

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

"Provide preventative care and assist with managing the illness before it worsens, so that the community doesn't see a person who is extremely ill instead they see a person who is being helped to manage their disease."

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?

Staff who care is the only thing working well with our current system. What can be done better is early access to services and more services- there is an acute shortage of beds in the public mental health system. Only the very ill get to be admitted and it is only a band aid affect as they are discharged too early when they are still unwell. Assistance with drug and alcohol problems would also help as many mentally ill people have a drug or alcohol problem as well.

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

"There is now a recognition that suicide is a big problem particularly for males in our society, talking helps but easier access to counselling or being admitted into hospital when it is needed would help, not weeks later when it may even be too late."

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.

Lack of beds and early discharge back into the community makes it impossible for people to experience good mental health. Opening of more beds at the acute setting opening of step down beds for people still not well enough to be discharged. When the government closed a lot of the institutions back in the 90s Victoria saw a reduction in the number of beds available for people with mental health issues. This has not improved but worsened particularly when you compare the number of acute beds available in Victoria compared with other states in Australia.

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

"The drivers are lack of services available particularly in the early stages of the disease process and the combination of drug and alcohol addiction which often goes hand in hand with mental health issues. What needs to be done is availability of early intervention, more acute beds and better assistance with drug and alcohol addiction."

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

"Family and carers need to be heard and listened to, they know the person with the mental health

illness better than anyone else. Early access to services when they are first requested."

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

Reduction in violence in the work place better hourly pay rate and perhaps better staffing to client/patient ratios. Improved working to leisure ratios to reduce burn out.

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?

Better management of their own health early detection and intervention when things are not quite right .

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?

"Early access to mental health care. Introduction of Outpatient type clinics for mental health as for other illnesses More acute beds for people who are acutely unwell and the introduction of a step down area for those people who are still unwell and not yet ready to be not being discharged back into the community. Improved identification of those people who are a risk to themselves or are a risk to the community through better access to Forensicare services. Broadening of Forensicare services so that specialised psychiatric care is available for anyone who demonstrates that they may pose a risk e.g. violent outbursts, don't wait until after the event and the person then becomes incarcerated.."

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

Increased funding prevention is better than cure.

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

Yes my husband died as the result of a violent attack by a person with Mental health issues. There were many warning signs that were ignored by the health professionals of the person with the mental health issues. A coronial inquest was held in relation to the death of my husband and the care provided to the person with the mental health issues. The coroner released his findings with recommendations however the response from the Health Department following the Inquest were very dismissive and I don't believe that any of the recommendations have been implemented. I feel strongly that if a coroner makes recommendations following an inquest after listening to the testimonies of expert witnesses they should be implemented. I am happy to share my story and details however the coroners findings due to being related to an individuals medical care were de identified at the time of publication