

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

## Organisation Name

N/A

## Name

Mr Stephen O Sullivan

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

N/A

## 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?

N/A

## 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.

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?

N/A

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

"The monotonous questioning by multiple professionals in a country where stable/long term GPs, etc, are impossible to find in rural areas; having to go through the same introductions with new faces brings about a 'why do I bother?' attitude when explaining your mental health issues. I'm certainly not assuming that a medical professional can ascertain what's wrong with an individual without asking exploratory questions, or that those trained in matters of the mind are in any way wrong in trying to delve into the mental recesses of those seeking help without asking these types of questions; I'm just really, really tired. Unfortunately the health system in this wonderful country (and others, no doubt) struggle with the weight of mental illness and providing a consistent level of care to those suffering, which means that answering those base questions becomes a regular event, as you are shuffled from one professional to another - through no fault of their own - due to waiting lists, few Medicare (public) availabilities, exorbitant private health professional fees, government funding, relocation of doctors, etc. It can become such a common place occurrence, that the regular questioning without further progress can make the answers seem contrived; the more I question myself the more I feel like a thorn in the side of a system that needs to help those 'really in need'. I can end up feeling like I need to just 'suck it up', or worse, like a liar. This can (and has in the past) lead to answering questions 'as they should be answered' rather than how 'you really feel about the answer', so that you can derive the most basic solution and move on -

short term low-dosage medication, brief counseling - Suck it up sunshine!"

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

"I've seen 9 different doctors over the last 6 years in Kyneton, Victoria; this is all due to GPs coming for the minimum amount of time needed to progress their career before moving to the 'Big Smoke' - trying to remedy this would be a start, as the GP is the first port of call for many of us, and not having stability reduces my capacity to actually make a regular appointment."

**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?**

"Bugger all opportunities! I have survived multiple suicide attempts, and immediately following on from each of the three occasions my wife, two young children and myself were in serious financial difficulties with no considerate support available through government channels - the paperwork and waiting times were crippling, and barring large financial gifts from family we would've been destitute - and during one specific time after my release from hospital, my wife asked a government employee at ██████████ Centrelink about what we were to survive on until any entitlements came through, the response was verbatim..."off the smell of an oily rag essentially, I'm sorry to say.""

**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?**

"Hospital facilities need upgrading for mental health patients, with different secure areas for patients of differing medical needs; for example, when I was placed in the ██████████ Psych Unit upon my release from ICU after a prescription drug overdose, I was side by side with patients who were serious drug users, violent offenders, and others, who seriously exacerbated my severe anxiety, bipolar and PTSD conditions. The conditions of the general areas of the unit, along with the shared rooms actually brought my suicidal thoughts and urges to the fore, and I felt drastically worse from being there upon my leaving. "

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

"The system is fractured and messy - the feeling that the ambulance service is the only option for serious help, and usually as a 'too late' last resort is decidedly wrong; unfortunately it is the thought process behind where the best help is for me and others like me, as the local GP is often too busy and diazepam handout happy to really help - and the local social services, such as ██████████ Community Health have come across as disinterested at times (but I would guess it has more to do with a lack of options for them to fall back on in serious cases.) "

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

"I have written a blog on my first experiences within the internal workings of the system and the difficulties in procuring help (after my first major breakdown and suicide attempt) and it is at: [stevesullblog.com](http://stevesullblog.com) or can be found under - Sull'n Existence. The commission is more than welcome to, and I fully authorise the use of any part of the blog as necessary as it is completely my own work, and no further permissions are needed to utilise its information."