

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

## Organisation Name

N/A

## Name

Mrs Karina Okotel

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

Encouraging people who have excelled in their field to openly talk about living with a mental illness in the public discourse would help to both reduce stigma and discrimination.

## 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?

"If someone is able to access admission to a private hospital or a public hospital, medical intervention is readily accessible. However, for a new patient, obtaining the assistance of the CATT is often difficult or being admitted to a public hospital can be very difficult. Advanced statements and nominated person documents are not widely utilised to better assist patients and carers to have treatment preferences taken into account. There is a significant lack of psychological counselling available to mental health patients. Most inpatients would like to have access to a psychologist, but either no one is available or there is a shortage of such staff. If a patient can work with a psychologist who they can build a rapport with and who can help them identify early warning signs, this will assist people to get early treatment and support. Many patients complain of boredom in hospital and would be more content to remain inpatients for a longer period of time if meaningful activity were available for them. If there is a security alert, hospital staff can escape any danger by retreating to the nurses station but patients are left at risk on the ward. Often patients are kept in extended care under the Mental Health Act in order to force abstinence from illicit drugs or alcohol. However, specific treatment/support to rehabilitate someone from using drugs or alcohol is generally not provided or not available in the inpatient setting. Furthermore, rehabilitation from drugs or alcohol does not fall under the definition of treatment under the Mental Health Act. If drugs or alcohol are causing a person's mental state to deteriorate, proper drug or alcohol rehabilitation services should be provided and provision made for this either under a separate act for compulsory drug or alcohol treatment, or by amending the Mental Health Act. An issue often experienced by people living with mental illness is loneliness. Case managers should be tasked with linking patients in with community supports and friendship groups if this is what they are seeking. Meaningful activity is essential to aid a patient in their recovery. Case managers should be supporting patients to engage in meaningful activity whether it is paid or unpaid. Often at Mental Health Tribunal hearings, the Tribunal will comment on a patient's treatment plan but generally these comments are not taken into account by the treating team after the hearing by updating the treatment plan. In the previous Mental Health Act, the Board had the power to recommend amendment of treatment plans. This power should be restored and expanded to authorise the Tribunal to require specific actions that can be realistically undertaken by the treating team to be complied with by specific dates. "

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

"Patients who are discharged from hospital after a suicide attempt are followed up in relation to

medication compliance but not with other supports. This is generally true for all patients and not just patients who have attempted suicide. In the first instance, supports like psychological counselling should be available and secondly, compliance with such treatment should be monitored. The use of maintenance ECT should be reviewed as a treatment broadly as this treatment itself can be a root cause of suicidal ideation. "

**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.**

"Having practiced in mental health law for a decade, there were three things that I found common for all patients treated under the Mental Health Act without exception. These were that all patients had either experienced: 1. Drug or alcohol addiction 2. Sexual abuse 3. Relationship breakdown or loss Under the medical model, generally none of these roots are addressed as part of a person's treatment. Addressing them through psychological counselling is essential to break the cycle of re-admission. "

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

"People who are financially poor or who have no family support generally experience poorer mental health outcomes. They often do not have timely medical intervention, do not have the same level of support to access allied health services and little housing support. For a patient to be discharged into homelessness in the broad sense, including to a rooming house, share house or similar, this in itself is a highly stressful situation with impacts upon a person's mental state and their ability to recover. "

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

N/A

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

N/A

**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?**

N/A

**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. Access to psychological counselling 2. Access to drug and alcohol rehabilitation 3. Access to secure housing 4. Review of maintenance ECT 5. Promotion of advanced statements and nominated person forms 6. Specific support for people with mental illness to access employment 7. Specific support for people with mental illness to access meaningful activity and friendship groups 8. Treatment plans reviewable by the Mental Health Tribunal "

**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?**

N/A