

Commissioners Productivity Commission

Dear Commissioners

26.2.20

POST ADELAIDE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION INTERVIEW COMMENTS

Thank you for the privilege of being able to present my thoughts on the mental health system in a submission, then to give reasons why I wanted to attend the Adelaide meeting, and also to be able to comment of The Productivity Draft into Mental Health released late last year. It was unfortunate that I could not stay for the length of the session as I had conflicting engagements. However I would like to summarize further what I see is the situation facing Australia.

1. Australia is a country that is unique in its global position geographically and economically. To reflect on the precarious nature of the world economy as it engages with a recognition for better human rights, a better balance of world resources, the need for ever increasing technological vigilance, a better understanding of future sustainability, and the need to collectively limit the damage of world catastrophes including pandemics, Australia must ensure that every budgetary effort achieves their set goals.
2. Australia's mental health system when judged by the numbers of people presenting with clinical diagnoses, the incidence of suicide, the numbers of people who manifest elements of sufficient stress that it affects (changes) their attitude, behaviour, and personal happiness, is failing. However this is only the tip of the iceberg if one adds in the changes in social behaviour that cost the country economically, these being a decrease in mutual respect, a decrease in personal responsibility, and decreased personal resilience to perceived setbacks.
3. From some analysis of the current submissions and interviews to the Productivity Commission, I see that there is a scenario of systems trying to use the dissatisfaction with the mental health system to further their own agendas. In the past the mental health system has been driven by a heavy pharmaceutical/ medical influence from the echelons of those bodies. The recent National Mental Health Commission Community Connections Program clearly showed the gap in needs and services which the insight of consumers and carers can bring to the table. However my observation that again the Productivity Commission was having to listen to regular propositions from businesses that are set to benefit economically from increased Federal dollars without changing the incidence of mental health.
4. The recent allocation of increased money to Domestic Violence whilst possibly not fully planned and distributed at this stage is in many ways yet another band aid to the mental health system. What we need to do is to use this opportunity, this time in Australia's history, to now totally reform our mental health system so that we significantly reduce the incidence of ill-health and seriously focus on preventing mental illness. This would then make an enormous difference to the health economy, if not the economy of the whole country. This is an opportunity for Australia to lead the world. (Possibly Australia could become the centre of Global Well-being).

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5. Although there is evidence that there are benefits on prioritising pre-conception well-being, certainly if the mental well-being of all women from conception could be maximised, and then married into a program of sustained family/partnership well-being, we would be projected a long way along the curve to preventing mental ill-health. Ideally every child would be nurtured in an environment of predictable enriching behaviour, where respect, responsibility, and resilience were enhanced, until they entered the education system. This would then be addressing what is considered to be the biggest risk area for future mental illness.
6. This reform should be bipartisan in its formulation as it affects every citizen every day of their lives, and its economic impact will be a significant gain to all governments. Every politician and business leader should fully understand what causes mental ill-health, but it should be driven from the top. Top of government, top of business, and the leaders in every societal influence in this nation. Everyone should breathe (prioritise) mental well-being every day.
7. The plan for mental health reform should be set in achievable goals so that no effort is wasted or allowed to procrastinate.

Humbly and sincerely,

Dr Bob Riessen