

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

## Organisation Name

N/A

## Name

Ms Talia Dow

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

"More television advertising that explains mental illness, more education to students in secondary schools, more professional development programs about mental health offered to staff in employment settings especially within the police force."

### **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?**

Education about the early warning signs for common mental illnesses may prompt more people to consult their GP before their mental illness is difficult to treat. More education around how to understand and process emotions may reduce the number of people who present with a mental illness. More support groups for people who are having a tough time or who want to connect with others who understand what they are going through. Connection and a feeling of belonging reduces symptoms of mental illness.

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

The suicide hotlines work reasonably well but not for people who are too scared to pick up the phone. More app based suicide prevention services might be more useful. This way the person can text their message which is much less frightening.

### **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.**

"Many people find it difficult to experience good mental health because our lives are too busy and the expectations we are meant to live up to are unachievable. Navigating the system is difficult as a lot of the information is conflicting. My main concern is with Psychiatrists. After a 1 hour consultation I was prescribed medication for my mental illness. There were no neurological scans, no testing of my neuro-chemistry, just a diagnosis that was determined by what I had said and how I had acted within a 60 min period. I was told that there was no way of knowing how I would react to the medication until I had tried it and it would take 3 weeks before the initial side effects wore off. Basically it was a trial and error method of treatment. This isn't good enough! "

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

I am not 100% sure but I would suspect that some of the drivers would be: - Low socio-economic background (less opportunities for people to reach their goals or do activities they enjoy) - Isolation (craving connection) - Cultural diversity (not feeling welcome or included) More community activities that were inclusive of all cultures may help. Also more opportunities for low income

families to participate in regular activities at a lower cost.

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

More support groups and information services are needed. Also more app based support services could help.

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

More Psych Nurses are needed so the staff dont become overwhelmed with requests from patients. Psych staff also need to learn that it is unacceptable to treat a psych patient like they are an in-mate. I am unsure what can be done to attract more mental health workers. I think introducing Psychology as a subject in secondary schools was an excellent idea.

**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?**

"More employees need to be aware of the adjustments that may need to be made for a staff member with a mental illness. This would allow employees with mental illness to be honest about why they are taking time off work, rather than having to hide it. More part time employment opportunities or flexible work hours might allow someone with a mental illness have the capacity to secure employment."

**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?**

"More support groups. Connection is key. Better care in hospitals - holistic assessments, individual counselling and group therapy, not just the prescription of medications by staff who treat you like a criminal. Better treatment options for people who have a dual diagnosis."

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

Re-education of current mental health workforce to ensure they understand the new reforms and to redefine their expectations.

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

"Addiction to alcohol and other drugs is a mental illness, however there is still a huge stigma attached to addiction. I believe it is time to re-educate society so they have a better understanding about addiction, how it manifests and how to seek treatment. "