

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

## Organisation Name

N/A

## Name

Miss Faith Palstra

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

N/A

## 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?

N/A

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

N/A

## 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.

"My illness is invisible. In fact many of you probably have no idea I am sick because I carry on and live a normal life. I'm studying and doing well. I keep fit. I try to eat well. I don't look sick. But mental illness is a real condition. I was raped among other things and as a result I suffer from PTSD and Major Depressive Disorder. Some days are harder than others and the past week has been exceptionally challenging. I have spent more time in hospital in the past 18 months than I have at home. I have put strain on my family with numerous break downs and suicide attempts. My friends have had to clean blood off my floor too many times. Depression sucks. But it is real and it deserves validation. PTSD means that some nights I wake up crying and screaming because my memories haunt me in my dreams. Mental illness affects not just the affected person but also the people around them. Before I was affected by these demons I thought we lived in a country with spectacular health care however I have learnt that I am one of the lucky ones because I have the means to afford private health insurance. But I've also been placed in situations where I experienced what the public system is like, how volatile and violent it can be and I understand why mental health nurses are leaving in high numbers. However by far the most scary situation to find yourself in is the one when you feel like you have nowhere to go when you are desperate for help. The mental health system in this country has a long way to go. My goal in life is to stay on this earth long enough to make a positive change to this system that's why I have chosen to do a Masters in Public health. Okay so now that I have put my story' out there I can delve a little deeper into what I'm trying to say. I hate to say it, but the mental health system in this country sucks. If you are not lucky' enough to possess private health care then you might be lucky' enough to be placed into a public psychiatric ward for 3 days where all you are offered is a bed, a different psychiatrist every day who will make sure you are kept drugged up to the eyeballs so as to remain passive, no rehabilitation in the form of skills based classes are offered, and if you want to speak to a nurse, good luck. The nurses are so run off their feet due to being understaffed that you're lucky if you can even find your nurse. Patients bang non stop on the glass surrounding the

nurses stations. I witnessed patients completely at the end of their tether that they have bashed their heads against walls, become so distressed they have screamed and ripped their clothes off, I even witnessed someone [REDACTED] in a suicide attempt. It is forecast that we will have an under supply of 18,500 mental health nurses by 2030. Expect to hear code grey a lot. Now let's talk about beds. That's the next major issue. Nearly every hospital is bed blocked so you're lucky (even with private health insurance) if you can get in. Take for example the [REDACTED]. A purpose built psychiatric facility [REDACTED]. It has in excess of 180 beds, however the average wait time to get into this hospital is 3 weeks. That might not sound like a lot but when you are in acute distress minutes feel like hours. Hours feel like days. And often you find yourself in the ED because you've lost complete control and taken an overdose [REDACTED] because you can't handle the way you are feeling which is exacerbated by the long wait time. Then, there is the opposite. Let's look at the [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Quite often these hospitals have empty beds but they are short on psychiatrists willing to take on new patients due to overload so even though there are beds, you still can't get in. So what do you do? You sit at home [REDACTED] to numb the pain you feel inside. You misuse your meds to try and block out the feelings. Your family becomes increasingly distressed as they listen to you constantly crying and screaming in your room. It breaks them. You continue to wait, for what feels like an eternity to get help. How is this a functional system? I'm grateful the Andrews government has given us this chance to speak up. I'm not saying I have the answers, I certainly don't. But we need to be writing to our local MP's about this catastrophic problem because from my personal experience things are getting worse not better. And while I'm speaking about this from my experience, I'm positive I'm not alone. I'm writing this from my hospital bed at the [REDACTED] where I am fortunate enough to be a patient. I am happy to speak further about my experiences with anyone who wants to hear. Thank you for taking the time to read."

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

N/A

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

Family member need to be supported not patronised.

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

How can I become a peer support worker. I have the qualifications and the personal experience but can't find a job in the industry.

**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?**

For people without private health insurance things are pretty grim as they cycle in and out of the system.

**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?**

Longer hospital stays Better support for mental health nurses Access to support groups Funding

for more beds.

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

N/A

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

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