Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System
PO Box 12079
A'Beckett Street
VICTORIA, 8006

Dear Royal Commission,

FORMAL SUBMISSION – MORELAND CITY COUNCIL

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

Moreland City Council has a commitment to improving mental health in the community. This is outlined in the Moreland Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017-21 (MMPHWP), Outcome 7: 'Moreland residents live in communities that support their mental wellbeing.' The MMPHWP takes a Social Determinants of Health approach, acknowledging that there are many factors that affect an individual's health outcomes. This has been taken into consideration in our response and recommendations.

Moreland City Council is committed to the health and wellbeing of our local community and this commitment informs our submission. Our submission is themed into focus areas, providing both Moreland context and specific recommendations, for the following:

- Housing and homelessness
- Reducing harm from gambling
- Social isolation and loneliness
- National Disability Insurance Scheme
- Early years services
- Youth services
- Prevention

Moreland City Council identifies that this is a once in a generation opportunity to accelerate improvements in access to mental health services, service navigation and models of care. Council is pleased that a key recommendation will focus on how to most effectively prevent mental illness and suicide – issues which remain prevalent in our communities. It is vitally important that all voices are not only heard but that people experiencing mental health issues are provided with opportunities to access appropriate services.

Yours sincerely,

Cr Natalie Abboud
MAYOR

5 / 7 / 2019

This paper is 100% recycled

Moreland City Council Profile

The City of Moreland is located in the inner-mid northern suburbs, 4 to 14 kilometres from the CBD. The current population is 181,725 with an expected population of 228,425 in 2036 (.id, 2019).

The Moreland Health Profile 2017, identified the following statistics in relation to Mental Health:

- One-quarter of all Moreland residents (24.7%) reported having been diagnosed with depression or anxiety by a doctor (Victorian average 24.2%)

- Three quarters (76.1%) of Moreland residents feel satisfied with their quality of life (Victorian average 77.3%)

- Just over half of Moreland residents (54.5%) report having an adequate work/life balance

- Moreland has an average score for resilience, on par with the Victorian average, however more vulnerable communities are likely to have lower resilience to stress and unexpected life events.

- Psychological distress: Moreland has higher levels of high and very high stress (14.4%) than Victoria (12.7%)

Housing and homelessness

Context

- Homelessness is of increasing concern in Moreland, with over 800 people who are homeless and many more in high housing stress.

- Stable, adequate, affordable, and available housing is important in preventing mental ill-health, achieving positive treatment outcomes, and sustaining mental health gains into the future.

- Many people experiencing homelessness also experience complex mental illnesses and will require intermittent multidisciplinary support, with very flexible case period lengths.

- The enhanced security of tenure in social housing provides security, which has a positive impact on mental health because security leads to the creation of community and community offers stability and support.

- Homelessness has been reportedly widely as a cause of drug use and addiction.

- Crisis accommodation providers in Moreland have been found to be unsafe for women and children in some instances and barely meet a very basic requirement for living standards.

Recommendations – That the Victorian Government:

- Invest directly in significant quantities of housing stock to ensure that housing is available and affordable to those who need it most. An immediate investment in social housing is required, as well as strategies to provide a pipeline of affordable housing into the future.

- Provide or support programs coordinating mental healthcare and access to housing for both private rental and social housing tenure.

- Provide or support integrated programs, which include professionals from a range of disciplines as part of a service delivery team. For those with higher levels of support needs, wrap-around team-based services might include practitioners across a range of disciplines supporting mental health recovery, including peer support, clinical mental health and health treatment and disability support, primary care, housing, community legal services, and addiction support.

Protecting those at risk and reducing harm from gambling

Context

- In the City of Moreland there are 640 poker machines that take $64 million every year from our community.

- Council recognises that poker machines are legal technologies but is concerned about their potential to harm those at risk.

- Gambling harm disproportionately affects vulnerable groups in ways that contribute to and exacerbate existing social inequalities.

- Gambling harm can both cause mental ill-health and exacerbate pre-existing mental ill-health conditions.

- The *Gambling in Moreland Strategy 2015- 2020* and Council's *Safer Gambling Policy Statement* promote an evidence-based approach to planning, regulation, advocacy and community education to reduce the negative impacts of current and emerging forms of gambling.

- Advocacy for consumer protection and safer gambling products and operations are a central policy objective.

- The Libraries After Dark program, coordinated by Moreland City Council in partnership with three other local Councils, provides diversion and prevention programs to people at risk of harm from gambling. More information can be found on our website https://www.moreland.vic.gov.au/libraries/library-events-and-activities/libraries-after-dark/

Recommendations – That the Victorian Government:

- Employ harm minimisation and reduction measures to protect the public from gambling harm. This should include:

    o maximum $1 bets and maximum $120 per hour maximum losses on poker machines.

    o banning losses disguised as wins (as recommended by the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation).

    o increasing minimum closing periods from 4 hours to 6 hours with all venues to be closed at 2am so that people cannot "venue hop" to find an open venue.

    o funding for prevention and diversion initiatives, such as the Libraries After Dark program.

- Supports the call for a royal commission into the gaming industry as per a recent motion passed at the Australian Local Government Association's National General Assembly, 2019 in Canberra.

Social isolation and loneliness

Context

- Social isolation and loneliness is increasing and becoming an emerging public health issue.

- Social isolation and loneliness affects physical and mental health. It can significantly increase risk for premature mortality, and the magnitude of the risk exceeds that of many leading health indicators.

- It disproportionately affects older people over 75 years and young people 16-25 years. A 2015 VicHealth Study found 1 in 8 young people in Australia report a very high intensity of loneliness.

- Interventions can be aimed at the individual, community or societal level. This might include projects that support connections, such as online groups, volunteering programs and befriending projects, and other approaches such as local neighbourhood initiatives.

- Neighbourhood Houses play an important role in promoting positive mental health. Community members can develop social connections and reducing isolation loneliness, also introducing people to their neighbours from all walks of life.

- The role that the Victorian Government plays in funding the volunteer sector is important so that sufficient funding is available to support volunteer driven organisations. They provide roles for people in the community to 'give back to their community' thereby reducing social isolation as well. Isolated job seekers often seek volunteer roles to stay connected to the labour force and this acts as a prevention for promoting positive mental health for people who can experience barriers to labour force participation.

Recommendations – That the Victorian Government:

- Improve transport access and connections so people can more easily attend programs and activities for social connection.

- Develop or support programs that encourage interaction between neighbours and create networks of support and social connection for older people, especially those with limited mobility.

- Support and publicise programs that challenge the stereotype of ageing and celebrate positive representation.

- Continue to fund Neighbourhood Houses and consider the growth of urban density in built up environments where new sites for Houses could be developed/funded.

- Continue to fund the volunteer sector ensuring sufficient funding is available to support volunteer driven organisations.

- Provide additional one off funding to be available for accessibility upgrades to existing neighbourhood houses with inadequate mobility access.

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

Context

- Council services across a range of areas including parks and recreation, library services and other direct service areas regularly encounter people who have complex mental health conditions. Many of these people spend time at Council operated venues such as libraries as they have limited or no access to other opportunities for social support or meaningful activities.

- There are significant numbers of people who were eligible for state-based programs but are now ineligible for the NDIS. Many of these people still need access to essential mental health services.

- The ability to refer people into support services has become much more restrictive, social support groups are harder to access, the NDIS transition has meant that some services no longer exist or are able to address the needs of those with mental health issues in the community.

- The NDIS is causing high anxiety for families who have been on a wait list for 12 months and have not had an initial meeting with a Planner to this date.

Recommendation – That the Victorian Government:

- Advocate to the Commonwealth Government and the NDIA to prioritise families of children with complex needs to reduce waitlist times and the anxiety this sustains.

Youth services

Context

- Severe anxiety and depression has dramatically increased over the last decade and suicide remains the leading cause of death among younger people. This doesn't only affect the immediate family, but also causes a massive ripple effect in the community.

- Young people and families experience significant challenges in finding and accessing timely and appropriate treatment and support.

- Council understands there is a greater need for support for young people going through a crisis. Often people in crisis mode are referred to hospital - which can be quite confronting and intimidating especially given the needs of adults also seeking care at the facility. Once outside of the hospital they are referred to Headspace or a similar service which may not be able to cater specifically for the intensity younger people require.

- Increasing support for longer term safe spaces that could be dedicated to younger people.

Recommendations – That the Victorian Government:

- Provide innovative mental health awareness and preventative programs in primary and secondary schools.

- Consider best practice programs, such as Joining the Dots Initiative
http://inllen.org.au/joining-the-dots/

Early years services

Context

- Early years services staff are being presented with a range of situations relating to both children's and parents/ caregiver's mental health, without the appropriate training or support for how to best respond. This includes the impact of parent's mental health issues on their children, preschool aged children presenting with high levels of anxiety and challenging behaviours, and issues relating to domestic violence for both parents and children.

- Families who have complex issues are having difficulty navigating 'the system'. Documentation and different systems for different services can be challenging for families who are vulnerable.

- Knowledge and understanding about infants and young children's mental and emotional wellbeing and social and emotional development is lacking. When infants and children display challenges in their emotional regulation, this behaviour is often not well understood or responded to by parents and caregivers.

- When working with infants and children, emphasis needs to encompass the health of the whole child – physical, mental, social and emotional along with the health and promotion of family relationships.

Recommendations – That the Victorian Government:

- Provide evidence-based training programs for early years practitioners and health services to:

  o recognise when infants and children are experiencing difficulties with their emotional security and wellbeing

  o understand and know about services available to support the infant parent relationship

  o encourage family's understanding about the importance of infant mental health

  o assist families to access early intervention when indicated.

- Provide targeted support for families with identified issues, including bypassing wait lists, to ensure early intervention rather than reactive treatment.

- Support Social Workers and Counsellors to work in partnership with Early Years staff within early childhood settings. This might include the introduction of services such as Play, Music and Art Therapy as a support avenue as well as other recognised services such as Psychology.

- Introduce an alternative education service to support children that are identified as 'high risk' in their kindergarten year.

- Provide environments or programs for social interactions that are not medically based, with a focus on families enjoying time with their children and others. This could include education about the importance of social and emotional skill development in infants and children and support services.

Prevention

- It is widely recognised and understood that treatment interventions alone cannot significantly reduce the burden of mental health issues in our community. There is compelling evidence that implementation of prevention and early intervention approaches will significantly reduce the burden of mental illness and mental disorder.

- Reducing stigma attached to mental illness: Ignorance of and fear about mental illness is prevalent in our community and organisations. Stigma leads to discrimination, which compounds the disadvantage experienced by people already battling with difficult conditions. It results in low self-referral, under-reporting of illness and under-use of support services.

- A significant barrier to progressing change is created by the need for increased financial resources to the 'prevention end' which constantly competes with established clinical services for priority in funding.

Recommendations – That the Victorian Government:

- Implement a sustained campaign to inform the community about the true nature and extent of mental illness. This could be via a community-based education program that promotes good mental health and addresses stigma in schools and in the workplace.

- Implement a sustained program for the delivery of Mental Health First Aid programs throughout the community including Youth Mental Health First Aid and Mental Health First Aid for Teens.

- Give a greater priority in allocation of resources to community-based prevention activities.