Ms Penny Armytage Chair of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System Commissioners Dr Alex Cockram, Professor Allan Fels AO Professor Bernadette McSherry

Dear Ms Armytage and Commissioners,



My work over this period focused on work-relate harm, specifically families bereaved by work-related death, including work-related suicide. From this work I have researched work factors in suicide, data weaknesses in the coronial and Victorian WorkCover Authority regarding work factors in suicide, mental illness in Australian Defence Force veterans, and mental illness of long-term injured workers on the Victorian workers' compensation system. The agency developed a successful peer companioning support program for bereaved families, a contemplative spirituality program for veterans, and framed a restorative justice service to respond to workrelated harm.

In addition, our agency's work (Work Factors in Suicide. 2002) led to significant research and development by other organisations:

- Work related suicide stressors. Department of Forensic Medicine, Monash University (2010)
- Suicide and work related stress in Victoria. Department of Forensic Medicine, Monash University (2011)
- Work and suicide prevention: position statement. Suicide Prevention Australia (2014)

We published 'Suicide and Work: the need for improved data collection on work factors in suicide as a contribution to suicide prevention' in 2010, but I do not believe there has been significant progress on resolving the issues we raised then.

As a result of a disturbing finding on the possible contribution of the workers' compensation system to long-term injured workers on the compensation system, our agency completed a study into the experience of fifteen injured workers. All experienced a deterioration of their mental health and a small number reported suicide ideation. The study is 'Filling the dark spot' (2014). The findings of this study were validated by a stinging report by the Victorian Ombudsman, 'Investigation into

the management of complex workers compensation claims and WorkSafe oversight' (2014).

A larger study was carried out by Monash Centre for Occupational and Environmental Health as part of the Victorian Injured Workers Outcomes Study for the Institute of Safety, Compensation, Rehabilitation and Research. I was a member of the Advisory Committee for this Study, and received a summary of the qualitative research study findings in December 2017. It is distressing that eighteen months later, WorkSafe has still not released the report, which in my view points to being on workers compensation as a risk factor for mental illness and suicide, as well as consumer-led proposals for social justice and social change.

For ten years I met regularly with a small group of Vietnam Veterans who each month met for a contemplative worship gathering in the Ignatian spirituality tradition. The anecdotal reports of the participants suggest that prayer in this Christian tradition had a healing dimension for their mental health issues arising from their war experience. My experience has been repeated recently with a group of West Papuan refugees from colonial domination and violence in their homeland, who have found solace and healing in spiritual exercises congruent with their faith tradition. I submit that there is a dimension of culture and spirituality in responding to mental health due to exposure to war and violence, which has been largely ignored by the prevailing medical model in western mental health systems. This would be a good time to look further into these alternative modalities.

Please note I am able to make PDF copies of all the reports mentioned in my submission should you wish.

Yours sincerely,

John Bottomley Director Transforming Work