

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

## Organisation Name

N/A

## Name

Mr. Oscar de Lorenzo

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

"In regards to depression of children under 18 years due to passing of a parent. Teach classes in primary and secondary school about mental illness and depression. Most children first learn about depression and mental illness through some form of treatment or specialized unit (eg. VCE Psychology Unit 1/2) instead of generally in the class room. Children learning about depression and how it works at a young age can help them and their peers in future years to deal better with depression and provide better support to their peers that maybe going through depression themselves. Classes that also touch on dealing with the loss of someone close could improve the education around what happens when a child loses someone close to them, what they may go through and how they can open up or seek help when it happens. Since children like stories, telling it as a story could be a good way to convey the message to young kids in primary school. Secondary school it would be best to tell it directly and straight."

### **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?**

"In regards to depression of children under 18 years due to passing of a parent. What is working well - BeyondBlue and LifeLine are good supportive tools to ask for general information in regards to depression and suicide. - Most school have a counselor present on site to help support children. What can be done better to prevent mental illness? - Early treatment is key. Most issues that adults have often are the result of an untreated issue or illness that has gone untreated throughout school. - There needs to be more information to help kids, families and school administrators on how to properly deal with a child if one of their parents pass away. The SA government have a page or so about this (<https://www.education.sa.gov.au/parenting-and-child-care/parenting/parenting-sa/parent-easy-guides/grief-and-loss-parent-easy-guide>) but there is nothing for Victoria. Canteen also have a small article about this (<https://www.canteen.org.au/friends-and-family/helping-young-people-deal-with-loss/#>), but it is extremely small and does not deal with helping the parents, child or the school. - More information specifically for each stakeholder is needed in order to deal with this issue. It is very easy without support for a child to get into drugs, a bad group of friends, crime or suicide without the right kind of help. - Parents need a template on how to deal with their child when they lose one of their parents and what they may need to do to support their child as well as themselves. Children need to be at least talking with a therapist or communicating regularly with someone on how well they are doing. Schools need a template to know how to provide support to a child and their family. For example, if a child's grades start slipping after the passing of a parent or their attendance at school starts to slip, that should be an indicator the child needs support and help and more intervention may be required. - Providing ongoing support to children who have lost a parent is critical to prevent other mental illnesses from manifesting within that child and carrying on into adulthood."

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

"In regards to depression of children under 18 years due to passing of a parent. A person under 18 years needs to have a social life, not feel left out and connect with other people. If they feel isolated and depressed or even if they exclude themselves from any social activities, it is very easy for them to spiral down, become more depressed and eventually look into suicide either as a call for help or to end their suffering."

**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 regards to depression of children under 18 years due to passing of a parent. I believe there is a lack of a framework and an action plan in regards to supporting kids who have lost a parent in schools, both public and private. There seems to be no framework for schools, parents and even children to know what to do or how to approach a situation like this. It becomes very hard to even measure what measures may work and what measures may not work or even to identify improvements on the treatment/support provided. In order to improve this, I would propose two recommendations. - Provide a framework to all schools on how to deal and adequately support kids who's parents have passed away. A framework for the school, parent and child should be made to help give as much support to all parties as possible. Schools should keep in contact with the child's parent since the child or children will most look up to that parent and the parent can work with the school in tandem to support the child or children as much as possible. - A website for supporting family members as a result of the death of a loved one. A section for kids, schools, parents and even organisations can help provide a framework and a method of action to best provide support to those during their loss. This is something that is currently not present in Victoria."

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

I do not have the knowledge to answer this question constructively.

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

"In regards to depression of children under 18 years due to passing of a parent. The family will have had one of the two most important people supporting the kids pass away. Their need will be stability in one way or another. Often families will try to an extent to fill the gap that the deceased parent had. Often this comes about by other family members taking on the roles of that deceased parent, but other times they may use other people to fill in the gap. For example one parent may start dating soon after or the child or children can start getting into relationships for all the wrong reasons. This can lead to a breaking of the family foundations that initially supported the family and a child developing serious mental issues within a couple of years. To better support a family from fracturing or feeling isolated dealing with these problems, schools and the government can provide support in the way of guides, advice or subsidies for support services. Providing services, offering referrals and information about their situation can all help a family better manage this tragic situation. One way of support can be for the government to keep a tab on children that loose parents during their school years, monitoring their progress and making sure they are getting as much help as they require from the school they are at. This would apply to public, private and

religious schools."

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

"There are three ways I think could help attract, retain and support mental health workers. - Allowing for mental health workers to learn a variety of skills on the job. If mental health workers can learn a variety of skills that are transferable to other areas of the economy or the mental health industry, then this can help incentivise people to be apart of the mental health industry. For example, personal skills of dealing with difficult situations, remaining calm under pressure, managing programs to support the mentally disabled, report writing skills or using programs including Excel, Word and SQL. If people see a benefit to the work in the long term, then there will be more incentive career wise to pursue this pathway. - Allowing for a degree of autonomy within their work and establishing their own projects, for example establishing talk groups for addictions, illnesses or traumas that are available to the wider public. Workers can do amazing things when they are given autonomy with their work. - Gateway programs for mental health workers to move into jobs within the health industry. For example, if they have five years of experience in mental health, they can undergo an accelerated course that if passed will allow them to study nursing, medicine or another area pertaining to health or mental health. There are a huge number of people who want to study medicine. It might be more effective having those people work in mental health for a few years and do a 1-year pre-medicine test course than studying for three years at university to attain a degree they will not use just to get into medicine."

**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 do not have the knowledge to answer this question constructively.

**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?**

"Personally, I would like to see the design, build and implementation of a framework of support for children who's parents have passed away to be prioritized. Speaking personally, there is almost no support nor framework out there for children or families in this situation, they are merely left to themselves or offered a counselor's support if they choose. Providing this framework and having the government and school work together to support a child and their family can prevent mental illness issues from arising in the future with either that family or that child. I would also recommend constructing two website. The first specifically deals with supporting families and children with the death of a parent or loved one. Again, there is no website in Australia that provides this support and Victoria could be the first in the country to do so. The second is a website that can be a HUB for all mental services within the state. For example, if you search bereavement, this website will give you information on bereavement, how it works and support services around the state. One of the biggest issues I believe we have in our society is people do not get treatment or support because they do not know where to get it."

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

"What can be done now to prepare for changes to Victorias mental health system The State of Victoria increased its population from 4 million to 5 million from 1971 to around 2004

([https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0014/14036/Victoria-in-Future-2016-FINAL-web.pdf](https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/14036/Victoria-in-Future-2016-FINAL-web.pdf)). It took Victoria 33 years to increase its size by 1 million. Now the population is 6.36 million as of 2017 and is projected to grow around 2% compounding each year (<http://www.population.net.au/population-of-victoria/>). Since there is no projected plateau, Victoria seems to be moving into a period of exponential growth which will put massive strains on the health system and presumptively increase the amount of mentally ill and disabled people that may not be properly identified as needing support. The main way I believe can best help improve Victoria's mental health is providing supportive and contact information as efficiently as possible through websites. Building a website that is a HUB for a HUB for all mental services within the state. This can be a point of reference, where people can look up information regarding support for a particular mental issue and can be directed to organisations that specialise in those areas or education material on a certain type of mental illness. For example, if one looks up on this website issues relating to depression family tragedy, this website can direct them to information, doctors and websites that specialise in these kinds of areas. There will need to be a campaign to promote this website in order for people to know it exists and for anyone to easily find and/or be directed to information regarding mental health and awareness. When it comes to supporting improvements to last, I believe creating the website will be a cheap and effective way to help people find the support and treatment they may need. Other than a website, I do not believe I have the knowledge of the mental health system to answer this part of the question any further."

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

"I have spoken from the perspective of someone who lost their mother in 2008 when I was 16. It was a traumatic time of my life. It was a situation that I believe, in hindsight, could have been handled with more care in different ways. I hope no child has to go through their childhood and have either of their parents taken from them. But if it happens, I hope they can get the support and care I wish I had when my mom was taken away from me."