

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

## Organisation Name

N/A

## Name

Psychologist Monique de Zoete

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

"We need to review what we mean by mental illness itself. It is a social construct. Diagnosis has repercussions for people and society as a whole. Mental illness needs to be considered in the context in which it arises. It is dangerous to keep identifying individuals as the problem. If we maintain a medical lens about suffering we risk reducing suffering to individual dysfunction and increasing power imbalances in society. Helping professionals need to talk more about the human condition and share evidence based knowledge so that social and emotional issues are not misguidedly pathologized. Evidence based knowledge needs to come from neuroscience and validated theories - teach people about themselves so they can help themselves and others. Empower society through sharing knowledge. This could come through public education, teaching emotional intelligence and communication skills. We need to normalise psychological suffering. "

### **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?**

"People talking about their suffering (mental health issues) is important. Our social and emotional well being need to be shared not only the domain of mental health professionals. We need to be careful about compartmentalizing suffering though. Public forums like ABC radio have a very important role in normalising psychological suffering. Public figures talking about their real life experiences in all walks of life is very important e.g., AFL footballers etc. This helps to change public perceptions. "

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

ATPS suicide prevention program was very helpful. Needs more funding to continue. We need to look at the societal and social factors linked to suicide - more qualitative research required.

### **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.**

"Education and valuing strengths we already have are critical- We need to privilege social and emotional capital. Women in particular provide a great deal of this - social fabric of society. We need to value this work. It should not play second class citizen to financial capital. Acknowledge this huge resource - encourage women to speak up, reward contributions that enhance social connectivity. Encourage people to join social groups (huge evidence based benefits) and put more funding into community building. Establish and fund initiatives that encourage people to care about each other - neighbours, coworkers etc. Teach social and emotional well being, conflict resolution etc. (soft skills) in all forums -child and maternal health centres - child care -school - work places etc. Value diversity "

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

"Inequity Lack of social support Intergenerational trauma - including war, multiple losses, loss of cultural identity in Indigenous communities etc. Geographical isolation - lack of infrastructure that physically isolates people Lack of diversity in public housing spaces - there are great models of diverse groups living together around the world that work. Lack of access to housing A punishing welfare system Capitalist framework and associated values - need for greater collaboration/sharing and less competition. We need to help each other - be reminded of the greater good and the importance of looking after each other as a shared responsibility. We are all inextricably linked. Trickle down economics does not work and has repercussions for mental health. Dominant unhelpful societal narratives need to be overtaken and addressed. We need to address the bigger picture issues that are making us mentally unwell Need new economic models e.g., "2040" donut model so we can address inequity and need to live more sustainably. Build green economy - find meaningful long term work that benefits individuals and society. "

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

"Family members and carers need to be heard and has so much knowledge through their lived experiences. I completed qualitative research with sibling carers of brothers or sisters with mental illnesses. They have so much to say. Provide forums for them to speak, listen and respond. Give carers roles so that they can advocate and engage collaboratively and equally in changing systems. Conduct interdisciplinary research to reflect the complexity of issues raised."

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

Maintain funding for programs that work.

## **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?**

"Establish more community groups for people to connect Establish greater internet connectivity for isolated people - e.g., therapy, community participation via face time. Set up wholistic hubs where whole families can come and be seen by range of professionals in integrated service. "

## **Thinking about what Victoria's mental health system should ideally look like, tell us what areas and reform ideas you would like the Royal Commission to prioritise for change?**

Review what we mean by mental health and ill-health. Focus on social and emotional well being. Consider funding interdisciplinary research that addresses the complexity of what causes mental ill health. Look at how society creates a context in which mental health arise and address how we can make bigger picture multi pronged changes to society rather than being over simplistic in our framing of problems and focusing solely on individuals.

## **What can be done now to prepare for changes to Victoria's mental health system and support improvements to last?**

Keep funding programs that work. Encourage shared responsibility for change. Responsibility for well being - good mental health should not rest purely on the shoulders of mental health professionals. In some ways mental health professionals are the seeing the canaries in the coal

mine. We need to look at mental health issues through a broader sociological lens if we are going to make meaningful and long lasting changes. Society is imbalanced and it needs to change.

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

"Please don't rush to simplistic solutions to address complex problems. Encourage collaborative - bottom up solutions. Draw on peoples lived experiences and consider complex responses to complex problems. Build review processes into any changes that are recommended. Appoint diverse, representative communities to be engaged in these review. Give them equal voices."