

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

Organisation Name

N/A

Name

Mr Nicholas Argall

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

"The Victorian community in 2019 is pretty good. People in general seem sympathetic, supportive, and well-intentioned. (It's not like it was in the 90s, which was an improvement on the time before then. A wider rollout of Mental Health First Aid would be ideal. During my time as an MHFA instructor, I felt that I helped people to be able to relate constructively to people who have a mental illness. The ancillary skills taught as part of the course (for example: understanding that other people have rights to privacy and confidentiality, and that there's a difference between those rights) would seem to be valuable towards good citizenship generally."

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?

"Better availability of services that actually work would have a strong positive impact on early treatment and support. Directing people into early treatment and support is a core theme of MHFA training. More mentally healthy workplaces and society would be great, although those are difficult to achieve. Particularly worth examining is the Australian habit of appointing managers and supervisors, not providing any training or meaningful supervision to those supervisors, then being surprised when they don't handle their staff very skillfully (often engaging in bullying or other anxiety/depression provoking behaviours)."

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

Responsible reporting seems to be pretty firmly in place. The suicide prevention component of the MHFA curriculum is probably worth rolling out as widely as possible (together with the rest of it).

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.

"Leaving aside the (massive) contribution made by social upheaval, economic uncertainty, and the inevitable fearmongering of a media that needs eyeballs to survive... 1) Treatment is expensive. I'm making progress, and I'm out of pocket \$600/month on treatment appointments. 2) Treatment is difficult, poorly understood and unreliable I've been in treatment since 2003, and I've been in contact with social workers about [REDACTED] since 1991. I currently find that I'm disabled by pain and distress for a week after working a 6 hour day. A very substantial part of the problem is that the theory which informs good treatment of my condition didn't come into existence until the last 5 years. There's a lot of fumbling about going on, and there's a lot of bluster and confusion. There are therapies that work which don't make sense from a common-sense point of view (intuitively, EMDR shouldn't work, until you engage with the neurology of vision and how it interacts with memory) which are powerful, and which have risks that are not fully understood. (The most active period of suicidal thought and self-harm of my adult

organizations and initiatives. If I could sign up to a job-matching service for peer support workers, which had an intake process which would help address some of the anxiety etc, that would be great."

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 skills - the most marketable of which is my ability to architect, design and manage complex technology systems. (Difficult technical problems use so much of my mental capacity that the demons can't find me while I'm doing work that's difficult enough. One of my problems is that I keep learning when I do that, so it's hard to keep me supplied with problems that are difficult enough and yet solveable.) I have friends who are brilliant at various sciences, but who have been out of work much longer than I, and not all of them have had the combination of resources that I've had. We are a massive and untapped resource. The problem is that nobody seems to need us badly enough to put up with our bullshit. We miss days at work sometimes, or mismanage social interactions, and most employers would rather have someone easy to manage than an unreliable genius. And we're the low-hanging fruit, too. People who distract themselves from their problems with drugs instead of puzzles; there's a lot of reasons why you'll find them harder to help. I guess the fantasy would be to come up with a moonshot project. Something so big and difficult that you end up needing people like me badly enough that there's a workplace for us to go to. Failing that, you can always fund the arts: we tend to have stories we want to tell through some kind of medium, and there's a general acceptance of 'quirkiness' among artists."

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?

"There is a desperate shortage of competence in handling angry men (now that I think of it, I have a friend who is an angry woman, and she struggles to get effective help too - she's had it worse than me in terms of life events, and access to effective help). We need a socially sanctioned and constructive response to anger. Good luck (sincerely) with creating employment opportunities. Please seriously consider adding Mental Health First Aid to the schools curriculum."

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

"I will very happily advise on how to prepare the ground for your strategy, if you'll tell me what the strategy is."

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

"I would advise you to get in touch with ABC journalist Jess Hill. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] .. She's done a lot of research and I feel confident that she understand the issues & the intersection between mental health and domestic violence really well"