

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

Organisation Name

N/A

Name

Ms Sally Fisher

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

"Ad campaigns and more people being honest and open about their diagnoses. Celebrities and sports stars are a good start, but the research shows there is a lot of self stigma when we, as ordinary Australians, don't feel we can be honest about our diagnoses. "

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?

"Honestly I don't think there's anything preventing mental illness, work in schools would be good and I think beyond blue is starting on that. Programs in work places could be better."

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

"I think whenever there is a story in media about suicide there needs to be some dot points provided on how to recognise some alarm bells and what to do. Research shows most people make sudden decisions around taking their lives, and they respond well to conversations from loved ones. Just like we learn CPR we should be learning basics of mental health first aid."

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.

"1. Over the Christmas period, when often those of us with this condition become unwell - for many reasons including end of year pressures, spending a lot of time with family who we may not get along with and the heat (which is known to spark mania) - it is almost impossible to see a psychologist or psychiatrist. They all go on long holidays! And this is when they are needed most. If there was a phone service even, not for when we are in crisis, but for counselling and info on medications, that would be great. 2. Sometimes I need assistance just over the phone on which of my medications I can safely combine when my psychiatrist is away and I have been unable to get this immediate help. My GP felt she could not help, the [REDACTED] said they couldn't and I was at a loss. I got steadily worse while waiting weeks for an appointment. 3. Medicare funds only 10 sessions with a psychologist a year. My condition is chronic and if I use my husband as a sounding board for my worries our marriage would not last. I personally pay for the sessions outside these 10 and it's super expensive. But it is vital I do this. For my health, and his. As a carer it is too much to ask him to be my psychologist as well. We need more than these 10 sessions a year. We need at least one visit a fortnight for the year."

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

I don't feel qualified to answer this question.

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

They need access to psychologists and counsellors.

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

More funds and career structures.

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?

"We just want a job and to be treated as valued citizens who have much to offer. I would be so grateful and happy for a job, to pay tax and contribute to the society I live in. I have a bachelor's degree and have worked full time for many years. But now I just need a little support to get another job. I would be an excellent employee even though I am now in my 50s! We really, really want to work. "

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?

"1. Employment support programs and working with employers to get us into jobs. Many of us are high functioning and have a lot to offer and we are so keen to work and contribute. 2. More than 10 sessions a year with a psychologist rebateable under Medicare 3. Mental health first aid programs at schools, unis, TAFEs, workplaces. 4. Campaigns to stop stigma "

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

"It's really hard to navigate the system and know where to turn. There seems to be many services and little coordination. If i cannot get into my psychiatrist where can I go? If I need help now I don't want to go to ED in a hospital or a CAT team, where can I turn?"

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

Thank-you so much for your efforts. It makes us hope there is a chance for a brighter future!