

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

Organisation Name

N/A

Name

Ms Michelle Thomas

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

"Most Victorians accept Anxiety and Depression as an acceptable mental illness. The general consensus seems to be focused on recovery. In most instances this is indeed achieved. However those with ongoing, incurable mental health issues are still very stigmatised. The awareness that such people are constantly trying to manage their illness, that there is no magic pill and that it is out of the hands of the individual to rectify issues themselves needs to be made aware. "

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?

"I find this question rather one sided. Some mental illness are not caused by events etc: Some people are born with issues that present as a child ie: ADHD Yet other illnesses such as Schizophrenia and Bipolar become more evident during adolescences and early adulthood. You can not prevent these particular Mental Illness, rather proactively manage them. I do believe that economic hardship is a huge burden in today's society, so those who present with sudden onset Depression and Anxiety are feeling the pressures of work/budgets and social status. Mental health leave days, could be beneficial in the workplace "

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

"Lifeline and Beyondblue are doing their best, but more funding for them to have a greater understanding beyond Depression and Anxiety is paramount. Also, I believe that people who have repeatedly rang these services for help should be taken more seriously and be added to a register if they wish. The pressures put on police, ambulance and ER staff during episodes is horrid. Perhaps more funding for them to be better educated to deal with suicidal, psychotic and manic individuals could be beneficial "

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.

"Living conditions, financial hardship, resources in rural communities and accessibility are huge factors. If there was a way to stop people slipping through the gaps, it would be fantastic... However because most people with Mental Illness are smart and intelligent, can read and write, drive cars etc: services like the NDIS do not see mental health as debilitating as it can be. Educating Mental Health professionals with referring individuals to the correct services available would be highly beneficial "

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

"The lack of public housing is pushing individuals to become homeless or live in sub standard

living. Making affordable housing available to individuals would certainly help many people of the huge housing waiting lists. Also the stigma associated with having a job making you a valuable member of society needs to be addressed, some individuals simply can't return to work, and slowly sell any assets they have to support themselves. The public need to be aware that these people do not choose to be ill"

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

"Carers under the age of 18 need to be acknowledged. Not only are they usually at school, working after school to prop up the household but also caring for parents is a massive ask. The adult needing a carer needs to be supported once the child carer leaves home. Carers also need to have stricter confidentiality imposed on them. Individuals living in rural areas do not need to be gossiped about in their communities, but instead supported "

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

"Better education and understanding. Mental illness is not something that you can put a bandaid on to fix. More funding to the NDIS will attract more people to support roles, especially if the remuneration matches the support role asked of them."

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?

"The opportunities are limited to location. The bigger cities and towns are better funded and have more health professionals. To socialise one needs to be in the cities and towns as in rural communities it's harder to access supports. More public housing in cities and towns will help those isolated in rural areas, will give them more opportunities for social activities and the chance to return to supported 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?

"Public Housing NDIS funding MHCC to be more proactive to complaints and enquires Funded Mental health leave days added to the amount of sick leave for the employed Ease of accessibility and referrals to supports ie:GP's Psychologists, Psychiatrists More media attention to the other metal illnesses beyond anxiety and depression."

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

More public awareness to create understanding and less stigma towards the mentally ill

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

"Living with permanent mental illness can put you on DSP. This in itself creates a catch 22 ... Individuals can't work to better their lives, yet they need money to live normally and boost their self esteem. The cost of living, whilst travelling huge distances to reach the correct health professionals can be very expensive ie: running a car on the atrocious Vic Roads in Rural areas. Being isolated due to no public transport. Trusting health professionals to keep confidentiality in Rural areas. Adding travel funding somehow to compensate those rurally, or making affordable

public housing nearer to recourses more available would be highly beneficial."