

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?

"Having a simple and clear definition of mental illness and dissemination of it. Educating the community that mental illness can happen to anyone, and that most people at some point in time of their life may have some form of mental illness without even knowing it. This alone will remove the stigma. The best definition of mental illness and its cure I have found is what Dr Scott Peck said in his book *The Road Less Travelled*: Excerpted- An illness exists long before the symptoms. Rather than being the illness, the symptoms are the beginning of its cure. The fact that they are unwanted makes them a phenomenon of grace a gift of God, a message from the unconscious to initiate self-examination and repair. Most reject this gift and do not heed the message. They do this in a variety of ways, all of which represent an attempt to avoid the responsibility for their illness. Even if they do accept the fact that they have symptoms, they will blame the world outside them. Only those few who accept responsibility for their symptoms, who realize that their symptoms are a manifestation of a disorder in their own soul, heed the message of their unconscious and accept its grace. They accept the pain of the work necessary to heal themselves. It is only the rare patient who enters therapy with a willingness to assume total responsibility from the beginning and see it through. Those who have faced their mental illness, accepted total responsibility for it, and made the necessary changes in themselves to overcome it, find themselves not only cured and free from the curses of their childhood and ancestry and living in a new world. Thoughts previously unwanted become helpful insights, sources of energy and guidance. Psychotherapy is only a tool. It is up to the patient to choose or reject the tool. Ultimately, people heal themselves with or without the tool of psychotherapy. "

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?

"In my assessment, and honest opinion, I don't think anything is working well in Victoria's mental health system. The whole system is crisis focussed than prevention focussed. The stakeholders (patients, carers, psychiatrists, psycho therapists, psychiatric nurses, social workers, law enforcement, judges, lawyers) are so divided in their opinions. The lack of trust, understanding and cooperation amongst these groups has made it a dysfunctional system and a hopeless situation for the mentally ill. In my opinion, only a holistic care system that integrates psychotherapy, trauma counselling, drug counselling, social work and dietary advice is a necessity to prevent mental illness. The current system gives too much power to the psychiatrists who either exclude the other professionals from providing necessary care to the mentally ill or allow minimal engagement to them with the mentally ill. It is a serious error that the system limits General Medical Practitioners from providing all care they deem necessary to their patients who are mentally ill. The GPs know their patients more and there is more trust between the GP and the patients. Education and dissemination of what mental illness is and how to take responsibility is a

necessity to support people to get early treatment and support. "

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

"The 24/7 telephone help lines are commendable. The cannabis trial for the veterans with PTSD is also commendable although long overdue. It is however, discriminatory to exclude those suffering with PTSD but are not veterans. From admission to discharge of a patient, the psychiatric treating teams, nurses, psychologists, social workers engaging in the mental health wards mostly aim to tick the boxes according to their policies than show a duty of care towards the patient. These policies do not put the patients' wellbeing ahead of everything else. Policies must be changed so that psychiatrists are compelled to put their patients' interest ahead of the mental health system status quo. "

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.

"The lack of holistic care, extremely high fees for psychiatrists and psychologists, restrictions on GP's to prescribe certain drugs for mental illness make it hard for people to access treatment as out patients. Most psychiatrists do not accommodate or acknowledge other professionals such as psychotherapists or trauma counsellors in treating the mentally ill. They prefer to just prescribe medications. The system should cater to the implementation of a system of accountability for all stakeholders that provide services to the mentally ill which is a necessity. "

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

Lack of duty of care in psychiatric wards has resulted in lack trust in the patient and carers. Lack of transparency in a draconian public mental health system that gives too much power to the staff has resulted in fear in patients and carers.

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

Total transparency of the treatment plan by including the carers' input in the decision making of the treating team. The public mental health staff to be trained in showing empathy to the carers. Accountability for the staff where this is lacking.

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?

To adopt the Open Dialogue: Finland's Alternative Approach to Mental Illness to treat psychosis.

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

"To demand more funding, as no amount of recommendations will help without funding to implement them. "

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

"The banning of ECT. We have personal knowledge of a psychiatric consultant in a mental health ward at a leading hospital who subjected our young son who was outspoken to 12 sessions of ECT, as a result of which his brilliant academic ability was totally impaired. He could not resume his tertiary studies. Premature dual diagnosis of youth with drug addiction issues must be held accountable. This has destroyed the youth and their families. This needs to be stopped immediately. This was what happened to our young family member. He had self medicated due to PTSD from childhood. Instead of properly diagnosing him the consultant prematurely diagnosed him with bipolar and put him on medication. This diagnosis was subsequently questioned by national addiction specialist Professor Alan Gijsbers in Australia as well as psychiatrist Dr Richard Jaeckle in the USA who successfully treated our son for two years. "