

5/6/2029

To The Victorian Royal Commission into Mental Health,

I have lived in situations and with co-illness known to cause depression from childhood.

There have been many things I could not control that impacted my mental health over the last 40 years:

- Narcissistic biological father
- Stepfather with morbid grief and bi polar 2
- Death of a step-brother via aneurism when I was 9
- Kicked at out home at 17
- Developed thyroid illness by 20
- Widowed with two small children at 26 because my first husband died in a workplace accident
- At 32 developed a rare allergy to living in the 21st century

Every single step of the way I have had to fight to over come adversity, depression and grief, often alone and without a lot of support, living on a Centrelink income. A income that has never really been enough to give me access to the programs I needed for health and wellness, and support my family. So my family has and always will come first.

I am educated woman, living with depression, now remarried and my children are teenagers, I am looking at beginning a Masters in the next couple of years. Yet I still struggle to find the support I need in our community. Allergic to the 21st Century makes for a lot of entertainment in my life, and only make the depression worse, for example:

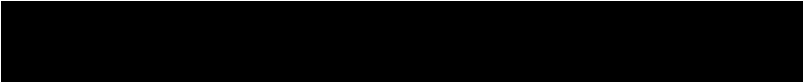
- Going for for job interview is rather interesting. It makes a great start to the interview process when I arrive but have to leave immediately, because the interviewer has sprayed on their expensive perfume or aftershave that morning. Yes the interviewer smells lovely, but for me to finish that interview means a hospital trip, and risking my life for a job!
- My husband always fills my car at the petrol station. He is not old fashion or romantic. When his sick his mate come, and pick up my car and fill it up for me to. Within 60 seconds the faint smell of petrol causes hives, full body bloating, throat closing over, and if I am lucky a buzz, but most often the smell cause a fast mood change that turns my thoughts to suicide for up to 48 hours. So I have to have a career for that period time. Which has effected his ability to earn a income
- There are school concerts I have left, and other moments I wanted to be with my children but could not. The guilt I feel as a mother is overwhelming, but I endure because my teens need there Mum even if she is a sick Mum
- I have had doctors look at my K 10 depression inventory score and ask how am I still upright? Most people at my levels are in hospital unable to get out of bed. I reply I am stubborn and my family needs me at home all true, but deep down the depression can be so dark I am tempted to do anything to try and escape!

There are many more stories I could tell you, but what I really need you to know is for anyone and their families battling any form of mental illness life is tough. It's made tougher by limited appointments with therapists, because only so much is covered by both state and federal governments, via Medicare.

Employers don't hire many people with a mental illness, careers lose jobs, and become depressed themselves. The lack of affordable housing intensely makes life harder. Job service agency's really do not have the right skills and training to help. The judgement in society as a whole because you live off government support is horrible to deal with.

The future planned implementation of a basics card will only make things harder again. Every day I wake worried about how I will support myself because I have barely worked. Currently I have \$2500.00 in super. I am working towards the goal of setting up a online counselling practice, after all I am qualified and a member of ACA. But I am worried I will not make enough.

SUB.0002.0030.0185



Through my journey so far the things that would of helped me are:

- More sessions with my own therapist
- Access to a personal trainer I could afforded to visit my home
- Stable and cost effective housing
- Job security for my husband, he really should be paid \$120k a year for all he does for me
- Help at home with cleaning ect, but we don't qualify
- More community awards around rare allergies because they do cause grief
- Support for my children's mental health
- Support to find away to work around being house bound and some to visit and help with that

Understanding that when it comes to mental health every ones needs and there families needs are different.

Kind Regards



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

Submission: 0002.0030.0183

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

"Staff in hospital's emergency departments need more training in how to handle a person with a mental health condition and a co-illness. More mental health programs that offer a minimum of 24 sessions per year, per person. Counsellors should be given government funding to see clients - who have a referral from GP etc! "

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?

"We as a community need more education on invisible illness, especially where mental illness is involved. I don't think mental illness can be prevented but I think as a society we can find ways to support people early with who are beginning to show signs of mental illness. - Paid compassionate leave - Paid mental health days - Lower housing costs for those with mental health issues and co-illness - Access to affordable mental health care"

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

"The reality is we cannot stop a person from the act of suicide. Care Collaborate and Connect is a great tool that talks about how practitioners should discuss suicide with patients and or clients. This program was developed by University of South Australia and is currently going from free to commercial. I would like to see it as part of all training for anybody working in the health profession including psychologists, counsellors, psychiatrists. Preventing suicide requires a lot more practical support than people receive and for each person that support may be different. There is not one size fits all model - sadly? "

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.

"There are so many reasons why a person may not experience good mental health. It can be genetic, it can be a nature/nurture issue. It can be because of the family of origin. It can be a sudden unexpected change to life circumstances. These any or all factors and much more will happen in everyone's life time - how a person copes and deals with them is key! People need resilience training! If employed paid leave from work. Financial support in a crisis. If a person has experienced a life changing event eg sudden illness, death of a spouse while raising a family, divorce, parents whose child died, anything that stops them from working it would be good to see if all loans had as part of a policy that 6-12 months of payments are suspended, placed on hold, or they can pay extra on their loan for an insurance payment to cover the cost in such life altering emergencies. Services coming together does not mean let's write letters back and forth it means let's meet in person with the person and talk together about ways that will help."

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

"- not enough cost effective mental health services for Victorians, all certified practitioners should be able to claim income in private practice off the government. For this to happen a Counsellor for example needs to be registered with Australian Counselling Association (ACA). - Farming communities need mental health workers who can visit them on the land and take food supplies or things people need. They also need to know it's ok to have depression but workers need to visit the clients not farmers go to the workers. Those with co-illnesses need support workers who can support them and the family around them. What is needed is more funding, more support workers and more education."

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

"Family members and carers need financial support the career pension is not enough for what they do! They really should have a proper working wage because of the work they do. They have given up their own dreams for a loved one, and they live in poverty. They are tired and often fall victim to mental health issues themselves because of the situation. This is a nasty cycle! They need breaks, they need workers to visit rather than trying to go out on their own. They need better part time work options and paid leave. They need disability and mental health training to help them support the person, including first aid - to at least a cert 4 level. Allowing them to work if the loved one passes away. Telecommunications or work at home options should not be counted as part of your Centrelink entitlement. Grief counselling as the carer gives up and loses their work, friends, social life etc. Networking groups support options not all will go but it should be a choice."

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

"Remove the stigma of mental health, Increase wages More leave entitlements to prevent burn out More government support for private practice."

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?

"A person needs to feel safe! Education is required across the whole of the community regarding mental illness. Employers need incentives to hire someone with mental illness. Lots of people are able to work but there needs to be support and training for those employers willing to hire someone, It depends on the symptoms of the mental illness as to how much a person wants to engage with our society both economic and socially and those symptoms need to be respected. Some people just can't be part of society and need the extra financial support to ensure they have the required items they need."

Thinking about what Victoria's mental health system should ideally look like, tell us what areas and reform ideas you would like the Royal Commission to prioritise for change?

"In the situation where a person is so mentally ill that they prefer to live outside rather than indoors it would be good to see them off the streets away from harm! In a dream world the government would have areas these people could live safely that is patrolled by police, and security, even if they all dressed in plain clothes. To prevent rape, harm or other injury, it would require a very

compassionate team with specialised training. It would have support workers and mental health nurses ect on sight 24/7 Each person would be given an out door space that was there own - with a toilet and shower built on each space & some where to store belongings. It could have a tent if they wished, or out door setting that they could have family visit. Giving everyone an address. In the centre there could be a kitchen where people can access hot food, where the mental health workers and nurses are stationed. A bus that would allow them to go out to shops ect. Where clients have the freedom to come and go. Giving these very ill people a very safe place to call home rather than a box under a bridge. I feel that rather than fixing a mental health problem we as a society need to find ways to support people in a safe caring way. Every one needs food, shelter, and a safe space. In some cases does a safe place or shelter mean a building or can it mean supporting the illness by ensuring a person has safe place to go? We need to think outside the box. "

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

Education of the whole Victorian community. If a system is working keep it - don't let accountants try and save money on it Independent studies to show what works and what does not. Invest in training for mental health also consider giving counsellors from ACA a rebate to lower costs for clients.

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

Personally I have a co-illness that has effected my mental health and the life style of my family for the last 17 years. I am a qualified counsellor to. In my situation there has not been a lot of support for me or my family and it's been tough. I have accused what little support is out there and it's helped but the things I know would have made our situation easier we're not available and still not available to me and my family. I see this with clients at work & it's heart breaking. There is not enough compassion or understanding in our community.