

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

Organisation Name

N/A

Name

Mx A Smith

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

"I work in the Victorian Public Sector - in the Department of Health and Human Services. As both a carer of a family member with severe mental illness, and a person who has experienced episodic poor mental health, I have personally experienced the barrier of stigma in my own workplace. This has meant I have had to be very creative, resilient and at times carry the burden of juggling multiple responsibilities in silence. This not only has a negative effect on my own wellbeing, but also compromises my effectiveness at work (it takes ongoing and unceasing effort to be silent). I suggest that at a workplace level, a public communications plan that found ways to de-stigmatise and 'normalise' having honest and supportive conversations with employers. As part of this plan, perhaps workplace champions, or senior leaders who were comfortable to lead the conversation, could play a strong role. I also suggest tools for supporting conversations with people managers - including providing clarity around practices of privacy and confidentiality. Finally, the department is steadily improving its general health and wellbeing initiatives - which helps everyone to work and live happier and healthier - I am strongly supportive of this. "

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?

"Preventative initiatives are key - this includes initiatives that target middle socio-economic brackets, and those who fall between the gaps of public and private health systems. "

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

"Suicide telephone and internet crisis lines are very important. And suicide preventions that target specific communities are key. As a member of the LGBTIQ community I know members in my communities are 3-5 times more likely to attempt suicide. During the postal survey numerous people known to me both personally and professionally engaged in self-harm, suicide attempts and sadly committed suicide. The LGBTIQ community is still recovering from this experience, and requires tailored support. "

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.

"After working in the community sector and health policy space for many years I personally experienced the crisis public mental health system this year for the first time in my life, and I was frankly appalled by the experience. When I observed that my mental health was declining I initially called a number of community mental health services and was informed that I was ineligible to receive a service (didn't hold a health care card, was out of their catchment, they were at capacity, etc). I then tried the private mental health system, and was informed that my level of private health cover did not provide for private admissions, and even with the Medicare rebate

most private clinician were outside of my financial reach. I finally presented at a public hospital during a mental health crisis including suicidal ideations, and experienced the response and treatment to be denigrating, humiliating and patronising. Ultimately the experience was more harmful to my mental health than it was helpful. The experience left me reeling. As a person reasonably confident of navigating different systems, undertaking research, and self-advocating - what would this mean for many, many other vulnerable Victorians who did not possess this confidence? In my experience, Victoria's mental health system is well and truly broken. People fall through the cracks and lives are lost - both to suicide, and to the loss of hope and potential that comes from not receiving the treatment and support needed in order to recover. I am interested in the potential for single access points that enable all Victorians to receive a response or triage. I am interested in crisis services that are human-centred and respectful. I am interested in what provisions are available for people who fall between the public and private mental health systems. I am interested in a better designed and integrated (and better funded) system. "

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

"I'll dot point for ease of capturing ideas: - Confusing systems, lack of clear access points - Cultures of patronising, 'doctor knows best' behaviour, leading to denigration of human rights. Workforce training is needed, especially for more entrenched professions, such as psychiatrists and other medical health professionals - Missing layers between public and private mental health systems - Services being beyond capacity - investment is needed! "

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

N/A

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

N/A

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'll dot point for ease of capturing ideas: - Clearer access points, single points of contact - Addressing cultures of patronising, 'doctor knows best' behaviour, leading to denigration of human rights. Workforce training, especially for more entrenched professions, such as psychiatrists and other medical health professionals - Addressing missing layers between public and private mental health systems - Investment is needed to address services beyond capacity - Tailored support to communities "

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