

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

## Organisation Name

Belgravia Leisure & Belgravia Foundation

## Name

Dr Jeff Walkley

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

"The Take Charge (TC) is a unique evidence-based program designed to (1) connect people living with mental illness (MI) to local, accessible, affordable and effective exercise opportunities to achieve improved health and happiness, and (2) train and resource leisure centre staff to welcome and support into leisure facilities, services and programs people living with MI, a group research has confirmed remain under-represented in access and inclusion in leisure facilities. TC was initiated by Belgravia Leisure in Sydney (NSW) in 2017, and scale-up to locations in Victoria has commenced at Melton, with implementation in the Yarra Ranges imminent. Belgravia Leisure and the Belgravia Foundation intend to further scale-up TC throughout Victoria, and Australia. TC provides youth and adult participants a free 60-day program supported by trained fitness professionals. It is a referral-based program, with referrals from medical or allied health professionals. Based on best practice guidelines, participant's unique needs are at the core of service provision, with fitness professionals providing support for achievement of these, concurrently with nurturing a social network for each participant to create social engagement and reduce isolation, and a sense of presence in a community-based environment. Ongoing access and inclusion after 60-days is through negotiated co-contribution toward membership cost, done in recognition of the often difficult financial circumstances experienced by people living with MI.

1. The program is based on: a. Published evidence and guidance ? key examples attached for your convenience (articles number 1-4, summarised in letter of support) b. Expert advice and support from Dr Joe Firth (Western Sydney University), aided by Dr Simon Rosebaum (UNSW) and Professor Alison Yung (Orygen Youth Health and The University of Melbourne). i. Dr Firth and Professor Yung are active collaborators, with whom we will work to continue to refine, improve and evaluate the program. 2. The program key features are described below, supplemented by attached documents: a. Staff training to provide layers of support designed to welcome and aid a person living with mental illness to access and benefit from the facilities, programs and services available in leisure facilities operated by Belgravia Leisure, including i. Understanding mental health ? currently a 2.5 hour workshop, with an online program under development and to undertake field trials through to September 2019, followed by all staff employed by Belgravia Leisure completing the training (~5,000 staff organisation-wide) 1. Research initiated by the Belgravia Foundation, supported by Belgravia Leisure and completed by Monash University (Dr Justen O'Connor and A/Professor Ruth Jeanes) revealed Belgravia Leisure staff reported a lack of understanding, knowledge and confidence to welcome and support people living with mental illness to leisure facilities, services and programs. 2. The Understanding Mental Health workshop is designed to demystify mental illness, and enable leisure centre staff to become more able to welcome and support people living with MI to leisure facilities, services and programs. ii. Mental Health First Aid ? standard 2-day MHFA course so as to enable improved capacity with leisure facilities to respond and aid people experiencing distress or similar while in a leisure facility iii. Take Charge ? 2.5 workshop to train exercise-related staff to implement the program (which has been

designed to align closely with an existing program we use called 'Face-to-Face' so as to promote uptake, quality assurance and efficiency) b. Entry into the program by referral from a medical or allied health professional so as to provide i. assurance that Take Charge has been determined to be in the best interests of the participant by a health professional (i.e. no contraindications, etc.) ii. guidance to staff so their actions support the mental health plan of the participant iii. support/advice to staff in an ongoing manner while the participant is involved with the program iv. a point of contact for staff to refer should concerns arise in regard the participants health c. Intake processes i. managed by a single staff member (typically an Inclusion Coordinator or Community Engagement Coordinator) so as to promote quality assurance leading to best outcomes for participants and staff ii. with controls on participant flow' so as to manage volume and workloads d. Participant choice and control are central and embedded in the processes whereby the participant decides the outcomes they wish to work toward, and our staff personalise the program to support this achievement. Take Charge is not a one-size-fits-all' product ?it is a process to support engagement in regular exercise by a person living with mental illness. e. No cost, and then low-cost. i. TC is free for the first 60-days, in light of the known financial challenges typically encountered by people living with mental illness 1. The cost for this 60-day period of free service is met by Belgravia Leisure ii. After 60-days, a negotiated co-contribution from the participant occurs, so as to promote 1. typical activity of daily life, whereby people pay for services 2. empowerment and control within the participant through the making of a personal financial contribution to their wellbeing f. Evidence-based practice, whereby i. the program has been established and continues using this feature ii. information is to be gathered to provide evidence of participant and program outcomes and outputs (see program survey and participant questionnaires, and Handbook) g. Linkage with other innovations being undertaken by Belgravia Leisure, including i. Partners in Health program, designed to have medical and allied health practices co-locating and collaborating (i.e. referrals) with Belgravia Leisure sites ii. ActiveXchange, a system for identification and matching of people to locally available leisure services aligned with outcomes people are seeking. Recommendation: The Victorian Government provides financial support to allow for the refinement, evaluation, and implementation of the Take Charge program throughout Victoria. "

### **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?**

"The Take Charge initiative is unique and different to existing community-based programs within the leisure and health industries, substantiated by: 1. No similar evidence-based program has been developed for youth and adults living with mental illness, trialled, undergoing refinement and evaluation, and in the early stages of national scale-up 2. No similar program has achieved collaboration from internationally renowned experts in mental health and exercise 3. No similar program has embraced an action research process of continual evaluation and refinement supported by some of the world's best researchers and research-aligned organisations and universities 4. No similar program puts staff development at its core, which is a major deficit as staff capacity to welcome and support access and inclusion of those who are marginalised from regular exercise in leisure, sport, aquatic and fitness facilities has been confirmed through research as being the most important factor that supports or hinders engagement by such people 5. No similar program has been embedded and prominently included in the strategic planning of an operator of leisure, sport, aquatic or fitness facilities 6. No similar program has aligned with medical and health services resulting in a pathway for participants to improved access and inclusion in community-based services underpinned by and supporting each person's mental health plan The goal of the Take Charge initiative is to address this gap, and create new locally available,

accessible, affordable and effective support for people living with mental illness, and train staff working in leisure facilities to welcome and support these people toward improved health and happiness. Outputs from the Take Charge initiative include: 1.350 people living with MI have been engaged and benefitted through the TC program. 2.Training of staff, including a.60 in Understanding Mental Health (with an online version of this ready for field trials followed by roll-out organisation wide to all staff planned to commence later in 2019 to ~5,000 b.10 in Mental Health First Aid c.2 as instructors of Mental Health First Aid eligible to deliver MHFA training to staff 3.Collaborations with over 15 organisations linked to the sector providing mental health services, advocacy, and research No independent formal research has yet been undertaken of the Take Charge program. Work to secure funding to permit this continues to be sought. Anecdotal information from the field trials of Take Charge with over 350 participants has shown they achieved: 1.high levels of participation and engagement 2.increased physical health through improvements in overweight/obesity, strength, cardiorespiratory function, better sleep, and improved levels of energy, and less fatigue 3.increased psychological health through improved feelings of perceived competence, achievement, capability and control 4.lower levels of psychological distress 5.improved social health through improved social networks resulting in more social connectedness and supports, and less isolation "

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

No response

### **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.**

" Mental Health service availability and uptake remain a challenge for people living with mental illness in Australia. Take Charge has been designed to (1) connect people living with mental illness (MI) to local, accessible, affordable and effective exercise opportunities to achieve improved health and happiness, and (2) train and resource leisure centre staff to welcome and support into leisure facilities, services and programs people living with MI, a group research has confirmed remain under-represented in access and inclusion in leisure facilities. Take Charge provides youth and adult participants a free 60-day program supported by trained fitness professionals. It is a referral-based program, with referrals from medical or allied health professionals. Based on best practice guidelines, participant's unique needs are at the core of service provision, with fitness professionals providing support for achievement of these, concurrently with nurturing a social network for each participant to create social engagement and reduce isolation, and a sense of presence in a community-based environment. Ongoing access and inclusion after 60-days is through negotiated co-contribution toward membership cost, done in recognition of the often difficult financial circumstances experienced by people living with MI. Belgravia Leisure and Belgravia Foundation is actively working with over 15 leading organisations that are linked with mental health services, advocacy and research. Additionally, Government and health promotion organisations have linked with Belgravia Leisure to explore implementation of Take Charge in local, regional, and state-wide initiatives. Locally, links with medical and allied health professionals are made to support local awareness of the program, and referrals into the program. Additionally, to inform the leisure and related sectors, Belgravia Leisure has actively promoted the Take Charge program through publications, conference presentations, submissions for grants and to inquiries, and advocacy. That the Take Charge initiative has achieved excellence is most prominently shown by its inclusion in an upcoming August 2019 publication in

the highly prestigious medical publication Lancet Commission. An article, led by Dr Joe Firth, on approaches to supporting people living with MI, Take Charge will be featured as an exemplar for excellence in community-based accessible, inclusive, low-cost and effective initiatives supporting people living with MI. "

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

"Leisure facilities provide key local community assets, for which the health promotion potential has not been realised. Staff working in leisure facilities, who concurrently typically live in the locality they work, report low understanding, knowledge, and confidence to support people living with mental illness to benefit from access and inclusion in local leisure facilities, services and programs. To support improved service availability and uptake of an evidence-based program designed to improve the mental health outcomes for those living with mental illness, Belgravia Leisure and Belgravia Foundation have created and are implementing Take Charge as a contribution to the community. "

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

No response.

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

No response.

**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?**

"Take Charge is designed to create improved health, happiness, social networking, reduced isolation, and participation in community life with a purpose"

**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?**

"Belgravia Leisure and Belgravia Foundation recommend more investment in effective, accessible and affordable programs like Take Charge. Recommendation: The Victorian Government provides financial support to allow for the refinement, evaluation, and implementation of the Take Charge program throughout Victoria. "

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

"Belgravia Leisure and Belgravia Foundation recommend more investment in effective, accessible and affordable programs like Take Charge. Recommendation: The Victorian Government provides financial support to allow for the refinement, evaluation, and implementation of the Take Charge program throughout Victoria. "

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

No response.