

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

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Name

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

"Improved mental health education in schools. Increased funding for accessible community mental health services. Move away from GP as primary mental health care providers. Develop media guidelines regarding reference to mental health issues. Increase public awareness through media campaigns (currently very superficial). Increase funding into evidence-based treatment for serious and complex mental health disorders e.g. psychotic disorders, personality disorders to increase confidence in effectiveness of mental health services."

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?

Improving public awareness of high-prevalence disorders and options for people. Access to treatment. Improved awareness of need for early intervention in young people. Medicare Better Access system enables people to access psychological treatment in the community without paying the full fee.

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

"Increased referral options for at-risk clients needed - increased option for CATT to respond to suicidal individuals. Increase options for these issues to be managed effectively via outpatient services given potential for inpatient admission to worsen or have minimal mental health outcomes. Improve focus on engagement of 'difficult to engage' individuals e.g., those often ending up in the criminal justice system. People generally tend to lack an understanding of how to access help in an acute crisis unless they have been through the system before. Move away from directing suicidal individuals through primary health system i.e. emergency departments. Improve continuity of care and follow up for individuals identified as being at risk of suicide."

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 worked extensively in forensic mental health, primarily in the prison system, and the demand for mental health services far far outweighs the need. While this relates to all mental health disorders, there are extremely limited options available for individuals with complex and severe mental health issues that also present a risk to the community (i.e., primary diagnosis of personality disorder and do not meet criteria for area mental health involvement). This frequently results in individuals being released into the community with no mental health-follow up, despite having a well-established history of psychiatric issues and repeated requests for support. There is too much of a focus in the community on medical responses to mental health issues, with a lack of understanding about the importance of more holistic evidence based care in assisting people to

recover over the longer term. "

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

Geographical location. Access to services

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

Need for increased support and education around mental health issues. Options for family members and carers to access own supports. Options for carers of those with mental illness to have respite and for this to accommodate individual circumstances and needs

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

"The demands and pressures in the workforce are immense and frequently result in burnout. For psychologists, there is more financial incentive to work in private practice with lower mental health acuity, meaning that individuals in contact with public mental health services are not necessarily able to access the most competent, experienced clinicians. Within the criminal justice system, despite improved servicing of men and women with mental health issues, the gearing of the system towards punishment and deterrence means that improvements in mental health are either temporary or minimal (due to inconsistent health care, undermining of outcomes due to adverse legal outcomes such as not being granted parole). The demand for prison beds also means less stability in prison placements and overcrowding, leading to a much greater potential for prisoners to be traumatised due to institutional violence and exploitation."

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?

"Reduce discrimination around mental health issues in relation to employment. Wherever possible divert people from the criminal justice system - for many with existing mental health issues this only serves to compound their sense of social alienation and difficulty engaging in prosocial and meaningful occupation. For others, imprisonment alone leads to mental health disorders (e.g., through exposure to traumatic experiences or absence of engagement in meaningful activity for prolonged periods, resulting in depression)."

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?

Early intervention. Increase funding for complex and several mental health disorders e.g. personality disorder. Increase funding for forensic mental health services in the community - creating opportunities for individuals with significant criminogenic needs to be able to receive support for mental health (typically community services are not well equipped to be able to deal with these individuals).

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

"Important to put thought into changes with a focus on longer term improvements rather than quick and cheap, superficial changes that are politically popular. Review what other jurisdictions are

doing and what has/hasn't worked. Speak with consumers, particularly those in the criminal justice system"

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

N/A