

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

## Organisation Name

Mada Australia - South Sudanese Community Development Initiative

## Name

Mr Stephen Mutton

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

"From a South Sudanese community perspective, people including youth suffer from a range of mental health issues brought about by a sudden introduction to a different culture, unemployment, lack of education, gambling and alcohol and drug abuse which has led to anti-social behaviour and criminality, suicides, family breakdowns and community disengagement. The South Sudanese community have very little knowledge of what is good and poor mental health and at times the topic is taboo. There is a need to create greater society awareness of these issues and additional educational programs. Formal training programs should be included in both the primary and secondary school curriculum. Next would be the tertiary institutions where many youth are experiencing difficulties with confidence, racial vilification, pressure to succeed and integration. Community centres and organisations should also deliver a higher level of mental health awareness programs and the media both mainstream and social media platforms, have an important role to convey positive messaging for the broader community. All South Sudanese community leaders should undertake Mental Health First Aid Training and Community Champions be identified to initiate conversation and provide guidance for mental health issues."

### **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 already excellent programs namely Headspace and Beyond Blue and help lines and call centres and the issue of mental health has become more apparent with well known personalities now publicly acknowledging their mental health illnesses. CSG's have been implemented in a number of LGA's and are successfully supporting the local South Sudanese community. There is a need to break down cultural barriers all all levels to encourage people to understand what mental health is but just as important what assistance is available. There is a need to encourage CALD people to become involved in mental health professions and vocations both as a professional and in a volunteering role. There is a need to train such workers: carers, support workers, nursing staff, social workers, counsellors to be able to identify mental health symptoms quickly and provide assistance so patients can be treated and supported in the early stages. The creation of more mental health courses with government subsidies is essential and also an avenue for CALD people to become employed as a professional in a field where they will be able to assist and support other people within their community. "

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

"With the discussion of mental health now becoming more public and frequently spoken about, there is still a limit of what services are available especially for the CALD community and for them to have the confidence and trust to seek those services. However within the South Sudanese community, youth suicide is on the rise and this could be attributed to the constant negative reporting in the media of youth offending, racial vilification and social media. Young people feel

that they not being understood by society and their family and are searching for place to belong and general acceptance. South Sudanese youth and parents need to be better educated and support services more readily available."

**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.**

"One of the key problems is early diagnosis because there is widespread ignorance of issues such as depression, bi-polar, schizophrenia and specific cultural barriers in seeking assistance. Further there is still a stigma placed on mental health by the wider community let alone CALD communities. The issue of how mental health is managed across three layers of Government with limited funding is a major problem and in short, the mental health system needs to be overhauled. The top priority must be the education and training of mental health workers in early diagnosis and intervention."

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

"As previously stated, the drivers include cultural barriers, lack of early diagnosis, services and education will require a significant number of new initiatives to enhance mental health outcomes and a reduction in suicide. "

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

Family members need to be better educated in how to identify problems in the early stages and how to prevent these issues becoming a bigger problem. Greater support and funding of local programs will be paramount and reducing the stigma of mental health and that there is no shame for an individual in admitting that they are suffering from a mental health diagnosis. Emotional support groups should be encouraged with South Sudanese health practitioners employed as there are numerous issues within family structures including single mothers raising a number of children without the assistance or support of their husband.

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

The design and creation of education and training programs that will attract professionals (including the CALD communities) to become part of the mental health workforce with attractive remuneration will be required. The aim will be to ensure working in mental health industry becomes an occupation of choice and their role will make a difference in the community.

**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?**

Education and acceptance by the broader community that persons suffering from a mental illness can still be employed and play a productive role in the wider community. Identification of specific occupations that can employ certain individuals is also required including training courses. The marketing and broadcasting of specific mental health campaigns informing employers and future employees that it is alright to employ a person with a mental health issue can make a significant

impact.

**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?**

"Understanding the impact that mental health has within CALD communities and overcoming language and cultural barriers so assistance and programs are readily available. Programs in the schools targeting young people but also specific programs for parents. Revamping the education and training system to attract more professionals to the mental health industry and significantly lift the standards and services of current programs. The impact of negative media reporting which impacts on unemployment, racism and being ostracised from the broader community."

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

"For the Royal Commission to have a specific focus on the impact of mental health within CALD communities and hear from leaders, mothers, young people and others of the issues specific communities face. For the Royal Commission to develop specific recommendations to assist CALD communities especially the South Sudanese community."

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

Our Government initiative has now an operational Board of Directors including four South Sudanese leaders who will be able to assist the Royal Commission if required as they have first hand knowledge of the impact of mental health within their local communities.