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Royal Commission a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for system change

Victoria Legal Aid has recommended significant reform to mental health and justice systems that are failing people experiencing mental health issues, in its submission to the [Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System](#).

Louise Glanville, CEO of Victoria Legal Aid, says the submission draws on our experience working across the mental health system and other related systems. 'In the last year alone, nearly 24,000 of our clients identified as having a mental health issue or disability. The submission includes the stories of 24 people. These stories paint a picture of a mental health system – and the systems that intersect with it – that for many has failed to understand and meet their needs.

'The Royal Commission is a chance to build a mental health system with people at its centre, that promotes people's rights and recovery, and reduces the negative impacts we see in our work every day. Consumer leadership should be at the heart of the Royal Commission and the system it helps redesign'.

Sam, a member of Victoria Legal Aid's lived experience advisory group, Speaking from Experience, explains what this means in practice. 'My own mental health treatment involved a serious lack of holistic services. It got to the point my medication was being doubled at every appointment without any offer of therapy or social supports. The increases in dose were doing nothing to support my mental wellbeing and the side effects were actually causing harm. I've found now that the best thing for my mental health is having opportunities to make meaningful social connections,' said Sam.

'Informed by our work, we reiterate the need for people receiving or at risk of compulsory mental health treatment to manage their own health in the way they have identified works best and to ensure compulsory treatment is truly a last resort', Ms Glanville said.

'We see first-hand the over-representation of people experiencing mental health issues in the criminal justice system and make recommendations to reduce that over-representation, including changes to policing, removing some summary offences and increasing access to successful therapeutic courts'.

'A lack of access to housing, disability services, employment, income support and mental health services can collide with experiences of isolation, family violence and discrimination, threatening people's mental health and undermining their recovery,' said Ms Glanville.

VLA's submission highlights six priority areas for reform:

1. Building a recovery-focused mental health system
2. Embedding consumer leadership and advocacy as part of a rights-focused system
3. Reducing the harm of criminal justice involvement for people experiencing mental health issues
4. Improving responses of other systems and services to mental health, including NDIS, housing, child protection, family violence and discrimination
5. Reducing inequalities and developing tailored, culturally safe practices
6. Strengthening governance, accountability, data and transparency

[The full submission can be found online.](#)

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