

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

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

"The inclusion of family members and carers at every medical assessment to clarify the extent of the illness and the possible treatments available. Perhaps a media campaign referring to Mental Health issues in the same vein as those about cancer. More "user friendly" centres without the current overload of security measures. "

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?

"Nothing is working very well currently in Bendigo. Perhaps the initial assessment could be conducted with family and carers present to help the patient to better navigate the possible treatments available. Alternatives should be offered prior to the current "instant fix" of generic anti psychotic drugs or anti-depressants. This, of course, would involve a lengthy consultation with several regular followups and constant monitoring which is unavailable in today's failing health system where the overwhelming priority appears to be money -making rather than patient care. More long term care needs to be provided, particularly with drug/alcohol related mental health illness and caring staff . "

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

"The current social awareness campaign of suicide and the promotion of removing the taboo around the topic appears to be helping, however until we deal with the epidemic of drug and alcohol abuse and introduce some holistic coping strategies rather than prescribing anti depressants" willy nilly, "nothing will change."

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.

"Social acceptance of alcohol and drugs, the lowering of educational standards and the current fracturing of the family structure is contributing greatly to the rise in mental health issues. Lack of funding for decent facilities with suitable, well-trained and compassionate staff is a major problem in rural areas as is the NDIS system which appears to be simply "nest feathering" certain service providers at the expense of the clients. An approved plan promising social interaction and support should not take months of implementation during which time the only allocated monies being used are by service providers claiming phone calls etc whilst the client sits at home becoming more isolated by the day!!!"

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

"Distance, lack of funding, lack of qualified practitioners and lack of facilities is a major problem

within rural areas This needs to be addressedwe should be allowed the same respect and care as our city counterparts...afterall we pay the same taxes!!!!!!"

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

"The family members and carers need to be listened to and treated with dignity and respect as do the patients.....something which has been sadly lacking during my sixteen years of fighting to keep my son alive. The confidentiality regulations are extreme and ridiculous especially when the patient is so sick that they are incapable of answering for themselves. I have found the attitude of every psychiatrist with whom we've had any dealings to be patronising,rude and completely arrogant! It is wrong that they are allowed to have the ultimate ""say"" regarding my son's treatment,particularly when they are reviewing his progress so infrequently. My only option has been to obtain Medical Power of Attorney in the hope that I can prevent him from being ""rail-roaded"" into agreeing with whatever drug dosage they decide upon after a two minute eighteen monthly consultation!!!!!"

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

"Firstly,ensure that all workers are highly qualified and actually have a love for their chosen career. Our experience of workers with no compassion whatsoever has been an ongoing issue....raise the standard of education needed to obtain a work place within this field to ensure that only genuine people have access to our mentally ill and then pay them accordingly. A truly decent society looks after it's vulnerable and that is not happening in Australia today!"

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?

"Opportunities here are really only available with the aid of parents who are prepared to spend the mayor part of their time fighting for the rights and needs of their child!!! We need to return to the ""institution style"" model.....24/7 clean facilities with competent, caring staff,minimal medication supplemented with holistic care.....constant activities such as cooking, gardening , music, sport etc with the opportunity of integration into the workforce. No more roaming the streets self-medicating!!"

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?

"As above.....provide a safe haven for these people...teach them strategies to cope,review their medications regularly and give them dignity. "

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

Visit some of the rural psychiatric facilities and watch what actually happens there. Visit our courtrooms and view the escalating results of our failing system. Give parents the right to speak with and for their children. Make GP's and Psychiatrists answerable to the over-prescribing of medications.

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

I feel that the alcohol/drug mental health issues have not improved at all over many years and that the problem is escalatingwe need money invested in prevention and education of the ways in which to handle life's ups and downs without resorting to drugs and medication.