

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

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

"question 1 I believe stigma and discrimination towards mental health is largely due to the lack of understanding, awareness and misconceptions to what it actually is. Not always having physical symptoms people are unaware of how to identify different mental health issues and more importantly being able to empathize with a sometimes 'invisible'" illness. EDUCATION, at all ages is needed to ensure that each individual is able to become aware of the mind feelings that one may experience at some point in their life time. From kinder, to primary schools, high schools, employment, becoming new parents or raising a family, curricular activities/organizations, ALL individuals at any age should have at least had the opportunity to learn about mental illness. This is essential, as I find what values and morals that are most important in society are now not confined to a general standard of the way to live. Years ago, we didn't know as much as we do now, so therefore there may be a barrier in which younger people view their feelings in relation to how their parents may be perceiving how they feel. Feeling misunderstood is damaging, and especially by those who you love. Simply not knowing how to respond to mental illness creates stigma. There is not one diagnoses for mental health and a medical procedure to operate on your body and take it away. "

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?

N/A

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

"Personally I cannot commend any particular service or prevention strategies in relation to suicide. On a whole, I believe services like lifeline, suicide call back service, SANE and others are definitely great ways in communicating to the public that there is someone willing to listen, someone who cares and someone to help you. CURRENTLY, these services require suicidal individuals to have access to technology, needing a phone with an active service to call or a device with internet access to use websites and crisis apps, forums, the lot. If more research was done in to those we have lost by suicide, I think environmental factors present at the time of their passing could help for further prevention. Identifying any common theme amongst those who have passed such as recently becoming unemployed, homelessness, financial crisis, domestic violence and many more can help communicate if the current preventative strategies (technology based)were available to them at the time of their passing, If so, were they used? Why not? For example, technology use of any sort will always require money. Only money will enable any person to purchase a mobile phone or computer device. You need money to access prepaid or postpaid services enabling the devices to continuously be used, and even still for public access to pay phone or internet use in local libraries require money "

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.

"1. FIRST STEPS TO IDENTIFY THE ISSUE I have gone to seek mental health assistance three times in my life, once 9 years ago and last two have been since my brothers suicide in 2017. Particularly focusing on my past two, I went to local GP as I knew this is where to get a referral and mental health care plan sorted for further help. This has been an absolute failure both times I was prescribed anti-depressants [REDACTED] from a doctor who did not know a thing about my situation and was quite obvious when I picked up my mental health care plan. The document was so brief and didn't reflect anything close to what I said to him. With no real compassion, interest or active listening he failed to encourage my attempt to help myself and both times I did not then follow up to see a psychologist. I was also asked, ""Ok so which psychologist do you want to see?"" I was confused, as I was unaware I needed to research a range of psychologists who I believe fit the criteria that I wanted. I didn't like that, and made me feel even more uncomfortable about how I felt and the courage to take a step in seeking professional advice. I don't believe general doctors are the FIRST step in helping yourself, as their expertise is not on the area of mental health which is like seeing a dentist to help you with leg pain. The only common ground they share is medication they know to treat pain, not to treat the actual problem. Having psychologist or mental health workers alongside your GP or at the location will benefit those struggling in their decisions to seek help. It is unnerving to finally take that step on your journey and will greatly encourage individuals to persist on seeking help if they felt listened to and understood. 2. CRISIS SUPPORT [REDACTED] [REDACTED] my brothers ""partner"" at the time had text my mother that he tried to hang himself [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. He then came to my mothers house later and told us it was a lie and to ignore her as she was known for manipulation. I texted him from the bedroom saying is it true and he said yes. I told him he must leave her, he cannot stay there. He said ""It's not her, its everything. I just don't want to be here anymore."" I was left frightened for my life, his life and too scared to tell anyone. [REDACTED] - I was on my way to my prenatal appointment at the hospital and I received a text saying ""I am about to send you something, don't freak out ok."" It then followed with the 3 texts, a message for my parents, a message for myself and his two children and message for my siblings that he was sorry being a burden and that he couldn't stay here any longer. Then his phone was off. In a screaming panic, 20 weeks pregnant I was throwing myself around the car calling everyone for help. We called the police for help to his address where we took him after finding him at a train station. After speaking to my brother and his partner they came to us and said look he seems fine, misunderstanding. They questioned if the texts were true and I became enraged saying ""THIS WOMEN IS TORTURING HIM, HES JUST TRIED TO KILL HIMSELF TWICE IN ONE WEEK, HES NOT FINE"" His partner told the police I was just emotional and pregnant and not to listen to me. The police asked us to leave, leave them alone to rest and this seems to be a case of FAMILY POLITICS. There is not much they can act on, as they convinced the police that this is personal issues not fact of the current situation. Nothing was done, reported, recorded. [REDACTED] I found my brother dead hanging [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. After 12months exactly from the last attempt, he had experienced domestic violence from a female partner who was believed on the probability that her statements were true. and because she was a female. Police filed for IVO against him to protect her, and they told him defending yourself is just going to cost you and make more paperwork for us. THE POLICE ARE NOT THE RIGHT PROFESSIONALS TO BE IN CHARGE OF MENTAL ISSUES, SUICIDE AND FAMILY VIOLENCE. IF THEY HAD ACTED ON THE FIRST ATTEMPT MY BROTHERS DEATH COULD HAVE BEEN AVOIDED. HIS MENTAL HEALTH COULD HAVE BEEN RECOGNISED BY THE REAL PROFESSIONALS AND NOT DISMISSED WITH NO

COMPASSION. THE POLICE ONLY CRIMINALISED HIS SUFFERING TO THE POINT IN WHICH HE COULD ONLY SEEK DEATH AS HELPFUL OPTION FOR HIS PAIN. The coroners conclusion reads; ""I find that [REDACTED] intended the tragic consequences of his actions."" "

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

"Gender- Males NATIONALLY, Australian government are advertising, advocating, verbalizing and supporting help for WOMEN. I am understanding that this is deserved for women as the past was not always so fair. I think most do not agree, but when we start categorizing human beings into genders that will be supported, believed, encouraged and empowered to stand up for themselves and care for their well-being, we are exacerbating the problem. This inconsistent approach to equality, freedom, rights is totally being ignored in application to ALL OF THE HUMAN RACE. We need to recognize this discrimination and stop communicating that if you are a male, you are not on the agenda to be helped. Multiple organizations are getting it wrong, when we are focusing on empowerment of one gender in turn of disregarding the other and Drug and alcohol abuse. This tough love, punishment and criminalization for substance abusers is never going to be have a greater outcome as the issue of WHY they have become addicted is not relevant and focus is on solely the act of WHAT they are doing. No consideration, no compassion and no courage to even address the reasons of why this has happened to them. No one ever touched alcohol, or drugs or many other addictive behaviors in ambition to become an addict. The view that a person CHOOSES this is somewhat infuriating that people can be so ignorant. This needs to be addressed by the current ""war on drugs"" view, a zero tolerance of any behavior EMPLOYMENT experiencing mental health issues, I would say more that are undiagnosed may have an effect on someone's ability to seem FIT for the job. Also I have seen many who become unemployed show a rapid decline in mental health. It also appears that some of them are not aware of such complications and how if left too long can cause low self esteem, depression, isolation. substance abuse, wreck less behavior and suicidal ideology. I think more services need to be referred to immediately once job termination occurs. In turn they should offer ongoing mental health assessments, progress and opportunities for future employment, free short courses or certificates to be earned to encourage personal growth and self esteem in the periods where they are unemployed."

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

"Any person diagnosed with mental health issue should be considered in treatment as one of a group, involving family or people who reside with the individual. This can offer the services and education needed in order to understand what is going on with their family member and ways in which it may affect them. People may be ignorant to the fact that it can take a toll or simply neglect the person struggling as they don't know how to support them. Help I feel could be offered individually and regular meeting of the person with the illness and their family/people caring for them together to gain awareness to their current management and coping strategies as a result."

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

"Important to frequently monitor their mental health of all workers and ensure that they are consistently being helped and validated in the way they feel and how they are coping in their roles as the professionals. Flexible work schedules that can be appealing to all adults, so they are

ensured that family or other important commitments are still met along with such a job. Ongoing benefits for services in other areas of community could be applied to this workforce "

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?

"SUICIDE PREVENTION - being applicable to all in society not only those seeking help for mental health. EVERYONE needs to be aware of services, referrals, signs of the behaviors in themselves, friends, family and anyone else in the wider community. BEREAVEMENT- The forgotten society of those left behind are not near enough considered in services available to cope mentally from this tragic event "

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?

"The more foundations of humanity we keep allowing to change and alter based on how you feel, the more peoples confusion and search for mental stability. We are giving so much choice in life, that with no rules there's chaos. We cannot meet mental stability and well-ness is we have no boundaries or standards on basic rules of life."