

Kerene Whelan

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?

Have more educational ads + information in all forms of media, social media, medical settings libraries and schools. Hold the media accountable when they make over generalized scare tactics associated with mental health issues, disabilities + crime. Eg people on the autism spectrum or with a mental health issue committing a crime. Not everyone with schizophrenia are murderers or rapist or dole bludgers.

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?

- there are services available which weren't available 20 years ago
- it is more recognised these days.
- if you get someone who speaks your language + knows your conditions that makes a big difference.
- recognise possible mental health issues in toddlers, preschoolers + primary school children.
- have the courage to identify mental health issues in young children then make sure there is a proper support system for the rest of their lives. Including educating their parents and teachers on what the condition is, how it affects that child + the best way to support that child.

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

Finally there is starting to be more education + support for those who have experienced suicidal thoughts, attempts and family and friends who have died.

However there is a long way to go. I now see suicide as murder or manslaughter due to the neglect of the mental health system. Especially when people suicide within months of being put on a new medication where one of the side effects is it may cause suicidal thoughts. Or when they are weaned of medication or change of medication without proper support. Many health facilities and services are not adequately staffed or ~~the~~ trained. There isn't enough communication + support between the medical team and carers especially when the client is not of sound mind.

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.

People don't feel safe in their communities.
 People find it hard to form safe connections + relationships,
 It's difficult to get long term adequate support for chronic conditions especially when someone doesn't respond well to medication.
 We need more safe nature places with support people to go. So maybe a building with a sensory garden, bushland, animals that sort of thing and there are safe people there to talk to.
 There needs to be more community awareness around mental health issues.
 When there is a change over between services make sure it is a gradual process and the client is fully engaged in the new service before the old one stops. More service animals. People need basic needs met.

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

People need basic needs met. Food, shelter, connection with others. These need to be good clean well serviced services. For those who are poor or have chronic mental health issues it is extremely difficult if not impossible to find appropriate safe and reliable sources of food, shelter, proper clothing etc for them or their children especially for school. They may need to be taught social skills and daily living skills according to the individual's needs.
 There needs to be more resources and easier access to reliable resources. People don't magically get cured in 10 sessions especially when the condition is chronic.

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

Need for on going up to date information + support about the person, how the mental health condition is affecting them and where to go + how to get quick support when there is a deterioration in the condition.
 Carers need stable support, accommodation + income to provide for themselves and the individual they are caring for.
 There needs to be safe options of reliable accommodation + support when a person is unable to care for the individual anymore for whatever reason.
 There needs to be a major increase in the carer's pension for financial security for the carer + supper paid for carers. It's pretty much impossible to get work when you've been caring for 20 plus years and have no up to date qualifications. Especially when experiencing carer's burnout and grief.

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

Pay them a proper wage.
 Teach self protection techniques.
 Proper debriefing.
 More time of to look after their own mental health.
 Shorter shifts. Not 12 hour shifts.
 Better rostering so shifts are more stable.
 Pay peer support workers + provide more debriefing.
 Recognise the value of peer support workers.
 On going up to date training.
 Listen to them as the client may speak more to a peer worker.
 Have a wholistic way of looking after the client so mental, emotional, physical + spiritual needs are met.

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?

There are bigger all opportunities for them at the moment.
 Very few are taken on for meaningful support + stable work.
 Very few are accepted into community.
 Look at programs run such as Art + soul by Michelle Sanders.
 Make it easier to get support or therapy animals such as MindDog Australia.
 Support those who want to, be foster carers of animals including wildlife rescue, train them + pay them.
 Create more Art + music programs for them with an opportunity where someone can sell their art work or hand craft.
 Bring back, hands on olden day skills such as knitting, lace making, more woodwork skills, leather work, Black smithing, metal work. These skills need to be accessible physically + financially.

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 would like to see supported gated communities made available like those for the 50's + over. I would like to see the gated communities for those with mental health problems - especially dual disability of a physical and or low I.Q. disability + mental health. Those with drug + alcohol issues would need the same sort of thing but in a different gated community. Let the communities be available for the clients + their immediate family + carer. Have an acute care section where they can get 24/7 help in times of crises without having to wait long hours.

Let these communities within Community be self sufficient with support. So the clients can learn all sorts of hands on skills which could be taken into the wider community if they are able to transition into the wider community 24/7 peer support available. So there is always someone to talk to when needed.

Lots of area for gardening.

An area for handcrafts.

An area for wood working.

An area for metal work including black smithing.

A small shopping centre with chemist, supermarket café
Library

Swimming Pool + hydrotherapy pool.

Animal Husbandary - small working farms.

An unidentifiable bus that can take children to their schools.

Education centre so those who need Distance Ed, Home schooling or tutoring can go.

The skills learnt in such a village can be transferred + intergrated into the wider community when ready + with support, then in time the client may wish to try living outside the supported community with support, but there is always the opportunity to come back as need be.

Also we need real crises numbers that can help online & over the phone not just refer people to hospital E.R.

Also need a place where those in crises can go and start getting help within 15 min ~~at~~ instead of 9 hrs or more or turned away.

Need services for children.

Need services + beds in a separate hospital sort of setting instead of E.R. with everyone + little service.

Revamp CATT team system so they actually help even if you visit more than four or five times.

Recognise the impact of Chronic Severe pain on mental health.

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

Provide a huge budget for it. It will cost. Look at what is working overseas and other states/territories of Australia both public system + private system.

Plan trial village settings in country towns. It may actually benefit the towns also with more economic growth.

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

Please, please, please, look into the effects of those who experience chronic severe pain + it getting harder to get access to meds + treatment that works. I really am concerned that people living with chronic severe pain ~~and~~ will be pushed to access illegal drugs for relief, and we will have another group of people in mental health crises that could have been prevented with the right support.

Chronic severe pain is disabling, screws with your mental health, can make you suicidal at the relentless agony, lack of sleep, difficulty moving etc.

With how hard it is to get the disability pension and how low payment new start is, these people are at great risk of mental illness. Let's prevent it.

Let's also make the public system safer + the private system able to handle clients in crises. Thank you.

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acknowledgement

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Yes No