

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?

"I am advocating on behalf of women suffering from mental health problems connected to medical problems stemming from hormonal imbalances. My daughter [REDACTED] was diagnosed with both PCOS and PMDD. She suffered from a range of symptoms including depression, anxiety, bouts of anger, fatigue, lack of concentration, mental confusion, paranoia. I sought help from various doctors, endocrinologists, psychologists, naturopaths, psychiatrists etc. At our most desperate we even consulted the renowned Professor [REDACTED] at the [REDACTED] Psychiatric Unit. Our experience was an absolute nightmare and the mainstream medication prescribed only made my daughter's symptoms worse or caused a heavily sedated zombie like state. We spend a lot of time and money consulting various professionals and no one really understood the crisis our whole family was going thru. Given how many women in our community suffer from these disorders its criminal that our health care system doesn't offer a coordinated range of services dealing with the myriad of problems associated with hormonal imbalances."

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?

"Being a qualified Social Worker I undertook research into my daughters problem and formulated an effective intervention plan. I consulted Dr [REDACTED], who is an Integrative Medical Practitioner. He advised us on how to safely get [REDACTED] off the medication which was making her feel worse. He recommended dietary changes, supplements and a new approach to balancing out [REDACTED] hormones using bio identical progesterone cream. GPs are ill equipped to deal with women's hormonal problems. The Health Care system needs to invest more into training of doctors, research and development of coordinated services helping women suffering from hormonal imbalances. We talk about early intervention. In light of our experience there was no one within the mainstream system to turn to and get effective help"

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

"During my daughter's illness we as a family felt alone, isolated and at times under siege when my daughters symptoms were at their worst. I slept in my daughters room keeping an eye on her. The responsibility falls on the families and support services available are not that easy to access. I felt this as a professional Social Worker so you can imagine how a lay person would feel. You are going thru a major crisis and no one really knows how to help. I am aware of services like the CAT team, telephone crisis services, individual psychologists and psychiatrists. They seem to exacerbate the crisis that you are going thru but don't know how to prevent or deal with a full blown breakdown when it involves hormonal imbalance. Mainstream Mental Health Services just aren't appropriate or helpful. Suicides related to conditions related to hormonal imbalances haven't been studied or documented so we don't really know the extent of the problem."

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.

"Obstacles to good mental health includes: family income, knowledge of problems as they arise, open communication within families, specialist training of doctors working in front lines to assess and diagnose problems, availability of coordinated support services in a climate of openness, honesty and acceptance at a community level. Funding needs to be allocated to researching ""Women's Problems"" and findings need to be disseminated to women and professionals looking after women to minimise suffering."

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

"Low incomes, being from a Non English Speaking background, lack of services, lack of expertise on the part of existing providers, division between services available to public and private patients, women being treated as second class citizens and their unique problems not being given the priority they deserve, misguided policies of previous governments focusing on de-institutionalisation denying seriously ill people the help that they need. MAKE WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH A PRIORITY. ALLOCATE FUNDING FOR RESEARCH AND INTEGRATED SERVICES THAT INFORM, EMPOWER, EDUCATE AND SUPPORT WOMEN. BRING IT OUT INTO THE OPEN TO MINIMISE HARM AND SUFFERING INFLICTED."

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

"We as a family felt under siege, alone and isolated. We consulted many professionals and no one knew how to help. I was blessed to be professionally trained and dedicated to my daughters well being so we got thru. It was expensive and at times our vulnerability was exploited by unscrupulous practitioners who sold us expensive supplements/treatment that didn't really help. There should be help and support available 24 hours a day to guide and help carers. Access to support groups should also be made easier. This is a major area of community health which we seem to ignore at a local level. My beautiful daughter has been involved in community consultations about what our local council needs to do to help young people in our area."

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

"Training, careful selection, professional support, good pay and conditions, providing secure funding to agencies, selecting workers from different backgrounds who have both empathy and understanding."

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?

There are none. Most people with mental health problems are discriminated against in the work force and often suffer in silence or don't disclose that they suffer from mental illness. We need to be more open about mental illness and employers have to become less bloody minded about how they treat people with special needs.

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?

"Focus on improving all mental health services for all Australians. Identify Special Needs groups eg: adolescents, men, women, the elderly and develop services geared towards these. I don't believe that one size fits all model really works. Allocate funding for research, training and integrated services that work."

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

"Review current services and their deficits. Address the gaps in these honestly and openly. I believe people with mental illness, their families, people working in the field are in a good position to advise the government how to improve these and what needs to be done."

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

I hope that you will be open to my feedback on the special area of mental health that has affected my family at a very real and devastating way. I am happy to report that we have come thru this not unscathed but much wiser about how we could have been helped better. I am proud of the progress that my daughter has made and feel that being a Social Worker was such a blessing in that it helped me to help my beautiful daughter to overcome a major life hurdle. As a mother I feel that everyone's daughters deserve the support that I was able to give my daughter. This needs to come in the form of integrated support services offered to women with mental and physical problems stemming from hormonal imbalances.