

Summary

Queensland Framework for the Development of the Mental Health Lived Experience Workforce

Purpose of the framework

The framework and associated resources are intended:

- to increase understanding of lived experience value and functions and provide clear information for organisations on how to structure and support lived experience roles
- as a set of tools to assist and guide organisations along all stages of lived experience workforce development
- to provide a detailed framework that can support the development/expansion of lived experience roles across Queensland and improve collaboration within mental health settings.

Factors that drive the need for the framework

Respecting and valuing lived experience in the mental health workforce is broader than designated lived experience roles. It helps embed person-directed approaches by respecting the expertise each individual holds regarding their own life and wellbeing. It can also promote work cultures in which it is safe for people in non-designated roles to disclose their lived experience.

There are many potential benefits of lived experience work for organisations. These include benefits for people accessing services, lived experience workers and organisations. Overall benefits include hope, greater wellbeing, and less need for ongoing formal services. However, there are also challenges for the lived experience workforce:

- employment conditions are highly variable and often unplanned
- while guidelines exist, there is no accountability for lived experience workforce development
- value/acceptance of the lived experience workforce is poor when others are not exposed to and able to understand lived experience concepts and the unique contribution of these roles
- no award wage, union or dedicated peak body for lived experience workforce to advocate for appropriate working conditions
- the need to consider diverse cultures and communities of lived experience workforce.

What is lived experience?

For the purposes of this framework, lived experience roles are defined as people employed to:

- use their personal understanding of life-changing mental health challenges, service use and periods of healing/recovery, to help others
- use their life-changing experience of supporting someone through mental health challenges, service use and periods of healing/personal recovery, to help others.

Lived experience roles exist in diverse organisations and contexts, spanning entry level to leadership roles. While everyone may have some 'lived experience', not everyone chooses to work in a role that is primarily informed by their lived experience.

Lived experience roles are informed by an individual's experience of mental health challenges and recovery but importantly also are understood in relation to the wider lived experience movement and universal issues of marginalisation and loss of identity/citizenship. Ultimately, lived experience work is about how experiences are understood and applied to benefit others.

Lived experience roles involve:

- life-changing experience of service use or supporting someone else through life-changing experiences
- willingness to share experiences/personal story
- understanding hopelessness and how to move from hopelessness to hope
- willingness to be vulnerable and publicly identify as having lived experience
- using emotional understanding and empathy as a foundation to the role
- understanding the impacts of trauma
- self-awareness and self-reflection in the use of self, relationship and experiences
- respecting equality and efforts to reduce power imbalances
- being an advocate/change agent
- level of awareness about self-care and skills/strategies for self-care.

Suggested citation

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What makes lived experience work effective?

- What has been learned through lived experience and knowing how to apply those skills and knowledge
- Links with and understanding of the wider lived experience movement and lived experience concepts
- Values-based work that is lived experience informed, person-directed and aligned with recovery principles
- Ability to effectively use one's personal story for the benefit of others
- An ability to convey or inspire hope
- Being a link of understanding between organisations and service users
- Awareness of the impact of trauma and how to respond compassionately to the impacts of trauma
- Strengths-based work
- Greater flexibility and ability to be responsive to the service user
- Specialisation may be useful depending on the context and experience

Specialisation

Increasingly specialist roles are seen as useful for some contexts and unique experiences. Specialisations may include but are not limited to:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- people from the Deaf community
- people identifying as LGBTQIA+
- people with a history of trauma and/or family violence
- people with experiences of perinatal mental health
- people with experiences of eating disorders
- people with experiences of suicide
- people with experiences of involuntary treatment, incarceration and/or homelessness
- people with experiences of alcohol and other drug use or dependence
- people identifying as neurodivergent
- people with disability
- older people
- youth
- veterans.

Ultimately, lived experience work is about how experiences are understood and applied to benefit others.



Key focus areas

The key focus areas of the framework identify what is important and needed for effective lived experience workforce development and to maximise the benefits of lived experience work for people, accessing services, working in lived experience roles, colleagues and organisations.

The key focus areas are:

1. Understanding and defining lived experience roles
2. Organisational commitment
3. Workplace culture
4. Diversity and inclusion
5. Human resources policies and practices
6. Professional development and training
7. Ongoing development



Understanding and defining lived experience roles

Understanding and defining roles is essential for managers and organisations to build an effective lived experience workforce. High-level understanding and clear definition of roles is evident when the lived experience workforce is well-defined, diverse and supported to be authentic.

What does emerging best practice in understanding and defining roles look like?

- Exposure to lived experience concepts, research, leaders and work
- Develop a network of organisations building a lived experience workforce to encourage mutual learning
- Provide clear position descriptions
- Acknowledge unique cultural differences and the value of specialisations
- Understand that lived experience work should never be involved either explicitly or implicitly in coercive or restrictive practice

Benefits of having a clear understanding and well-defined lived experience workforce:

- Increased understanding of how best to design, utilise and support lived experience workers
- Motivation to ensure lived experience practices are authentic and well-supported
- A more effective lived experience workforce
- A more diverse lived experience workforce with greater access to people from diverse cultural backgrounds and with diverse experiences, orientation and identification
- Lived experience work is understood for its unique contribution in building relationship/rapport with people accessing services in a more equitable way
- Lived experience work is supported to be authentic

Respecting and valuing lived experience in the mental health workforce is broader than designated lived experience roles.

Organisational commitment

Organisational commitment includes the philosophical and financial commitment made by organisations. This commitment is reflected in both the workplace culture and human resources policies and practice.

Organisational commitment is increased by greater exposure to lived experience roles/concepts that in turn increase understanding and perceived value of lived experience roles.

What does emerging best practice in organisational commitment look like?

- Management actively champions lived experience roles to ensure uniqueness is protected
- Lived experience positions are continually created, including lived experience leadership roles with the potential for impact
- Sufficient numbers of lived experience roles are developed to allow the work to be embedded (not an add-on)
- Ongoing and adequately resourced commitment to lived experience workforce
- Value of lived experience is included in the mission statement/core values of the organisation

Benefits of organisational commitment

- Enhanced recovery orientation and more person-directed services
- Organisation develops/demonstrates a willingness to be adaptable, flexible and open to change
- Integrity of lived experience roles are maintained
- The lived experience workforce is sustainable and valued across the organisation
- Organisation is seen as a leader of lived experience practice
- People accessing services see their lived experience as valued by the organisation

Key focus areas

Workplace culture

Workplace culture is determined by the attitudes and beliefs of people in the organisation. A culture that views lived experience as unique, valuable and essential allows the roles to be meaningfully embedded.

What does emerging best practice in workplace culture look like?

- Prepare and plan before and after employing lived experience, including promotion of the value of roles at all levels of the organisation
- The value of lived experience work and perspectives is actively promoted by senior and executive management
- Championing of lived experience occurs at all levels of the organisation
- Lived experience workers are understood and valued across all levels of the organisation
- Open communication and ongoing training to develop and maintain mutual understanding between lived experience workers and non-lived experience roles
- Effective collaboration and co-production between lived experience workers and non-lived experience roles
- Whole-of-workplace strategies prioritise the wellbeing of all employees
- People in non-lived experience roles are safe to disclose lived experience and feel comfortable to do so

Benefits for workplace culture

- Mutual understanding and respect between lived experience and non-lived experience roles
- Lived experience workers are understood, valued and supported
- Greater work satisfaction, feelings of support, value and belonging for all employees
- Person-directed and recovery-orientated practice is strengthened

Diversity and inclusion

Because lived experience workers work with people from diverse cultures and experiences, it's important the lived experience workforce includes people from diverse cultures and experiences. To do this effectively, organisations need to respect and show understanding of diverse perspectives and needs and embrace a variety of unique contributions.

What does emerging best practice in diversity and inclusion look like?

- Acknowledging that Western concepts of 'mental health' are not shared across all cultures. Building a culturally inclusive workforce to ensure different ideas and concepts are embraced, encouraged and valued
- Preparing, educating and communicating with the workplace to welcome and understand roles from diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences
- Ensuring the workplace is flexible and committed to meeting the needs of different cultures and diverse experiences by promoting policies and practices that are respectful and considered
- The lived experience workforce includes different cultures and experiences relevant to the people accessing services
- Reasonable adjustments including accessibility are addressed and readily available
- The organisation acknowledges the impacts of trauma, previous experiences of marginalisation and respects the needs of staff to respond to cultural commitments and community/family responsibilities

Benefits of diversity and inclusion

- Culturally safe/respectful organisation with increased sensitivity and kindness
- Decrease in unplanned leave for cultural reasons and less fear in asking for time-off
- Lived experience workforce is culturally inclusive and includes people from diverse backgrounds, orientations, identification
- Traditional practices are given a place alongside western medical treatment and perspectives
- Lived experience workers better represent and respond to the cultural diversity of service users
- Acknowledging the important role of connection to land, community, family and spirituality. Demonstrating good cultural understanding and building connections/respect within the community
- Greater retention of culturally diverse workforce
- Improved connections and relationships with local diverse communities and cultures

Human resources policies and practices

The role of human resources policy and organisational process is key to an effective lived experience workforce. Policy and practice need to be aligned with values that support and maintain an effective lived experience workforce. Policy and practice are tangible outcomes of commitment by organisations and help formalise and maintain accepting workplace culture.

The potential for lived experience involvement/designated lived experience roles in human resources may assist in supporting lived experience workforce development and promoting a workplace that supports anyone who has a lived experience.

What does emerging best practice in human resources policy and practice look like?

- Policies and practices support the value and uniqueness of lived experience work including no lived experience involvement with restrictive or coercive practices
- Lived experience-led or co-produced training for the whole organisation, including at induction, assists to increase understanding and embed lived experience roles
- Lived experience leaders help guide lived experience workforce development
- Suitable recruitment processes and job descriptions informed by lived experience concepts and leaders are used
- Lived experience leadership roles at any level of the organisation are held by people with a deep understanding of lived experience work and concepts, not just an individual lived experience perspective
- Lived experience workers receive appropriate salary and adequate work hours for their role
- Reasonable adjustments are openly acknowledged as part of the legal rights of all employees

Benefits of lived experience-friendly human resources policy and practice

- Lived experience work is valued and lived experience roles can work from their unique perspective
- Improved role clarity and understanding of lived experience work
- Mutual understanding, respect and collaboration between lived experience and non-lived experience roles
- Employing the right person for the job based on the appropriate skills and knowledge
- Increased job satisfaction, feelings of support, value and belonging for all
- Improved understanding of legislation and rights
- Lower turnover of staff
- Increase in organisational knowledge that cannot be taught through traditional learning channels

Professional development and training

Key to developing and sustaining a strong lived experience workforce are opportunities to develop, define, refine, and clarify the knowledge and skills needed to be effective in lived experience roles.

What does emerging best practice in professional development and training look like?

- Appropriate and timely supervision is provided, including lived experience supervision
- Opportunities for career progression within lived experience roles
- Opportunities for lived experience are provided for coaching, sharing and learning
- Access to role specific training and traineeships at various levels of education, including certificates through to research higher degrees
- Networking, communities of practice/conferences are available to lived experience

Benefits of professional development and training

- Lived experience workforce is well-supported
- Strong role clarity is provided for lived experience
- Higher skilled, purposeful, self-directed, reflective and ethical lived experience workforce
- Strong networks with other lived experience and organisations employing lived experience
- Opportunities for cross-fertilisation and collaboration across the sector

Key focus areas

Ongoing development

While much has been learned and achieved, the lived experience worker is still developing and there are areas of consideration for ongoing, sustainable workforce development.

What does emerging best practice in ongoing development look like?

- Lived experience leadership roles in all relevant organisations including funding bodies
- Lived experience roles across all levels of organisations
- Lived experience on boards, tender and recruitment panels, induction process and committees
- Increased funding targeted at developing the lived experience workforce
- KPIs in contracts to ensure adequate lived experience involvement
- An independent and adequately resourced lived experience peak body
- Ongoing and effective promotion of lived experience workforce
- Development of award wages and other industrial issues addressed
- Mentoring and formal networks created to allow resource and knowledge sharing between organisations committed to lived experience work
- Training and specific supervision for supervisors of lived experience workers
- Additional lived experience specific qualifications for various points of career progression
- More lived experience role specific training focusing on the unique features of lived experience roles, must be lived experience-led and delivered
- Increased lived experience leadership/co-production of research and dedicated funding for lived experience research
- Targeted positions for lived experience researchers, teachers/lecturers and engagement officers
- Lived experience is identified as desirable and valued within all roles, not just designated roles
- Pro-active policies to ensure cultural diversity within the lived experience workforce
- Exploring language and shared definitions of 'mental health' that are culturally appropriate
- Significant development of lived experience roles and lived experience training in regional, rural and remote areas
- Further development of designated lived experience roles within sectors outside mental health

Benefits of ongoing development

- Lived experience has a stronger and more consistently heard voice and given greater priority in budgets, planning and funding
- Organisations are more motivated and equipped to progress effective lived experience worker development
- Ongoing career progression for lived experience and organisations retaining highly skilled lived experience workers
- Full potential of lived experience explored, leading to increased benefits for organisations, colleagues and people accessing services
- Increased lived experience roles in regional/rural/remote areas
- Increased access to support/education/best practice
- Culturally appropriate policies, language and definitions are created for improved diversity and inclusion
- Diverse needs are met within a culture of safety



To view the full framework and support resources, scan this QR code or download from the Queensland Mental Health Commission's website: qmhc.qld.gov.au/engage-enable/lived-experience-led-reform/peer-workforce



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