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

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What are your suggestions to improve the Victorian communitys understanding of mental illness and reduce stigma and discrimination?
"If the support is free then the help becomes more readily available. The hoops that you have to jump through put people through more stress and shame that is necessary. If anyone could very easily access free mental health services, then more people would do so. This would make it feel less isolating. Especially more group services where people can meet others experiencing similar illness. I have been seeing a psychologist for 12 months but really, group therapy would go so far to make me feel less alone and ashamed of my illness. "

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 health care plans are good, but 10 sessions is not enough. That is less than one session a month, and its still expensive. I am suicidal approx 35% of the time but I cannot afford to see a psychologist as often as I need. I also find that GPs push medication on to you and to me, it has often felt like they will not grant me access to a psychologist unless I am on medication. I am now on medication and yet I am still suicidal. What I need is quality counselling. I also once had a trainee psychologist tell me that she would not engage in talk therapy with me unless I was on medication. I felt incredibly shamed and embarrassed and my mental health suffered a large set back after this session."

What is already working well and what can be done better to prevent suicide?
"The stigma is that if you are suicidal you are standing on the side of a bridge about to jump. And to me, the helplines seem like they would help you in that situation. I have suicidal thoughts but don't often find myself ""on the edge"" of actually hurting myself. But yet, I am still in a state of extreme helplessness feeling like I will have to figure out how to kill myself and thats when I need immediate support. But what can a helpline do for me except suggest I go to my GP and see a psychologist. Who I need to speak to at that moment is not a stranger but the health professional who knows my situation. If you are risk of suicide then your GP should be able to connect you with a psychologist that works on some kind of on-call or call back basis. Personally, a 10 - 15 minute call with my psychologist would be enough until my next appointment. But it would help give me the skills to deal with those extreme suicidal thought scenarios. Again, group therapy around these situations would be immensely helpful. Understanding that others feel this way and how they have learned to cope would be incredibly helpful and potentially life saving. Most of my suicidal thoughts come from a feeling of disconnectedness. And so, connection is vital for me. But that connection could come from others who are experiencing similar illness. "

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.

"I have relocated to Gippsland, VIC after living in cities for the last 10 years. I struggle with the lack of activities on offer in rural areas aside from competitive sports and gyms. I come from a performing arts background and there is very little available for me here. "

What are the drivers behind some communities in Victoria experiencing poorer mental health outcomes and what needs to be done to address this?
I can only speak from my experience in Gippsland where it is an incredibly low socio-economic area. Even before the power stations closed down you can sense that there are many many fanilies doing it hard and experiencing poorer mental health. Connecting these people together would alleviate some personal services and allow people to heal and grow through connection with others from their community. My husband and I probably make more money that a lot of others in Gippsland and yet we struggle to afford my health care and activites that we know would go so far to help my illness. I cannot imagine how hard it must be for low income people to find effective support.

What are the needs of family members and carers and what can be done better to support them?
Counselling. Not necessarily expensive psychiatry or psychology but counselling for sure. And group counselling to know that theyre not alone would be amazing. Carers leave also for partners/carers of those with mental health illnesses.

What can be done to attract, retain and better support the mental health workforce, including peer support workers?
"Pay them what they deserve, which is a lot. "

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?
"If governments subsidised rents for businesses that provided creative/social/learning activities, more businesses (especially in rural areas) would be able to open up to provide activities that are vital to people with mental health issues. I would love to see businesses and communities able to provide more activities and social events that allow people to meet new friends. Social isolation is a huge part of mental illness, especially in rural areas."

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?
"Up the subsidy to the full cost of a psychology session (or a much smaller gap). Or subsidise rent for psychologists do they can lower their prices. And up the sessions to a MINIMUM of 40 per year. Provide free group conselling sessions according to the particular illness, ie anxiety, grief, anorexia. Provide psychologists for those with suicidal thoughts/behaviours that can operate a call back service in times of great need. Provide those with mental health illnesses vouchers for activites in their local community to increase connection. Ensure quotas of council run community events that bring people together and allow people to meet new friends. Make employers pay carers leave on top of sick leave. Continue education about mental health through every year of schooling. Get those recovering from mental illness to speak to children so they can understand it better. Bring in programs for kids to organise activities that support those in the community

suffering from mental illness."

What can be done now to prepare for changes to Victorias mental health system and support improvements to last?
Let people know that change is coming. Hope is what people need.

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