

Your contribution

Should you wish to make a formal submission, please consider the questions below, noting that you do not have to respond to all of the questions, instead you may choose to respond to only some of them.

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

I am a former First Police Constable, Advanced Child Protection Worker (Vic), Senior Incident Manager for Qld Government, 'I ran 95% of the State of Qld. I did military service with the Army Reserve and RAN which was over in my early 20's.

In 2010 -2011 I did a NATO Contract in Afghanistan where I was first medical response to 35000-40000 troops and contractors, part of my role was incident investigation which the US Govt required.

I was front line in the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires as a CFA volunteer and local resident in the [REDACTED] South. The surrounding areas were [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] area, it was all within 5-8 kilometres I bare witness to the horror. Just under [REDACTED] houses lost, [REDACTED] dead from our community. Our pages were going off but we couldn't get to them, we were under resources and even doing what we could we are purely lucky we survived.

I have a lived experience of mental illness and have experienced that insufficient time is given to people with mental health issues e.g. one hour appoints lead to more crisis, it is a snowball effect of issues.

I affirm that early intervention is crucial, I believe it is likely contain significant damage to one's mental health.

I would like to see holistic intervention which did not happen for my family, the children suffer the most. It is my observations; they are the forgotten ones. My family separated, my children were alienated from me, my son by 15 on ICE, selling drugs as his mother and sister abandoned him, all my family are suffering. My son is not at school is involved with police and DHHS Child Protection and Youth Justice.

My involvement with Government personally and as a parent post diagnosis has included CFA, DHHS, VicPol, Dept of Ed, DHHS Child Protection, the Govt. strategies used have been contributing significantly to my mental health issues. Every contact results in risk mitigation strategies.

I can see what should be happening, I have firm evidence the states employees go to great lengths to mitigate liability to the state.

Discrimination is prominent at the CFA, it is you face top to bottom. The most Senior Fire Officer described me to the Police and Emergency Services as, 'this is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] he has mental health', it is just condescending.

While working as a constable for the Victoria Police, I found their attitude to people with mental health was belittling, there was a real lack of comprehension of it and a sense of superiority amongst police, but at the Police Academy you hear the words, 'you are the Queen's men' true but just childish statements in my view.

After exciting Victoria Police and being asked to report my PTSD I experienced police making fun

of my mental health issue, I am left with no doubt it was an abuse of power.

I know you have to develop thick skin to keep seeking help, when you're already struggling, it is a battle regarding a battle, it's a catch 22 situation. When you have mental health issues you are trying to problem solve and things come at you from left field, they contribute to your mental health issues as your capacity to process them is inadequate and unsustainable.

After Black Saturday, looking back now with a different perspective, reflecting I can see the warning signs. While it is happening, it is almost like "disassociation", it's a blur almost like surviving rapids without a canoe.

I sold my house, not through fire but by poor decisions, we really couldn't afford to move re start again but I'd hate to think of the other option, seemed very bleak.

When the Black Saturday onslaught happened, I was on long service leave and had accrued holiday leave, that money is what we lived off.

Despite being vulnerable, we left our home and we moved to Qld 2009 and returned in 2011, we sold the house and returned to Queensland early 2012. By 2013 the marriage was all but over. On 28-10-2012 my wives mental health was not good, on that Sunday night, she tried to strangle me and made admissions to Queensland Police. In 2014 she returned to Victoria and fooled Victorian Courts into believing she was a victim of domestic violence and I have had intervention orders on me ever since, this was as took action in the family court.

Regarding ██████████ South I found it had to live with my family in a place of death and destruction.

I didn't lose my house, which was luck. I was on one of █ fire trucks nearby but we definitely were not focused on my house, we were preventing the whole town going up at the ██████████

As a volunteer fire fighter for the CFA, we protected the town. I was frontline and there were only █ of us there fighting on our truck, there was one more further up and there was a █-person crew in a 4x4.

We were fighting the fire and helping get people out of their homes, people left it way to late to get out, they were getting animals etc and I saw the fire following a stream of headlights out of ██████████ just making it to safety.

I saw horrific scenes during the fire that stay with me, I did approximately 48 hours before making it to a bed with slight breaks, less than an hour. I got about 5 hours sleep and was back out into it. Interstate crews arrived days later and stayed for a significant time. Ours were from South Australia.

3 or more days later the Police, including the Australian Federal Police (AFP), NSW Police the military, choppers, Bill Shorten who was then Acting Prime Minister I knew it was a big deal as it was all happening.

The days after the fire it was just baron, scored earth, it was quite.

I saw things physically that needed to be done but mentally it was very tough to process it all.

I can see the logistics of it. I slipped under the radar, like being at war.

I have completed two stints in Afghanistan, in the First Response Unit as a driver. I was the only one who was an ex-cop.

At the time I was sleeping well and experiencing no flashbacks, but I was under a lot of pressure.

After my 2nd Afghanistan stint I returned to Qld and my wife wanted to move back to the fire zone as our house was there. I didn't want to be there as it was still the same, fire ravaged and when I smelt the fire, it all came back.

My kids didn't talk about their experience much, and it felt like my wife was acting like it didn't even happen. There was disassociation.

The CFA booted me out due to PTSD - I was a volunteer until 2016/17.

Even though it wasn't my identity, it removes that for me, something I can no longer do. I could not go back on the front line.

I was have a report in late 2018, by a CFA appointed Independent Medical Examiner that my PTSD was in remission. It is NOT in remission.

People keep asking me when I am going to get better- I would love to be better, but unfortunately, I still suffer from severe PTSD.

I saw a lot of domestic violence situations while in the police force, and the impact this has on people.

My wife and I separated late 2012.

I am now in a new relationship which is much better for me, with a supportive woman who understands mental illness, domestic violence and the impact on individuals and families, she has a Degree in Psychology and worked as a Domestic Violence Counsellor.

I had to take out family court action with regard to having access to my kids, 8 months post separation I was in a relationship with an [REDACTED], my ex-wife didn't like that and did a precipitous departure overnight from Queensland to Victoria, in cohorts with her parents.

I had full IVO's against me less than a week after I logged the Family Court Recovery Order, I now know this strategy is called 'the silver bullet' in the Family Law industry.

The Family Court process is a toxic one. It is very simple, one person is made to be bad, the other good. Both parties are pitted against each other. Whoever takes the children first in 98.5% of cases gets to keep them. It was 7 weeks before my application was heard, by then my ex-wife was claiming the children were settled and all victims of domestic violence. With that 50/50 parenting was eliminated.

I know the above strategy well, evidence of the world wide used template is found in the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Bala Report 2012.

I have an 18-year-old daughter who is studying at Deakin University, I don't see her at all, I love and miss her, she has be alienate from me by my

I can't have my son live with me as I as have IVO's on me- I have asked for them to be removed so my son can live with me but DHHS have this anti men gender bias. My partner is a former domestic violence counsellor, and psychologist, he daughter studies law at Melbourne Uni.

The Black Saturday Bushfire's was the start of the breakdown of my family. I didn't give evidence

at the Royal Commission into the Black Saturday bushfires. I didn't have the confidence to give evidence back then, meaning I just wanted it to all go away.

I saw people getting recognised, and one man received the national emergency medal- and these people weren't even there- they weren't on the front line. There were only [REDACTED] of us that were. The people on the ground who were supposed to be supporting us weren't.

The Victorian Govt were paying a company called [REDACTED] to try and help me set up and market a business, they were listed on the Govt website. I found out they aren't mental health experts even though they said they were and this greatly contributed to my current mental health issues. It was a scam milking the Government

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

Mental health has had a significant impact on my life- a frustrating system.

51% of children come from a separated family- a very high stat that is found in Parental Alienation research on the Australian Institute of Family Studies website. The Professor [REDACTED] research 2012 gives deep insight as to why this happens, in summary, it is lawyers pitting families together to make a dollar.

There is a significant issue of parents who cannot see their children, this exacerbates existing mental health problems.

There needs to be effective strategies for reaching out to at- risk men- more suicide prevention- strategies. We need to try to remove the gender bias. Men need to communicate, to reduce isolation and to connect. The gender bias by the Victorian Government does not contribute to a balanced healthy society.

The Aged, the disabled, isolated farmers, people in the mental health workforce, victims, people with drug and alcohol problems, all require support with suicide prevention.

The Govt is making tax from the selling of alcohol- an enabled part of society- this creates dysfunction which feeds the economy.

It is important to make social connections, and sport is a good example of reflecting the ups and downs of life. The emotions of the game- anger, letting off steam, people talking and connecting who wouldn't normally, it brings people together in society.

With PTSD and depression/anxiety, you have to hit rock bottom before you come back up. There is always someone ready to kick you back in the guts, Govt keep asking professionals when I will get better.

I joined the gym this helps me manage my mental health yet it is a struggle to stay motivated.

I have a strong connection with my partner who understands my issues- we all need a support network. It is important to try and have a healthy mind.

I find distracting the mind helps- ruminations lessen, less rubbish in your mind-I do this with yoga and meditation.

The human brain needs to be told what to do. If we are depressed, we feel like we have lost everything, and we need to take some control.

I find routines and responsibility are needed, and structure.

Find some purpose in life.

Societal expectations, and social pressure are hard. You want to be a functional part of society.

With all employment these days, you need to be qualified.

People with mental illness are being taken out of the community.

3. 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.

It's important to surround yourself with the right people.

People talking about their own Lived Experience- peer support.

What do you need?

Social interaction skills

Animals, therapy.

Structure of a community- watching animals and retriggering community and how to interact with people.

Need to get the spark back into someone's brain.

Recovery is an interesting concept. You cannot expect someone to be there 24/7 for you and services are 9-5, and not easily accessible. I think you need to reach crisis point to access services. My son, who just turned 16, is now taking drugs due to suffering PTSD from the fires- he is living up in [REDACTED] now and I have tried to get appropriate services for him. My son is now part of the DHHS cycle and is not allowed to live with his mum. He has a DHHS approved carer, I last saw him 2 weeks ago.

I have a pressure cooker in my brain at times, and over the counter pain medication doesn't work. I am on medication to try and relax my mind.

All I needed was basic medication. I don't want to be a drug addict.

I have been seeing a psychiatrist for the past 18 months. I get my medication through him, but it is expensive, and the sessions aren't long enough for me.

Whenever I receive counselling, they want you to go back and finish your story- relive the story- I want to forget my story- not keep telling it.

There is so much red tape regarding getting services, this is part of the pattern of what happened to me and there is a clear reason for my PTSD diagnosis. There were certain connections to follow, and I found a resistance to follow protocol. Interventions that were available weren't appropriate for me.

CBT is useless, I have tried EMDR but I am not sure it fixes PTSD as I still cannot sleep at night, it

is a work in progress.

I have been hospitalised for my mental health. I believe people need to reach a critical point to get help.

People just want the PTSD to go away, but it doesn't work like that.

I have had over 100 counselling sessions, and 22 with my current psychologist.

Hospital admissions for your mental health don't always address what you are there for.

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

Isolation

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

People use religion and churches to get that relief, and each other.

There is too much expectation on carers and they don't have the tools to help, it is a flow on and then effect their mental health.

Our whole family is affected by the fires. - all affected by PTSD and all coming apart. My mother was not even there but has been supportive, there has been no assistance for her.

It has had a debilitating effect on the family- my daughter is at [REDACTED] but I don't see her at all, it is clearly unhealthy, but my ex wife decided parental alienation was a wise strategy to hurt me for leaving her.

She is now out in the world and exposed to others at uni and this is hopefully expanding her mind and experiences.

I VO's mean I cannot have much contact with my kids- there must be another way.

I had to defend myself in the system, and I actually do not have the capacity to, legal aid services are hopeless as they are not funded appropriately and the lawyers have no motivation.

There are assumptions occurring when you inform people you have PTSD.

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

If people don't fit the box, they aren't included - I have been on interview panels and seen this happen.

Older, more experienced workers I have observed are undervalued. People with their own mental health issues are pushed aside as professionals, but when you delve into most people's live regardless of if they admit it or not, generally they have it in some way shape or form.

If you are employed straight out of Uni, you don't have the life experience. This can lead to taking an organisation on a culture path that is unhealthy. DHHS was a classic example of this, that place is one of the worst workplace cultures I have ever experienced, and they are the ones running the majority of mental health programs. I have found many professionals to be soul searching themselves.

In regard to the mental health workforce, people are in positions of power and should not abuse this but the fact is many do.

I feel like there is hope for individuals and groups with a lived experience of mental illness communities to wherever that may extend others can be helped.

A person with lived experience is looking to others for guidance and support still, and who associates them may or many not benefit them, it really depends on how vulnerable the follower is and how well the leader actually is.

We need to look at what the benefits of an individuals really are, and encourage the use of those abilities as a community, reshape the skill to boost confidence and add value to the community.

We need intelligent people to lead people with mental health, however overloading them with people who are too intelligent and cannot communicate in simple turns I believe is detrimental.

We need clear communication, and to try to pay attention to the message - what they are saying.

7. 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 is huge pressure on society to evolve all the time and this does not help things. There is no secret, the communities culture is lead from the top but the top in order to do that successfully need to understand the people down the bottom to gain meaningful insight.

There is no really mental health community groups, these are outsourced to community services organisations and they are a business with an agenda, that is ultimately to make money, people are not silly. I have insight into this as I worked in government. Empowering the people to believe they have valued I sense contributes to a more profitable society.

8. 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?

Institutions are being closed and this means people are being made homeless and being pushed out. There is not routine for them and with that they drop out of sync with society, I am guilty of it myself.

Remove the stigma. The R U OK? campaign was a good concept, but mental health is not new, humans have been around a long time.

██████████ Mates for Mates I like the concept. ██████████ I have major issues with who heads it, she has a history of abusing people by their decisions and then acting like they are the saviour for the problems they have caused for so many ██████████ is a absolute classic example. ██████████ he made significant decisions that impacted on the lives and livelihoods on many Victorian's to not acknowledge that is a delusional society, and delusional government.

Mental health wellbeing and ██████████ we need to improve these services. I have heard them talk, it is a performance and they are saying the same stuff from 20 years ago, and the fact is they do not provide solutions. I would happily have a debate with them.

The media control what we are seeing on TV, it is blood, guts, murder, crime, man bashing is continuous and if you actually took it all too serious, society would all end up with mental health.

Regarding people, I note it is unattractive to cry and show emotion, especially as a man, those Workcover ads, they look like a bunch of babies stuck as victims, they are hard to take serious, it looks like a uni student has done the ad.

If logic is pushing down emotion, emotion will be suppressed, only when allowed or in a safe place will it pop up. However emotion will ultimately override logic.

There is lots of Govt training involved in working in the Police force, but more is needed to better manage colleagues and the general public who are battling mental health issues.

We need policies to offer help to people after a traumatic event. People are left on their own to try and deal with big life changes.

9. What can be done now to prepare for changes to Victoria's mental health system and support improvements to last?

Get serious, get raw have a brutal, uncomfortable good look at the dysfunction of the system. Listen to the people it effects. Look at the medications being dispursed to address this issue in Victoria.

A transcendence in thinking about mental health is required, that comes from a dose of reality.

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

It is clear the Royal Commission is not adequately funded. I sense post it's release and people get more comfortable about talking about it, it needs to be revisited.

Privacy
acknowledgement

I understand that the Royal Commission works with the assistance of its advisers and service providers. I agree that personal information about me and provided by me will be handled as described on the Privacy Page.

Yes No