

2019 Submission - Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System

Organisation Name

N/A

Name

Dr Amy Wilson

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

"In order to reduce the stigma and discrimination within the Victorian community, we need a greater level of understanding and awareness of mental health in the wider community. We need people to experience what it is really like on a day to day basis. Of particular interest to me, is the mental health needs/ challenges of long term, unpaid carers (of people with disabilities and/or mental health problems). We need more advertising campaigns that show others HOW to help carers on a daily basis, and to talk about the broader responsibility of extended families, friends, communities in caring for people with disabilities. We NEED our communities to recognise that unpaid caring (especially long term caring) should NEVER be a one or two person job (if the goal is to avoid mental health problems). It will ALWAYS take a village. "

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?

N/A

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.

N/A

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

"The community I want to focus on is the thousands of unpaid, primary carers in Victoria currently experiencing ongoing, low-moderate level mental health problems. Most of us did not CHOOSE to be carers, and many of us will be carers for the rest of our lives. We care because we love the people who need us, but caring takes a massive toll on OUR MENTAL HEALTH! We give up plans, dreams, relationships, careers and much, much more - to give THEM the best life possible. WE become ISOLATED from our friends, relatives and co-workers because OUR lives are different and no longer fit in to mainstream, normal society. We spend our days on edge. When we are at home:- We listen and manage disability needs and mental health challenges eg emotional outbursts. - We feel trapped, doing the same activities, same routines day after day after day. BUT if we go out:- We are always watching, thinking and planning: where can we go that is safe? How can we keep the volume at a reasonable level? Etc etc - We are always trying to protect our loved ones from others: What will we do if people stare? What will we say if people scold our loved one for 'bad behaviour' or tell us that we are a 'bad mum/ carer'? - We feel sad

watching all of the normal families taking the basics for granted the parties, the footie matches, school fairs and going on holidays! When our loved ones are at school/ day program:- We spend our days planning and organising and dealing with the fires. We make phone calls and pay bills and push all day to get the services and therapies they need. - We think and reflect on what else we can do because we NEED to do something else other than caring but who is going to hire us? We might have degrees but our work history is patchy and we'll mostly need to work from home. Carers end up sacrificing THEIR social, physical and MENTAL health in order to provide the best possible care for their loved ones. The rate of depression and anxiety among carers is alarmingly high, and this just isn't good enough in 21st century Victoria!! Yes, the federal government HAS invested some funds into the Carer Gateway including extra money for counselling, coaching, peer support and so forth. However, unpaid, primary carers DESERVE SOOO much more, and they NEED governments to invest extensively in improving unpaid, carers mental health for the LONG term! "

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

"(See previous comment) Carers DESERVE to have a PURPOSE and a LIFE that does not just revolve around an unpaid caring role. We DESERVE the opportunity to pursue OUR own dreams and goals. We DESERVE to have more CHOICE and CONTROL over the direction of our lives. To do this Carers NEED TIME away from the unpaid, caring role to focus on ourselves and improve our mental, physical and social health. We NEED governments (state and/or federal) to invest funding into RESPITE - giving unpaid carers access to meaningful, regular, lengthy breaks to improve their own mental health: to pursue their dreams, take a holiday and participate in the everyday normal activities they miss out on as unpaid, primary carers. Currently, respite funding is very limited and primarily available based on the needs of the person with a disability, not the unpaid carer. For example, my son was allocated funds in his NDIS plan based on HIS need for after school social activities, not on MY needs for a holiday or break from the caring role. We NEED governments to recognise that unpaid caring (especially long term caring) should NEVER be a one or two person job (if the goal is to avoid mental health problems). It will ALWAYS take a village. "

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

N/A

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?

See previous comments

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?

See previous comments

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?

"I recently attended the Ballarat community consultation, and one of the things that was extremely clear to me was that conversation was dominated primarily by those living with severe mental health issues such as schizophrenia or multiple personality disorder. It struck me as odd that no-one was talking about the enormous numbers of people experiencing medium to low level mental health problems every day due to their life circumstances - people such as the elderly or disability carers. This is the reason why I chose to make this submission. Thank you again for all your good work!"