

## Supporting Document to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System

By [REDACTED]

I have spent the last 18 months trying to get my adult daughter who has a mental illness, help through the public mental health system but there are just not enough services and support in the area of [REDACTED] where we live.

I care deeply for her, though I do not identify with the term carer.

**I first took my daughter to get psychological support when she was 13 years old, she is now 45 years old and I am at the end of my tether. She's not really my daughter anymore, I love her but I don't know her anymore, she's not the daughter I know.**

My daughter has a diagnosed mental illness and a substance use issue which has intensified over the years from marijuana to ice. However, she doesn't think there's anything wrong with her, so I have been left constantly battling to get services to recognise her need for intensive support and treatment.

**Over the years she has been in psychiatric units and begun medication for her mental illness, but there was no support once discharged and she was not on any form of compulsory treatment order so as soon as she is discharged, she disengages from all services. These services let her down, there's no follow up and that's what she really needs.**

I understand and support everyone having rights, I understand why the laws have changed to protect people from forced confinement in psych wards when they don't need it. However for those who need treatment, but may not recognise it because they are delusional, there needs to be processes in place to ensure they get the help they need. It is not fair to my daughter or our family.

**Being a mother, I believe you should also have rights, when you know they are as sick as they are, you should be able to sign a form to at least get them assessed by professionals so they can get help.**

We have tried rehabs. Again, once discharged from these services the support was almost non-existent. As her mother I am expected to be her complete support system, which at 73 years of age is just not feasible. I am exhausted, the endless years of battling to get her help have worn me down. In order to survive I will soon be relocating to Western Australia without my daughter. I simply cannot stay any longer.

From my experience, the main issues I want to raise with the Royal Commission are:

- **Professionals not listening to the family:** It has been incredibly difficult to get people within the mental health system to acknowledge the fact that my daughter needs help. I know how bad my daughter is, I would like to have the power to say she needs to go into care, without her permission, because in her head everything is fine but she doesn't realise she is delusional, she has two voices in her head. I don't want to lock her away, I just want to help her to be well again.
- **No regard for safety:** When my daughter is really unwell she sends me threatening texts. I have taken them to the police before when I've been worried about what she might do. They tell me not to worry as "it's just words" and "there's nothing we can do until she's hurt herself or someone else". How can it be that I have to wait till that happens, do they have to wait until she kills herself or me? I don't think the police know what to do, but then it's not their job to know either. If the mental health services were doing their job I wouldn't have to resort to the police.

- **Difficult to get treatment for dual diagnosis:** The dual diagnosis of mental illness and substance abuse has made it even more difficult to get her the treatment she needs. If you've got money in this world, you can do a lot more. You can't access long-term and supportive rehab facilities unless you have money! But that seems to be the way with a lot of the systems these days, if you don't have money you don't get help. My daughter is Indigenous as well, so I'm not sure if that has played into her addictions and the support she does or doesn't get.
- **Burden of care falls back on to families:** It breaks my heart watching and listening to her, I've been close to a breakdown myself. My daughter won't access any services because she believes they are all plotting against her. When she has, the workers who come out to monitor her get sick of her saying "she's fine" and refusing support, so they discharge her from their service even though she clearly isn't fine. I get so annoyed by this – they get paid to do their job, they should make sure they are doing it properly. They should be assessing her thoroughly and encouraging her to get better.
- **Support for families and clients:** There are not enough supports out there for family and carers or the clients. I have been lucky that I have found a great support in the team at ACSO Traralgon in the last two years, but for a long time I had no one. I would think, who else can I talk to, what can I do? I was a mess. But the team at ACSO go above and beyond. They listen to you, they come to visit and I know I can always call when things get bad. There should be supports like this for carers and clients available everywhere. We need dedicated people who are willing to engage and have the time and resources to do so.

**To the Royal Commission I make the following recommendations:**

- **Family inclusive services:** We need services to realise that families are trying to help, that we want the best for our family member. Services need to listen to the family to make sure they have all the facts and then do a proper assessment.
- **Support for families:** I know there's many people out there going through what I am, it's hard on both parties, but families need better support so that we can be there for our family member. People like me, go through so much trauma, it really takes its toll on your health. We need support services out there specifically for families, so we have someone to talk to, to connect with others who understand what we are experiencing and to get support and information.
- **Safe housing with wrap around services:** Having a safe place to call home whilst having the support of professionals would really help my daughter. The workers could monitor medications and check in on her as well as encourage her to get well and have a good life.
- **Affordable rehab services:** we need more long-term rehab services and ones that are affordable. These supports and services should not only be available to those who have the money. There needs to be a place, a home, where my daughter can get the care she needs for both diagnoses that is affordable and safe.

**The impact of trying to get my daughter help all these years has been immense and I have gone through so much trauma. She has worn me down, even my personality, my attitude. I just don't feel like myself anymore.** My health has gone so far downhill that people are really worried about me and as such I have to move away. I can't do anymore for my daughter now, I couldn't get her help. Someone else has to take over because I'm 73 and I don't want to die so young. I just want to live and be happy for a while.

I love my daughter and I want the best for her. Before the mental illness and drugs took over, we had a good relationship. I miss that person. I have lost someone important in my life, to drugs and mental illness because the supports weren't there when we asked again and again for help.

**I hope that you will take notice of what myself and other people are saying. Something really needs to change for the better, because the way things are going at the moment, nothing is working. It needs to change.**