

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

Organisation Name

N/A

Name

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

"Treat people the same in the health system would be a good start. Make funding for mental health which is currently the poor cousin, equivalent of that for physical health - fund it the same way, allow people to go to any service location as they can with physical health. Positive stories about prominent people with mental illness. This has been done to some extent but it needs more. Talk about it on social media as though it is not something special as you would do with a broken leg or other physical condition. Employ more people with mental illness in sustainable employment in main stream organisations eg work in government departments and provide support for them. I have worked in a social firm where both people with and without mental health issues were employed and one of the good things is that people with mental illness are integrated with others but receive support at the same time. This way people start to understand people with mental illness which reduced stigma. "

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?

"To be honest there is not a lot that is working well at the moment. Headspace appears to be doing reasonably well with a number of services integrated under one banner. Orygen youth mental health services also seems like a very good model. I thought the mental health nurses program worked well. It helped many marginalised people and was a good way to provide on going support and monitoring of people with serious mental illness. Because they specialised in mental health they were better placed than GPs to provide on going support and monitoring. Whilst Headspace is a good program, similar organisations/programs for older people with mental health issues are required. These people are missing out at the moment. The NDIS is a step in the right direction but should be available for people over 65. In terms of supporting people to get early treatment and support, easy access to mental health services would help greatly services that can be accessed when people start to have concerns not just when there is a crisis. When in a crisis situation, easy access to assistance would often prevent it becoming an emergency. "

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

" Early intervention is critical and with appropriate follow up. There are numerous reports of people presenting to services like ED with suicidal concerns, are turned away with tragic consequences. More training in assessment and involvement of peer workers may help. R U ok' program which gets people to talk to each other is a good idea but needs to be backed up with accessible services if people are not ok. Services for carers, friends, acquaintances, fellow employees, students etc to contact to find out what to do when concerned about someone. "

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.

"Treating people with respect, dignity and compassion are such a basic but essential part of working with people but do not appear to be part of the current mental health system. Again a service similar to Headspace for older people integrated one stop services. Services based on the Open Dialogue model encourage working with the person's family and friends etc, listen to the person's experience, use minimal mediation, treat the person as a whole, provide plenty of followup support particularly in the early stages A walk-in service for people to just go in and talk to someone. Affordable housing is so basic to mental health. It is so hard to maintain good mental health with out stable accommodation. If this is provided at an affordable price, it would go a long way to wards helping people maintain mental health. Housing needs some innovative solutions such as Tiny houses. Sustainable employment help people feel part of society, connected and maintains their feelings of self esteem. Employment will ultimately contribute to the economy and reduce the load on the public purse. Sustainable employment may mean providing some modifications for people with severe and enduring mental health issues eg part time work, flexible hours, quiet areas , working from home etc Explore alternative models for services to keep people well such as the Clubhouse model where people become members, learn new skills, work at their own pace with help from peers and move into the broader community when ready. They can also come back to the clubhouse whenever they need it or can remain members as a support mechanism. Ongoing monitoring and support for people with mental illness from the public mental health system which would ideally be integrated with other services or at least better pathways between them. Currently people are discharged from the health system, often too early and this may not help a person maintain good mental health. Reduce attendance at ED and hospital admissions with alternative approaches. For example out of hours services rather than just 9 to 5 services would help greatly. There was a cafe running near St Vincent's Hospital where people could go if feeling isolated, vulnerable and/or unwell. This may help keep people well and avoid a crisis. New programs such as Consumer Operated Services (COS) and Peer Operated Services (POS) which are organisations run predominantly by peer workers. There are a number of examples in Queensland. There have been anecdotal reports that crisis presentations to emergency services have reduced for the target. An example is Brook RED (<https://www.brookred.org.au/>) g which has been operating in South Brisbane for fifteen years. The organisation has 3 centres, a number of services including a residential space where people can spend a few weeks working toward recovery goals. They are a peer-managed and operated community mental health organisation. Being part of society, feeling connected, included and accepted in community. "

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

These area seem to be associated with low income and disadvantaged areas.

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

"What they most need is a proper functioning mental health system to take to the load off them. Somewhere to contact and get assistance when their family member is not well. Inclusion in all stages of admission, treatment and planning where possible at very least be informed about what is happening, where and when the person will be discharged. Needs vary depending on the carer but many need supports at different times of their journey. They need information and support.

Some respite. Support needs to be flexible to meet different needs. Education of mental health professionals about confidentiality provisions. The Act says that as a carer, you should be informed of events that directly affect you and your care relationship with the patient. Listen to carers. Provide flexible work arrangements for carers. "

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

"Flexible work conditions and better pay. A system that is properly resourced so that staff are not under so much stress. Debriefing for staff. More training in respect, care and compassion as core values for working in the field. "

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?

"Sustainable employment help people feel part of society, connected and maintains their feelings of self esteem. Employment will ultimately contribute to the economy and reduce the load on the public purse. Sustainable employment may mean providing some modifications for people with severe and enduring mental health issues eg part time work, flexible hours, quiet areas , working from home etc. The disability employment services provide training to and some help getting jobs but there need to be more suitable employment available. Government could assist with this. "

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?

"radical improvement and adequate funding of the services so that people can access them when they need them as with the physical health system. Consider alternative and innovative solutions which may require investment up front but cost less as time goes on and provide people with a better quality of life. These might include things like the Clubhouse model, Open Dialogue, Consumer Operated Services (COS) and Peer Operated Services (POS) which are run predominantly by peer workers. "

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

Provide regular updates of what is happening. Include people who suffer from mental illness and carers at all stages. Keep asking them what they want and need.

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

"Most services are now based on the recovery model. This is a good thing but has some downsides. There are different interpretations as to what recovery means. To some it means that the person returns to normal and is "cured". This is usually or at least often not the case. The model does not adequately make provision for the episodic nature of mental illness. As part of this model people are often 'discharged' from services - clinical or community mental health services. Also people depending on the severity of their illness have different capacities - some may not be able to return to 'normal' - recovery for them may mean something quite different to recovery for someone else. Whilst it is great for people to become connected and part of the community it is also helpful I believe for people with mental illness to have access to services which allow them to connect with other people in similar situations who understand. We do not want people to become dependent on services and identify with them however I think people often need both. I really

hope the Royal Commission is able to provide practical and innovative recommendations to the Victorian government and that the Victorian government will implement them. People are really suffering and in a wealthy and civilised society like Australia we should be able to do better. I also hope that the Victorian government will lobby the federal government for changes."