Supporting Families in recovery when Parents have Mental Illness: 
*Personal & professional perspectives*

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Empathy, resilience, strength, awareness

‘...all of us, regardless of our life circumstances, need to develop coping strategies such as resilience and the ability to adapt to change, in order to maintain good mental health’

Mental Health Council of Australia (2000)
Personal as political - forgotten families

• Lack of identification, support & information

• Fractured family structures & connections

• Intergenerational impacts
  – Mental distress, stigma, trauma, loss & grief
  – Resilience & recovery
A major public health issue

- 23% Australian children have at least one parent with mental illness\(^1\)
- 41-77% risk of developing MI\(^2\)
- Children with PSMI: 32% risk SMI, 55% risk any mental illness\(^3\)


Complex causal pathways

Figure 1. A Developmental Model of Transgenerational Transmission of Psychopathology (Hosman et al., 2009)
Intergenerational mental illness & trauma – a wicked problem?
Professional perspectives...

Winston Churchill Fellowship: US, Canada, Netherlands

• People as parents first

• Prevention by definition = building resilience

• Interventions with population-level impact (eg. schools, health, primary health care)

• Policy needs to support families not individuals
• Partnering together – Family Options program (Family Recovery)

• Promoting parental MH -> +ve impact on all family members

• Family-centred, strengths-based, trauma-informed, recovery & resilience focused
An Australian perspective

- National mental health policy & National COPMI Initiative
- Information, resources & workforce training
- Family-focused practices & recovery
- Victorian FaPMI network
- Victorian MH Act 2014

http://www.copmi.net.au/
Prevention is effective – parenting as primary

Up to 40% reduction in child risks with preventive family interventions

(Siegenthaler et al., 2012)
‘a recovery approach is a crucial element of family-centred practice. Indeed, parental functioning can be intimately related to the recovery process’.

(Trowse, Hawkins, Clark, 2013)
Tasks for families in recovery

- Maintaining hope
- Reconnecting
- Overcoming secondary trauma
- Journeying from carer to family

'you’re not always alone and...you will find your way out of it, like it’s a big dark cave and there’s two roads. There’s one road to hide your feelings but another road leads to an opening and that’s what I’ve learnt ... it practically tells you what path to choose. It’s not saying “oh choose the one on the right”, it’s just saying “that way leads to a better ending but on the left one you’ll just live in a deep dark house”

(John, 11 yrs, in Foster et al., 2014)