

I'd like to begin Speaker, by sharing a reflection on our mental health system –

Words pulled from the pages of expert findings –

And informed by the stories of survivors. I quote:

It is clear from evidence presented in this report that the cost of mental illness in terms of human lives and suffering is enormous.

People affected by mental illness are clearly among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community.

They suffer from widespread, systematic discrimination and are consistently denied the rights and services to which they are entitled.

The effects of discrimination and stigmatisation are also felt by [their families].

Carers spoke passionately... about their struggle – to the point of exhaustion – to obtain professional advice and appropriate treatment.

And the stresses associated with providing care are compounded by... an almost total lack of understanding, recognition or support.

...The costs of our current neglect [is]... clearly documented in this report.

[It] demands an urgent, concerted and effective response.

As a community we cannot afford to continue to turn a blind eye...

I quote, Speaker, not from the Commission –

Nor the report we're here to table.

Instead, these words come from the Burdekin Report –

Australia's National Inquiry into the Human Rights of People with Mental Illness –

Handed down almost 30 years ago.

Speaker, three decades on, and the system it describes –

The deep cracks, and closed doors –

Is, frankly, all too recognisable.

That sense of isolation for individuals –

Despair for families –

Desperation for workers –

And the profound cost and scale of suffering –

All of it, aching, familiar.

I chose to share these words today, not to diminish the findings of that report –

Or those who've worked so hard in the years since to address them.

But because Speaker, it shows –

Three decades on – not enough has changed.

And without real, concrete and committed action from government – nothing ever will.

The failings in our mental health system, Speaker, are often described as cracks.

Cracks that emerge when people are told they're too sick.

Or alternatively, not sick enough.

When they're told there's a waiting list.

Or, more commonly, no waiting list exists at all.

The cracks that means people in our regions and in our suburbs are only ever offered care –

Far from home, and far from the people they love.

The cracks that mean new mums, overwhelmed and exhausted, have no idea where to turn.

That sees older blokes bottling it up, keeping it in, until it's too late.

That sees parents and their children falling – because there is nothing to hold on to.

Eventually Speaker, those cracks become a chasm.

And far, far too many Victorians are falling to their death.

Last year, we lost 698 Victorians to suicide.

That's 698 of us.

Then there's a much bigger number, Speaker.

Those who experience anxiety, depression, panic disorders, eating disorders.

A continuum as complex and diverse as each of the individuals involved.

And from there Speaker, an even wider net is cast:

Families, workplaces, schools, entire communities.

As one submission from the interim report described –

If you have one member of a five-person family who is suffering with a mental health condition –

You have four more people who suffer alongside them.

That was certainly the experience for Madeline's family.

Close-knit and connected, her good days and her bad days were felt equally by her family.

I had the pleasure of meeting Madeline on a good day, Speaker, back in 2014.

We were there to visit her school, Essendon Keilor College, to make an announcement about a new upgrade.

As a Year Seven student, and as a member of the school's junior leadership team –

Madeline had been asked to speak to the throng of assembled journos.

Bright, smart and articulate –

She fielded their questions with the poise and confidence of a seasoned media performer.

That meeting with Madeline, Speaker, stayed with me.

So when, just a few weeks ago, her mum Karen emailed me to share what had happened:

It floored me.

I won't go into the details of Madeline's death, Speaker.

How or when – or perhaps most heartbreakingly, why?

But as her mum told me –

Madeline was “a bright and shining star”.

A bright and shining star who deserved a bright and shining future.

It's why Speaker –

Today, tomorrow and in the days to come –

We should never forget the true cost of failure.

Daughters and sons.

Brother and sisters.

Mums, dads.

Mates and best friends.

People we know, people we love.

And getting this right – at long last, getting this done –

It's them we owe it to.

Speaker, we established this Royal Commission because we knew of the cracks in our system.

And we knew too many people were falling through them.

Just over two years on – and as we table the Commission's final report –

It's clearer than ever that our system is more than just cracked.

It's completely broken.

And instead, we need to rebuild a mental health system from the ground up –
Ensuring care for those who need it, where they need it, and whenever they need it.
Speaker, there are some issues that take a long time to build.
And some reforms that develop an undeniable momentum –
When it's clear the time has come to act.
That's what saw us establish this Royal Commission –
And that's what will see us implement every single one of its recommendations.
That's the action and effort of government.
But getting us to this point, Speaker –
That's been the collective purpose of thousands of Victorians.
I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the Commissioners for their work.
To Penny, Allan, Alex, Bernadette and your staff – our deepest thanks.
I also want to thank the Expert Advisory Committee, chaired by Professor Pat McGorry.
Collectively, what you've achieved is nothing short of amazing.
Never before has a document been delivered to government driven by such human experience.
This is a report shaped profoundly by those who know our mental health system best:
The people who've turned to it.
The people who've worked in it.
The people who've been failed by it.
I want to thank each and every individual who shared their experience:
Survivors, families, workers, advocates and experts.
Your courage – your commitment – has laid the foundation for this once in a generation reform.
To each of you. To all of you. Thank you.

Over the course of this Commission, it's become clear –
That for many Victorians –
Talking about mental health continues to carry with it a burden of pain and stigma and shame.
But the truth is, Speaker:
That shame doesn't belong to them.
Instead that shame should be shouldered by a generation of policy makers.
Those who saw the problem, but failed to rise to the challenge.

Speaker, that includes our own government.

Today we have a once in a generation opportunity.

An opportunity to reach across the divide, and set right those many wrongs.

To rebuild our mental health system – from the ground up.

As reform, it won't be simple, it won't be fast, and it won't be easy.

But without a doubt Speaker, it will save lives.

There isn't a moment to lose.

This is the time to get this done.