

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

SUB. 0002.0028.0502

Name

Anonymous

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

"Better awareness and education needs to be provided to the individual and family both early on (initial appointment/diagnosis) and through out the duration of the illness. A more proactive approach needs to be directed at a community level. Mental wellbeing and how to best achieve it and also mental illness needs to be discussed more; in schools, in local communities via seminars and workshops, on television, and in workplaces. Better resources need to be available and more accessible to individuals and their families throughout the entire mental health journey. All parties need to be offered education about the illness, and provided with appropriate advice and guidance of the illness, and be left with a sense of hope that there is a way forward with appropriate treatment and support. GP's need to be much better educated at risk assessment and have mandatory protocols to follow when assessing and managing mentally ill patients. To many mentally ill patients present to GP's and are inadequately managed; they are poorly assessed; often misdiagnosed and not followed up or adequately referred or reviewed leading to detrimental outcomes. GP clinics and emergency departments are often peoples first point of call in a crisis, these facilities need to have a better focus and approach to diagnosing and referring and educating people and their families around mental health illness. Mental health workers/specialists should be employed in these places and be accessible for all patients so that they can be provided with all the necessary education and resources for initial and ongoing care. "

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 are some great resources available online for example Beyond Blue, MindSpot and The Black Dog Institute, or via phone eg. Lifeline, however there are so many individuals that are unaware of these resources. I feel that GP clinics and Emergency Departments and television/social media could better to market such useful resources to increase awareness and help guide people access early treatment and support. I think having mental health specialists more readily available in the community would be really beneficial to people seeking early treatment and ongoing support. We need to be able to go somewhere and know that we are going to get the right help and support from people/professionals who are passionate and educated and actually care about us and our illness. We need to be informed that there is hope in our situation, that there is help available to us, and a way forward. We need to be followed up with people who care and want to listen and support us through this process. In my experience most GP's don't have the time or energy or passion to deal with mental health issues and they are often reluctant to refer. When/if people present to their GP to get help for their mental health issue we're often desperate for a way forward, for an explanation, and for hope and help out of the situation. So accessibility to GOOD help is vital for survival. Good help can provide early recognition and treatment and help prevent mental health issues from escalating. Good help is currently hard to find, so in my opinion better education and accessibility to more specialised mental health

professionals essential. "

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

"My younger brother recently committed suicide. He was 26. It completely shocked my entire family, as well as his girlfriend whom he was living with at the time, his closest friends, and also the wider community. He didn't fit the usual mould, if you can say there is one... I'm not sure what is currently working well in this domain, however I do feel that GP's can and should be held more accountable in this area and should be doing more in their role to assist in preventing suicide rates. My brother, and I know of two other separate incidences in recent months, where GP accountability and lack of assessment, education, referral and follow up, played a pivotal role these suicides. While I can't speak for the other two gentlemen, I can speak on behalf of my brother and my own personal situation. I sincerely feel that its so vital for individuals to feel heard and supposed and given hope at that first point of call. I've suffered through severe depression myself and I vividly recall how challenging my initially appointments were, it took three appointments of me sitting in front of my GP in tears, literally begging for a referral. It was so hard, and I almost gave up, but after 15 years of working in the health industry as a Registered Nurse and Paramedic, I had insight, I knew I was severely depressed, I knew I had to advocate for myself to get the help I needed and to get better for my husband and kids. This experience gave me insight as to why people chose the other way out - Suicide. It's such a dark and challenge illness, and then its a fight to get the help that's needed. The help is there, its' the accessibility and availability of it that's often the issue for many. So I think if there was a better system, either a central hub for people with mental illness to be assessed by specialised people, and/or mandatory protocols for health professionals to follow so people are diagnosed and treated appropriately early then this would help prevent many suicides. I've attended multiple suicides on a professional level also, and often if initial help was provided in ED or at a GP level, most could have been prevented if early intervention was initiated. "

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.

"Obviously there are multiple factors and current research which support good mental health and wellbeing, and I think most people are aware of the basic everyday lifestyle changes that can be implemented, however, I do feel there is much more that can be done to help individuals access and experience their potential in this area. I believe on a professional level the approach needs to a lot more holistic and multifaceted and up to date with the current evidence research. Patients need to be given this information early on and even as a community have this information accessible as a preventative measure. Education is key. And I feel entire communities need to be reeducated on this information as it's evolved and changed over time. Teachers, nurses, doctors, parents, workplaces, need to be better educated and more engaged in better/good mental health practices. I feel that more people are wanting to learn and improve this area its the accessibility that is the issue. I feel that a solution to a lot of these issues would be having a central Mental Health Hub available in communities, which would be staffed with specialised mental health professionals, from psychiatrists, psychologists, GP's, mental health nurses, dual-diagnosis clinicians, social workers, councillors etc, nutritionalists, naturopaths, yoga/mindfulness/life coaches, dieticians and educators. This would enable communities to have access to an entire team of consistent, passionate and specialised mental wellbeing/health professionals and have access to all of the resources, and ongoing support, referrals, and education they would need.

Workshops, seminars and community awareness and education could also be done at this level. I feel that a consistent, reliable resource point is missing for communities. People don't know where to go and find the right/good help. This needs to be better and easier for individuals and their families. "

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

██████████ Hospital ██████████ is the local provider of mental health care to patients in the region. While I have experience admitting patients to this facility on a professional level I have also had to witness an older sibling be admitted to this facility on an involuntary and voluntary basis on several occasions over the past 17 years. Unfortunately, I have witnessed too many times this facility taking shortcuts and discharging patients too early, and providing poor in patient care, lack of security, poor and often no follow up care in the community upon discharge of patients. Poor triage, patient management and lack of community care has certainly resulted in poor mental health outcomes for many individuals, including my brother who suffers from a chronic mental health illness, schizophrenia. He has no insight into his illness and is non compliant with medication, he abuses alcohol and drugs and there are currently no facilities for him or my family to turn to to help him. He has been homeless at times, abusive and functions very poorly, he struggles with every day tasks and living skills. It's so sad and heartbreaking to seek him like this and know that there is nowhere for him to go. Professionals say, ""let him be"", ""he'll likely be dead by the time he's 40"". Which is just absurd! He is my brother, and he is a human being, and he has the right to be treated fairly and given a safe place to rest his head. He didn't chose to have this illness, just like people don't choose to have cancer. Imagine if cancer patients were discharged onto the street, left to fend for themselves and have nowhere to go. I feel for the chronically ill patients like my brother and many others, who have no insight into their illness, therefore are not of sound mind to make judgment on their health and wellbeing, there needs to be a facility that they can step down to from the Acute Psych Ward and continue to be treated and rehabilitated. Often my brother has been discharged prematurely before the medication can even reach therapeutic levels. As soon as he is discharged he is non-compliant. The Court or his psychiatrist needs to be able to initiate a Court Order for him to continue treatment as the management and care and risk he has on others and himself is just too great. I feel that the lack of education and mental health resources in ██████████ for both acute and long term mental health patients has a huge affect on mental health outcomes. The lack of housing available for chronically ill patients is abysmal. The lack of support for families experiencing the everyday battle is negligible. The closing of community mental health services in ██████████ has created negative effects upon families dealing with loved ones suffering from chronic mental health illness. And also the lack of good, consistent psychologists, psychiatrists, and mental health facilities in the ██████████ has created a "

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

"Over the 17 years my older brother has been suffering from psychosis and schizophrenia and been in and out of hospital my parents and 5 other siblings have never been offered or received any education or psychological support. My siblings and parents and I had never had experienced mental health issues prior to this and we've all endured and witnessed and suffered a lot over these years. At times it's been an intense and very mentally and emotionally challenging time for us all. I do wonder if my family had been offered some education early on whether or not it would

have changed the fate of my younger brother. He committed suicide 11 months ago, at the age of 26. Access to respite would be a huge support for my parents. I honestly don't know how my parents haven't broken down mentally from all they've endured over the years with my older brother and his illness and the lack of support they've received from services when they've needed it the most over the years. To be heard and supported and involved in the care of my brother would be very beneficial for them, especially as they've been his main carer over the years. Better communication from staff is what is needed in circumstances such as these. I know it can't be the case in all mental health cases, but there needs to be exceptions, particularly for those patients are that unwell they don't even identify they have an illness, as management and assisting schizophrenia patients is near impossible. So better education and support at this level would be beneficial. Better resources. Support groups. Help lines. etc"

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

"Better management. More funding. More patient focus, rather than financial focus. Happier and more vibrant decor and staff in the workplace. It's so depressing visiting these places. It can't be good for mental health of patients, if it's depressing for visitors. There is no life in there, so depressing. More engagement in activities. "

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?

"Workplaces need to be more willing to employ mentally ill people. More incentives have to be given to employers to do this. More education is needed for this to happen. People with mental illness are isolated. They need positive connections in their life. They need to be given hope and opportunity. They need to be able to reconnect with society. Online workshops to help with self esteem, confidence, social skills, depending on their needs would be helpful. A list of employers that would be accepting for them to do some part-time work. Re-integrating into a workplace may also need to involve further training, to enable them to develop social skills etc again. More support groups in the local or regional area. A central access point to access available resources would be great. "

Thinking about what Victoria's 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 feel that there needs to be a better system in place for people making that first point of call for help. Assessment and diagnosis is too often dismissed/missed and therefore there needs to be a mandatory protocol for GP's/doctors to follow so assessment is undertaken and referral and follow up made. Patients should be immediately referred to mental health practitioner to be educated, and given more holistic approach to care and mental wellbeing. There needs to be better access to resources. I dream of this being a central Mental Health Hub in communities filled with all of the needs and specialists patients need. People can step into this warm and welcoming Hub and feel supported from the moment they step through the doors. They are greeted by a mental health worker, who can assess their needs and guide them in the right direction. It may be a simple referral to a website or app, or a GP or nurse who specialises in mental health issues, it may be to inform them of an upcoming workshop that's running that day, week, month, or even a referral to the local crisis team, or to schedule them in to see a local psychologist/psychiatrist. In my mind this is so much more! Patients and families need to know where they can get adequate help and support

in these times of need and crisis. There needs to be a central place all of this information is available. GP's that specialise in mental health, psychologists, psychiatrists, all health professionals as listed previously, that can provide a holistic approach to mental wellbeing. This needs to be coordinated early and offered as in times of crisis the family and individuals are often too overwhelmed and mentally exhausted to find and access and utilise this information. For the chronically ill patients like my brother, who suffer from schizophrenia and are non compliant with treatment and have no insight into their illness, there needs to be support for these people. They are suffering. EVERYDAY! We are his voice, so please listen. He desperately needs help! I feel there needs to be better avenues to care for these patients and more support and involvement for their bereaved families. We want what is best for our loved ones, and we want them to be safe. It's heart breaking when this situation is so helpless for us. So help us help them. Ideally there needs to be a mandatory rehab/residential place for these patients to step down into following time in the acute psychiatric ward at [REDACTED]. As these patients have no insight into their illness what is in their best interest, rather than being dumped back into the community and left untreated with no follow up care, and left to deteriorate again, I feel a supported rehab facility would be really beneficial for these patients. Life skills could be retaught, cooking skills, financial management, involve and educate patients about social and employment opportunities, integration into support groups or into a community be really helpful also. The appeal process needs to be addressed. Especially for patients whom are too unwell to have insight into their illness and not of sound mind. In my opinion they should not be able to make sound judgement on their mental health and discharge. This has proven to be a huge flaw in the system for my brother on several occasions, and it has been really disappointing process for my family over the years. At times we have fought so hard to get much needed in patient mental health care for my brother, and had to witness him endure the traumatic involuntary admission process, it has been extremely disheartening to then receive inconsistent and negligent care from treating psychiatrists, which has been detrimental effects on my brothers treatment and discharge. On on occasion one psychiatrist who had know my brother for many years informed my parents that my brother was acutely unwell and needed longterm admission for treatment, my brother disagreed and appealed the decision the following week and had the decision overridden by visiting psychiatrists which resulted in him being discharged a short time later and before treatment could even reach therapeutic levels. This should not be allowed. It's happened multiple times and is just a joke. There needs to be consistency and accountability from the treating team. Wouldn't it be great if society put as much focus on mental health wellbeing as we did on physical wellbeing. Maybe in the future in we'll have 24/7 mental health gyms which we can access. Filled with all things good for our mental well being. Mental health personal trainers, mindfulness pods, yoga studios, a cafe which feeds us nourishing brain food, mental health workshops, sleep stations... One can dream! "

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

"[REDACTED] - [REDACTED] Unit the local psychiatric ward in [REDACTED] needs to be urgently reviewed as it's current management and capacity is extremely insufficient. More resources and funding is needed in the [REDACTED] Area for mental health services, particularly for chronically ill patients. A central Mental Health Hub in communities to allow for better access and availability to mental health resources. Better first point assessment and GP/ED accountability to enhance earlier diagnosis and treatment and referral. Mandatory protocols for mental health patients so misdiagnosis is avoided. Educate community - More workshops, seminars. "

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

"Thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute and feel like finally after so many years of feeling helpless to my brothers situation, for the first time I feel like I can actually finally help him. "