

Barriers and enablers to lived experience workforce development



A summary of the research report
Identifying barriers to change: the lived experience worker as a valued member of the mental health team.

Background

In 2016, the Commission engaged CQUniversity to undertake research to identify the key barriers and enablers to lived experience workforce development in government and non-government mental health services. The lead researcher was Dr Louise Byrne, a lived experience academic.

This research project is part of action taken to implement Shared Commitment to Action 1 under the *Queensland Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Strategic Plan 2014–2019*. It commits to identify and implement actions to enhance engagement and leadership as an area for reform by:

- providing meaningful opportunities for individuals, families and carers to participate as equal partners in all levels of policy development, and the co-design, planning, monitoring and evaluation of mental health, alcohol and other drug services
- ensuring individuals, families and carers are informed, equipped and empowered to voice their perspectives, particularly in relation to their rights.

These actions are specifically focused on the ability of people with a lived experience, their families, carers and support people to influence the system, and provide peer work and peer networks.

The importance of the lived experience workforce

Lived experience workers are an invaluable member of the team. They provide a unique perspective to support people on their recovery journey. They provide an example of hope and that recovery is possible; practical

assistance with recovery through the purposeful use of their own experience; and a person-centred, humanistic approach that complements the clinical approach of other members of the team.

The employment of lived experience workers is a demonstration of the organisation's commitment to recovery-oriented approaches and belief that recovery is possible.

Key findings

The research project explored executive/senior management perspectives on the barriers and enablers facing the lived experience workforce, with a particular emphasis on why organisations were embracing lived experience workers to greater or lesser degrees. In-depth interviews and focus groups were held with 29 participants in total; 16 participants employed within the non-government sector, 13 employed in state government run organisations.

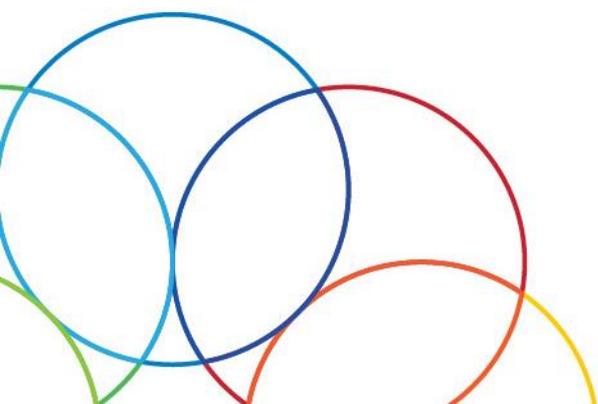
The research showed that 'the degree to which executive/senior management value and understand lived experience roles directly correlates to the commitment shown in developing and supporting lived experience workforce within organisations'. This value and understanding also affects 'the potential for future growth and opportunities for lived experience roles'.

There are a number of key issues that need to be addressed to support lived experience workers in their role encompassing the organisational culture and system enablers; having clear roles, support and supervision; and the importance of career pathways.

Organisational culture

Senior management support and 'buy-in' is crucial to setting an organisational culture that is recovery-oriented and values lived experience perspectives and work. Having lived experience workers as part of the team can encourage others to be more open about their own lived experience and this can help to reduce stigma.

Lived experience workers are an equal member of the team and need to be treated as such. There needs to be systems and processes in place to ensure a whole-of-service approach to the inclusion of these roles.



Role clarity, support and supervision

The research report showed that having clear roles for lived experience workers increases understanding of the role and in turn the value placed on it.

Lived experience workers need the same kinds of support and supervision mechanisms as other professions in the team. Systemic approaches are required to embed this into organisations.

Organisations with an established lived experience workforce can play an important role in sharing learnings and offering support to organisations that have not previously had a lived experience workforce.

Career pathways

Strategic workforce development is required to support the existing and emerging lived experience workforce.

Building career pathways to senior lived experience and non-lived experience roles is a way to reinforce and support a recovery-focused culture and reduce stigma by infusing lived experience perspectives throughout the entire organisation.

Ongoing education and development is important, both for existing lived experience workers and those who are considering a career in the lived experience workforce, for example, through providing support to access the Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work.

Next steps

It is intended that the findings from this research project will contribute to and influence workforce development at both the system and organisational level.

Connecting Care to Recovery 2016–2021: A plan for Queensland's State-funded mental health alcohol and other drug services includes a commitment to the development of the lived experience workforce. It is hoped that the findings from this research will be considered by Queensland Health as part of this work.

Consultation with people with lived experience, service providers, peak bodies, and the Queensland Mental Health and Drug Advisory Council as part of the renewal of the *Queensland Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Strategic Plan 2014–2019* confirmed the value and importance of the lived experience workforce. Consultation also confirmed that a focus on lived experience engagement and leadership continues to be a high priority for the renewed Plan.

Reference

Full report:

Byrne, L. Roennfeldt, H. and O'Shea, P. *Identifying barriers to change: The lived experience worker as a valued member of the mental health team: Final Report*. Brisbane: Queensland Government; 2017.

Summary:

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