

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

SUB: 0002.0022.0006

Name

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

"Specifically in regards to the stigma and discrimination faced by Children and Youth who get involved with the Youth Justice systems in Victoria, I propose having brief advertisement campaigns by the Department of Health / Mental Health, i.e. video vignettes on prime time tv with teenagers speaking out on various issues related to understanding of offending causes and improving general understanding of issues faced by forensic youth, e.g.: Vignette on male and female teens of various skin colours and cultural backgrounds speaking out about witnessing or being subjected to domestic violence as well as other trauma (if coming from war torn areas), and making a link of how DV influences young people in becoming reactive and violent towards others as a result of their own trauma. Modelling of violence by adults and the associated trauma often causes long-term mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression in addition to violent behaviour, or driving teens to AOD use to escape issues at home. Vignette on a male teen not fitting in at school and being bullied due to struggling with reading problems (i.e. having a learning disability); he starts wagging school. Having a strong desire to socialize and belong to a group leads him to a local park where he meets a group of older teens who involve him in theft and graffitiing. From there he gets involved in crime with these peers primarily in order to gain a sense of being of value and accepted by others. Young Sudanese teens (and their elders) speaking up about their culture and identity, and about being productive members of the community (e.g. going to school, university, working as a hairdresser, bank teller, shop assistant etc.) to counteract the strong public perception that Sudanese teens are violent gang members. Seeing Sudanese teens on TV as positive role models will help other Sudanese teens and children to feel respected and aspire to achieve in education and employment after seeing on TV how it works for their peers in leading a happier life. -If possible, moderating media releases on young offenders (under 18) committing crimes, to avoid sensationalist journalism and subsequent misrepresentation on certain communities (e.g Sudanese youth gangs) that drives further societal division and lack of ethnic and racial tolerance "

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?

"-Working well : Variety of services of different acuteness levels being available for Child and Youth Mental Health in community (CYMHS, Headspace, private practitioners, AOD services) To be done better: -INCONSISTENCY IN CYMHS AGE RANGES: The lack of"

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

" -Educating teens about the difference between reality and fantasy in online worlds / social media would be helpful, as teens are cognitively unable to understand that difference at times, and tend to believe that highly edited, idealised lives and images on social media actually represent reality. Comparing their own messy lives to the glossy social media accounts of their peers or celebrities

can drive low self-esteem and sense of hopelessness, increasing the risk of depression, anxiety, body image issues, anorexia and suicide. This is especially true for young people going through teenage years where seeking social acceptance and meeting a perceived group norm (which is massively distorted and filtered on social media) is a normal part of identity development. Managing romantic and sexual relationships in social media, especially with regards to online bullying, sexting, ghosting etc. world also requires some education and attention. "

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.

"What is needed: -Timely access to mental health services -Development of youth forensic assessment and treatment services in custodial and community settings across Victoria as a preventive step to reduce adult offending -Young people who become disengaged from mainstream schooling due to developmental disorders, intellectual disability or learning difficulties need quick and easy access to alternative skills-building pathways that can lead to future employment (e.g. car mechanic, barista, hairdressing courses with hands-on skills rather than academic skills). Otherwise these YPs run the risk of being bored, disengaged from education and getting involved with in crime to obtain material goods and a sense of purpose and belonging they lose when they don't fit in mainstream education system -Improved understanding on how mental health difficulties and trauma can underpin antisocial behaviours such as physical violence towards others, or inappropriate sexual behaviour. Educating mental health clinicians on the role of mental health in driving and addressing offending behaviour, especially in youth services for early intervention purposes, before a antisocial pattern of behaviour becomes entrenched, is warranted. "

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

"-Covert and overt racial and / or ethnic discrimination in the Australian community can adversely affect overall mental health of CALD and ATSI youth proposed solution: working on influencing overall cultural attitudes, by improving the visibility of positive CALD and ATSI role models in general community to break down general prejudice and to provide visible positive role models for youth "

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

"-Thus far, campaigns against Domestic Violence and services that assist DV affected families are very helpful and worthwhile"

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

"-Streamlining intake and assessment processes across different service providers would help in staff understanding each other better and collaborating more effectively across the state and different service providers, and resulting in better client outcomes and staf retention."

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?

"With regards to reducing youth offending : -Mainstream schools and local MH services would ideally be intimately linked with various TAFE and other practical employment courses available in their communities for young people who have learning or other disabilities, and start failing in mainstream academic settings. In order to avoid youth turning to crime out of boredom and a need to belong somewhere, we need to provide such youth with opportunities to be trained in practical skills that can lead to quick employment thus improving their sense of self-esteem and personal power by being able to positively contribute and earn enough to support themselves. -Channelling struggling youth who have been suspended or at brink of being expelled into courses offering alternative, more practical rather than academic employment education streams should be swift and readily available when problems arise in mainstream schooling and vulnerable youth start dropping out of school. "

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?

"-All of those in questions and answers above stated above. -Getting it right with early interventions with vulnerable youth can be immensely preventive of future economic and emotional burdens to Victorian society. Reducing the number of youth growing up without appropriate early interventions, and becoming life-long consumers of adult and aged care MH systems, especially in the forensic arena. Steering them away from MH and forensic services with an early intervention would be ideal. "

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

Shared Victorian MH electronic data system; clarify and consolidate Child and youth services age range issue

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

Thank you for taking the time to consider these points and making recommendations for changes to improve our MH care system for all Victorians.