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

"Community discussion and mass media campaigns seems to be changing the community's attitude towards family violence and respectful treatment of women in general. While we are yet to see any impact in terms of the number of women murdered by their partners/former partners, I am hopeful that ultimately there will be real and tangible outcomes achieved in this regard. For this reason I think similar levels of community discussion and media attention are required to raise the profile of mental illness in the community, discuss the impact of stigma and discrimination on people with mental illness, show the many ways that mental illness can impact on people's lives and talk about real and tangible ways that people can help others with mental illness. One example of this is the change in the conversation about ""RU OK Day?"" from asking the question to what do you do with the person's answer (especially where it might be ""no, i'm not really ok""). One of the difficulties is that mental illness is an invisible illness. More people need to understand that if people with mental illness had a broken leg, or diabetes, most of the stigma and discrimination would not exist. I believe the Royal Commission has an important role to play in this regard. We have seen the impact that the Royal Commission into Family Violence has had on the level of attention given to the issue in the media, the amount of funding allocated to services, the investment in the development of new models of care and fixing systemic problems that have been around for decades, etc. I am hopeful that this Royal Commission will have a similar impact for those living with mental illness."

## **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?**

Refer to comments below about the difficulties in getting appointments.

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

N/A

## **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.**

"I understand that the Royal Commission is primarily concerned with the public mental health system - I hear from friends and colleagues that there are good elements in the system, and bad elements. However, my issues are with what I'd call the ""private mental health system"", which is as difficult to access and navigate as the public system. As an example, my treating psychiatrist [REDACTED] was forced by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) to close his practice in December 2018. He has been required to give an undertaking not to practice medicine. I do not know why, though presumably it is for some serious and egregious malpractice (but not serious enough to warrant full de-registration). This is unfortunate because for

the most part I found Dr [REDACTED] to be a professional and helpful practitioner (albeit extremely unreliable). Both Dr [REDACTED] and my treating psychologist have commented that I was one of his "higher functioning" patients - I am a well-educated, highly skilled professional, and I hold a mid level management position. What concerns me is that while I can organise a new referral to a new psychiatrist, it takes several months to get an appointment - generally 3 months, and this is in private rooms, not in the public system! This is of absolutely no use to me when I'm experiencing an exacerbation of my symptoms that is so bad I'm struggling to go to work. Surely I can't be expected to take 3 months off work while I wait for an appointment and then take another few months off while we find the right medication that will work for me without too many side effects? This is outrageous! Of course, I know that if I was psychotic or acutely suicidal I would get some help from some hospitals. Not all of them are so willing to help - I hear St Vincent's is good, but many others (eg [REDACTED]) still claim patients are just "attention seeking" and send them home. How this helps the patient is beyond comprehension, let alone the adverse impact it has on that patient, the staff and other patients in terms of the stigma of mental illness. Yes, sometimes self harm and suicide attempts are a call for help, but they are not "attention seeking" in the accusatory way that is generally meant by people who use the phrase. I am hopeful that the government's new crisis hubs in emergency departments will help this situation, once they get up and running."

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

"There are many drivers - rurality, loneliness, poverty, links with alcohol and drug use, homelessness, genetics.... unfortunately there is no single driver."

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

"I have no family (they are all deceased). What would have helped me was to have them understand what it was like to have a mental illness - and to reduce the stigma. My mother especially still believed that if you 'pulled up your socks' and 'got on with things' everything would be ok. There are times in life when that's true, but mental illness isn't one of them."

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

No comment

**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?**

"Better understanding by employers of the needs of employees with mental illness and a willingness to work flexibly with those staff on return to work arrangements, protection of employment (ie, not sacking people for being sick). "

**Thinking about what Victorias mental health system should ideally look like, tell us what areas and reform ideas you would like the Royal Commission to prioritise for change?**

Make it easier to get appointments with specialists - publicly and privately

**What can be done now to prepare for changes to Victorias mental health system and**

**support improvements to last?**

N/A

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

N/A