

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

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Name

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

"Education at an early age, in particular with males, so that they do understand it's ok to talk about and express their emotions. From an early age boys are exposed to a culture of being emotionally tough and as they enter adulthood they find a culture and a language that doesn't allow them to express that they are not doing OK, This culture amongst men is dismissive i.e. Harden up, grow a set, stop being a sook. This immediately dismisses the males emotional wellbeing and the need to talk about how they are feeling . Not being able to work, as men we are raised that we need to work, and that some how if your not working your lazy or conning the system or you are not worthwhile you are a failure. Examples are when a man is injured, or experiences PTSD or is left with a permanent disability then they perceive themselves as failures, they doubt their worth and this I believe leads to the risk of self harm. Work places need to develop a better understanding of mental health and wellbeing. We need to not only talk about mental health in a broader scope, we need to educate and be flexible in how this is delivered More peers should be a part of that education process it should cover all parts of mental health and emotional wellbeing from vicarious trauma, grief loss relationship break ups and sadness I have both experienced and worked with people whom have lived with the above, or have known someone whom has taken their own lives "

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?

"My experience with young people is that there is a growing acceptance of diversity amongst their peers, it still has a ways to go and there is still a need for a growing understanding of the impact of bullying on children and young people. I have found young people when given the right to self determination and the skills to problem solve have improved not only their wellbeing but that of others. Young people want to be accepted and to be heard, they find positive in creating their own solutions through problem solving. I have founded that through my own lived experience and my actions have supported them to seek solutions and to build resilience and acceptance of the value of themselves and others. An informal approach works well. The biggest criticism i have heard in my almost thirty years of working with people, in particular young people is how judged and dismissed they have felt within a clinical environment The move to a psycho-social model and a belief in a shared journey of feeling equal in my experience works."

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

"I feel that talking with young people and validating their experiences is a positive step towards prevention Sharing the journey allows for the development of resilience and hope. My own journey has been one of many challenges and I have experienced my own mental health journey. The loss of my two children to drowning is very public and so is my involvement in prevention, I therefore choose to use my experience as a way to give hope to others to walk along side them

and to assist them to understand the value of themselves. The response has been positive . I have though found on rare occasions that some professional state, that despite my success in working with people that some how my approach is unprofessional?? "

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.

Judgmental and dismissive approaches Power imbalances Work life balances Acceptance of diversity Acceptance of the person journey and that it is real for them. Macho culture and the expectations that somehow you are weak or broken if you have a lived experience of mental health issues. We need to educate on acceptance on listening and validating people's experiences We need to recognise the strengths and worth of the person with a lived experience Utilise the person experience and strength so as they can go to work places and share their story. Mental health and wellbeing is a part of our diverse community we should be valuing the strengths of the experiences and empowering people to share in workplaces and communities if it changes people's perceptions and beliefs then it may just save someone life.

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

"Mental health doesn't translate very well into many communities there is no word for it, or it is seen as something the family should be ashamed of. Men, mental health emotional wellbeing issues are seen as a sign of weakness so few talk about how they are feeling. RUOK is a great concept but I am not sure it's cutting through all professions we need to go in and talk to workers to change the few of mental health and emotional wellbeing. Lack of understanding by the broader community of the experiences of people's of the First Nations and how this impacts on the emotional and spiritual wellbeing. The concept of yarning of proactive assertive outreach is lost. There are too many ""white fellas"" are taking a colonial approach to what is essentially aboriginal sadness/sorry business . Empower aboriginal people to manage emotional/spiritual wellbeing in their own way. Provide the funding for community to do this. Defence. Emergency services, outreach workers nurses clinicians life savers any person whom works with people and are exposed to direct/vicarious trauma. This is an area that requires more change and supports so as to ensure that they do not burn out and suffer PTSD "

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

"More resources Spaces to be heard and validated Time out be it a break away for a couple of days Counselling so as to understand they are not failures, and to learn how to sit with risk in a way that doesn't burn them out "

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

"Stop the cutting of work forces reduce work loads If the service is successful then don't cut it, or hand it over to another service, the recommissioning done under the previous Government caused so much trauma for young people. It saw services with no experience in working with young people handed these services despite their lack of experience The NDIS is problematic and hasn't been able to meet the needs as previous services could. It's seen not only trauma for the individual and families but also seen jobs lost as the formula for funding and expectations were

difficult to sustain. Recognise and value the peer worker, build on this so as they are able to go out to a diversity of work places and 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?

Value the strengths knowledge and wisdom of the person with a lived experience create pathways into employment where these strengths knowledge and wisdom can be utilised to build resilience and understanding into work places. ensure that their employment is not tokenism rather its valued. Talk with various community organisations and tertiary providers so create a flexible pathway for education The knowledge and wisdom of many people is often greater than that of the person whom just graduated from home and university Empower self determination within aboriginal communities so they can employ their own people.

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?

"See people as people, not patients consumers clients etc. See and validate the strengths of their journey Change the clinical approach it just creates divisions ensure there is a psycho-social model when working with people Change the culture, encourage men to talk about their mental health without fear of judgement or loss of job. Stop the silent culture of bullying it goes on yet the perpetrators often have strong networks to senior managers or founders Change the terminology to people for that's whom they are. Better support PTSD as well as the impact of grief and loss relationship breakups job loss, in particular for men I have heard to many stories over the past 30yrs in which someone has either attempt self harm or lost their life because they felt like a failure "

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

"Lobby for a review of the NDIS it's not working for many or people are not getting access to it. Continue to bring in new staff support them as they challenge by those whom continue to embrace the old authority driven I know best model. Put a stop to the competitive politicking about funding, it creates further cracks in the system Over the years I have found many services want to look good so they plaster of the cracks and gaps. Value and continue to build on a diversity approach "

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

N/A