

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

Organisation Name

Missing Persons Advocacy Network

Name

Ms Loren O'Keffe

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

We need to raise the profile of the issue of missing persons in Victoria. Poor mental health is one of the main reasons that a person goes missing in the first place. And the impact of ambiguous loss (of not knowing) on the loved ones left behind has a significant impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

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?

"Missing Persons Advocacy Network (MPAN) is the only NFP organisation in Australia that responds to the issue of Missing Persons. Over 100 Australians go missing every day, that is 1 every 14 minutes. There are more than 2,600 long-term missing people in Australia. When one person goes missing, research shows at least 12 other people are directly impacted emotionally, financially and psychologically almost half a million Australians every year. MPAN supports those left behind, who are worried sick every moment of the day, trying to find their missing loved one. MPAN has developed world first resources to assist people to find their missing loved one, and it directly/closely supports approximately 50 families at any one time."

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

"We've learned through our relationships with various families, that it is extremely common (though there's no data recorded, which is part of the problem) for loved ones of missing people to become suicidal and/or die by suicide. Specialised mental health support for those experiencing ambiguous loss will alleviate the psychological impact on those left behind when someone is missing.."

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.

N/A

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

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

"Ambiguous loss - Families and friends of Missing persons are the profoundly impacted when their loved one goes missing. If their loved one is missing for minutes, turns into hours, days and longer, the mental health impact increases, and often people require psychological support, medication and

more, to get them through the days and nights. This ambiguous loss is a type of loss that is different to other types of loss we experience. Standard grief counselling does not adequately respond to ambiguous loss and can in fact leave the person feeling further isolated and not understood. MPAN is developing a pilot project to train counsellors in ambiguous loss, so that people experiencing this loss can be receive specialist care. This could be expanded to reach more people when the trial has been implemented and evaluated. The project is based on the work with Missing People in the UK."

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

N/A

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?

"Focus is for families and friends of missing people. If MPAN had the funding, we'd be able to create events that would further assist those impacted with the management of their trauma. Bringing people together who are enduring the same niche grief gives them a sense of belonging and alleviates the social isolation they generally experience (as friends often don't know what to say, so they avoid it altogether)."

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?

N/A

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?

"Research has found that no other form of loss is as unmanageable and traumatic as the stress of ambiguous loss. Unlike traditional bereavement, it doesn't get easier over time, nor can it be fixed with a certain amount of therapy. It is a continual loss that requires specialised and ongoing treatment. It directly and profoundly impacts a community of Australians and must be better understood by our society. MPAN receives no funding from government to provide this ongoing, demanding and important work. To enable MPAN to continue its work and to expand its important role in supporting the mental well-being of those left behind, MPAN needs an allocated funding stream from government. "