

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

SUB: 0002.0027.0074

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

I cannot comment on this

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?

"In terms of government services for mental illness that I have accessed - honestly nothing is easy or working well. Learning the signs of mental illness when young would be great. I had no idea for years that I was suffering from major depression. I thought depression was 'feeling sad'. What I didn't realise was that it's sometimes like not feeling at all. When I first started having anxiety attacks, I thought I was dying. If I'd been taught as a child what the symptoms were, I would have accessed help a lot sooner. We don't get enough rebated mental health care sessions. You have to jump through so many barriers to get your first sessions, and then have to keep going back. My yearly pattern is: Start of year: GP visit. Take time off work, pay fee to get referral. Get scripts done for medication. Cost: \$0-70. Time cost: 1.5 hours. Other costs: loss of income for this time if it's over work hours. See Psych. Take time off work for visit. Cost: 160. Time cost: 2 hours. Other costs: loss of income for this time loss of income for this time if it's over work hours. Use poorly designed and hard to use medicare app to get partial refund of ~\$130. See Psych. Take time off work for visit. Cost: 160. Time cost: 2 hours. Other costs: loss of income for this time loss of income for this time if it's over work hours. Use poorly designed and hard to use medicare app to get partial refund of ~\$130. See Psych. Take time off work for visit. Cost: 160. Time cost: 2 hours. Other costs: loss of income for this time loss of income for this time if it's over work hours. Use poorly designed and hard to use medicare app to get partial refund of ~\$130. See Psych. Take time off work for visit. Cost: 160. Time cost: 2 hours. Other costs: loss of income for this time loss of income for this time if it's over work hours. Use poorly designed and hard to use medicare app to get partial refund of ~\$130. Get letter from Psych asking for more sessions. Bring letter to GP. GP visit. Take time off work, pay fee to get referral. Cost: \$0-70. Time cost: 1.5 hours. Other costs: loss of income for this time if it's over work hours. Get new scripts for medication. See Psych. Take time off work for visit. Cost: 160. Time cost: 2 hours. Other costs: loss of income for this time loss of income for this time if it's over work hours. Use poorly designed and hard to use medicare app to get partial refund of ~\$130. See Psych. Take time off work for visit. Upfront Cost: 160. Time cost: 2 hours. Other costs: loss of income for this time loss of income for this time if it's over work hours. Use poorly designed and hard to use medicare app to get partial refund of ~\$130. See Psych. Take time off work for visit. Cost: 160. Time cost: 2 hours. Other costs: loss of income for this time loss of income for this time if it's over work hours. Use poorly designed and hard to use medicare app to get partial refund of ~\$130. By this time it's mid year and I've run out of subsidised sessions. Make decision how frequently I can

afford to see my psych out of pocket. In my current situation it's once a month. etc "

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

I cannot comment on this

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 government system for accessing mental health services is designed to be a complex, inaccessible system. First, you have to find a GP that actually understands the mental health system. This might take multiple tries. Most misunderstand it the rules, as the rules change every year. You have to pay for a long consult, and get a letter of referral. In order for that referral to be made, you need to choose a psychologist. If you haven't got one in mind, you either take a gamble with the GP calling around for you, or have to go away, find one yourself, and return to the GP again for the referral to be written. Again, costs rising up, time being spent. You have to find a good psychologist, you might have to go through multiple to find the right one. This costs money, time and vast effort. The good psychologists are clustered in parts of the city that are hard to access for a lot of people (toorak, fitzroy etc) You have to pay ~160 up front and then claim back using the awful medicare app or via mail (can't claim in person any more) Good psychologists won't have optimal times for appointments. You'll have to take 3 hours off work to get there, to do the session and return. And good luck functioning at work after a session if it's brought up bad memories. And that might be as frequently as twice a week at first. You only get 6 mental health plan visits, and then have to go back to your GP (more expense if they don't bulk bill) for another referral After that, you only get another 4 visits. When they are used up, you're in the limbo zone of paying out of pocket, or just waiting until next year. Now imagine all the above while you're suffering from depression, anxiety to whatever else. For someone who might struggle to perform daily functions like getting to work or dressing themselves, the burden is just too much."

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

"Good psychologists don't bulk bill. Good psychologists are all situated in the affluent inner suburbs Good psychologists are usually booked out and their only free slots are during working hours. For low income earners, in outer suburbs, who can't afford to take time off work: it's pretty easy to see how the odds are stacked against these people accessing good quality treatment."

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

I have a family member living with mental illness and have helped her navigate the system. I've had to take time off work to try and get her treatment. It would be great to be able to access a central person who knows all about the system and can advocate for my family member's needs. This is theory is the role of a GP however in practice most know nothing

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

Pay them a better wage

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 cannot comment on this

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?

"have a central rating system for mental health practitioners incentivise high quality mental health practitioner talent to work in areas that are easier to access for low income earners rather than charge a full amount and put the burden on the patient to claim back, instead mental health practitioners should charge a 'gap' fee, like how GPs and other health services do. streamline access to medication for people with long term needs. Perhaps 2 year scripts. It's costly and time consuming having to go to the doctor every 6 months for new scripts, particularly when you know this is the pattern you'll be doing for the rest of your life. for people with a long history of mental illness, change mental health plans to be every 3 years or longer rather than every one year. rather than having to re-apply for another 4 sessions, just give 10 sessions up front. look into online / phone sessions for remote users"

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

more funding

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

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