Gabrielle Robinson

Your contribution

Should you wish to make a formal submission, please consider the questions below, noting that you do not have to respond to all of the questions, instead you may choose to respond to only some of them.

---

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

I think some suggestions to improve the stigma of mental illness are:

- Introducing Mental Health as a compulsory subject in all schools across Victoria.

- Making sure every employer including small or large business owners, have a fundamental mental health plan integrated into their policy and procedures to help better understand and make it easier for employees who may suffer mental illness, to talk about their own issues.

- Have consumers become Mental Health Advocates for schools, work places and sporting industries.

---

2. 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 think the mental health system is improving as each year passes and nurses and doctors are very well trained; but with the increase of illicit drugs in the community, it means more people are becoming unwell and many people are being treated in emergency and possibly transferred to a psychiatric ward which means more stress and burn out for nurses/doctors and therefore not taking every person as seriously as some need.

I find it annoying when someone with a drug habit becomes psychotic and ends up in care when someone who is unwell mentally needs the care themselves; at the same time, the people who are addicted to drugs need support too and that may include more drug and alcohol professionals in the hospitals to help those addicted get the right care, such as rehabilitation and not leaving them to their own demise once deemed stable and then discharged from the hospital.

---

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

I think intensive care in a psychiatric ward with psychologists on the ward seeing the patient at least once a week, is beneficial. Also, making sure patients, once discharged, have proper ongoing treatment with a psychologist and or psychiatrist and offering places that bulk bill because being sick is costly enough.

4. 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.

Easy access to alcohol and drugs makes any mental illness worse. I believe the two go hand in hand (dual diagnosis) and it's the coping strategy that we use as it is accessible and cheaper than expensive treatment or medication.

I think to improve better mental health, is to make medications cheaper and doctors/psychiatrist bulk bill so that you still must have a script and that way it makes it harder for the general public to access possible strong psychiatric medications.

Also, training every psychiatrist, doctor, nurse and social worker in substance misuse/abuse and mental illness to ensure they have an extensive knowledge in both areas; this will help them understand why consumers use these substances.

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

I believe it is about the costs of affording proper treatment. Like I said, if most places bulk billed, more people would seek the help of professionals instead of buying cheap alcohol or drugs as a way of coping.

I see more unwell people in poverty stricken communities because of the lack of bulk billed doctors or a lack of understanding in the community and therefore the people who do not have a lot of money, will hang around those that also do not have a lot of money as its less judgement and alcohol and drugs are probably a lot more accessible as a means to cope in the moment.

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

I believe family members and carers play a big role in helping the consumer.

Without the love and support from mine, I wouldn't be here today and I am now thankful for that.

Some family members do not understand and therefore lack compassion and sympathy which is all some consumers need.

To help support carers, I think they should also be linked in with a psychologist to express their emotions and issues that they may have when trying to help someone who is mentally unwell.

I have seen, once I became well, the devastating effects it has had on some or most of my family members and it is hard to see but I wish they also had ongoing treatment with a psychologist to express themselves and learn more about the illness and why people turn to AOD.

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

I think to attract, retain and support the mental health workforce is also remembering that they are also people with emotions and feelings and they may need time to express themselves and be supported.

Also, they could improve the morale in the work place if they could see that mental illness is not always some sad and daunting thing, because it isn't always the case.

I think free and ongoing training provided to the workers is critical as well. It will make them feel more involved and important and confident in what they're doing.

To put pressure on the government to pay all people in the health industry more. Mental illness is something most Australians will suffer or have suffered in their lifetime from low anxiety to severe schizophrenia, so why not pay the workers what they deserve?

8. 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?

I don't know of many opportunities in the Victorian community that help people with mental illness improve their social and economic participation but I did attend Orygen Youth Health which I believe is a free service like Headspace and a few other places which are great and have helped me dramatically.

More places that are Not-For-Profit will make a big difference and not only Victoria, but Australia as a whole will have a better understanding and system in place to help those affected.

9. 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?

I have liked most mental health places I have been too and there are quite a few. The psychiatric wards or even general hospitals that I have been admitted to, have mainly consisted of lovely nurses, doctors, psychiatrists and social workers.

I don't think places like PARC (step up, step down) program works at all. Yes, it is a nice place to relax and collect your thoughts but there is no proper care once discharged from a very secure psychiatric ward.

I had other patients who were severely psychotic in a place like PARC with voices in their head telling them to walk in front of cars and I didn't see any nurse or carer around to help or check up on us as regularly as we needed. To me, I used it as a hotel and with a dual diagnosis, I used it as an excuse to have overnight leave and drink and run back the next morning hungover and pretending I was tired. The nurses/carers knew what was going on but nothing was ever done and no action was taken apart from threatening to kick me out.

I think, if you're going to have places like PARC, it needs to be way stricter with clear boundaries set. It should still feel like a place of comfort as it provides and daily walks and therapy sessions but more encouragement to attend programs would also help. For me, I won't attend any programs in any psychiatric facility because I get paranoid easily and won't participate in programs where vulnerable people may cling to me because I am a nice person and this has happened a few times.

The programs are great, but sometimes I think the nurses/carers need to have a strict guideline set where phone numbers are not allowed to be given out and if a nurse/carer sees a patient with another and the other one looks or expresses disinterest, then help them.

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

I know hospitals and psychiatric facilities are audited constantly but thinking about changing types of bedding so people can't hang themselves or patients don't have any chance of accessing drugs or alcohol in these places.

Bulk bill mental health systems so they're more accessible and people will feel more inclined to access these services.

Having more stimulating tasks to participate in within a hospital/psychiatric facility but also a quiet place where patients feel overwhelmed, can escape to.

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

Put pressure on the government for more mental health funding for not only facilities but for the workers. It is rewarding them for not only what they do but an incentive to continue the work they do. As well as holding functions for all workers to come together to celebrate the work they have done and a chance to meet other professionals to discuss their views on different mental health strategies.

If consumers and professionals and the general public also had functions where they came together to discuss mental health, then more people would have and share a better understanding of mental health in Victoria and Australia.

Privacy acknowledgement	I understand that the Royal Commission works with the assistance of its advisers and service providers. I agree that personal information about me and provided by me will be handled as described on the Privacy Page. ☒ Yes ☐ No