

## **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?**

"Confidentiality and respect from all mental health staff, treating people with a mental illness with humanity at all times. Educate support networks (ie. Anglicare, Salvation Army, family, friends, etc) in how to better deal with people with mental illness. More support groups in regional areas where people with mental illnesses can meet. Healesville used to have a place called Rivendell, where there was a veggie garden and an alfresco coffee area for people with a mental illness to just drop in. Once a week there was a community meal where clients would cook and eat and just socialise. There were art classes and other things to do however it was all shut down due to poor staffing and management. "

### **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?**

"Psychiatrists, psychologists and doctors need to be held accountable when a client expresses suicidal thoughts and the treating doctor fails to act resulting in the client either committing suicide or attempting suicide. These professionals need to take their patients seriously when they express thoughts of self harm. More government funded counselling available to all public would prevent a depressed person from becoming suicidal or an anxious person becoming agoraphobic, for example. A little problem gets worse without treatment. The turn over of staff in the mental health system isn't helping where a client has to re-explain their story to a new person every time."

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

As above.

### **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.**

"The government really needs to put more funding into these areas as too many organisations that are actually helping get shut down (for example, Neami that later became Partners in Recovery). There is little to no communication between organisations with most working part time and on different days. It would be good if mental health services could be highlighted in the newspaper or at Centrelink because unless you are already involved with an organisation, it is very hard to know what services are available to you."

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

"Psychiatrists and psychologists misdiagnosing mental illnesses, not understanding their clients better, lack of counselling, over prescribing too many heavy prescription drugs. They don't admit people in crisis that should be admitted to receive psychiatric care in hospital but admit people

unnecessarily and do more damage by doing so. I was admitted as an involuntary inpatient of Maroondah Hospital psychiatric ward after being diagnosed as "mentally incompetent" by a psychiatrist after one five minute session where he asked my religion and I replied with "None of your business. What's your religion?". I took offence to this question as I couldn't see the relevance of the question. He then cut the appointment short and made another appointment for the following week. When I arrived at the appointment, I waited for 20-25 minutes outside the building and noticed two police officers opposite watching. Upon entering the psychiatrist's office, he placed his left arm around my shoulders and told me I wasn't going to like him very much. I asked why and he informed me that two paramedics had arrived to take me to Maroondah Hospital psychiatric ward as involuntary inpatient. He would not allow me to make any phone calls to my work, my daughters school or any support network to look after my daughter or pick her up from primary school. He insisted that the paramedics physically restrain me to which they refused as I was clearly in shock and not a threat at all. He then asked the police who were attending to physically restrain me to which they refused as it was not necessary. I was extremely complacent and followed their directions to get in the ambulance. When I arrived at Maroondah Hospital, they took my shoelaces and then three males insisted that I sign paperwork or there was no one to pick up my daughter from school. I signed unaware due to all the distress that I was signing my daughter over to the Victorian Government to be placed in foster care. I was then placed in solitary confinement and in the mens section where I was sexually assaulted on the first night by a male patient after the night nurse left my door unlocked. The following day I was kept in isolation with a male guard in a room with a window where I could see other patients walking around. I was not given any clean clothes, toothbrush, no person hygiene products, nothing. I finally got a room in the womens section on the third day. I was called in by the psychiatrist and he informed me that he had made a dental appointment to have all my teeth removed. I asked why and he replied with "If you want to see your daughter anytime soon, you'll do exactly what you're told without word of complaint." I then had to walk to the dentist unaccompanied. On the fourth day, two of my support workers finally found me as they had no idea where I was and were concerned for myself and my daughters welfare as my disappearance was completely out of character. By this stage I had broken out with a severe skin disorder called hidradenitis suppurativa caused by the severe trauma for which I received no medical care for. The nurses requested a doctor to investigate but they were refused. My support workers then came back the next day with clean clothes and personal hygiene products. When my daughter finally allowed to visit, she was clearly shocked at how I looked so gaunt with the immediate weight loss and lack of teeth. This traumatised us both a lot. My birthday was coming up and the child protection officer "pinkly promised" my daughter that she would bring her in for my birthday which fell on a Sunday. When my daughter found out child protection were not able to bring her in on the day, she ran away from the foster carer and threatened self-harm when found demanding she be taken in to see her mum that day. The foster carer understood why my daughter was so upset and agreed to take her in to see me. They picked some tamrinds from the foster carers garden so my daughter had a birthday present for me. It was so hard to say goodbye to her each time. I was discharged on the twelfth day to find out I had to go to the Melbourne County Court to regain custody of my daughter after child abuse charges were filed against me. There was no mention of my hospitalisation or mental health. I regained custody of my daughter and all charges were thrown out. This whole experience traumatised my daughter. She began self-harming, had severe separation anxiety and panic attacks. Neither of us ever received proper care or counselling after this whole experience."

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

"More funding, better screening of mental health workers, more programs for youth and support groups for all family members."

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

**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?**

"Better diagnosis of mental illness with second and third opinions. Hold professionals accountable for not taking threats of self-harm seriously especially when they result in suicides that could have been prevented. More counselling, less heavy prescription medications. Look into foster homes and do better monitoring of these families. Always perform a police check on a person before placing a child in care of that person as was not done in my case."

**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?**

N/A