

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?

"Like most social issues, our awareness of mental illness is quite cyclical, meaning that it appears every so often as a social campaign (for example, "R U OK Day"), however it sometimes appears tokenistic and I wonder whether or not it quite challenges problematic social attitudes and prejudice. In some respects, there appears to still be a paternalistic attitude directed towards people with a mental illness, where the focus is on what they cannot do, rather than what they can. I believe that investing in further education for younger people to shift these attitudes over time would be a useful and beneficial response. I would also focus on campaigns which point out that everyone will either have or know someone with a mental illness to hopefully normalise it."

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?

"There is a diversity of options for people depending on their specific needs and expectations for service delivery, and it appears to be catered for people of different ages, cultures and severity of conditions. This includes access to the GP for referral to public and private mental health providers, clinical supports in publically and privately funded hospitals, community based residential and outreach supports. Thus there is diversity when it comes to the design and delivery of services."

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

N/A

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.

"From my perspective, having more publically funded programs that allow people to engage in social and recreational activities with others would be extremely beneficial. Programs - more or less - have a strict focus on mental health, however building social relationships and connections, learning new daily living and recreational skills and finding meaning and purpose through education, volunteering and employment are equally, if not more, important. Therefore, understanding mental illness from a more holistic perspective, which considers the psychological, social, educational and employment components (whole of person) is very important in supporting someone with their recovery. I am not sure whether there are enough programmatic responses available to fulfil this need."

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

"For the most part, I believe that the stressors of everyday life are a huge contributor and a loss of

community, particularly in the age of social media. People are working harder and longer, the cost of living expenses are increasing at a rate which outweighs the wage growth, most people appear to be connected via social media, which in my view creates greater feelings of social isolation and loneliness and the ongoing stigma associated with mental illness. I am aware that two significant issues in society includes both stress and loneliness and any attempt at improving the mental health system must take a wider view to considering how these issues might be better understood and addressed. "

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

"Family members can experienced just as much stress and anxiety supporting someone with a mental illness as the person themselves. Speaking about someone with a mental illness to others can be an uncomfortable topic and there is a lot of stigma attached. Families need increasing amounts of support themselves to feel as though they feel safe, supported, heard and understood and provided with sufficient resources to help them actively support a person, including education."

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

"The work environment can be dynamic and stressful. Staff face daily pressures to best meet the needs of consumers whilst navigate a team environment. Ensuring that staff are properly educated (social work, psychology and occupational therapy degrees) should be mandatory as many of the decisions made, and the levels of engaged required, demand careful ethical thought and consideration. I think it would also be helpful to provide experienced professionals to provide external supervision for staff members so they have an independent outlet to discuss any concerns or to receive 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?

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?

"I believe the GP mental health plans, which provided a limited number of sessions with a psychologist, social worker or psychiatrist need to be seriously reviewed. People requiring mental health support need the appropriate level of treatment over the period of time that they require, not a cookie-cutter style number (10 per year) that will not suit their needs. The process must be more flexible and adaptable so if a person needs more than the allocated sessions they can access them in a simple, easy way that does not further deteriorate their mental health. I also think the NDIS needs to be funded in a way where people are not waiting for months at a time for a care coordinator to get in touch with them to schedule a planning meeting."

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