Your contribution

Should you wish to make a formal submission, please consider the questions below, noting that you do not have to respond to all of the questions, instead you may choose to respond to only some of them.

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

Attaching personal stories to mental illness helps to portray to people how it works. For a lot of people mental ill health, especially on an extreme level hasn't been experienced. It is hard for people to identify with others who do experience it if they can't quite understand the feelings themselves. Being able to connect with personal stories makes it less clinical and encourages a level of connection between those who do and don't experience it.

Also, highlighting that mental ill health comes in many forms. Lots of people assume that just because you're diagnosed with an issue, it means that you struggle all the time but that's not always the case. Having more of an understanding that disorders behave in different ways and at different levels is crucial in breaking the stigma of 'you're diagnosed, you must not be able to function normally all the time'.

People need to be more aware that there's people who suffer sometimes and can still maintain a functioning life. Others are completely debilitated. A broader understanding of how it takes form would be useful.

2. 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?

There needs to be more services and access to services. Increase health workers too.

Unfortunately, the system is completely burdened and in such high demand that people can't access resources when they need too. Having waiting lists of a minimum of 6 weeks isn't good enough. Yes, you may not be at a hospital admission stage, however some people need support almost automatically in one way or another, whether it's therapy of consultations with psychiatrists regarding medication and more serious symptoms.

We need more workers and resources in the mental health industry as it's such a huge problem in our society.

Especially for those who can't afford private treatment, access to affordable/free services needs to become more readily available and services need to be increased to meet demands.

Other factors include being more aware of people and their lives. More education needs to be put in place for both adults and children about warning signs and what YOU can do to help. Very often the burden is put on the sufferer to reach out and find support which can add to more problems relating to stress and depression as you don't want to feel like a burden. Having campaigns like 'r u ok' are absolutely useless if we don't exercise it daily. We all have a responsibility to make the world a better place and ensuring everyone in our community is feeling okay. We need to raise awareness about early warning signs and how to recognise a potential problem because mental ill health can very quickly sneak up on you.

Preventing mental illness comes in many forms. The environment you live in must be stable. Unfortunately, you can't quite control how people keep their households and raise their families.

We need to work on providing stability and coping strategies for children and younger people, so they'll be prepared when they become adults. Our generation is being failed by our parent's generation as these days it's all about participation certificates and no matter what you're always the best and the working world doesn't work that way. It's competitive and cruel and for those who have been through no hardships or barely had any responsibility struggle more than those who are taught how to be an adult. Life is hard and we're not preparing the current and future generations with strategies on how to deal with life and its problems.

Having more employment for young people is crucial, it allows them to work for themselves, learn how to support themselves and gain confidence in their selves.

More extracurricular activities for children and teenagers rather than using screens e.g. gaming, TV, social media for hours. This works for adults too.

More face to face connections to reduce the epidemic of loneliness and the feelings of disconnection.

Better diets. Diets have a huge correlation with mental ill health.

Exercise needs to become a part of people's lives like eating food every day. It's crucial in keeping the mind healthy. It shouldn't be optional, it needs to be more heavily engrained into people.

Increasing wages so people can actually afford to support themselves and have a work life balance. It's nearly impossible to live alone/housemate/partner and try to save for property and hobbies and whatever you want in your life. People often need two wages to support themselves fully. More help should be given to those who need it. Financial pressure and stress are one of the leading causes of ill mental health. We are overloaded with stress as every industry seems to be understaffed, not enough funding, etc It's the same story everywhere and something needs to be done with financial control and delegation.

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

Recognising what suicide encompasses and why people are led to it.

Suicide is incredibly complicated. Every suicide victim is different, has different lives, struggles in different ways, etc… however, the act itself and the feelings prior before have similarities.

People's lives need to be improved. Suicide is caused because people have no HOPE. They don't believe anything will get better and they don't have the foresight to see how life or the world could possibly offer them the peace and find comfort in death. People who commit tend to be looking for a way out of the pain they are experiencing. We need to start changing the way people live and having more work life balances, overworking people is a primary cause for issues as is financial stress, unstable relationships, etc.

We need to work together as a society to improve the relationships we have with people and to make them fulfilling.

There is so much we can do to prevent it and most of it encompasses changing the way people live which is incredibly hard to do when people have no money/are in debt/are living week by week and struggling to keep on top of things. This is extremely common and not acceptable.

4. 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 isn't enough services or support for people. And the services that are available often let people down and aren't worth waiting for.

All services should like together. E.g. child protection, youth justice, justice, corrections, parole and bail services, etc should be linked with mental health services to see if the client has ever been with another service and why and if it will help them to manage their ill mental health.

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

Unemployment, ridiculously high housing market, living expenses are too high to manage financially for lots of people. Wages don't cover the basic expenses.

More connection with the community and other people. Lack of stability with how the community operates.

Increase job opportunities, start funding things for the community to gentrify them. Tackle crime with harsher sanctions. E.g. vandalism. It's hard to feel proud of the area you live in when things are being constantly destroyed.

More employment alone will tackle lots of issues as it gives people something to do and feel proud about. It'll also help to reduce crime as criminally inclined people will be occupied with a job. Young kids who act up tend to be super bored, have no self-respect or respect for others and ultimately do not care about anything in society. They've given up and are acting out. Changing these patterns of behaviour will help people with their mental health.

Lots of people have lost hope in this world, in government, in people of society. We need to create more hope for people.

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

More financial support. Even on families on 'good' wages struggle to make ends meet.

More access to services needed. Support for family members and parents with children. You can't work a lot, mind children and take care of the domestic duties. It's too much of a burden and it all comes down to financial pressure.

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

Create initiatives for workers. Higher wages would be a start. People who work in the industry are under lots of stress with the burden of clients but also because it's hard work. They need to be recognised and supported. It's very much so a traumatic workforce and the problems you have to sort through will mentally effect you. Provide more support to them.

8. 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 aren't many opportunities. When employers/people in general know about your diagnosis you're automatically placed into a category. Bias comes in to play more than one can assume.

If there are opportunities they need to be promoted more and people need to be made aware of what they are.

9. 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?

More immediate support for people struggling. Reducing waiting list times. Increasing workers in the industry. Creating more of a work life balance and increasing wages for those who are struggling. Centrelink needs to actually provide support to those who need it and not people who are scamming them for money.

10. What can be done now to prepare for changes to Victoria's mental health system and support improvements to last?

Try and employ more people in the sector. Increase job positions and availabilities and create funding for the industry.

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

Mental ill health is too common, and it needs to be prevented rather than dealt with. We need to turn our focus, as a community into how we can prevent these issues from arising but also how to recognise symptoms and how people are struggling. We all struggle but some more than others.

I've been dealing with mental health issues since the age of 5. First panic attack at 5, suffered with depressive symptoms and body dysmorphia throughout my childhood and adolescence and I wouldn't wish it on any child.

Started to self-harm at 12, had suicidal tendencies from 12 years old onwards. Starting abusing substances at 13 as a coping mechanism. Still struggle with sobriety to this day and probably always will. Have been in therapy on and off since 12 years old. At 17 ad a nervous breakdown where I couldn't sleep for 4 days due to paranoia and panicking and was a phone call away from the psyche ward. At 15 had a psychotic breakdown and experienced

psychosis for nearly a month and am now a borderline psychotic and it may develop into a disorder in my future. Currently on anti-depressants to try and combat my anxiety and depressive symptoms.

I could go into more detail about my story but it's not necessary. What's necessary is having the understanding that majority of our population are struggling, and we need more support. The community needs to come together and there are so many changes to be made. Try and reduce stress in people's lives and offer them something worth living for. Loss of hope = loss of person = an unhappy nation. This is an epidemic that can't be taken lightly.

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