

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

Organisation Name

Maroondah City Council

Name

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How can the Victorian community reduce the stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness?

"A preventative approach to working with the community to address and reduce stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness is paramount. Education and open communication are critical and should commence early with children and young people providing them with the tools to increase resilience and understanding of what positive mental health looks like. In so doing this promotes mental health as a health issue that sits alongside physical health issues. The messaging of mental health is important and there is a need to ensure that stories are shared to promote that this effects people from all walks of life. The more recent sharing of stories from high profile people, particularly elite sports people, has assisted in this regard. Promoting success stories of how individuals and the community have addressed, or manage, mental illness can make a big impact in reducing stigma and discrimination. Supporting preventative programs and initiatives within the local community enables individuals, community groups and other key stakeholders, particularly those operating at a grass roots level, the opportunity to gain skills and a greater understanding of mental illness. Employers can demonstrate understanding by offering flexible working arrangements to support people to manage their employment. Providing an environment where people feel open to seek support when necessary in their workplace without discrimination is important. Ensuring staff are trained in understanding mental health also contributes to addressing stigma and discrimination. Mental health needs to be recognised as a health issue in the same way that other physical health conditions are considered."

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?

"Council's Maroondah Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017-2021 describes how Council and partners are working towards achieving maximum health and wellbeing for the community. The Plan has been developed on a solid evidence base using stakeholder consultation, statistical analysis of current health and wellbeing indicators and the wider strategic environment that impacts upon both individual and community level health and wellbeing. The Plan includes a range of actions and can be viewed at: <http://www.maroondah.vic.gov.au/About-Council/Planning-for-our-future/Strategies-and-plans/Maroondah-Health-and-Wellbeing-Plan-2017-2021> Council is involved in working on a range of initiatives that focus on prevention and early intervention to improve mental health outcomes. Council supports the following key initiatives that are examples of what has been working well and could be replicated in other areas. Mental Health First Aid Training Over the past four years Maroondah City Council has delivered Assisted Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) and Mental Health First Aid Training to over 150 community members. Sessions have been provided to carers of people living with a disability or mental illness, volunteers providing their services within local clubs as well as representatives from local groups including the community services sector. The training has enabled participants to build their knowledge to assist those they are either caring for or interacting with. This training has been

embraced by the community and feedback from all sessions has been overwhelmingly positive. A partnership with a local community health service has enabled follow up support to participants when they have completed the course, should they find they need to utilize the knowledge they have gained in the training. Maroondah Plus 10 Schools Project Investing in schools as universal environments where young people learn wellbeing skills. They develop knowledge, build positive relationships, understand and utilise their strengths and establish a sense of belonging. This helps to provide a scaled preventative platform to build resilience and positive mental health. Putting this into action the Maroondah Plus 10 Schools project is a prevention base project that incorporates a partnership between Maroondah City Council, the Maroondah Principals Network, the Victorian Department of Education and Training, the University of Melbourne and the Institute of Positive Education. All are collectively working to raise the wellbeing and educational outcomes of young people in Maroondah. Successful outcomes have included positive education training delivered in participating schools and all Maroondah principals undertaking training in Positive Education. Further information can be found at: <http://www.maroondahyouth.com.au/Maroondah-Plus-10-Schools>

Maroondah Hoarding and Squalor Network The Diagnostic and Statistical Mental Disorders (DSM-5) now classifies Hoarding Disorder as a mental health condition. Maroondah City Council has been active in working with a range of services to be best placed to support people impacted by hoarding. Hoarding is estimated to effect 2-6% of the community and is associated with significant mental health issues. Solving complex issues relating to hoarding cannot be done in isolation by one single agency or one level of government. There are many social and economic impacts associated with hoarding and the types of home environments and the incidence and frequency of cases being identified is rising. The Maroondah Hoarding & Squalor Network (MHSN) is a forum that has been developed for local agencies and community groups confronted with hoarding and squalor issues, to come together, develop relationships, share skills and knowledge and establish positive collaborative outcomes for our community, despite the lack of State level guidance, funding models or coordination between services. While the network is underpinned by a No Wrong Doors' approach in order to assist each other and the community through complex issues. The introduction of NDIS and changes to My Aged Care has made this referral process extremely difficult. Further information can be viewed at: <http://www.hoardingsqualormaroondah.org.au/>

Maroondah Communities of Wellbeing Initiative The Maroondah Communities of Wellbeing initiative, brings world class expertise in positive psychology into Maroondah. The initiative involves a range of key stakeholders including education, community health, community support and both local and state government working in partnership to improve the wellbeing of the Maroondah community. Preventative work is key to building resilience to mental illness. Positive psychology provides evidence based interventions that works to build resilience and positive mental health that equips people with tools and resources to manage adversity. Investment in strong communities helps to build the protective factors needed to have people feel supported, access help and opportunities that foster activities that promotes positive mental health such as belonging, engagement, meaning and purpose, physical wellbeing, social connection, kindness and compassion.

The Ripple Effect - Mental Health Awareness Event The Ripple Effect (Connect, Communicate, Care) is held annually with support from the Eastern Primary Health Network. The event is held in the Ringwood Railway Station forecourt and aims to help create a positive ripple effect in the community by encouraging mental health awareness and suicide prevention. It includes performances from local musicians, food carts, an art installation and people who attend can speak to local health service providers.

Mindfulness For Mum's Group: This six week program delivered by the Maternal and Child Health team at Maroondah City Council is designed to assist mothers to develop skills and gain support to better manage the difficulties experienced when adjusting to motherhood. It is specifically useful

for mothers who are experiencing mental health issues including: Lack of confidence in their mothering ability Anxiety Post Natal Depression Self -criticism Ambivalence about motherhood/ not enjoying their baby Difficulty adjusting to motherhood Social isolation Recovering from Family Violence (with supports in place) During the group program, mothers have the opportunity to reflect on their mothering experience, explore and develop mindfulness skills, communication skills, self -care and compassion and to clarify their values as a mother. Men's Health Deaths by suicide in Australia occur among males at a rate three times greater than that for females. Of relevance, as part of Council's annual Business Week activities in 2019, Council ran a session on men's health. It was promoted as follows: As men in business, we can get so caught up in the busyness' of life that we don't make time to stop, connect with our mates, have some fun and talk about the real issues of life. Held on 31 May 2019, this event provided the opportunity to hear from AFL legend and mental health crusader Wayne Schwass alongside MC Lehmo. It was presented in partnership with the Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network and focussed on men's mental health and wellbeing. On a related note Council has also supported the work of Sport and Life Training (SALT). This has been through direct financial and in-kind support. SALT is a not-for-profit group that delivers education, culture and leadership sessions into sporting clubs, schools and businesses. Many sessions have been provided to men within sporting clubs with a focus on addressing issues of drug and alcohol abuse, violence, suicide, discrimination, mental illness, racism and addiction. Further information on SALT can be found at: <https://www.sportandlifetraining.com.au/> "

What ideas do you have to prevent suicide?

"There is a need for more open campaigns that start the conversation about mental health and suicide and provide opportunities for people to seek and offer support. A good example of this is the RUOK campaign. Social media is a powerful platform that can be used to build a realistic view about the reality of people's lives rather than the perception that is often portrayed. Social comparison builds unrealistic expectations about people's lives compared to others and can amplify feelings of despair and hopelessness that can contribute to suicide. The erosion of opportunities and incentives to meet face to face means people spend less time building authentic and meaningful social connections which are one of the key protective factors against mental illness. Facilitation and promotion of more social inclusion opportunities that foster relationships is required where people feel genuinely cared for by others, and provide opportunities to be identified as needing help, or to seek help for themselves. Providing knowledge to families and the broader community on the signs to be aware of in regards to suicide is crucial. This enables people to feel better equipped to respond early. The roll out of Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) and Mental First Aid training can assist in this regard. Maroondah City Council has delivered such training over a period of 4 years and has been taken up by many community members and service providers with positive feedback received. An early intervention approach is essential to the prevention of suicide. The inclusion or access to mental health professionals in a range of settings including schools and workplaces is worthy of consideration. There is a need for better access to support services and stronger referral systems in place that can occur in a timely manner. "

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.

"Access to information, strategies and new skills are often barriers to experiencing good mental

health. There are a range of tools and strategies that are proven to build positive mental health, that can be taught to people. Simple concepts like gratitude, mindfulness and fostering positive emotion are proven preventative factors for mental illness. Such concepts taught in schools as a universal platform for wellness, and wellbeing skills should be considered as important as literacy and numeracy with corresponding time and financial investment and resourcing. The role of food, nutrition and exercise is an important element in experiencing good mental health. The link between these areas needs to be promoted more. Social media and technology play a key role in improving mental health. Young people want acceptance and are measuring their worth based on likes'. Cyber bullying is more commonplace and is no longer just verbal, but also online where people can ruminate and re-read content. Social media usage will only increase hence the greater need to give young people the tools to manage it. The importance of role models and mentors is critical. Messaging and programming can include the following:

- oHave healthy role models identified in different settings
- oPromote everyday heroes' who make good life choices
- oPromote the ability to develop skills and strategies to deal with issues and promote that recovery is possible

Since the introduction of the NDIS there has been a reduction of funding for mental health services reducing the options for the referral of people with mental health issues to appropriate services. "

What areas and ideas for change you would like the Royal Commission to prioritise?

N/A

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

"Council welcomes the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and appreciates the opportunity to make a submission. As outlined in this submission, Council is working in partnership with key stakeholders on a range of initiatives that focus primarily on prevention. These programs operate at a local level and this is crucial to their success. Evaluations that have been undertaken consistently demonstrate the positive impact that the programs are having on the community in improving mental health including reducing stigma and discrimination. Knowledge of the range of service and programs and how to access them is crucial. Services also need to be equipped and funded to provide a timely, co-ordinated response that is appropriate to the needs of the individual and family/carers. A key concern relates to the erosion of referral pathways and services available, particularly post-NDIS and My Aged Care (focussing on CHSP and loss of carer support). The establishment of early intervention and support services for those experiencing a mental health issue is critical to ensuring adequate responses to what is a growing issue in our community. "