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Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System
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SUBMISSION TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON MENTAL HEALTH

Caroline Chisholm Society (CCS) welcomes the opportunity to provide this formal submission to the Royal Commission on Mental Health.

As the Society celebrates its 50th year of service and commitment to the Victorian community, CCS is in a unique position to speak to the range of issues impacting the social and emotional wellbeing of mothers and children. The work of CCS supports mothers and children in north and west Melbourne, as well as across Victoria including the communities of greater Shepparton, Mitchell, Strathbogie, Campaspe, Cardinia, Moorabool and Moira.

The work of CCS across the continuum of supports and services takes a unique and specialized approach from pregnancy, pre and post birth, including working mothers and their children up to the age of 5. This work includes outreach, welfare appointments for drop in and emergency services, new and preloved material aid, and home visitation practitioners working to prevent homelessness and working with mothers who are engaged with child protection.

In 2017 CCS made a formal submission to the Inquiry into Perinatal Services (the Inquiry) conducted by the Family and Community Development Committee of the Legislative Council of Victoria. In that submission CCS focussed on key recommendations relating to perinatal mental health arising from its extensive contact with mothers and their children during the first 1000 days of life.

In 2018 the Committee tabled in the Legislative Council ten substantial recommendations in relation to perinatal mental health. The Victorian State Government rather than responding directly to the Inquiry's detailed recommendations regarding perinatal mental health stated:

About one in 10 women experience mental illness during the perinatal period, and for a very small number of women, this experience is one of serious and acute mental illness. The critical role of early sensitive care for women experiencing mental health problems during the perinatal period was highlighted by the Consultative Council on Obstetric and Paediatric Mortality and Morbidity (CCOPMM) in the Victoria's Mothers, Babies and Children 2016 report. The 2017–18 State Budget secured approximately \$6 million ongoing funding for

Locations

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perinatal mental health services in Victoria. This investment is providing more women and their families with the mental health care and support they need during pregnancy and in the months that follow. It also means that Victorian women can more easily access the care coordination services provided by Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia (PANDA); however, there is more to do. Preparation for the Royal Commission into Mental Health is well underway, and a commitment to implement its recommendations will improve mental health care and support for all Victorians.

It therefore falls to the Royal Commission into Mental Health to consider the findings and the ten detailed recommendations in relation to perinatal mental health made by the Inquiry into Perinatal Services and to make recommendations to government, hopefully including endorsement of the Inquiry's recommendation for a comprehensive perinatal mental health plan.

CCS would strongly urge the Royal Commission into Mental Health to consider the findings and the ten detailed recommendations in relation to perinatal mental health made by the Inquiry as a matter of urgency.

If we can get perinatal mental health right we will improve the wellbeing of every Victorian child during the critical first 1000 days of life and thereby significantly prevent many problems that lead to poor mental health throughout life.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Weber".

Jennifer Weber PhD
 Interim CEO
 5 July 2019

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