

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

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

"Education is vital, unless you are working in the area then until it impacts you directly you will have next to no knowledge, and then when something does happen you don't know where to look for help. Adding modules to the curriculum in late primary or early secondary school would go a long way towards this, perhaps integrated with general first-aid instruction."

## **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?**

"There are some wonderful people and groups working in carer education and support, but how do you know they are there when you need them? They are rather poorly funded and resourced, and under the present NDIS model this may be worse rather than better. The police are often the first on the scene when something goes wrong, and they need to be better resourced and educated in this area. In our case we had two squad cars turn up after midnight when my wife was hallucinating and called 000. They recognized it as a mental health issue and handed it on to a mental health group - who belatedly contacted us by post to say they would like to help but we were not in their area!"

## **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.**

"It was our direct experience that there is almost no communication between the mental health service and the police, and from what we can ascertain there is no system in place for this to occur. "Privacy" legislation is the principle reason given for this, but it appears that both services are too stretched for time to actually become familiar with the legislation, and rather just use it as a blanket reason for refusing to communicate. To improve this we need to have a system set up to facilitate communication between mental health, the police, the judiciary, and consumers and carers. This could be a single point of contact and assistive technology, surely we are smart enough to come up with something here - and perhaps export it to the world!"

## **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?**

"There are some organizations making great submissions in this area, to which I have made some contributions. I intend to further represent and illustrate my direct personal experience in attachments to this submission. A lot boils down to: - Better fund and resource local carer support and education groups - Facilitate communication between carers and health professionals, particularly psychiatrists "

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

"There are some incredibly compassionate, caring and dedicated people working in this area. There are also quite a few who are just in it for the money, such as it is, and the self-respect that comes with having a job. To attract and retain a dedicated workforce you need to provide them with a vision, a goal to strive for, and a clear path towards reaching it. You need consistency, backup, good resources and infrastructure, and adequate rewards. Support workers need to be rewarded for their dedication and compassion, and not chastised for ""not following the rules"" to keep everything professional - that isn't good for the carer or the one they are caring for. ("Participant", as they are called) These things are not there now, and are not easy to achieve. "

**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 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?**

N/A

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

N/A

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

"The specific focus of my submission is the lack of a reliable communications system between the mental health services and the police and legal systems. This is exacerbated by the privacy legislation and its overly broad interpretation, which has a heavy impact on family and carers, this in turn reflecting back on and limiting their ability to care for their loved ones. I highlight this in my attached documents, which describe the events leading to and surrounding one specific incident and the impact it made on our lives. I see no technical difficulties in setting up a good communications channel, given a willingness from the leadership of each group to promote and sponsor it internally, provided there is some political push which can clear a way through perceived conflicts in legislation. At least someone should be assigned the task of looking into the best way to get this going, with the authority and funding required to push things along at a reasonable pace. As someone with firsthand knowledge of the problem I would be interested in having a role in this process. "