

Peter Gray QC & Peter Rozen QC
Per Solicitors Assisting the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality & Safety
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Sent via email to: ACRCenquiries@royalcommission.gov.au

12 November 2020

Dear Mr Gray and Mr Rozen,

Mental Health Victoria (MHV) and Prevention United thank you for this opportunity to respond to the Counsel Assisting's final submission to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.

MHV is the peak body for the mental health sector in Victoria. Our members include consumer and carer groups, community health and mental health services, hospitals, medical associations, unions, and other bodies. Mental Health Victoria's vision is to drive system reform to ensure that people receive the mental health care they need. This point is particularly salient when considering the vulnerability of many older Australian's to mental health issues and suicide, and the barriers to accessing appropriate services and supports that currently exist.

Prevention United is a mental health promotion charity that specialises in the promotion of mental wellbeing and the prevention of mental health conditions. Prevention United's vision is for a world free of the negative impacts of mental health conditions. Our mission is to work together with individuals, families, organisations and communities to prevent mental health conditions by fostering their strengths and reducing their risks.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety comes at a critical time for our nation and its ageing population and we commend the counsel assisting on the 124 recommendations which will undoubtedly improve the quality of life and care received by older Australians in the future.

Older persons have the same rights as other people in Australia. The fact that some may require care and assistance, including through residential aged care services, should not strip them of these rights. Aged care should be understood as the provision of programs, supports and services to help older people maintain their independence, continue their participation in social, economic and civic life, prevent or manage cognitive decline, and maintain their best possible mental and physical health among older persons. Aged care is therefore more than a 'sector' but also a process or system for the aggregation of all the necessary inputs to help older people achieve good physical and mental health.

We are therefore particularly encouraged to see a number of recommendations aimed directly at improving access to mental health services, reducing social isolation and enhancing the skills and ability of the workforce to respond to mental health issues.

However, mental health and the wellbeing of older persons should not be confined only to a set of initiatives or strategies. Rather, in keeping for the vision for aged care described above, the mental health and wellbeing of older people should be embedded as a core focus of the entire framework of policy, investment and initiatives aimed at better supporting and caring for older people in our community and aged care settings.

To this point, we are supportive of a new Aged Care Act (recommendation 1.1). The objective of this new Act should also be to promote the social and emotional wellbeing of older people, and to properly support those experiencing mental health difficulties or disorders. The Act should also include and explicit focus on suicide prevention given the concerning high prevalence of suicide amongst people aged 65 and over. It is also of utmost important to enshrine family and carer's rights in the Act. The ongoing involvement of family, friends and colleagues in the life of their loved one is important as well as a vital contribution to 'aged care services and supports'.

With mental health and wellbeing at the core of an overarching framework for aged care, it is hoped that the design and implementation of all programs, services, physical structures, workforce initiatives and policies will subsequently embrace this as a primary focus.

Mental Health Victoria and Prevention United have provided in principle support to many of the counsel assisting's recommendations, particularly those which align with mental health and wellbeing. A response to these is attached with this letter.

A focus on active ageing, mental health and wellbeing, and suicide prevention is an integral to supporting for happy and healthy ageing and we commend you to including it as a core focus of the recommendations.

Older Australians have made a massive contribution to this country over their lifetime and deserve to live in dignity and have their basic human rights maintained, and we are confident that the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety will deliver outcomes which lead to a much brighter future for our older Australians and their families and carers.

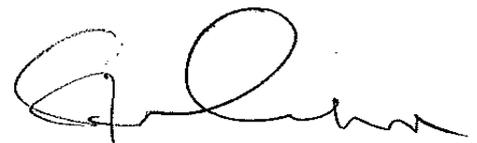
Yours sincerely,

Larissa Taylor
Director of Policy



Mental Health Victoria

Dr Stephen Carbone
Executive Director



Prevention United