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

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

"Alcohol needs to be addressed. It is everywhere in our culture and it is poison. I believe more awareness of real science behind drugs is needed. Not the propaganda we grew up with. Drugs are drugs. Some are better for you some are worse. The amount of tradies I know that have utter contempt for people who do drugs, but then down a six pack every single night. Do what you want, but be aware and informed and consistent. More campaigns aimed at humanising the problem will aid in reform and public engagement, helping to minimise discrimination and hypocrisy as well. "

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?

"Being able to get a mental health plan annually is amazing. It has literally saved my life in my dark times. However it only allows the patient access to very low-level help. Anyone with a fast mind will be two steps ahead of a counsellor and that allows the patient to subconsciously manipulate the conversation, and not get the real help they need. Someone with a decent qualification and the wit to keep up with highly intelligent people costs a lot of money. When I was struggling I was also broke. I couldn't get the help I needed for a long time because I was a slave to my issues, and avoided every attempt at breaking through from counsellors. It wasn't until years later that I had the means to see a psychologist rather than a social worker, and found myself being treated and helped rather than read a script. There are great social workers out there and I mean no disrespect. Simply stating that some people need higher level help than others and the current system doesn't allow for that. An additional annual visit to a psychologist or psychiatrist as part of the mental health plan would help to guide and add insight. If nothing else it's simply a second opinion. "

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

"Lifeline is a godsend. I've never rung, but knowing it was there meant the world to me when I was alone. My personal experience with suicide was different to most, in that my desire to die (many years ago), wasn't based on any self hatred. I had experienced a life filled with pain, and I wanted out. I remember thinking I had nothing to lose. This wasn't any good so either I get another shot at a better one or I get nothing but darkness and I get to escape. I needed to be shown real kindness in order to break that. Looking back that's what changed me. A strangers kindness. A rekindling of faith. Sometimes the messages sent out in support of those in need seemingly pretend to know what the person is going through. It can alienate those that it doesn't resonate with very quickly. Support is always a good idea. Refining that support is also a good idea. "

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.

Alcohol. Stop selling it everywhere. Stop promoting it everywhere. 80% of the population have a hangover on Sunday and wonder why they have mental health issues. It's a depressant ffs. And it's everywhere. Invading all of our culture. But it's good money so nobody wants to talk about it. When a government starts giving a sh1t about its people this conversation will happen.   You can't fight social media. It has dehumanised our connections but only because of our lack communicative ability. Teach people to have real conversations via text. Yes it's better to sit face to face but people don't do that. Stop fighting progress and start adapting to change.   I can write well. So I find I can have a real connective conversation with people in text form. Most people struggle to convey their true feelings and emotions in text. Beyond surface level anyway. We need more education on how to write well so that we can express well to each other. It's all about how you package it to the public. Would love 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?
"There's always going to be the dodgy part of town. It's a product of economy and location. The poorer part of town has the cheaper housing, collecting the poorer people. For the record that's me I'm not judging I'm just stating facts. Why do poorer people have more crime and mental health issues? Duh. Money. What can we do try and support them better? Is that a question of whether we should support them MORE than other places? Anyone with half a brain knows where the dodgy parts of town are, and that those places need more mental health support and legal support and parenting support.... all of it. Allocate more resources to those that need it. Simple. "

What are the needs of family members and carers and what can be done better to support them?
"There's a good system in place for those that have the occasional need. I have no personal experience with those that need more, so I won't speak to it. "

What can be done to attract, retain and better support the mental health workforce, including peer support workers?
"I'd love to be in the mental health sector. I completed vce psychology out of a textbook in year 9 with my schools chaplin. (I was kicked out of my English class - my teacher was American and could barely speak the language let alone teach it. So I ended up doing off the books psychology instead. I left school to feed myself. I was homeless and I could get a trade and make more money than staying at school. I love what I do but I could have been a psychiatrist if I hadve had the financial support there like I had the schools support.   Even now, how am I supposed to go back to school and finish vce and then do uni? I've got bills to pay. I'm certain (as arrogant as it might be) that I would be excellent in any field I was allowed into, but as a mental health worker I would save lives and feel amazing doing it. But there is no way for me to ever chase that dream and help my community like that. I spend 60-80 hours a week working just to try and pay the rent. "

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?
"A cultural shift is already underway in Australia. It needs to be encouraged. Currently a social outing in Melbourne means drinking and footy, or drinking and a show, or an expensive dinner. With drinks. Personally, I can't stand the idea of a crowd of drunken morons yelling at a ball. I'm not alone in that. We need to stop pretending Australians are all the same. There is a shift towards

variation in nightlife attractions. Gaming lounges. Pool halls are making a comeback. Even bowling. Some of the old ways die and some are worth keeping.   What can the government do? Start having a conversation about why it feels the need to keep its population drunk?"

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?
"Additional allowance in the existing mental health plan for real psychiatric care. A higher amount made available as a return on counselling visits. My psychologist costs $140 an hour. And he's cheap and good. I get half of that paid which means I'm not likely to go. I don't have the money to spend on sitting and talking with someone. A targeted campaign, aimed at drugs. Education that alcohol is a drug. And a pretty bad one too. Help for adults who want to study mental health. You want more people in the field? Pay me to study so I can still survive and I'll do it. "

What can be done now to prepare for changes to Victorias mental health system and support improvements to last?
"We need more people in the mental health sector. People of all walks of life. We need them to be trained properly, not just thrown into the mix.   More education for all about hormones and their role in mental health. Doctors included. Most GP's don't know much about endocrine systems. Specialists are rare and expensive and hard to get time with. "

Is there anything else you would like to share with the Royal Commission?
A hug. Thanks for doing this.