

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

Organisation Name

N/A

Name

Ms Michelle Hunter

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

"more campaigns perhaps with real people talking about their experiences. More opportunities to discuss mental health in a helpful way in the media, in businesses, in schools. "

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?

"What isn't working is the amount of Medicare sessions you currently get under a mental health plan. Increase the amount of Medicare sessions you can have with a psychologist a year. 6-10 is not enough. I have been seeing a psychologist/s since 2013, and I need to continue seeing one where I am paying full price for half a year or more because I cannot go without. I can barely afford it full price and I really need to be seeing my psychologist more often than I do at the moment. And psychologists even say that that amount of sessions are not enough to help the person. "

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

"People talking about it more is good. However I think there somehow needs to be better prevention, to find a way to help people feeling comfortable enough to talk honestly about their mental health and sooner too. When I get really bad I actually find it quite hard to bring up that I have been thinking about death because I don't want to worry and bother my family or friends, I feel like a burden. It's hard to have these conversations. If there is a way we can find ways to help people have those conversations with their loved ones, help people to be able to talk to loved ones they are worried about etc. "

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.

"Mental health services are expensive or from what I have heard from friends can also take time even getting beds in psych wards when they are suicidal/in crisis. Medicare doesn't have enough sessions in the mental health plans. For some (for example a family member of mine) is struggling financially so she can't even access any mental health services even though she really really needs it. And if there is a free way she can, we haven't been able to find it. There needs to be so much more funding for mental health. So much more support services that can help people that can not afford it, or needs more than what Medicare currently gives us. "

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

"Well in my family, 3 suicides in the family has been a big driver for us all experiencing poor mental health. As well as our family experiencing many other deaths in a short amount of time in 6 years. My whole family I feel probably needs different levels of support and some are not getting

any treatment for it. I think finding a way to help people you aren't actively seeking help is important. I feel like a lot of the time there are really at risk. Financial drivers, some simply cannot afford the medical bills to seek out psychological help or to purchase expensive medicines. Men having trouble opening up and talking honestly about their mental health. Every single person I know that has committed suicide which is 5 people of varying ages have all been Men. There is not enough support for males in our society for their mental health. "

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

"They also need to support, If there are support services to help it would be good for them to be more widely known, or to put more resources into it. "

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

N/A

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?

N/A

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 money into Medicare, possibly more free/low cost options for people struggling financially of all ages. More money into mental health services so we can get better early prevention to save lives "

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

N/A

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

"In my life 5 people I know have taken their own lives. Three in on one side of my family alone. I have been seeing a psychologist for 6 years and I am still not okay, as time goes on, when my mental health gets really bad, and it dips down, each time it is dipping down further. I'm currently in a bad place at the moment, due to various things, most recently due to a beloved family member passing away and dealing with my own personal health issues. I feel like I am drowning, and I don't feel like I have the support I need. Because I can't afford the support I need. I see my psychologist as much as I am able to, and right now it is not enough. It is not enough. I am paying full price for my psychologist because I have already used up my 10 Medicare sessions for the year, and too quickly, because the amount of sessions you get under a mental health plan is not enough. I have family that are having quite serious financial issues where they are also struggling with grief and loss and she has no way to access mental health support because she can't even afford to see a psychologist even with Medicare. In my family we have had people on suicide watch, needing constant support. There just needs to be so much more support. So much more. I am terrified that another person in my family will be taken by suicide. I'm scared I'm going to lose more friends. I am scared that I am going to dip so far down with my mental health that I won't be able to get back

up again. What we are doing now to combat mental health is not enough. Not enough at all, and you can see that simply in the constantly rising suicide rates. Thank you for your time. "