

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

Group Submission
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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?

An environment where self-disclosure and open conversations becomes the norm will enable sustainable opportunities for those with lived-experience of mental illness challenges and for those who want to be genuine and proactive allies. An understanding that mental illness and the associated symptoms are different to that of mental health. A mental illness is ongoing and will often involve a professional diagnosis and ongoing treatment regimen.

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?

"Face to face support is invaluable for people experiencing mental illness Care coordination models of care that involve all members of a person's support team meeting enable the person experiencing a mental illness to be involved in the collaborating of a unified support plan. Improved support for employers to support staff who experience mental illness. Employee Assistance Programs that can be accessed to facilitate appointments with Psychologists and other mental health practitioners is invaluable. Return to work plans that accommodate the mental health challenges an employee contends with and a general acceptance of these requirements ? as would occur if an individual was returning to work from a physical injury. Greater mental health training for GPs. Access to Medicare-funded sessions with Psychologists, Mental Health Nurse, Social Worker who can provide some forms of treatment that require regular, intensive intervention. More funded sessions would enable a comprehensive approach and potentially resolve or mitigate symptoms which otherwise may continue to be problematic. "

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

"Immediate access to a facility when/if a person identifies as being suicidal. Bypassing the hours of waiting in Emergency Departments and environments that only exacerbate the sense of being a burden/problem. We view online services as great for those who don't want a face-to-face interaction. However, for some, the actual physical connection with another person may be incredibly beneficial ? and once again the Community hub may be a great option for this. An acknowledgment that the suffering the person is experiencing is incredibly real' to them, and the notion of taking their life makes sense to them in terms of a legitimate solution to their pain. "

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.

"Fundamental to good mental health is the need for stable and affordable accommodation along with income security and public transport options. A variety of entry points (other than the GP) to mental health services would provide pathways to people from different backgrounds and whose require culturally and linguistically appropriate services. The models of treatment need to

accommodate the varying needs of the community. People may have persistent and ongoing symptoms and not require hospitalisation. For people living in rural and remote areas the availability of mental health services is often limited, involve long wait lists and substantial travel for those that live remotely. People with severe and persistent mental illness symptoms often have multiple health appointments every week. This results in a huge personal financial cost and deprives people of opportunity for social and economic community participation. "

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

Minimal or no local services available. If the GP is not comfortable/proficient with mental health related matters ? sometimes there are no other options. Farming communities are at risk of isolation and economic stresses. The stoic and resilient expectations these people place upon themselves is potentially catastrophic. Difficulties for people to access support around their employment shifts.

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

"An acknowledgement of the incredible role they play in supporting a person with a mental illness and being cognisant of the toll this caring role can take. An awareness that it is almost always a family member who cares for a person experiencing mental illness who initiates contact with mental health services. Access to other carers ? opportunity to debrief, share experiences, gain information, flag concerns that may have been normalised, and experience some well needed respite "

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

Training opportunities for those wishing to specialise in mental health ? should have a very strong focus on all things mental health related. Minimum qualification levels for support workers and higher qualifications required for staff in management and supervisory positions. Trained and experienced peer facilitators can offer support that breaks down the professional' context and provides the person in need with a sense that the conversation is going to be based on a mutual understanding of the lived-experience paradigm.

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?

People with severe and persistent mental illness symptoms often have multiple health appointments every week. This results in a huge personal financial cost and deprives people of opportunity for social and economic community participation. If people are trying to survive on Newstart ? this in itself is already contributing to the additional stressors in their life. An environment where disclosing a mental illness will not automatically exclude an individual from being legitimately' considered for a position.

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?

"Mental Health facilities that had outdoor spaces where people could walk and contemplate, had a calming and therapeutic impact. The need to be co-located within the generic hospital environment

is questionable. Ensuring GPs have adequate mental health related training (and mentoring) to enable them to be well-placed to assist patients coming in with a range of conditions. Considering other community-based venues where mental health support is one of the specialties available. Acknowledging the interface between income support and the capacity to deal with mental health challenges. Centrelink is generally not considered an environment conducive to positive experiences for those living with a mental health condition "

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

"Ensure funding is available to enable innovative models of support can operate in a sustainable manner. Acknowledging that for many individuals, their mental health challenges are often episodic, and so the ability to move in and out of support in a seamless manner is vital. Ensure there is a meaningful and ongoing process whereby the voices and experiences of consumers are heard and responded to. Ensure carers' feedback is sought and valued "

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

N/A