

Royal Commission into Mental Health - Terms of Reference Consultation Uniting Vic.Tas Submission

30 January 2019

Background

Uniting in Victoria and Tasmania (Uniting Vic.Tas) is the community services organisation of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania. For over 100 years we've delivered community services across Victoria and Tasmania. Together we are more than 8000 people delivering hundreds of services accessed nearly 200,000 times each year. We work across the full spectrum of community services, intervening early to help people avoid crisis, as well as supporting those who live life at the margins.

About the Royal Commission

The first of its kind in Australia, the Royal Commission into Mental Health aims to provide wide-ranging recommendations on how to reform the current mental health care system in Victoria to support people at risk of suicide and people with a mental health condition.

As a significant provider of community services for people at risk of or experiencing financial crisis, homelessness, mental illness and problems with alcohol and other drugs, Uniting Vic.Tas welcomes the opportunity to share our experiences and expertise to help inform the Terms of Reference and its recommendations. The below responses were submitted in January 2019 to help guide the themes and issues to be explored by the Royal Commission.

Based on the ten (10) themes proposed for the Royal Commission, Uniting rank the most important focus areas as:

1. Prevention and early intervention
2. Community mental health services
3. Social isolation, depression, anxiety and trauma
4. Preventing suicide
5. Integration between Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) and mental health services
6. Acute mental health services (mental health assessment and treatment both in hospital and in the community)
7. Accessibility and navigating the mental health system
8. Deliverable reform to improve outcomes for people living with a mental illness
9. Workforce development and retention
10. Forensic mental health services (mental health assessment and treatment for people in contact with the criminal justice system)

Additional themes we believe should be included in the terms of reference for the Royal Commission:

- How mental health services intersect, collaborate, coordinate with AOD services – this is very different to the context of integration.
- Different experiences for people living in rural, regional and metropolitan areas, including investment, access, distance, cost. There is a lack of funding for rural and remote communities, plus models developed in metropolitan areas are insufficiently tailored to meet the needs of rural and regional areas.
- A special focus on the needs of vulnerable groups including, but not limited to, primary school, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, prison population, older people, CALD, new arrivals including asylum seekers, LGBTIQ+
- The extent to which a diagnosis of different mental health conditions can affect the treatment received. Stigma around some mental illnesses/diagnoses (particularly Borderline Personality Disorder) can significantly impact the level of care and treatment provided for these clients
- The under-treatment of high prevalence mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression due to current approach of short-term plans with no ongoing support.
- The focus of the mental health system on outputs rather than outcomes.
- Mental health service structure, governance and delivery mechanisms.

Uniting Vic.Tas await further opportunities to contribute to the Royal Commission once the Terms of Reference are announced in February 2019.