

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

SUB. 0002.0023.0001

Name

[REDACTED]

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

"Television advertisements are working well. Billboards would help; Social Media grabs etc. The important thing is to keep it in the public eye, as with all health campaigns, until it is internalised. Short messages with a 'this is what to do' message, such as step 1, step 2, etc, culminating in seeing a mental health professional."

## **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?**

"Mental illness can really be addressed by family education programs. Starting from the baseline of poor mental health that becomes inter-generational is really important. More services for families in the home.. Parents are hard pushed to go out to services when they work. A therapist coming to the home fortnightly providing follow through and a focus on behavioural change would impact all; parents and children could even take a repeated' single session family consultation approach. For some families this is long term work and I realise it is expensive. The harsh financial circumstances families find themselves in produces stress for people and that costs society in so many ways. As an aside, I have worked in NSW for many years and recently returned to Victoria. Congratulations, VicHealth is doing a much better job of getting the message out there, I believe. Other areas don't compare as well."

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

This is an area that seems to have improved. People's increasing awareness hopefully translates to keeping an eye on your mate. Helplines are accessible. Keep the message out there to notice if anyone around withdraws socially or starts to say unusual things.

## **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.**

"People are simply under too much pressure to make money and live and in our aspirational society there is always a source of discontent to be found. Teach children yoga and still body, still mind techniques. Emphasise the physiological benefits of exercise promote it as a tool to manage mental health. Endorphins etc. self-control and achievement. Plato had it right know thyself by knowing thy body."

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

"I think some of it is entrenched and when the population grows and changes, so will the level of mental health. But it is always the case that rural communities have fewer services, often of poorer quality. If they had better access they have to travel, and petrol costs money. The stoic

country man and woman can't be bothered because they don't readily believe anything can change. Addressing apathy."

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

"Support groups, access to training and education. A recent example of very poor service to a stroke survivor who has struggled on for 6 years. She has an NDIS plan but no one has worked with her to really nut out what she needs and what she is able to use her NDIS funding for. Her stoic attitude has not helped, but a skilled worker can easily circumvent that."

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

"Salary and conditions, primarily. Most of us also want a happy work space with motivated people who have time to be the caring workers they intrinsically are. Everyone is stretched and stressed and quality of service and quality of work life diminishes."

**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?**

"I have examples of NDIS workers NOT adequately doing their job. It's as though they have been instructed not to proactively work with the client. Rather the emphasis is on the client coming up with ideas about what s/he needs and that might be outside their knowledge and if there is cognitive impairment, simply impossible. Not everyone has a family who can fill the gap for them."

**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?**

"Access to mental health sessions without going via a GP would help enormously by allowing clients to self- refer and freeing up clinicians from a substantial chunk of time writing review letters. The worried well population don't need to tie up the system, but they do need to get quick access to sort out an issue and are likely to need fewer sessions. On the other hand, mental health patients in genuine need of services are hampered by the 10 session model at the primary health level, and often not sick' enough to access secondary level, government funded, mental health. Failure to recognise the difference between the two groups is, I think, detrimental to both. The worried well don't want to go to a GP, and those with a diagnosable mental health issue don't have enough sessions to get better. At some point you have to trust clinical psychologists to differentiate. Allow unwell people to have 2 x 10 session for 1 year and then 10 session in subsequent years, but at discretion of the clinical psychologist who is highly trained to make such decisions . Mental health clinicians are also working to reverse years of dysfunction; they are trained to do it but can't produce miracles in 10 sessions. It's very disappointing."

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

Increased Funding.

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

"These questions have been too broad the issues should really have been presented more clearly, as per focus group data. An approach could have been formed and the questions could

have provided people an opportunity to have input into the possible solutions. "