

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

Organisation Name

N/A

Name

Ms Peta Laughlin

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

"More highly trained Wellfare staff in schools (that are struggling with the amount of anxiety, depression, self harm and bullying occurring). These staff are often on contracts and don't get holiday pay over the summer. They need to be supported financially so that they can stay long term and build positive relationships with the students in the school. Students that are struggling are often seen as 'weak, weird' by the wider community, when what they need is support and understanding. Greater promotion of acceptance, tolerance and diversity of all people (race, gender, sexuality etc) - this must start with parents and should flow on to education in schools. Much greater opportunity for new parents to access support workshops on parenting. Greater education provided to students, parents, teachers regarding the inclusion of mental health as being a part of the overall health and well being of a person. This requires funding to train and pay experts and to develop support materials and support groups. School need to focus on addressing bullying, which is an issue that feeds into stigma and discrimination and mental illness. More jobs set up and funded to specifically target people with mental illness and provide a support platform with which they can safely return to work without fear of More community support groups set up and funded, that allow people who are mentally ill to socialise, be accepted and in turn may break down 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?

"There is a growing awareness of the issue of mental health and suicide (that it affects all kinds of people) and there are organisations such as Beyond Blue. Men's Shed etc R U Ok campaign etc. Greater funding to promote more community groups (music, sports, arts, performing arts, environment) - Less people are going to church which is fine, but may now be missing out on the connection a religion can offer and also the positive aspects that promote good mental health (gratitude, meditation, community). People seem to be lonely. People are time poor - address the growing working hours and huge stress many people undergo in their daily jobs - other models are working well (Finland). Students are also extremely busy - reconsider the data driven era we live in and the impact of many exams/tests on students. Greater promotion of people doing exercise and outdoor events/environment - more time to do this, more incentive, more community connection to do so. Drugs are readily available and sometimes more so in affluent areas. Much greater drug education/awareness - including alcohol. Greater studies into impact of technology on young people (gaming addiction, antisocial behaviour being modelled online, social isolation, access to age inappropriate content)."

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

As above.

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.

"I have addressed this above, however mental health treatment and support services should be more broadly advertised and there should be more of them - they should be common knowledge as it is difficult to access the right care once a mental illness has progressed. There should be more mental health services that are 'preventative'. For example, Many Primary and Secondary aged students are exposed to a great deal of violent/graphic and sexualised content at a young age at home via increasing access to a wide range of material from the internet/media. Parents are not keeping up with advancing technology and the impact on future generations is still yet to be discovered. However, more funding needs to be put into place now to educate and support family/parents/students/schools as to how to access and use technology in a healthy way (reduced screen time, ensuring content is appropriate for age etc). This includes self - regulation. This needs to be taught. Instead of seeking support services, some young people are using social media to seek self validation which is sadly, often acknowledged by others and further exacerbated (self harm, weight issues, drug use, sexualisation) Teenagers need to be taught that there are more healthy ways in which to deal with these issues and they need to be aware of all of the supports that are in place to help them. Again this needs to be taught firstly to parents of young children and then continued to be scaffolded through the schooling years. "

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

"Having a mental illness is extremely costly. People need to be able to access psychologists for much less money. Many people use the current system in which they get 10 sessions subsidised per year (still out of pocket about \$1000 for that). Most people need ongoing support from a psychologist (medication is not enough). On average a 1 hour appointment can be between \$160 - \$260 each session. This is simply unaffordable for most. Greater funding in providing all people with access to cognitive behaviour therapy will enable people with the supports they need to be a part of the community (hold down a job, rent/buy a house, good citizen). The cost will be offset by savings to crime/stay in prison, homelessness, hospitalisation etc etc etc. With 1 in 3 students at secondary school experiencing mental health, we need to prioritise lowering costs to ALL (lower to middle socioeconomic). Medicare needs to include and support the cost of mental health. Some communities are a hotspot for poor mental health with the drivers being poverty, lack of community support and lack of education. Greater support services need to be established in these areas, jobs need to be created to enable these communities to become proud and independent, People need to be empowered."

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

"Family members and carers need support and counselling services themselves. This is often not mentioned and members/carers are very susceptible to mental health issues induced through the stresses of caring for their friend/family/loved one with a mental illness. There is an immense stress placed on other relationships within a household. In providing care for a person of poor mental health, the health professional should also look towards supporting the carer. Family members and carers often need to take time off work to care for their loved ones. Greater support needs to be provided - negative social stigma can make this stressful. The financial cost to a carer is tremendous. Firstly, someone has to pay for the medication/psychologist/psychiatrist and

it is expensive. It is sometimes difficult for the carer to work full time or at all as they are needed to provide care for their loved ones. There is no respite for carers. There are no 'safe' (nurturing, healthy) places provided in which a carer can place their loved one short term when they need some respite. Government places currently provided do not have a good reputation. "

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

"The mental health workforce need to be remunerated through higher pay and working conditions. As I earlier stated, some welfare staff in schools are only paid in school term - they must have holiday pay. How can they be expected to support others if they are not supported themselves? Mental health/social workers need to have a much higher profile and respect within the community. More funding to provide high qualifications and also, ongoing training. Train more people in mental health. Psychologists/Psychiatrists are extremely expensive (are they pocketing all that money? If so, review that. If not, then provide more government assistance to reduce their outrageous fees) - there is not enough competition out there - it is extremely difficult to find a 'good' psychologist and when you do, it is extremely hard to book an appointment as they are booked in advance. "

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?

"I am unable to comment as my experience is with child/teenage mental health. I will say that welfare staff in schools are wonderful, but they do not have enough time to keep up with demand. Teachers are wonderful, but the issues are expanding to well beyond their expertise (and job description) and therefore, more welfare staff are needed. Children and teenagers need to be part of a group/community connection - having a child/teenager with poor mental health sometimes means that you watch your child being excluded from social and community events - greater promotion of socially inclusive behaviour may be of benefit."

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?

"There should be affordable access to cognitive behaviour therapy, psychaitrists and other mental health related therapists that are needed to aid mentally ill people in their recovery, but are too expensive for the majority to utilise. More funding and much greater mental health supports are needed in schools through providing more welfare staff (no chaplains - put trained health professionals in school as they are needed). Greater prevention of mental health through inclusion of education programs for parents and schools that promote mental health (and subsequently physical, spiritual health as it is all connected). Aimed at parents and schools (far too often it is expected that schools take responsibility for this when it is the home environment that has a significant impact). "

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

" This Royal Commission is a good start. Continue to promote the findings, share the stories and let people know they are not alone in their struggles to find adequate support in the area of mental health. Educate people to understand that mental health is as important as physical health.

Educate people as to how to look after their mental health. "

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

"Overall, a more wholistic approach to mental health needs to be taken. It is complex. Mental health involves good social (connections), physical (exercise, food, water, sleep) and spiritual health (mindful, gratitude, kindness). Much of the time these aspects of mental health not treated as a whole and without this approach it is difficult for people to recover. "