

New seclusion report flags safety & rights issues in Victorian hospital mental health services

Psychological trauma, human rights issues and major discrepancies between hospitals are highlighted in a new report on ‘seclusion’, released today by the Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council (VMIAC).

The report ranks Victorian hospitals based on how often they use ‘seclusion’, a practice which involves locking distressed patients into an isolated room.

“It’s hard to understand how any mental health service can use seclusion in this day and age,” said Maggie Toko, VMIAC CEO. *“Frankly, our hospitals are hurting people and it has to stop. Victoria must commit to eliminating seclusion.”*

Australia-wide, seclusion has been on a downward trend for 10 years. Victoria was following that trend until four years ago, when Victorian seclusion rates started climbing again. Last quarter, the worst performing hospital in Victoria secluded people **18 times more** often than the best performing hospital. On average, Victorian hospitals seclude people for 8.3 hours, much higher than the national average of 5.1 hours.

“This report shows the need for a new culture in Victorian mental health services. There is no good reason that Barwon should be secluding so many people when Frankston is able to avoid it,” said Dr Chris Maylea, RMIT.

The Royal Commission into Mental Health has now begun in Victoria, and VMIAC is hopeful that harms and human rights issues in mental health services, like seclusion, are a key topic of investigation

A significant body of research is clear that seclusion can cause serious psychological injury, including loss of trust, humiliation, shame and disempowerment. *“This is NOT how you help someone who is experiencing mental distress,”* said Louise*, who was secluded as a young teenager in a Victorian public hospital. *“This is how you worsen it. These memories do not go away.”*

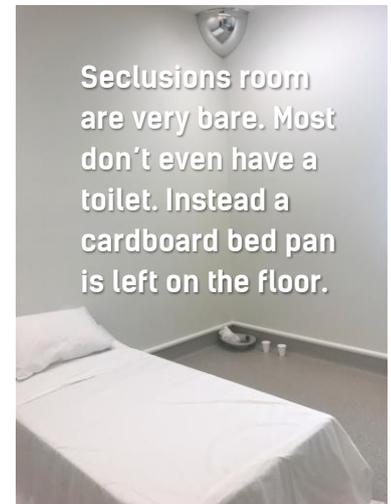
In 2013 the United Nations criticised Australia for subjecting mental health consumers to practices like seclusion. Human rights experts point out that seclusion use in mental health services could be considered as a breach of the absolute right to freedom from torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

“The Royal Commission can’t properly understand better ways of helping people until we address the ways this system is hurting people,” said Indigo Daya, Human Rights Advisor at VMIAC. *“Too many people have been so hurt by seclusion that they’re now fearful of ever seeking help from a mental health service again. If we’re really serious about reducing suicide and promoting recovery, then we have to do much better.”*

More information: www.vmiac.org.au

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*Pseudonym



Seclusion room in a Victorian public hospital
(image supplied on the condition that the hospital remains anonymous)



www.vmiac.org.au

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