

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

SUB. 0002.0028.0465



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

"Individuals and families living with mental health issues are tired. They have given up careers, hobbies, and friends to care for their loved ones. Their own health and emotional lives are often in tatters as a result of the endless ups and downs of mental illness and never ending appointments and hospital stays. Please educate the public that mental health issues affect more than the individual suffering from them. It's the whole family. They need more support. Education, finance, holidays, more carers leave to care for suicidal family members who can't get into 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?**

"The system just isn't working. Our public mental health wards are full of drug addicts and there are no beds. We have taken out private health to care for my husband so he can attend a private hospital and out patients program which is costing over \$800 per month!?! We did this a year ago and have found the program run at Beleura Private Hospital very good. Why can't all mental health wards we run like this ? As for prevention , put more money into decent services which are affordable and safe (public mental health wards are not safe). Too many psychologists and psychs are charging way above the recommended fee. Even on the GP's mental health plan (6 per year) we pay \$130 on top of the government allowance ). "

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

"My husband called lifeline this year to chat. He let them know he was thinking about suicide. They sent the police after him, even though he was being cared for by his son. We took him to emergency and waited until 2 in the morning only to be told there were no beds in public or private hospitals?!? So he waited in emergency. I had to go to work ?! It's a joke. "

## **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.**

"My husband grew up in a home with a parent who had bipolar. It was very traumatic, but he never spoke about it until his own breakdown 8 years ago. He never had any education with regard to emotional or mental health issues at school and with such stigma associated with it, most families kept it under wraps. Neither of us really knew what to do when he started to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety. We sought help from a Counselor who was hopeless, and friends told us to stay away from medication. This led to a serious breakdown which involved calling ambulances as he was catatonic. He couldn't work and we lost our house and business. We got no support really. "

## **What are the drivers behind some communities in Victoria experiencing poorer mental**

### **health outcomes and what needs to be done to address this?**

"Funding, funding, funding More smaller mental health facilities than run education programs, Outpatient programs and inpatient short stays. One in each community. They could also run group therapy sessions. People can't afford expensive psychiatric and psychology sessions even with the government allowance. "

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

Funding More carers leave when they are caring for suicidal family member Carers allowance. (I have given up my life to care for my husband and his mental health issues) Education for family members Group therapy with others who are caring Free mental checks for carers

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

Better pay Double leave (at least 8 weeks) Ongoing free education

### **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?**

My husband found the YMCA very supportive He joined the gym and ended up running mental health awareness programs in the gym and local high school. Due to the nature of his illness he couldn't continue on a regular basis.

### **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?**

"Funding to hospitals Overhaul the entire mental health programs run in hospitals to make for a safe, engaging and holistic approach to rehabilitation. Funding to carers of family members with mental health issues. We're the ones giving up everything. I can understand how people with depression end up on the street!! If they don't have family they're stuffed. More community based mental health facilities offering education, inpatient short term care, group therapy etc "

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

"We need immediate action on this. We need very clear pathways for people who have early warning signs of breakdown First contact with GP should be very supportive with clear pathway of support and medication, psychologist, maybe hospital stay There should be no stigma They should not lose their jobs Funding if they have a business Educate families Get into the schools "

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

It has been absolutely heartbreaking to watch my husband try to navigate his way through the system. It has also been hard on myself and our children. We are the ones trying to keep him alive when he's so depressed he can't get up in the mornings. You leave for work hoping he'll be ok. Or when you're ringing around trying to convince the hospital that he's suicidal and they say wait three weeks. There's no beds...