

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

Organisation Name

N/A

Name

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

"It is already happening, but its stigma and dignity, sufferers need to speak and be heard. The work place Human resources ect is not equipt to identify if a staff member maybe be suffering from a mental illness. e.g. my experience I started showing signs absenteeism, my work dropped, instead of asking is there something going on?? I was counselled and put on an work performance improvement notice. Eventualy I left that job after 25 years. Started working temp casual jobs and kept having my contract terminated. This went on for a couple of years then I finally cracked and had multiple breakdowns severe anxiety and depression. The workplace needs trained mental health awareness officers in HR."

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?

"mental health awareness organisations and social media. Organisations such as beyond blue, headspace ect. There is lesser known orgs such as Puka Up created by Wayne Schwas, people on social media such as Nick Bracks, I myself blog on mental health awareness and we share ideas [REDACTED]"

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

"As Australia has the highest rates of suicide per capita in the world and mainly men from 16 to 45/50 I'm not 100% sure of the figures, but I'm close. I don't think its working well. Its work life balance, heavy cost of living, add pre condition to mental illness, childhood trauma ect, there is many reasons, each individual has his/her own reasons why this occurs. I can only go by what happened to me but given the chance I would like to personally talk through lived experiences and elaborate."

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.

"The first thing I'm going to say is this and going on again about my own experience. Mental health treatment can only start once there is NO burden of financial factors such as functioning e.g. food bills and living, mortgage ect. Family and friends accepting of illness. In my case my doctor and psychologist couldn't get through to me even with treatment and meds (Lexapro) I wasn't responding as I was so stressed about my finances. I lost my dignity and I was suicidal! whilst going through treatment I still had to keep up with my financial responsibilities calling banks essential services ect to get bill extensions ect. I have income protection insurances it took 10 months get approved!! my wife salary of 50 k not enough to cover a normal family of 4 with the cost of living!!!. Centrelink NO help because of wife salary. both of us have combined superannuation of 400 k could not touch a cent!!!!!! In that 10 month period lost all our savings

which wasn't much anyway, behind in all bills threats of disconnection ect, behind in mortgage strain on our marriage, relationship with my kids and last but not least 2 failed suicide attempts. I actually got worse while being treated. But as soon as I received my insurance payments and back pay I changed and now wanted to get better so treatment started taking affect. I had no financial worries I had some dignity restored and family and friends accepted my situation. I wanted to live again. The support from the medical health profession is this. 1. mental health treatment plan from your GP the 12 medicare bulk bill not enough it should be unlimited as required by patient. Before I received payments I used up my 12 quickly and stopped for 3 months as I had no money to cover the \$120, 2. You need to wait a calendar year and your GP needs to create another mental health care plan. 3. mental health professionals go by the standard charter and principles of RTW (return to work is the best for recovery policy and they push hard when all individuals are different and have there own complex issues e.g. performance anxiety and generalised anxiety. In my case it was many issues and basically at 50 I was mentally exuasted!!! due to childhood trauma my mind was that of an 80 year old."

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

"It is obvious lower educational & socio economic background and people with childhood mental trauma. I need to elaborate personally at this forum as I know I have a lot to bring to this forum that is very helpful. But in this Royal Commission you also need to have finance ministers attending, health professionals gp youth workers ect."

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

"Family members need to take courses to learn how to deal with and provide help and support for their loved ones, and this should be done by the GP. Also again the finances!!!! the family member e.g. spouse may start showing signs of frustration despair and anger at the ill person which subconsciously happens as now you have the whole family unit with mental health issues."

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

"Mental health Wellbeing run by HR. However this can only happen if you have been in the same employer for years!!!. If you are fairly new they won't keep you!!!! its just the raw fact that is the reality. I started a new job just before my illness hit I was sacked during probation because I was making too many mistakes and didnt pick up computer programmes quick enough. Now I have been in therapy for nearly two years haven't work for two years. If I were to apply for work and employer asks what have you done lately and my reply is haven't worked for two years due to mental health, how do you think that is going to down?? I won't get the job that is the reality!!. At my age at 52 I am unemployable now I know that."

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?

Finances treatment acceptance mental health orgs social media with same like interactions about lived experience a lot of volunteer work in this area.

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?

"Finances (get that equation away from the patient immediately Centrelink pay temp payments (until income protection comes through) Superannuation (temp release) health care card to get discounts on all bills ect lift the spousal income threshold (my wife on 50k) I received nothing from Centrelink. banks and financial institutions to take into account illness Medicare bulk bill 100% free for those that cannot afford medications heavily discounted for those that cannot afford. The CBT therapy that psychologist use passive and aggressive (e.g. everything I told my shrink she kept on telling me was unrealistic and what caused my anxiety and depression was unrealistic and I had to accept the real world!!! but for me the realities of the world is what caused the majority of my illness.(having said that I did grow up in domestic violence as the son of a migrant greek who was frustrated because of language barriers. I was his interpreter and letter reader probably from the age of 10 if I didnt understand what the letter meant he would have a go at my mum. So yes childhood trauma. At the age of 50 I'm so mentally exhausted my mind is that of an 80 year old, I have short term memory loss, I find it hard to learn new things. So what do till the age of 67 when I can receive my super???? All this adds to the recovery process of mental health. Too much red tape and bureaucracy causes more heartache then everyone realises. As experts you need to asks us average Joe blows what would have helped you???? "

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

As I've said you need us to let the government and medical profession know what we need.

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

"I would like to take part personally and talk and tell about my lived experience as it will come from the heart and I can express myself better and elaborate. This has now become my cause ill will advocate for anyone that needs my help.I write blogs on mental health lived experiences. I have spoken to my local politician (Mark Dreyfus) he has been helpful, I have also corresponded with federal health minister Greg Hunts office, Jenny Mikakos state health minister and Martin Foley mental health minister. I have also corresponded with John Pandazopoulos (ex minister in Bracks government who put me onto Pronia a greek community service as I wanted to get involved in mental health with the Greek elderly as depression and anxiety is taboo in our culture. I also do volunteer work at the afl St.kilda football club and I'm helping out with talks about lived experiences."