

Impact Case Study

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

Introduction and background

Within Australia's workforce are many who have, or have had, significant health challenges. These include people who experience mental health challenges.

Increasingly, businesses and industries are engaging Lived Experience/Peer Workers: people who have experience of living with and recovery from mental distress who are able to apply their knowledge effectively to support people currently accessing services and create work cultures which are safe, accepting and supportive.

Meaningful inclusion of lived experience perspectives in the workplace is an important factor in delivering best-practice mental health service outcomes. It is key to achieving mental health reform worldwide.

However, this workforce is still emerging, often poorly understood and under-supported.

The need for supportive work environments is greater than ever in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, which has left many people with varying degrees of uncertainty, anxiety and mental distress.

Public health researcher Dr Louise Byrne has a deep knowledge of the issues relevant to 'lived experience' mental health employment, informed by her own experiences. She has held numerous designated lived experience positions across the mental health and higher education sectors, including the first full-time lived experience mental health academic role in Australia.

Dr Byrne has also conducted lived experience research under a Fulbright scholarship at Yale University in the US and had an expert advisory role to the Queensland Mental Health Commission in 2015.

Dr Byrne brought her considerable knowledge and experience to the Queensland Framework for the Development of the Mental Health Lived Experience Workforce project.

The research was undertaken on behalf of the Queensland Mental Health Commission (QMHC), to develop state and national guidelines for the effective development of the lived experience workforce, including an emphasis on how the workforce could be engaged across diverse settings.

The research

Dr Byrne and her RMIT research team – Dr Lena Wang, Ms Helena Roenfeldt and Dr Melissa Chapman – used data and research findings collected worldwide over 12 years to develop the Framework.

Qualitative and quantitative research methods were applied to the global data, using a multidisciplinary approach which spanned mental health, public health, nursing, psychiatry, psychology, and management disciplines. An expert advisory group and focus groups provided feedback throughout the Framework's development.

Feedback was also provided by cultural experts identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Culturally and Linguistically diverse (CALD) and LGBTQIA+ to ensure the Framework provided appropriate guidance for a diverse workforce. Leilani Darwin, Head of Australia's first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre, provided significant input.

The research explored the full lifecycle of the lived experience workforce – from recruitment, implementation and retention, to overall global needs and the broader implications for colleagues and leadership within and beyond the mental health sector.

Funding support and/or institutional support

This Queensland Framework for the Development of the Mental Health Lived Experience Workforce project was funded by QMHC.

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What's next...

Project outcomes

The project resulted in the Queensland Framework for the Development of the Mental Health Lived Experience Workforce, published in 2019 by QMHC.

The framework is a toolkit for embedding people with lived experience of mental health challenges into public, private and NGO workplaces. It shows diverse organisations how to establish governance, policies and practices that will support sustainable, effective growth of the lived experience workforce.

Guidance includes high-level policy considerations, practical actions and additional resources, with specific sections aimed at funders/policymakers, organisations/employers, and lived experience leaders/workers across all sectors.

Publications

The Framework documents were published by QMHC.

- Queensland Framework for the Development of the Mental Health Lived Experience Workforce
- Lived Experience Workforce Framework summary
- Lived Experience Workforce Framework poster

Awards

Dr Byrne has received several industry and academic awards including:

- 2019: The Mental Health Services Award of Australia and New Zealand in the Early Career Research Category for Best Practice, The Mental Health Services Learning Network
- 2015: Queensland Mental Health Week Achievement Award, Individual Award
- 2013: Queensland Mental Health Week Achievement Award, Organisational Award

Media

The research has been featured on respected national media, including:

- Radio National 'Life Matters'.
- As a panel member on ABC television's Q&A.
- A 2017 TEDx talk by Dr Byrne.

Speaking events

Dr Byrne has been an invited speaker or keynote at thirteen regional, nine national and five international conferences/events, including a keynote address at the 2019 TheMHS conference.

Further research

Following her PhD findings, QMHC funded Dr Byrne to conduct the research project, "Identifying barriers to change: The lived experience worker as a valued member of the mental health team".

This project can be viewed at ResearchGate.

Overview of the impact

The Framework's impact includes:

- The design and recruitment of new lived experience roles at QMHC to establish a Queensland mental health consumer peak organisation.
- Metro South Addiction and Mental Health Services' use of the guidelines in the development of their lived experience workforce, the largest within a public mental health service across Australia.
- The growth of state-wide networks, including the QLD Lived Experience Workforce Network (QLEWN) and Peer Participation in Mental Health Services (PPIMS) Network.
- The 'Open Arms' Veterans and Families counselling service successfully piloted a program to incorporate lived experience roles, with the Federal Minister for Veterans Affairs announcing in late 2018 that lived experience roles are now planned for Open Arms services nationally.

Professor John Mendoza, the inaugural Chair of the Australian Government's National Advisory Council on Mental Health and the CEO of the Mental Health Council of Australia, tweeted on 24/10/2019 that the Framework was:



The wider implementation of lived experience concepts, strategies and roles is anticipated to decrease stigma and encourage more inclusive and accepting workplace cultures, particularly in relation to mental health.

Next steps

The success of the Framework led to Dr Byrne and team being selectively engaged by the National Mental Health Commission to develop the National Lived Experience Workforce Development Guidelines. The Guidelines are a key national reform initiative from the Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan and will be the first national policy document for the emerging workforce.