

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 would like to see more training & guidelines to be mandatory for schools to follow when a student informs them of their Mental ill health. We need more awareness around how Mental ill heath can contribute to challenging behaviour. How it can affect some young people. Educators need to listen to parents warnings. And not just brush them off as being over protective. Schools need to take notice when students are continually taking time off school for their mental health and well -being. Offer the students and parents support. Not just penalise them for missing days of school. And then when they do got to school they find themselves victimised and excluded. Please stop excluding young people from school as this only leads to more questions around the student that they may not feel comfortable answering. My son was not allowed to go on a school camp after his first suicide attempt. Impacting his mental health further.

There needs to be confidentiality a when students finally get up the courage to go to well- being about their struggles. Unless the student gives permission for them to discuss their health with colleagues the conversation should be private. Young people are smarter than some people give them credit for and can tell if their private information has been shared. That trust may never be given again.

We need to get more community members trained in Youth Mental Health First Aid and safe talk education programs. Let's make our communities safe places for our young people to fall. Not just the fish bowl that small communities can become where instead of picking people up we all just wait for someone to stuff up.

Our 15-year-old son ██████ took his own life on ████ 2017. He was the popular boy the one always ready for a laugh and a joke. A national Athlete. On the outside he had it all. On the inside he was broken. ██████ death shook our community to the core. Only about 10% of them had any idea of ██████ Health situation. It's a weird situation when you let yourself be vulnerable and let them in on your secrets at first everyone is there for support (just like after his death) during the crisis but they soon start to dwindle off or get a little less compassionate. It's hard work being there for someone who is struggling like this. They don't just get over it. It's not just fixed with a pill. I will never forget someone telling ██████ that they had depression and then went on medication and they were fine. Imagine what that could do to someone who is feeling like they cant do anything right and even the medication doesn't work for them. It may have a placebo affect for a few weeks.

These people who promised to be there for start to question whether it's just attention seeking and not that there is actually anything really wrong with you. Since ██████ death I have been contacted by so many parents, friends and relatives about their loved ones. Its amazing how their concern when their loved one is in crisis or missing turns to frustration after they have been found safe. I am so sick to death of people saying they were only attention seeking. You know what if they have to do something so drastic to get attention maybe they need it. Just give it to them. Judging them only causes them more heart ache and pain and takes a way what they once thought of as a safe place.

When a young person dies of cancer or some other illness or an accident. If they are part of a sporting club a trophy is named in their honour. But because of the stigma surrounding suicide it dosen't happen if your child dies by suicide. I will never forget the pain I felt after being asked to come to the football presentation night the following season after ██████ death. They wanted to have a trophy in his name. For me this was going to be such hard thing to do as I would look at ██████ peers and think he should've have been there.

I never heard anything more about it.

I wish it was never mentioned to me in the first place. It wouldn't hurt so much then. Or the [REDACTED] scholarship that was supposed to be an annual thing only happened once. Or the [REDACTED] between our two clubs that both lost a young person to suicide. Where as parents were invited to come and be a part of the awareness and suicide prevention. But our boy's names were not mentioned once. Why is my child not worth honouring? Because he took his own life, he was suffering from Mental ill health. Or because someone years ago said if we honour people who take their lives that others will copy cat them to be honoured. Bullshit. Those same people said that we can't talk about suicide and look where that has got us. My son was one of 3128 Australians who took their own life if 2017. All it does is continue the shame and stigma.

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 needs to be awareness that not all Mental ill health comes from a chemical imbalance. Sometimes it is situational. Look at me now I am traumatised, my mental health is a mess. I need to see a psychologist every week just to survive.

I think its fantastic that we have mental health plans but seriously 10 free sessions is hardly enough. That's not even one a month. I see my psychologist every week.

If we give our children the skills(tools) to help them when things get tough. Teach them mindfulness in primary school so if they need to draw on it in a crisis they have the skills there ready. Teach them its ok to cry and asking for help isn't weak. That we all make mistakes.

We need people in schools with the proper training in Mental Health first Aid. That the well- being people are trained properly to handle all situations.

Our community needs to be built on compassion and empathy. Not jealousy and greed. Be kind. Lets make it safe place where people feel like they can reach out and ask for help.

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

The fact that we are talking about it in the public spaces help. We need more people to stand up and be honest in their struggles but for them to do that we need to continue to create a safe space.

To often people are sent home from hospital while still in crisis because the hospitals are full.

On worksites they are more aware of Mental health and hand out the R U Ok material and have people come out and talk. But what they are missing in this area is job guarantee. The workforce has become full of Labour Hire companies and casual hire. With no guarantee of work from day to day. This is reeking havoc on families. Imagine living in that kind of constant stress and the harm it has on your mental health. We are losing our farmers too.

People with lived experience have a big part to play in suicide prevention.

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.

Life stressors and the fact that we live in a society where everything we do is under public scrutiny. We need to make looking after our Mental health just as important as our physical health.

Have holistic health hubs that include Drs, Psychologists, Psychiatrists, social workers, Youth workers etc.

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

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

Make the system easier to navigate. It so frustrating to constantly come up against road blocks when at times you are trying to keep your loved ones alive. They need to be reminded that self-care is not only important it's imperative if they are to support their loved ones. Offer them free counselling services. Provide services such as cleaning and meals.

By making the community more aware of Mental health issues families would feel safer to reach out for help. We need to make our sporting clubs and schools more educated in how to help people going through this and not judge.

I gave up my job to support my son but I never told my employer why. I had so much time off in the months leading up to quitting. I couldn't reach out because I felt it wasn't my story to share.

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

They need to be paid well. Make sure they are given time to look after their own mental health as this sort of work takes its toll. 3 day weekends where possible. Listen to them.

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?

We need to provide services that will help them become the best version of themselves. Bring in Mental health workers, social workers and remember just like Psychologists they may not get the right one first off so allow them to get someone else. We all need someone we can trust.

Look into Equine Therapy and putting it on the Mental health Plan.

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?

Make services more accessible for all Australians. Everyone deserves to be able to get professional help if they need it. It should not just be for the rich. Let's look after our most vulnerable people. The support needs to be there before we get to crisis. Give our children the tools they may need later on in life when times get tough. Mindfulness, connection. Make it ok to not be ok.

Look into our schooling system and see why our Secondary school kids are under so much stress. Why are our VCAL Programs now only available to students who pass a test. And if they don't

pass they go on to do VCE. It used to be that kids who weren't academic did VCAL. Now they are stuck doing VCE where they have no chance of passing. So these kids eventually drop out of school. Schools need to be held accountable if they are found to have been negligent when dealing with someone in such a vulnerable condition.

We need to make sure people realise that young people dealing with Mental ill health don't necessarily react to situations like someone in good health. Their judgement is not great. Something small could seem so big. And sometimes that extra nudge the wrong way can be enough to tip them over the edge.

Could we also please look into warnings for movies where there is a suicide. I was lucky enough to be warned not to watch A Star is Born. But too many of my friends and family didn't get a warning and they ran out of the cinema. I know if I see something on tv that is the same way [REDACTED] died I go straight back to that awful night and relive it over and over for weeks.

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

Promote the importance of looking after your mental health and raise awareness around Suicide.

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

After [REDACTED] death I started doing what I call [REDACTED]. You see at [REDACTED] funeral my body kept score and I tore my meniscus. I even know get a stab of pain under my ribs when I'm anxious. When I was able to walk I was only allowed to walk for 5 minutes and build it up slowly. [REDACTED] was a National Athlete and represented Victoria for LAVIC on numerous occasions. He was invited to the AIS. He was an allrounder. I loved to watch him run the 400m he was amazing. So I would go out to our football oval and initially only do one Lap (400m) and this is now known as [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] friends would join me sometimes and we chat. I started up a Facebook Page [REDACTED] where I and others would post our Laps. This has not only gotten people out in nature exercising but it has started the conversation around Youth Mental Health & Suicide Prevention. We now have a community that goes out and does [REDACTED] and with these conversations start. So far we have done 26,933 [REDACTED]. I was terrified about the impact [REDACTED] death would have on his mate's so I organised an overnight camp out at [REDACTED] for 8 of his closest mates. This was such a success that last year we held our very first [REDACTED] day to raise money to give other young people this opportunity. We raised almost \$7,000. So far we have had over 25 young people participate in the Youth Program with some very positive feedback.

With my page I receive many messages from young people and worried parents. It wasn't until we lost [REDACTED] that all of these other young people started reaching out for help. So many who had attempted suicide or were suffering depression and anxiety. Its scary to see and hear how many young people are affected by Mental ill health.

I will continue to learn as much as I can and help as many of these young people as I possibly can.

I just wish I could have saved my own son. He was only 15