Dear ministers,

My name is Yvonne Bartolovic.

I just wanted my voice heard about my experience this year. I am writing to you all about my experiences this year, before and after the event of the 4th of June 2018. It has been nothing short of horrendous too say the least.

On the 4th of June 2018, I had dental surgery too take out all four wisdom teeth, my right molar, and two cysts that had formed around the teeth. It was conducted by [redacted] at [redacted] private day surgery. Leading up to this, I had been suffering sever depression and anxiety which deemed me unable to work and as such I applied and was granted the DSP. Something I never thought I'd have too do in my lifetime.

In January this year I was prescribed dexamphetamine, by [redacted], a specialist I had only been seeing for a few months before this. In addition too this I was also on paxam and circadian. I always took my medications as prescribed and have never tried any kind of illicit drugs in my lifetime.

Shortly before the surgery, when I spoke the surgeon, anaesthetist and other doctor, I made sure I mentioned the medications I was already on. I had already written them down on the forms prior also. I told them that I noticed inflammation in my face and some sinus issues (which I found strange as I already had an ENT related surgery in late 2015 conducted my [redacted] which was a success). I also mentioned "arthritic" pain in other parts of my body for the last couple of months. I said it could be due too inflammation. (Sometimes pain so severe, I was not able too do basic tasks at home)

Aside from this, months earlier in around March (at around the time I went from 2 dexamphetamine per day too 4) I had started too spew up and was having abdominal pain, of which I mentioned to my gp [redacted] and specialist [redacted]. I was ignored by everyone though I did have a gastroscopy in April as I suspected helicobactor, which is something I had some years earlier. The result said non active gastritis. My gp stupidly put me on nexium. My blood test results in February were fine. No other blood test was conducted between February and June. August was the next time I had a blood test, even after explaining the story below too multiple people.

The surgery proceeded, completed and I was sent home with only one gauze pack. I was taking the post operative medications I was prescribed. They were Mersonyl forte, an anti biotic and an anti inflammatory to help with any pain I may hav. As advised, I was also able to continue my regular daily medications.

Within about 24 hours of the above mentioned surgery, I briefly lost consciousness and immediately noticed I had some memory loss, confusion, and a stutter. It was hard to put some sentences together. In general I did not feel well. I did not panic and did not want too overact and I stupidly put it down to perhaps all of the medications I was on. I said to my mother just before this event “this is trippy, what’s going on here” as I then sat to the floor very weak, vision somewhat impaired, seeing white. Dizzy. I fell asleep that night and the next day my speech was better but I was still stuttering and confused, and lots of short term memory issues. Some long term also. The symptoms persisted for a few more days at which point I then called the surgeon and anaesthetist. The surgeon advised too see how I go for another week or so and then advise. At which point I had too see him anyway for my follow up appointment. The anaethetist mentioned what he used during surgery and all seemed well. I was not happy with the answers I was getting. When I saw the surgeon for the follow up, He said I was healing fine and did not ask me about my concerns or listen to them.

A couple of days after I believe it was, I visited the psychiatrist and said to the receptionist I’d like too see the doctor as I think this is an emergency. She asked me too wait. I was then advised to come back in an hour, which I did. When I spoke to him I said that I really don’t think I should be on this medication, due too all the symptoms above, what happened after surgery and my family medical history of diabetes and heart disease. This conversation happened in the hallway and only lasted a few minutes as he was busy and could not see him in his room. He asked me to come back that night. I advised that I would not be able too as I won’t be in the area. He advised that I see him the next day, in [redacted] I believe it was (normally I saw him in [redacted] which I did not do as I didn’t think he had a duty of care too,listen too my concerns, considering what I had told him, what I was feeling, and what happened the day after surgery. I decided to carry on and monitor myself.

After this I had organised a trip too Queensland which I left on the 20th of June. I only left the house two /three times since the surgery and not because of depression or anxiety, but because of what symptoms I had experienced as I mentioned above. The arthritic pain was heightened. I was still not feeling well, but I thought I was perhaps well enough too travel, as I had not been anywhere in three years because of my sever depression and anxiety, medications not working or making me worse, it had left me housebound much of that time. That time was debilitating in itself.

During this trip, I noticed increasing inflammation and pain get worse. I continued too feel it all over my body. Feet, wrists, arms, ankle, and my back pain was worse than it ever was and I've had constant pain there for about 15 years which I finally now why, because I've had an X-ray and mri this year that show problems with my cervical spine and it's region. Everyone ignored that pain too for many years. I also noticed my breathing getting worse, my confusion and some memory loss was still there. I was feeling hot throughout the whole body and salt was leaving my body also. My chest and lungs were contracting due too hypoxia or something similar, as I was choking, and as such I have provided a photo of this. I have never experienced this in my life. I was worried too fall asleep at night, not knowing and then waking up a few hours later having too cool my body down and sweating profusely. A few days earlier I had stopped circadian and paxam as I thought to myself that perhaps all of this may be due to medications. I didn't want to also abruptly stop dexamphetamine but I feel I had no choice considering what had been happening. Since the event after surgery, and continuing and worsening symptoms; I decided on the day I felt like that I was choking and breathing even worse (I noticed the night before, I was also unable too inhale my cigarette and I stopped smoking for two days) and almost passed out in the shower, that I must stop this medication otherwise I may collapse again. And that this time, I may not see the light of day again. That was the day I chose too save my own life, through no fault of my own as I had been taking it as prescribed, I felt that this drug at that dosage was causing much harm too myself. I had only been on it for 6 months but clearly it had already caused many problems, some of which I still have today. Problems I did not have before I started it. I still have unexplained "shin splint burning pain" in my right lower leg and feet/ankles. No one has bother too followed this up. I still have protrusions/growths that no one has followed up.

In my confused state, before I stopped the meds; I extended my trip as I thought it may be good for me too relax and recover after surgery. I did not plan any physical pursuits which I would have loved too seeing as I was in a beautiful part of Queensland, as I was not able too due too not feeling well. However, When the hypoxia got that bad, I decided too call [redacted] and changed my flight, again. Initially I was meant too fly from Hamilton Island (I was staying at Airlie Beach a place I'd never been too before) too Brisbane. Then hang around in the lounge, then Melbourne. I initially chose this as I enjoy aircraft and flying. When I called them to get the next one back from Hamilton island, it was for the next day and via Sydney. I said that's fine. I initially though there was a 2-3 hour wait for the ongoing flight too Melbourne so I could relax as I was not feeling well. I mentioned to [redacted] over the many calls that I was not feeling the best since my surgery, but on the last call I said I'll be fine to fly, not even knowing if I would be. I just wanted to get too a major city and go too a hospital where I thought I would be able to access the care I needed at that time. However, the connecting flight from Sydney was not in a few hours, it was in 15 minutes after landing. As I got off the aircraft in Sydney, too walk too the other gate, I was still having breathing issues and was a little disorientated. I asked the gate agent too please, please take off my bag as I will not be taking that flight as I am unwell. I knew it was much to ask as the gate was going too close and all bags were onboard. After I went to the toilet and also called them, I then went back to her; showed her the business class ticket and I said, look I really don't think it's in [redacted] interest if I fly in this condition, and she promptly organised my bag too be taken off and be sent too the customer service baggage collection area. I collected my bag and proceeded to sit outside the terminal and booked a hotel. I went there too rest. I hydrated myself and tried too make myself feel as comfortable as I could. Early that night I had fallen asleep. I was very tired. It was quite early. A couple hours later, the same as what happened in Queensland at nighttime occurred. Breathing problems, sweating, salt coming out of body and other random pain I've never experienced. Somehow, I feel asleep. The next day I had enough. I was not well and had not been well for weeks already. I asked reception too call a taxi too take me to the [redacted] hospital. I was feeling very fainty and weak. The staff member was lovely and momentarily waited with me outside and I said I'll wait here on the driveway alone. I had too sit down, that's how weak I felt.

I presented myself there on the 30th of June, and was almost immediately seen by triage. There was only three of us at that time in ED. I explained all the symptoms, medications, constant pain, and prior surgery. I mentioned my chest and lungs contracting and showed her a photo, and she said "oh I have that too". For me this was not normal. She also said why didn't I go on to Melbourne too follow this up. I said to her that I have hypoxia like symptoms, lack of oxygen and have not been well for weeks, so I didn't think someone with oxygen problems as I had should be flying anymore and need too be attended too. She said it seems like there's a lot going on and to mention this too the doctor. I said yes there is, and I knew perhaps I'd have too wait some time too be seen. In hindsight, I should have been seen straight away considering what I had mentioned too her. I waited for 3-4 hours at which point I didn't want to wait anymore. No blood test was conducted. I asked for a blanket too use as a pillow when someone came around and asked if we wanted anything. I asked for nothing of them the whole time I was there apart from this and had no other conversation of concern towards me. I minded my own business and waited. Like an idiot. I started falling asleep.

I asked the lady at the window if there was a possible eta, and she did not understand what that meant. I explained. She said no. I said, I'm not prepared too wait any longer and that I was leaving. At this point there was still only 3 people in ED from memory.

I left for Melbourne the next day and soon after I had terrible flu like symptoms for over a week which now I believe was hypothermia. Symptoms were similar as before but also lots and lots of mucous started, and I mean lots. Only now have my sinuses almost returned too normal. The physical pain was still there. I was spewing up everyday. Chills. Temperature. The heat through my body continued. I was hot all the time. I decided too deal with this alone and did not want too worry too much and though, well I've been ignored by so many already that should have helped me, that I didn't want to be turned away again.

Finally in August, on the 12th; I decided too go to [redacted] as the pain was not subsiding at all. I already knew there was much inflammation because of how I felt, and how some parts of my body looked. I was in so much pain that I called an ambulance as I did not think I'd be able too drive my car there safely. Some of these symptoms have continued for months but some, and some just not as pronounced anymore.

After arriving, a blood test was conducted after about 45 minutes and it gave me a chance too talk to the nurse about all of these concerns. I arrived in the evening and was seen in the morning. I waited almost 10 hours overnight to be seen. I was finally seen between 0900-0930. I arrived before 11pm the night before. I was told the blood test that was taken had come back fine, (he also told me I was fine without looking at anything) when in fact I called pathology when I got the report and it hadn't even returned to the hospital or been opened by anyone, while I was there. I was yelled at by the doctor, bad behaviour supported by the nurse no less. When I asked if we could talk like the two adults that we are as it seemed as though he was not listening too me, either. I said there is something wrong here, please can I have some help. Neither helpful were most of the nursing staff prior helpful. A mental health nurse was sent, when the reason I presented myself at hospital was far from mental health related and I mentioned this to him also. I never mentioned any depressive or anxious symptoms when I came too the hospital, just what medications I was on that I had stopped almost 2 months. The doctor also apparently called my psychiatrist without telling me (probably as I gave him a list of all the meds prescribed too me over the last few years) he came back to me and said that everything I was experiencing was normal according to the psychiatrist. He offered pain relief and accordingly I said no because I still had no blood results back that I could see and I still had no idea the extent of any damage that had been done. I just knew by the pain and symptoms I had endured that I was not ok. I could not believe I was being treated that way. I asked him too explain that they will do nothing for me to my father Joseph who was on the phone with me, and he did not want too speak too him. He advised I follow this up on the "outside". I gave up with them and left. I was extremely tired having spent all night on those chairs in emergency waiting, and disgusted at the behaviour towards me.

I would like to know why every doctor (at [redacted] medical centre [redacted], and various gps at medical one ([redacted], and a couple others there in [redacted]) , my surgeon [redacted], specialist, [redacted], hospitals [redacted], the two internal chronic specialists I saw [redacted] [redacted], has ignored me this year. One internal specialist even said “this will be hard to diagnose”. Well it actually isn’t if he actually listened too me and what I told him. This isn’t some mysterious syndrome. It’s simply adverse affects of medication coupled with the surgery. I still have symptoms that have not been properly attended too or investigated and I still experience burning pain in my right leg and both feet. I still have “growths”, one on my foot and one in the shoulder area. I still have no proper diagnoses or someone that can explain results properly too me. I now have mild fatty liver, and I did not have this before. I have some notes/ results on the ecg performed that I would like further investigated as no one has explained them too me. I find it abominable that it wasn’t until I saw [redacted] (neurosurgeon) that no one bothered to order a brain scan. Even when he did, he put on the referral only “headache”. I still get blank looks, and I still get bullied. Too the point that I will not see them anymore and follow this up elsewhere as I still have unexplained pain, and I am still tired throughout the day. Thankfully my esr levels have fallen over the months, but it’s not where it was back in February. Alt is still high. I have always been a model patient and I have always listened and put my trust in them all. That was my biggest mistake.

I also find it abhorrent that in order too see a neurosurgeon, I had too take out private health insurance too see someone quicker, yet my back and neck pain has been no secret too me, yet no one had listened too me over the years (I had an X-ray and mri in 2005/06 which showed a loss of physical lordosis) until this year when I had subsequent xrays and mris (cervical spine) that show abnormalities.

None of these providers should be practicing. What I have endured this year due too these peoples lack of duty of care, has been nothing short of disgusting too say the least. All of this could have been fully preventable if only people listened too me. Being treated like an idiot, and watching someone who has been harmed by the above events, and then doing nothing is disgusting. Myself and my family have paid large amounts of money and have received absolutely nothing in return. I have only received lies and corruption. It is no less than criminal. I know more about what has happened too me through my own research, yet I have spent $4,000 since June (not including the cost of surgery which was also $4000), including health insurance and still have no answers from them. I have also spent about $1500 on physio and Myotherapy services this year due too my back and neck pain being worse due too this medication. There were days where I couldn’t cook. Days where I couldn’t even hold my phone. I still sometimes use plastic cups due too the pain I had in my wrists and arms.

I have only just recently reported these events too the tga of which someone from the nps has advised it would be sent too the tga. I probably won’t hear back from them, either.

In the future I would like too see policy change so that those who are on dexamphetamine be given mandatory monthly bloods tests. If this were already the case, it would have shown very high esr levels/elevated alt levels/low vitamin d in my body before my surgery, and I would not have proceeded with the surgery. When a blood test was finally conducted in August these were still high. God forbid what they would have been in June right after the surgery and in the weeks after, if anyone bothered too listen too me and treat me. I have no doubt that I would have been hospitalised and perhaps that would have prevented what I have experienced since then.

I would also like too see policy change so that gps and psychiatrists are audited on their patient care, too make sure the patient is actually getting the care that they need. Stable patients like myself who’ve never been hospitalised or attempted suicide also need the proper care and attention, and even more so when they also have other physical ailments that are ignored.

I would also like to be apart of any future royal commission into mental health and/or a general health royal commission that the Victorian state government is proposing too do. Justice won’t be served, until these people are held accountable for their actions, or in my case inactions. Not once has any of these providers have asked if I’m ok, or followed up what has happened. People will continue too die, or almost die; in my case; due too stupidity, if nothing is done.

I would like this letter acknowledged if at all possible. All I am actually looking for is someone too say gee, we are sorry. I have already forgiven the above mentioned people, but I will never forget their stupidity, lack of duty of care and dishonesty.

I would like some answers and the proper immediate care that I need. I have even begged, and￼ voiced myself, but too no avail. I have just been sent around in circles and been made a fool. I am not sure what else I can do too be heard. I am going too do great things in the future, for many people; but I need too be healthy in order too achieve this.

Thank you for you’re time in reading this, and I do apologise for the confronting photos of my chest and lung area contracting because I couldn’t breath normally as the oxygen in my body had been depleted for many weeks. The other photo is of that “spot” on my foot of which I have similar on my shoulder. However, as I like too keep it real, they need too be seen and acknowledged.

I look forward in hearing from you all,

Yvonne Bartolovic

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

Organisation Name
N/A

Name
Ms Yvonne Bartolovic

What are your suggestions to improve the Victorian communitys understanding of mental illness and reduce stigma and discrimination?
"Firstly it would start with the wider medical community. Other doctors and specialists who don't understand it, especially when one also has a condition that is not mh related, but they make out as if it is.   In general stigma has been improved. Im not conceared about stigma. Its imoroved and with some in the public they will always have their heads in the sands and nothing can be done. Im more conceared about the comment I made above "

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 don't think anything hint is working well. Wait time for private costly psychiatrists are high and public hospital wait times and admissions times (time you can stay there) is appalling

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

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.
"Less waiting times. Costly private doctors. More services for chronic / long term whether drop in services and specific hospitals and clinics for mh, or more beds for people who really need 24/7 care, so they are not on the street ornon family who cant care for them "

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

What are the needs of family members and carers and what can be done better to support them?
"The support and education is quite good for careers What isnt is some doctors when needing to fill out forms for patients, is not done correctly and this must be repeated. The lack of care in this regard is ridiculous. I had one doctor tell [redacted] don't bother applying for the careers payment (after looking after [redacted] already for more than 20 years whilst working full time) that she wouldnt get it. Not sympathy and help from some psychiatrists "

What can be done to attract, retain and better support the mental health workforce, including peer support workers?
"Change the way we treat patients. Give them more time to heal, rather than quickly send them

home. And those chronic give them a place to stay long term "

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?
Explore neighbourhood houses / mensheds more as they can be a good place (when people are well to leave home) to engage and participate In society

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?
More hospital beds Longer stays Create Specific mental health hospitals /clinics Shorter wait times for private psychiatrists

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

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