

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

Organisation Name

N/A

Name

Mr Oscar Alateras

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

"One of the many heart-breaking facts about our society is that people play the role of judge, jury, and executioner. They judge others, elect themselves as their own jury to come to a decision that people should be treated based on who they are. If they are normal, they should be treated normally, but if they are different, that is no longer the case. We need to teach everyone that no-one has the right to come to the conclusion of whether someone is different or normal, because truth be told, there is no different or normal, there is no right or wrong when it comes to who you are; there is just us. We are all unique and different in our own special way, and that is what makes us all amazing. We need to teach people that it is okay to be different and that in fact, we should embrace our differences with confidence. More importantly, we need to teach each and every member of society that everyone should be treated as equals. No-one is more or less than any other person in the world. All in all, we need to teach people from a young age, the proper way to respectfully treat others. This will build a good foundation for healthy relationships in the future, allowing stigma and discrimination to decrease, simultaneously doing the same to the number of people experiencing mental illnesses."

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 this question, I am going to be focused on the youth - in high schools in particular. There is a strong correspondence between the number of schools that have a solid mental health support system and the number of students experiencing a mental illness. The schools with a strong support system have fewer students going through a mental illness. The reason for this is because these students know that when they are feeling down, they are able to seek professional help in a place they spend 30+ hours each week. Unfortunately, many schools don't have an adequate mental health support system, which means when students are facing a mental illness at school, such as anxiety, there are no professionals to offer them support, meaning they are left to solve the issue in their own head. This never ends well as they are now bottling up their emotions. My request is that the government makes a considerable effort to ensure that ALL schools have a sufficient mental health support system so that all students know that they are not alone and can always turn to professional help. One thing that is already working well is how people are continuing to raise awareness that it is okay to not be okay. So often we are afraid of admitting that we are not okay because we are afraid of being perceived as weak or vulnerable by others. It has been a massive help that so many members of the community are raising awareness that it doesn't make you weak to admit you are not okay, but that it makes you strong instead."

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

"One thing that is really helping is the open suicide hotlines available. This means that when people are experiencing suicidal thoughts, they have people to contact 24/7 who can talk to them,

listen to what they have to say, and most importantly, actively help them. I think one thing that needs to be talked about is the impact our actions have on others - as sometimes, they can lead to people committing suicide. If we can educate people about the potential impact their actions can have on others and the adversity it can cause, then it will make people think carefully about the way they treat others. If we can improve the way members of society treat each other, then that will be one massive step forward in better preventing suicide - educating of the potential impacts our actions have on others is an excellent way to do just that."

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.

"As I mentioned previously, the reason people are having so much trouble experiencing good and stable mental health is because of how society works. If we identify someone to be different in any way, shape or form, we target that difference and treat them differently as a result. This often makes people feel like they are not accepted and do not belong in a certain community or group. This sort of treatment has the potential to severely degrade an individual's mental health. Furthermore, there are many schools that do not have an adequate mental health support system. The high school environment, in particular, is a very toxic one, as people are treated based on their 'so-called differences.' This way of treatment often makes students feel lonely and anxious, leading to a high rate of mental illnesses within high schools. When schools do not have an adequate mental health support system, students do not have the option to seek professional help from within a place where they spend 30+ hours each week. These leaves them to continue to deal with the issue themselves - which never ends well as teenagers will bottle up their emotions and overthink the issue to the point where it seems worse in their head than it is in reality."

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

"A driver behind some Victorian communities experiencing poor mental health outcomes is the accessibility to mental health support services, as well as the lack of education to members of the community regarding the proper way to treat others. If we can make these mental health support services more accessible, affordable and stronger than they already are, people experiencing a mental illness will have an easy way to seek support and health. Moreover, further education on the right and respectful way to treat others will cause there to be a noticeable reduction in mental illnesses stemming from the way they were treated - which is something that needs to be addressed as soon as possible."

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

"The issue is, these family members and carers are trying to help someone with mental illness, but many do not know the best way to do so. If we can teach them effective techniques and methods in which they can help those around them who are going through a mental illness, it will allow them to offer support in a more effective and efficient manner. Furthermore, with someone helping you in an effective way, it helps take even more of the load off the shoulders of the person experiencing the mental illness."

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

including peer support workers?

"To attract and retain members of the mental health workforce, we must make them aware of just how valued they are. Sometimes these people aren't sure if they are really helping others, but once we make them aware of just how much of an amazing effect they are having, it makes them more likely to join and stay with the workforce and field. In regards to better-supporting members in the workforce, we need to make them aware that if they are ever experiencing mental health issues, they have people to go to. Often, people working in the mental health field feel weak if they are experiencing mental illness. We need to let them know that it is okay to not be okay and that there are people who can help them in the same way they help others. I have noticed this is not the case in many mental health workforces and would like to see it improved."

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?

"There are already so many opportunities for people living with mental illness to improve their social and economic participation. Of course, it would certainly increase the number of these opportunities, but personally, I believe that it is important to let people know they have this option. So many people are unaware they actually have the option and therefore, do not use it. If we can raise awareness that they have this option, they will use it, which will not only improve the social and economic aspects of their life, but their entire life as a whole."

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?

"I would like the Royal Commission to prioritise change and improvements in the mental health support system of schools. Students spend 30+ hours at school every week, and it would make a noticeable difference in their overall mental health if each and every student had the option to seek professional help when needed."

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

"I think to make sure these improvements last, we need to have both a short term plan in place to implement change, but also a long-term one. By having a solid long-term plan, it will ensure that these changes and improvements do in fact last."

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

"I just want to stress the need to focus on the mental health support systems of schools. They need to be improved. The number of students experiencing a mental health illness is alarming and quite frightening. These students deserve so much better, and there needs to be more effort and attention put into the mental health support system of schools so that all students have the ability to seek adequate professional help when needed"