

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

SUB. 0002.0028.0160

Name

[REDACTED]

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

"Early education, and reducing stigma at a young age is essential. Having mental health first aid mandatory part of managerial training - at least where physical first aid certifications are required. In an ideal world, parents would teach their own children to value diversity but in lieu of that, I believe the responsibility falls to schools & local community programs. "

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?

"I believe the conversation around mental health is changing, at least in my generation (28 years old) but my mother - who is the person I make this submission for, she is living with schizophrenia and intellectual barriers, and must reside on the other side of town because it is the only supported residential service accom that doesn't also house people living with addiction - she feels very uncomfortable and scared of [REDACTED] from time spent there in her younger years. Breaking down stigma and having proper access to accommodation, more housing for those dealing with mental health and addiction - encouraging demographically (age?) appropriate match ups between people so it is easier for people like my mother - who has minimal family support - to find community and solidarity with people like her."

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

"I think having services like Lifeline help some, but it's a seriously under resourced problem - especially in helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth."

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.

"My family's experience has been worsened due to lack of financial security. This should not be the case in a country like Australia. I don't believe my mother has had ongoing access to therapy where she can talk about her feelings, and learn how to better express herself, but has had plenty of access to medication that slows her down and makes her feel sick. Poor nutritional education and lack of access to fresh foods, or the empowerment to learn for ones self is a contributing factor to declining mental health. It is certainly something that I have struggled with and only learned how to do with the help of uni housemates. I am dealing with my diagnosis of PTSD much better now that I have a better understanding, and agency over, my gut health. My two younger brothers are still stuck in a rut regarding this health issue. "

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

"Better opportunities for education, more empowering messaging coming from govt and other

leadership bodies. Better access to healthy food and means to support ones self in difficult financial times. Why would someone pay to see a GP or psychologist if they don't feel they can feed their family properly? Why make it known at work that time off to deal with mental health is necessary if they are unsure they will have a job to get back to? De-casualisation of the workforce and better protections are required before people will take the risk to opening themselves up to rejection, judgement or harassment by being honest about their mental health. "

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

"It wasn't until my mother has pneumonia last year, and had to be taken off her medications in order to be treated for her pneumonia that a doctor had a conversation with me and my brothers about her care - and how she needs to quit smoking and needs to be dressed warmer. Her residential accom support workers do not have the capacity, apparently, to deal with these needs. There needs to be more support for family members to have these conversations, and feel empowered to ask questions about how we can better her situation from a distance. Less stigma in the work place will make it easier for people to take time off work to be with family, or take time for themselves to process difficult situations. . As a start."

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

"I'm not too sure how to answer this question, I leave this for others with experience in the matter. "

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 know hardly anything on this topic. I don't see my mother ever being able to work or socialise in ways that are not harmful to her, given how she has been let down by the state, and her family, over the past twenty years. "

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?

"Affordable housing and services. The DSP is not enough money, especially to cover accommodation outside the public access. My mother shouldn't be allowed to smoke where she lives but no one who works there cares. Better access to counselling and psychology services, before prescribing medication."

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

"Better education, firm govt commitment to change culture and the law in order to shift stigma. "

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

"My.father was also very depressed when he had to separate from my mother because of her unpredictable nature, and difficulty with post natal depression, in 1997/98. My brothers and I were in foster care for a short while, while he took.some rest to cope. I don't believe he was really followed up on, or given support for himself. We grew up in fear of talking about how bad our home.life was for fear of being separated and our father being assumed unfit to care for us - which

was true for the most part. But we shouldn't have had to grow up like that, and education could have made all the difference. "