing and I should be heard and not ignored. Change the law so that the doctors who cause brain damage to their patients by prescribing antidepressants, can be sued. Current law protects the GP'S from being sued, because what I experienced is considered ""rare."" My brain was injured because of the so called treatment that was supposed to help me. I am educated and had plans for my future, but I have not been able to work because of the discontinuation syndrome. In my opinion GP's should be banned from prescribing antidepressants. They lack education and training in regards to the affects of psychotropic medication on the brain. Psychiatrists should be closely monitored for over prescribing medication. Free access to psychologists, or minimal fees charged. Psychiatrists should not be just drug pushers, but also offer alternative support. The ideal mental health system would be the one that offers substantial support rather than band aid solutions. Most people with mental health issues are offered drugs as first point of treatment. Drugs are a band aid solution, and should be only prescribed to patients who suffer from psychosis and not for people with anxiety issues . I want to see holistic approach to mental health treatment. I would like to see free access to psyclogists, more bulk billing psychiatrists, greater medicare rebate for mental health. Mental health recovery centers, that offer psychologists, nutritionists, art therapy accupuncture, under one roof. Easier access to community care, such as counselling, employment opportunities for mental health patients, welness and mental health programs that incorporate Art therapy, meditation, etc. There is not enough access to these types of services and waiting times are too long. Mandatory genetic test before prescribing psychotropic medication should become the norm, in order to minimize harm to patients. Every GP practice should have a psychologist as well or mental health nurse. "

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

"Build mental health recovery centers, retreats. Incorporate holistic approach to healing. Sometimes people who experience suicidal ideation, mental breakdown, depression, need a safe place to go to just to regroup and recover. They don't need to be in a hospital environment. Support also need to be offered to patients that are coming off antidepressants. There is nothing like it in this country . Most doctors don't have a clue how to get patients safely off Antidepressants. It takes years and not months. It takes years for the brain to recover too. Too much ignorance in regards to this issue amongst the medical professionals and zero support in

regards to this matter. It is time for medical professionals to have this conversation. "

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

N/A