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

SUB. 0002.0032.0104

Name

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What are your suggestions to improve the Victorian community's understanding of mental illness and reduce stigma and discrimination?
"The campaigns to educate and increase community awareness of mental illness have been good but it needs to go to the next level. There is perception of weakness when people succumb to mental illness and automatic assumptions to drug use, alcoholism, gambling etc. To reduce the stigma we have to be very clear that mental illness itself does not discriminate! Wealthy people who suffer from depression are asked what they have to be sad about? Depression and sadness are two different things and that is what the education should clarify. The recent advertising about anxiety identifies the negative self talk that sufferers battle with but we need to educate further and say that sufferers should snap out of it as if there is a switch, it's not a choice. The advertising, in my opinion, is aimed more at those people who might be suffering from an undiagnosed mental health condition. (And should continue) But the stigma and discrimination lies with the general public THEY need to comprehend that mental illness can affect anyone."

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?
Continue with the advertising campaigns. We needs appropriate care facilities that are accessible to both high and lower functioning sufferers. High functioning suffers can work for sustained periods but imagine how quickly they might recover if they could receive after hours treatment at a facility where they could check in to every night after work and check out in the morning to go to work! Perhaps our health insurance providers could allow up to 2 weeks for this treatment? This may reduce the impact of a long term struggle resulting in chronic mental illness or worse. Specific care facilities with specialised staff is what I see as important. Give mental illness the same respect that other major illnesses receive.

What is already working well and what can be done better to prevent suicide?
"Continue the education. Ensure family involvement in the mental health plan. Train family and carers to look for changes in behaviour. Teach them what questions to ask the sufferer to encourage more communication about how they are really feeling, how to get the honest answer. Perhaps we need to demystify suicide? It's not reported and I understand why. Other western countries do publicise suicide, I'm not sure if the statistical impact differentials. "

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.
"It has been my experience that people often don't realise they are experiencing poor mental health until the are pretty low, if it were possible for everyone to receive regular screening like other illnesses that would help to identify mental health issues and support mechanisms could

commence."

What are the drivers behind some communities in Victoria experiencing poorer mental health outcomes and what needs to be done to address this?
This is not really being addressed in my community

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

What can be done to attract, retain and better support the mental health workforce, including peer support workers?
Treat mental illness as a real illness Create experts and specialists that are attached to all health facilities

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?
Not sure in my community

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?
Recognise mental illness as the far reaching illness that it is. Make health checks available to everyone Initiate mental health clinics

What can be done now to prepare for changes to Victorias mental health system and support improvements to last?
"Mental health check ups should be as routine as the dentist, this will help to reduce the stigma, it needs to become the norm'"

Is there anything else you would like to share with the Royal Commission?
"I lost my brother to suicide in 1994, he took his own life on the eve of his 27th birthday. He had previous drug dependency in his teens and early twenties. He was not diagnosed with mental illness back then but he certainly would have been today. When he pulled his life back together by age 25 I thought we were safe. His death was something we were not prepared for at all. No note, leaving us only to guess what the final catalyst was. As I write this submission I am experiencing that grief as if it was yesterday. After his death I wanted to know everything I could about suicide prevention, at that time 25 years ago the Hume region had the highest suicide rate per capita head in the world! Not something to be proud of. "