

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

## Organisation Name

N/A

## Name

Ms Jessica Coombs

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

"To reduce stigma and discrimination of persons with mental illness we must end the notion of segregation and isolation as a treatment method. If the community's understanding of mental illness is people with severe psychosis and suicidality locked up in hospitals and prisons, or people chronically on welfare in and out of hospitals it is only natural that such negative views and discrimination will occur. Once we start treating mental illness within community contexts, creating pathways and integrated services between education, employment, leisure and community these walls will come down. Everyone is afraid of what they do not know. "

### **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 already a lot of research and early intervention programs. Programs are slowly being rolled out into focused areas such as schools and universities that are a positive start. Similarly nearly everyone I talk to says they know to ask for help, or to tell someone to ask for help. The problem lies with accessing the help, because there is no in between. If talking to your GP didn't help, which it so rarely will or you didn't make way with only 10 sessions from a psychologist most of which you spend trying to feel comfortable then there is next to no support until you are at breaking point. To support people to get early treatment there has to be early treatment. "

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

"There is a lot of awareness around there being numbers you can call, or that certain demographics are at more risk the awareness campaigns are working well. In order to prevent suicide there needs to be somewhere people can go and not the emergency department I have heard more horror stories of judgement and trauma than I can bare to admit about from friends who have fronted up to one. The process between acute services to community also needs strengthening as this is when people are most likely to relapse. "

### **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.**

"Good mental health is incredibly hard to experience it isn't that bad mental health happens and good is the standard, it's the other way around in the current society we live in with such disparities and loneliness. To improve good mental health mental health treatment needs to focus on the whole person and their needs, employment, education, leisure not just removing doors of acute episodes. "

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

"The drivers behind communities experiencing poorer mental health outcomes is from my experience exclusion. It is those facets of the community who are excluded from others that face the greatest barriers and pain. This includes those who can not find work, those who have grown up poor, have disabilities, are from another country, are ATSI or LGBTIQ+, have been in jail or simply just can't find their fit. "

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

"Family members and carers need to be supported and psychological help should be available. Having been a carer myself what is most needed is for those suffering to be taken care of. A carer should not have to fight for, scream and beg for help for their loved ones. "

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

"As a peer support worker what can be done to attract maintain and support this resource is funding, jobs and acknowledgment that the knowledge we have is powerful and helpful. Even this royal commission has dismissed the value of the peer workforce by including next to none of them within the staffing of the commission. "

**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?**

There are only as many opportunities as we create. Pathways need to be established supported jobs with wages and assistance need to be created. Job Agencies need to be properly trained so as to not make things worse for those with mental health difficulties. I know of several people who have severely self harmed because of direct treatment by these places.

**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?**

"proper funding for proper care, no more illusions you can ask for help, actual help needs to exist. The people between a couple of GP talks and acute wards need somewhere to go."

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

N/A

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

"The Royal Commission has consisted of experts that is the medical profession and government agencies listening to people who have accessed the system. This is far too alike sitting around a table with three psychiatrists telling you your fine or not, take this drug or that one they are kind of listening but all the decisions are still there's. They aren't listening to you're insights or fears or letting you decide when it is supposed to be about you. If this is going to be how things are continued to be done then progress will be barely made. "