

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

## Organisation Name

N/A

## Name

Miss Cassandra Ryan

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

"While there is currently work being done to address the attitudes towards depression within the greater community. There is no work being done on a state wide level as such towards relieving discrimination on other mental illnesses. R U OK day goes some way to check in with base line depression, but covers one day a year. Consider however that it does alienate others within the mentally ill community, and can feel mocking towards them. Consider instead more days of awareness with funky lines as well. R U OKAY day is great for raising early awareness for depression. But for those people with mental illness that is chronic, and has no end in sight, it comes off as offensive. "

### **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?**

"Ensuring that asking for help is the correct and right thing to do. Preventing mental illness goes further than the scope of the health department, as you're now looking into economics, housing, jobs, genetics, life-events. You're better off focusing on ensuring that people are able to come and get help when they need it, making sure that all General Practitioner offices and the GP's understand that these people need to be sent to see someone low pressure within a community base (EACH, for example). Where there are social workers and professionals that are much more relaxed, but that can also offer a range of other services that are helpful to alleviating depression. This however will put strain on an already over burdened public mental health system. "

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

"What's working well? Huh, not a lot when it comes to suicide prevention. More early crisis prevention. Ensuring that people that are at risk have access to long term public mental health services at community public service providers (again, like EACH). Nothing makes you feel more worthless than knowing your problems are limited to six sessions. Putting more money into building BETTER, more ATTRACTIVE, less DEPRESSING, mental health facilities, and psych in-patient units. All Victorian psych in patient units are under extreme stress. All you have to do is have meetings at these places with the staff who runs them to find out how bad it is. Accepting more people with mental health issues onto the DSP"

### **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.**

"Lack in funding of public mental health support, as well as being able to find out about it. It should be advertised in all doctors offices, in hospitals, anywhere there is a public space, these places should be advertised. There should be a single, easily accessible website that someone can go to to find out where their local mental health provider is. With information on who they are, what they

supply. There should also be a listing of private sources on there as well. Their specialities, their pricing, where they are located. All this information should be a few clicks or swipes away. There also needs to be a re-implementation of paying "the gap" at a private clinic. Many people are unable to go, given that the amount that they have to pay is in the hundreds. And while they get most of it back. They still need to have HUNDREDS of dollars available. To someone that is severely mentally ill, that's something that does not happen."

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

"A lack of funding. A lack of access to mental health services. Poor/ingrained attitudes that mental health issues are a sign of weakness, or that "she'll be right", instead of seeking help. Honestly, the system is under so much strain because it lacks so much money, resources and infrastructure. "

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

"Heck. I don't know. Ensuring that they have access to someone to talk to as well. That they have an easier time getting a carer payment, and that it's sufficient to counter the cost of taking care of someone that is mentally ill. "

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

"Money, better working conditions, more benefits. It's an incredibly under-funded area, so they lack the ability to hire people to work there, placing more stress on the people that are working there. Hell, I'm severely mentally ill, but I'd get a job in mental health if I could. If there is a lack of funding, they cannot hire people to reduce strain on the workers. Ensuring that the workers have an enjoyable work space. It's bloody depressing there."

### **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?**

"Excuse me while I start laughing. Economic participation? No one wants to hire someone that's mentally ill and might have a break down at any point. The only time people were getting hired is when the government was paying them to hire people. And it's usually the terrible jobs, things you would see indentured servants doing. There's some more stigma for you. Mentally ill people are only allowed jobs that are meaningless, fruitless and require only the body to do. There have been great youth services that allowed weekly catch ups, to participate in art, and social outings and excursions. But those are, you guessed it. Under funded. They're also for YOUTHS, so the cut off is at 24. Now at 31, I would love to be able to catch up in my town again and sit and talk and paint and enjoy some time with other people. There are plenty of therapies out there that don't involve talking to a therapist, that could be easily turned into social groups while providing people with therapy and support. The government just has to care. "

### **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. So much more funding. Look I would need a lot more time and someone else to talk to about this. But the system is under strain and under funded. There are already some amazing

people and work being done out here, but it's only reaching a tiny community because that is as far as the money allows. More hiring in mental health services. Take the strain off those already working in the industry, and try and suck some of those working in private practice into working public. Decrease the cost of studying psychiatry/psychology in university for those who want to go into the field. Rebuild/Build new in-patient psychiatric facilities that don't look like depressing nut-houses. "

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

"Include long term budget changes that support not only the mentally ill, but those that work in the field. There is a lot of light being shone on depression currently, but a lack of light being shone on other mental health illnesses. These are people that are still at risk of discrimination and stigma. Force private health companies to cover psychiatric visits as an extra for lower coverage plans. "

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

"Look, at 31, I've been dealing with the public mental health system for 20 years. Since I tried to kill myself as a child. There are places that are severely lacking, and some that are amazing. There does need to be more money in the area in general, and we need to be able to stop so many professionals going private, which is taking away people's ability to get help. There is a massive gap between youth help and adult help. There seems to be a giant hope that 'they' will be able to stop any mental health issues before you become an adult, and for a lot of us it's something that won't happen. There are still those of us, like me, that will be mentally ill for the rest of our lives. We do not know what will happen in our future, and where our continued care will come from. "