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

Organisation Name
N/A

Name
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What are your suggestions to improve the Victorian communitys understanding of mental illness and reduce stigma and discrimination?

"Victoria drastically needs to improve how Workcover and Worksafe deal with workers who incur mental illness as a result of their employment. Employers and government agencies need to do much more to understand that mental illness is a serious health condition just as much as a serious physical injury or injuries can be.   Much can be done to improve the manner by which workers who claim compensation for mental illness are treated.   Workers claims are currently treated with the same processes as an insurance claim for damage to a motor vehicle. There is little to no empathy by employers or Workcover 'Agents' (insurers) and more often than not the process only exacerbates the workers condition. I speak from my own experience as a former employee of Victoria Police who has been diagnosed with serious mental conditions who is yet to have these conditions recognised by Victoria Police or it's Workcover ███████████████."

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'm not sure that anything is working well in the prevention of mental illness especially for emergency workers.   From my own experience their is still a massive stigma against workers who seek assistance for mental illness.   This is not helped when workers do apply compensation for mental injuries their claims are dismissed arbitrarily and the subsequent fight for compensation (and acknowledgment of injury) causes just as much if not more harm.   The process and system for processing claims for workers who have incurred mental health injuries as a result of their employment needs to be reviewed.

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

"Workers need their condition/s to be acknowledged.   Employers and Workcover agents/insurers need to totally overhaul the way they deal with workers who have been injured at work. There seems to be no ongoing support for workers who's employment has ceased due to their injuries, especially mental injuries and conditions.   Victoria Police are particularly bad at this."

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.

"It is extremely hard for people to experience good mental health in the employer/employee space when they see how people who do incur mental health issues are treated. I believe this makes employees reluctant to seek help in the early stages of experiencing symptoms. There needs to be co-ordination between mental health support services, employers and Worksafe to ensure employees are getting the very best support possible whilst undergoing the workcover process. Workers who are off work as a result of injuries incurred at work are left feeling abandoned and

isolated."

What are the drivers behind some communities in Victoria experiencing poorer mental health outcomes and what needs to be done to address this?
From my personal experience the drivers to poorer mental health in the employer/employee area are the way workers are treated by employers and workcover insurers. The whole process of workcover claims needs to be overhauled in the interests of better mental health for workers.

What are the needs of family members and carers and what can be done better to support them?
Family members can struggle to understand the impact of poor practice and processes have on workers who suffer mental health conditions as a result of their employment. I know personally the adversarial process regarding the claiming for compensation for mental health injuries has a huge impact on family members.   Information packages for family members would be of great assistance.

What can be done to attract, retain and better support the mental health workforce, including peer support workers?
The promulgation and promotion of the principle that mental illness is a serious health issue and that working in this field is essential and important work and that employment in the field can be a great and satisfying career.

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?
"Workers experiencing mental health issues would benefit greatly by the acknowledgement and recognition of their injuries without such an adversarial process for compensation.   The current system does nothing to provide social participation, in fact the reverse is true."

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?
The way workers who incur mental illness as a result of their employment in Victoria needs to be completely overhauled. I would like to see the Royal Commission address this issue by making findings and recommendations as to how these processes can be improved. As start would be challenging employers and workcover agents/insurers to greatly improve the way they treat workers who suffer mental illness as a result of their employment.

What can be done now to prepare for changes to Victorias mental health system and support improvements to last?
Start the conversation about the very poor state of the workers compensation system in Victoria. Identify the very dangerous implications and effects of the adversarial treatment of employees. Stop the practice of rejecting claims for compensation in the first instance as a matter course.

Is there anything else you would like to share with the Royal Commission?
"My personal experience is that the way employees who suffer mental illness as a result of their employment is appalling.   There is much to be done in this space.   The cost to the community, individuals and their families is huge, much more by comparison of settling claims for

compensation more readily without unnecessarily exacerbating the individual's condition."