

Media Release:

Off to a shaky start, Mental Health Royal Commission

Sunday 24 February 2019

People who use mental health services have expressed mixed feelings about today's announcements about the Victorian Royal Commission into Mental Health.

The most important commissioner is missing

VMIAC, the peak body for people who use Victorian mental health services, welcomes today's announcements about the Mental Health Royal Commission, but says the most important experts have been left out.

'It's really disappointing that we don't have a consumer commissioner,' said Maggie Toko, VMIAC CEO. 'The people who've survived the mental health system have the most important expertise for this Royal Commission—but they're not there.'

The appointed commissioners have backgrounds in psychiatry, law, economics and public policy, but no one who has actually used the system. This is despite the Victorian Government committing to [involve consumers at every level](#) of the mental health system in 2014, and a growing number of consumers who work in executive and leadership roles across the mental health sector.

There are thousands of consumers who may want to testify at the Royal Commission, but VMIAC believes consumers must be engaged in leadership roles as well. 'Because there is no consumer commissioner, it's even more important that the Expert Advisory Group has a consumer co-chair, and at least half of the members are consumers,' said Vrinda Edan, VMIAC Chair and consumer academic.

Serious abuses not even mentioned

'The kinds of abuses being disclosed in the Aged Care Royal Commission also happen in mental health services,' said Toko, 'yet the terms of reference for the Royal Commission into Mental Health don't mention these serious issues. We're concerned about whether these issues will be looked at.'

'For so long our stories of abuse have been ignored,' said Edan. 'This is an opportunity to acknowledge harms, and then move forward to build a system that helps rather than hurts people.'

Consumers have echoed VMIAC's concerns on social media: *'All well & good to have 3 eminent and respected experts as commissioners, but we desperately need equal representation of lived experience on any panel leading this enquiry.'* (Dave Peters, Twitter). *'Nothing about us without us.... Sigh. I am so worried that this commission is going to advocate for an increase in availability of treatments known to be harmful and full of violence and violation.'* (R.Egan, Facebook)

Looking forward

'VMIAC looks forward to working closely with the Royal Commission when it begins next month,' said Maggie Toko, 'and we'll continue to work actively with our community to understand people's responses to these announcements, and to ensure that people are heard.'

More information: <https://www.vmiac.org.au/royal-commission-into-mental-health/>

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