

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?

More education and open talking regarding mental health. Programs implemented in schools.

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?

"The Headspace Centres appear to be working well for the younger people and it is a great starting point. In many cases mental illness cannot be prevented, it has to be managed and there needs to be many more mental health workers and appropriate centres to manage and support people. "

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

N/A

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.

"The trouble is many services do not link with each other, You start with your GP and tell your story and then you just continue to tell your story until you reach breaking point. In many instances there are no available appointments or services for 6 or more months. In the case with my boys and so many others that window of opportunity to get them help is long closed by the time anything is available."

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

"Drug and alcohol abuse, lack of employment opportunities and difficulties that arise from being a farmer. Again there needs to be more education and more support and services in the smaller communities."

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

The needs of family members and Carers is huge and all I can think of is where do I begin? The only support I was able to get for my children to help them try and make sense of what was happening with their father then their two brothers was an hour away and I was working half an hour away in the other direction. It was impossible for me to get them there. It was proposed to get a little group going in our town but it then became a funding issue so it did not get off the ground.

What can be done to attract, retain and better support the mental health workforce,

including peer support workers?

"A better system than the one they have, more funding and more options for them to be able to support the people they are caring for. The privacy laws need to be less strict when it comes to people with a mental illness and workers should be able to talk freely with the families because they are, more often than not, the ones who know when their loved one is becoming or is unwell. They have valuable and important information that often needs to be passed on and considered."

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?

We need jobs for them. They need to feel part of the community and have a sense of worth. Its so difficult for them because often they are on strong medications and it takes so much out of them to just push through that. They definitely need a sense of belonging and a sense of worth.

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?

"I can only speak from my experience and my experience has left me with very little faith in the existing system. My son was discharged from his mental health service in about August/September of 2016 and I can tell you he was clearly very unwell. He promptly went off all his medications once removed from his Community Treatment Order, (which he was a serial offender of doing), and then in the November he murdered his father. That is not fair. How does a very unwell person just get discharged from a service? People with physical disabilities dont get discharged when they are unwell, they continue to get looked after. My family will never be the same. My eldest daughter and my three youngest children found their fathers body, they have to live with that image for the rest of their lives and they will never ever forgive their brother., who also has to live with what he has done. My family is broken. These loopholes or whatever they are must be closed. If people with mental illness are to live in the community then they have to feel safe and they have to have the appropriate support. So I list this as a priority: Change it so that people who are unwell do not get discharged but rather followed up and cared for."

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

"You have started the process by letting families and carers have a say, we must continue to be heard because we are the ones who live this life every day. "

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

"Funding needs to be put towards long term Dual Diagnosis Centres where people can be treated for their addiction as well as their mental illness, all under the one roof. Addiction and mental illness often go hand in hand and they should be treated together. My 23 year old son is currently in an extended care unit of a psychiatric hospital but has to find somewhere to live when discharged. He will require supported accomodation of some type but because he suffers from mental illness and addiction he will struggle to find a service that will accept him. His brother murdered their father and has an appropriate place of care where he is doing exceptionally well. He committed a robbery, has spent 2 wasted years in jail learning nothing new or being rehabilitated in any way shape or form and when discharged from hospital will struggle to find an appropriate place of care. Why must things turn to an absolute crisis before appropriate care can

be obtained??"