

What we've heard

Over the past 10 months, we have engaged with a wide range of individuals and organisations across the mental health and wellbeing sector.

Engagement and partnerships

Our team of four commissioners, including two with lived experience—both consumer and carer—brings valuable diversity and insight to our work. This diversity is a strength of the Commission and highlights our commitment to being an exemplar for lived experience leadership. Further, the leadership and active involvement of our commissioners highlight the importance of lived experience for effective and compassionate reform.

Our focus has been on understanding the needs and aspirations of those working in and using public mental health and wellbeing services. These conversations help us determine how the Commission can contribute to meaningful and collaborative pathways to reform. We are committed to being person-centred and trauma-informed, prioritising individuals' experiences, providing culturally safe environments and being sensitive to the effects of trauma.

Throughout the establishment year, we have focused on connecting with services, system oversight organisations, community support organisations and service users across Victoria, including regional and metropolitan areas. This has involved visiting newly established Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals and Connect Centres to gain firsthand insight into their operations. These services play a vital role in addressing the 'missing middle' of mental health and wellbeing care, providing welcoming environments for those experiencing psychological distress, and offering safe spaces for carers to connect, access respite, and focus on self-care. We had enriching and often frank conversations about the pace of reform and the need for these centres to be a continued priority in any reform plan changes.



Commissioners Maggie Toko and Annabel Brebner along with other staff from the Commission, visited the Brimbank Mental Health and Wellbeing Local in April 2024.

Our outreach has been extensive and impactful, involving participation in various events and engagements to hear diverse voices, raise the profile of the Commission, and identify ways to support and drive transformation in the mental health and wellbeing system.

Highlights of our engagement activities include:

- meeting with patients and lived experience staff at services such as Thomas Embling
- attending carers' lived experience workshops
- collaborating with universities to share information with students who will form part of future workforces
- presenting at forums like the Social and Emotional Wellbeing Forum and the TheMHS Carer Conference
- involvement in panel discussions, such as at the Equally Well Forum
- sharing our work through presentations to organisations like Wellways and Co-health
- voicing our concerns and raising awareness about the need for better reporting on mental health treatment and restrictive interventions in emergency departments
- participating in the Monash Mental Health Art Awards
- acting as a sector expert on various advisory and working groups including Psychological Safety in the Workplace.

Our Chair Commissioner Treasure Jennings participated in the following committees and advisory groups:

- Mentally Healthy Workplaces Ministerial Advisory Group
- Quality and Safety Advisory Committee
- Mental Health Workforce Safety and Wellbeing Committee
- Safer Care Victoria Mental Health Improvement Program Advisory Group

Our commissioners and senior staff regularly meet with a range of sector bodies, including the Department of Health's Mental Health Division, Forensicare, the Victoria Collaborative Centre (VCC), Office of the Chief Psychiatrist (OCP), the Mental Health Tribunal (MHT), Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA), Victoria Legal Aid (VLA), Safer Care Victoria (SCV), Health Complaints Commissioner (HCC), and Mental Health Victoria (MHV).

We also maintain regular and ongoing contact with peak organisations such as Tandem Carers, Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council (VMIAC), and Self Help Addiction Resource Centre (SHARC).

These meetings ensure a collective push towards systemic reform and continuous improvement.

Our Resolutions Team engages with services to identify improvement opportunities and better understand the environments where complaints occur. This involves quarterly service meetings and an annual program of service visits. This is in addition to the day-to-day engagement that takes place regarding individual complaints.



Engagement with First Nations peoples

The Commission has had a particular focus on engaging with Aboriginal Victorians to understand their lived experience and specific issues of cultural safety within Victoria's mental health and wellbeing system.

We acknowledge the tremendous impact that events of the past year have had on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, particularly in the wake of the outcome of the 2023 referendum. We also recognise that Aboriginal Victorians need improved access to culturally safe and appropriate mental health and wellbeing support and services, and that reform is needed to drive this change.

We are committed to centring Aboriginal lived experience and expertise at the heart of what we do. This past year our lived experience commissioners met with Victorian Aboriginal communities and the Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing workforce including the Bendigo and District Aboriginal Cooperative (BDAC) and Aboriginal Advancement League (AAL) to discuss the work of the Commission and the experiences and expectations Aboriginal people have of the system.

We are committed to Aboriginal self-determination, and we approach our engagement with First Nations' peoples in a culturally respectful manner, recognising their resilience, wisdom and leadership. We understand self-determination is about deep listening, and partnering in a deeply respectful way that is more than just consultation.

Commissioner Jacqueline Gibson also attended the Yoorrook Justice Commission's hearings into the health system and heard the powerful testimony. The Commission wholeheartedly supports the Yoorrook Justice Commission and look forward to implementing the relevant recommendations that come from its inquiries.

Going forward, the Commission is prioritising the development of Indigenous data sovereignty and governance processes to ensure we can report accurately on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal Victorians. We are also developing a culturally safe complaints process. This process will ensure that Aboriginal Victorians are able to make a complaint about their experience in a manner that is free from racism, considers the impacts of colonisation and intergenerational trauma and incorporates a social and emotional wellbeing approach to recovery.

We look forward to progress on Treaty in Victoria, and the First People's Assembly. We thank Victorian Aboriginal communities for collaborating with us to achieving better mental health and wellbeing outcomes.

Lived Experience Team – engagement and connection

The Royal Commission identified the need to:

“invest in initiatives that will result in a cultural shift in the mental health system, where lived experience, diverse explanatory models and cultural perceptions of mental health are valued equally alongside the clinical knowledge and expertise of our workforce.”¹⁶

To support this, the Commission has commenced foundational work to prioritise the importance and impact of effective engagement with all stakeholders, building upon key values and continuums of lived experience engagement.¹⁷

Our Lived Experience Team has ongoing engagement with a range of stakeholders across the sector and in developing the Lived Experience Plan, used a best practice approach to integrating lived experience perspectives into the steering committee, project team, and wider engagement efforts. To ensure effective and meaningful engagement occurs, the Lived Experience Plan will target future activities aimed at creating a safe environment where consumer and carer knowledge and expertise is valued and prioritised.

This approach is further evidence of the Commission’s elevation of lived experience leadership and participation at all levels. More recently the team has begun work on a mental health and wellbeing principles project, which involves extensive engagement with services and the lived experience workforce. The Lived Experience Team have also provided critical advice and connection to a broader and diverse range of stakeholders in developing the Commission’s Strategic Plan and Stakeholder Engagement Framework.

Consumers and carers

In the Commission’s establishment year, the Lived Experience Team have built and expanded relationships with consumer groups, families, carers and supporter groups, peak bodies, government, system and community. This has included engaging directly with other lived experience teams and workforces, including but not limited to Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council (VMIAC), Tandem Carers, Victorian Transcultural Mental Health (VTMH), Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA) and the NDIS Quality & Safeguards Commission.

Our Lived Experience Team has also actively engaged with research and training organisations including the Centre for Mental Health Learning and the Victorian Collaborative Centre as we seek to contribute to, and develop our own, systemic responses to the Royal Commission recommendations.

¹⁶ Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System, 2021

¹⁷ Mental health lived experience engagement framework., Department of Health & Human Services, 2019.

Lived Experience Team – Engagement and connection (continued)

Connecting with services

In conjunction with the other Commission teams (including the Resolution Team and Legal Team), the Lived Experience Team has met with 19 services through quarterly online meetings and onsite visits during 2023-2024. 12 onsite service visits were undertaken throughout Victoria, both metropolitan and regional, including with inpatient services, community outreach, and the new Locals and Connect Centres. Focus areas for the Lived Experience Team in these meetings included learning how individual services are building lived experience leadership and how we can support services to build their lived experience capability and capacity.

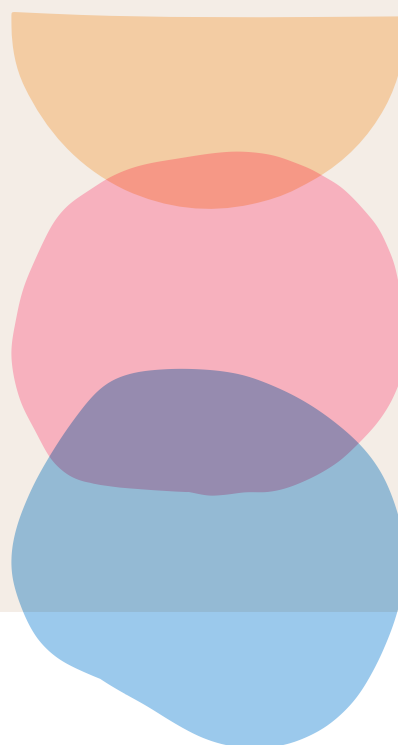
Lived experience workforce

The Commission made commitments in its Strategic Directions, to be:

- an exemplar organisation for lived experience leadership, and
- grounded in the expertise of people with lived experience.

Central to these commitments is connection with external lived experience workforce groups. The Lived Experience Team plan to stay connected and grounded in lived experience values and principles by participating in opportunities for community of practice and spaces including the Centre for Mental Health Learning Victoria's (CMHL) Consumer Workforce Reflective Circles and Tandem's Carer Lived Experience Workforce (CLEW) network.

As part of our Lived Experience Plan, the Lived Experience team are exploring other ways to engage with the lived experience workforce, including via meeting with advisory groups in services, or hosting meetings where we plan to share resources and education on supporting consumers and carers to make complaints and updates.



Communications and engagement

Our Communications and Engagement Team hold regular bi-monthly meetings with sector bodies and peak organisations to share information and learn from others about reform initiatives.

Social media, our website, and various communication materials are used to reach consumers, carers, families, and supporters. These platforms are crucial for informing individuals about their rights and encouraging feedback. Our communications must meet the needs of our end users, and we have involved lived experience perspectives in developing our website.

We have also developed an Engagement Framework at the Commission which outlines our commitment and approach to sector and community engagement.

We recognise that good engagement is vital to achieving our goals.

The Framework outlines the promises and expectations that guide our engagement. It demonstrates our commitment to working with others and explains how we will work with them.

While there is still much work to be done, we are committed to continuing these vital conversations and working together to enhance the system. Our goal is to ensure it is person-centred, trauma-informed, and all Victorians can choose and access services when and where they need them.



“The community is keen to see the Commission succeed and help drive change and reform, from its complaints process and approach to compliance through to its role in leading initiatives and participating in system improvement and design, with lived experience at the centre.”

Simon McKenzie, CEO

