

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

SUB. 0002.0006.0110

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

"I come from an ethnic background like many fellow Victorians. From firsthand experience I can confidently say the awareness of mental illnesses among people from ethnic background are much less compared to the general public. The issue magnifies with members of these communities with limited exposure to the general society. In my view this includes the seniors of these communities and stay at home mothers. Specially the senior citizens of ethnic communities only associate members from their communities. They hold on to, many cultural and social values of their country of origin. General mental health awareness programs unfortunately do not penetrate to this group. For an example even a tv announcement promoting Mental health during prime time will not be seeing by this group who mainly watch soap operas from their country of origin available on YouTube. My suggestion is there to be a targeted awareness programs, in non-English languages as well. It could be something as simple as leaflets in other languages left at culturally diverse places like, places of worship, shops selling ethnic food etc. These would have a far-reaching capacity within ethnic communities at a fraction of a cost of other methods like prime-time TV announcements. Another possible place is YouTube, for an example if someone from Victoria watches videos in other language a short few second mental health awareness announcement in that particular language can be played. Again this will cost much less than a prime time TV advert."

### **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?**

Medicare subsidised access to psychologist. However lot of psychologist have considerable out of pocket charge. In my view if more psychologists are made available the fees will go down due to competition

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

N/A

### **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 feel work place awareness into mental health is extremely important

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

"Not having the awareness of mental health issues and not seeing mental health as a medical issue are drivers for poor mental health. My suggestion is there to be a targeted awareness programs, in non-English languages as well. It could be something as simple as leaflets in other

languages left at culturally diverse places like, places of worship, shops selling ethnic food etc. These would have a far-reaching capacity within ethnic communities at a fraction of a cost of other methods like prime-time TV announcements. Another possible place is YouTube, for an example if someone from Victoria watches videos in other language a short few second mental health awareness announcement in that particular language can be played. Again this will cost much less than a prime time TV advert."

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

It is important for family members and carers to understand mental health issues takes a long time to recover. It's not something that can be fixed by 5 day course of medication. In my experience the empathy and sympathy for a mental health patient is much less than any other illness. For an example if someone had an heart attack the family members will be very sympathetic and look after the ill person but when it comes to mental health the response can be vastly different For an example I was told by my mother-in-law that I can come out of depression and anxiety in a snap of finger if I develop the right mind set. I do appreciate it can be frustrating and family members could run out of patience due to the extra long time that may take one to become better after deterioration of mental health. Again I can not think about anything but education and awareness to overcome these issues

**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?**

N/A

**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?**

I wish the society will change to see mental health illnesses as another form of illness that can be either cured or managed. As stated elsewhere I was admitted to ██████████ Mental Health Unit for Depression and anxiety and I had to take 5 days off from work. I returned to work straight after that. I was an Engineer on a contract. My workplace said they support me and would be flexible for me to go to medical appointments etc during work hours which I am grateful for. However within few weeks they hired another engineer of similar experience to me and I straight away knew that my contract would not be extended. 3 months later my predictions became true.

**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?**

"I am 39 years old from Sri Lankan background and Australia has been my home for 20 years. I have a very traumatic experience due to the stigma and lack of awareness in Mental Health Issues. I was diagnosed with Depression 17 years ago when I was in the University and have

managed my condition well with the help from medical professionals. However during my short marriage I have been pushed to stop medication for Depression by my ex-wife. Due to advice and views of her mother, my wife was in the belief that all mental health illnesses are mind made (the stories we tell our selves) and can be easily overcome by developing the right mindset. My mother-in-law is a strong follower of a very unorthodox ethnic religious group. Some in the Sri Lankan community calls this group a Cult with a supreme leader. On Nov 19, 2015 my ex-wife wrote ..You are taking pill bc of your mindset or your approach to this situation or way you think or stories you tell yourself then I do have a big issue and this has trouble me a lot more than you know since we have known each other so I have a big issue with it. If you are cutting yourself short. Either case I think it is worth trying to change mindset. I think Buddha teaching is way to change a person mindset and that you can change your mindset through applying his teaching. I have felt very strongly from the time we were dating and around time you told me these issue till now that I can help you overcome these issue honestly I feel we both can work together and overcome it. I felt very strongly then and still feel very strongly now that Lalith uncle, my mum, lockuamma and Bapi and Gayandhi Akki can help you to change your mindset. I felt that with there support also you can also change your mindset and overcome it. Here she refers to the depression medication by pill. The Guru (leader) of the religious group as Lalith uncle and Mum (mother), lockuamma (aunt), bapi (uncle) and Gayandhi akki (cousin) are members of her family who are strong followers of this religious group. Due to the constant pressure from my ex-wife I cut down on my depression medication. I was made guilty of taking medication for a medical illness. With reluctance I also attended number of 4 day retreats (sermon programs) by this Guru held in Melbourne and Sydney. When I started seeing things through the shaded lenses of Depression due to cutting down of medication I felt even more guilty of having depression and I too started to believe that I can truly overcome this by following the teachings. Due to lack of medication my mental health deteriorated very badly very quickly and I started to experience anxiety attacks for the first time in my life. During these attacks the heart palpitations I experienced were very strong at times I thought I was having a heart attack. I lived through a very dark period where everything even eating a meal was an effort to me. I was constantly experiencing high levels of anxiety, I lived in a flight and fight mode for most of the day. I could not concentrate and repeatedly failed in getting a job. Eventually I saw a psychiatrist secretly to my wife and ended up being admitted to ████████ Mental Health unit. It was the first time I became an inpatient. It has taken over 2 years for me to get back to where I was before the deterioration of my mental health. Now I am full time employed live a generally content life without my ex-wife. I feel extremely frustrated that I had to endure a huge relapse of Depression and Anxiety for unwarranted reasons. I suffered from suicidal thoughts because my brain was not functioning properly without the right physiology. All because my ex-wife had a belief that I should stop medication for Depression and find a remedy through religion. My mother-in-law had the ability to change the views of my wife, a very well educated woman, who completed school and university in Melbourne. If there was at least a general knowledge in my mother-in-law that Mental illness are Medical illnesses and medication does help as in any other illness like diabetic for an example, I may not have had to lived through the darkest days of my life. The mother-in-law takes medication for diabetes. It seems very hypocritical to me when its ok to take medication when someones pancreas does not work but its not ok to take medication when ones brain glands dont work properly. Once my mother-in-law told me that I can come out of Depression in a snap of a finger if I develop the right mindset. Most importantly I am concerned if there are other vulnerable individuals like me, may be deprived of right medical attention by the followers of this extreme religious group. I am glad that I came across The Royal Commission website and able to share my experience and hope recommendations can be made to the government to be aware of religious groups who are in

denial of Mental health issues and may be preventing from vulnerable people from accessing the medical help"