

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?

"That people who have not suffered with anxiety, depression, eating disorders, learn that those of us with these things are struggling, not trying to get attention or be drama queens. The life of someone with anxiety is so very difficult and most people are very misinformed about how hard life can be."

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?

"I don't think it works well unless you are rich and can afford a visit to a psychiatrist, counsellor regularly. I had to get a referral for a psych mental health plan. and although it did not work out I was going to the doctor again for a new one to a new counsellor which cost me \$91.00, I have had 6 visits to my current counsellor, part of which medicare subsidises, but now must get a new plan set up again which will cost 91.00 for the doctor to write up in less than 5 minutes. I appreciate that counselling is expensive but maybe have 12 visits per year without having to visit the doctor for a repeat referral. My husband had a severe mental health episode which had him hospitalised in [REDACTED]. When he came out, he was told he would be contacted by mental health professionals, but this did not happen, he just keeps getting put on medication again and again and it is not good, Again doctors just rewrite a script with no real care for actual mental health. My only good thing to say here is that he had to be bought home by Police once who were fabulous and went above [REDACTED] and beyond to help me get assistance in the form of counselling for him. They even contacted me to see how he was doing, great job and I am thankful they cared."

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

I don't think it is working. Too hard to get assistance and [REDACTED] etc palm you off to the mental health section of hospitals who are already snowed under.

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.

"Co workers not understanding mental health issues, my work claims they care about mental health but send you to a local counsellor who is very airy fairy and wishy washy. I went twice, but nothing helped. My work actually tries to get rid of people with mental health issues, and I have witnessed this on occasion. Mental health access should be as easy as finding a doctor or dentist, yet getting referrals is off putting, time consuming and expensive, and waiting lists to see anyone can take months, mental health issues need assistance quickly."

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

"Lack of keenness of practitioners to move to areas outside cities . Often rural communities are where men live (eg farmers)and feel stigma to ask for help. This idea needs to be removed, and let them know it is ok not to bottle up feelings etc. More ease of treatment access."

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

"Work needs to understand you may sometimes need to take days off to care for or take person to appointments. At my work they will give you time , but talk about you not really being a carer. It is damn hard looking after someone struggling and having to work as well."

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

"Safer workplaces, better pay, greater support ."

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?

"Often they need an understanding employer , hard to come by, realise that someone with mental health issues just need a bit of encouragement and they will do the job just as well as someone with no problems."

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?

"Cheaper psych/counsellors visits. Ease of availability, not having to wait months. Mental health plans to be longer than 6 visits and subsidised for all , or free to those on low or no income. Although becoming more understood at work, make it mandatory that Mental health is seen as a real thing that affects people. We are not putting it on, and that anyone bullying someone about their mental health at work can be charged. I experienced this from 2 teachers this year because of my anxiety, and it was swept under the carpet, because I am only an assistant. I was told if I did not stop worrying, they would go down the road of getting me sacked. I was trapped in a room with them for an hour, and told all manner of things about my anxiety and how annoying it is, how they can't stand being in the office with me because I am anxious etc.I tried to slit my wrists that night because I felt so useless and hopeless. "

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

Stop psychiatrists charging so much now.

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

"No, but thank you for the opportunity to write this. I have also suffered hugely from anorexia for 40 years after being bullied by a PE teacher in High School , and had no treatment, because there was none then , apart from being thrown into ██████████ mental health hospital in 1983 to try to snap me out of the Anorexia, just after my Dad died in the Ash Wednesday bushfires. Any further treatment I had revolved around people blaming my parents for my anorexia which was not true. If a teacher would do that now they would get in trouble, but unfortunately it is too late for me.I have lost pretty much all my life through this disease, so may be more affordable assistance

for sufferers would be a good step. Thanks so much, [REDACTED]