

Impact Case Study

The National Lived Experience Workforce Development Guidelines

Introduction



People employed specifically to use their lived experience of mental health challenges in their job are uniquely placed to support others through shared experiences and understanding.

In the mental health sector, lived experience roles help service users negotiate the complex mental health system, assisting in the design and delivery of more accessible services that reflect people's needs.

Although meaningful and effective employment of an LE workforce is increasingly seen as best practice, LE roles are still poorly understood and under-supported. To achieve mental health reform goals, this emerging workforce requires guidelines, strategies and support from advocates in leadership.

Background



The Australian Mental Health Commission states “a thriving mental health Lived Experience (LE) workforce is considered a vital component of quality, recovery-focused mental health services”.

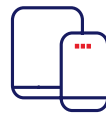
Victoria's Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System 2021 report (<https://finalreport.rcvmhs.vic.gov.au>) recommended significant changes to mental health care models, laws, services and accountability. However, the path to change and its implementation were less clear.

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.

In 2019, Dr Byrne led the Queensland Framework for the Development of the Mental Health Lived Experience Workforce project, for the Queensland Mental Health Commission, to create guidelines for the effective development of the LE workforce.

The success of the Queensland Framework contributed to the Mental Health Commission inviting Dr Byrne and her team to lead the development of national best practice guidelines.

The Research



The National Lived Experience Workforce Development Guidelines were informed by Dr Byrne's (then) 13-year program of research, developed after extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including LE workers, health and government staff, employers, management and colleagues within diverse roles and organisational types across the sector.

Key components:

- The Guidelines explain the uniqueness, history and value of this work and its informing principles
- They provide practical guidance and strategies in the short to medium term to ensure collective LE workforces are developed within settings that understand, value and support the work to be sustainable and effective
- They emphasise the importance of diversity and inclusion, and proactive strategies to achieve a more diverse LE workforce
- In the medium to long term, the Guidelines' priorities will contribute to the necessary transformational change to reform mental health care.

“We found a significant change in attitudes after people were exposed to the evidence [in the National Guidelines] and an increase in the confidence in the work that we were doing.” ~ The Alfred Hospital

The guidelines and companion documents will be expanded and updated as knowledge of this field deepens.

Organisations can use this suite of documents to:

- understand the potential of well-supported and understood LE roles
- understand the requirements for employees to be successful in LE roles
- have a common language to discuss concepts
- develop a thriving LE workforce.



Project Outcomes



Launched in 2021, The National Lived Experience Workforce Development Guidelines and related documents are available at:

- <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/lived-experience/lived-experience-workforces/peer-experience-workforce-guidelines>

Dr Byrne speaks about LE and the National Guidelines at events, conferences and webinars across the health sector, including:

- Yale University's 'Let's Lead' sessions for LE workers (US) https://medicine.yale.edu/psychiatry/prch/train_consult/academy/home/
- Lived Experience Workforce Guidelines Masterclasses; nine sessions hosted by MHLEEN/PHN including:
 - 20 May 2022 <https://youtu.be/pY7VNgY-GuM>
 - 30 May 2022 <https://youtu.be/-9LB0oe-AFY>

Headspace, Southport, Qld, has also acknowledged Dr Byrne's work and its role in informing the development of Headspace's LE Workforce framework.

Mind Australia's extensive Lived Experience Strategy was informed and guided by Louise's work and in alignment with the National Lived Experience Workforce Development Guidelines as discussed at a webinar on July 11, 2023:

- <https://www.mindaustralia.org.au/webinar-mind%E2%80%99s-lived-experience-strategy-reimagining-culture-leadership-and-workforce>

Funding Support and/or Institutional Support



The National Lived Experience Workforce Development Guidelines were a direct action of the Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan and signed off by all levels of Government.

<https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/Monitoring-and-Reporting/Fifth-Plan>

Overview of the Impact



Organisations and institutions that have used the National Guidelines express the value of Dr Byrne's work in helping them to develop their LE workforce.

The Alfred Hospital, Melbourne

"The National guidelines assisted us when designing our two Director of Lived/Living Experience (Consumer and Carer) roles and [...] workforce structures that were needed to grow and support an emerging discipline.

Using the National Guidelines [...] also provided the broader workforce with the confidence that the service was making decisions based on best practice evidence and building the acceptance of the LE workforce and expertise. We were able to provide education to the wider executive team [...] about the National Guidelines."

Wesley Mission Queensland

"[Dr Byrne's] work has had a significant impact on Wesley Mission Queensland. It is proud to have implemented this work in full, both spirit and intended outcomes, and is now moving forward with a solid foundation proved to be effective. This is informing work for other Queensland NGOs as they begin to formulate LE Workforce Development."

~ Liz Asser, Project Officer – Lived Experience Workforce Plan

The Department of Health

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Division of the Department of Health advises that it will use the National Guidelines and companion documents to provide guidance for mental health services. The Lived Experience branch has approached Dr Byrne for advice on implementation.

Next Steps



Mind's plans for continuing to embed LE into its systems include recruiting for an LE Executive role, forming a Project Working Group to drive implementation of LE informed recruitment and HR policies, and widescale and multi-layered strategies to facilitate workplace culture aligned with LE principles and practice.

In 2023, the Federal government announced \$8.5m in funding to "support those with a lived experience of mental health to shape the policies and programs that affect them" – a key recommendation of the National Guidelines.

This sum represents \$900,000 for Lived Experience Australia's continuing research, \$100,000 to establish a stakeholder forum, and \$7.5 million for establishing and operating two independent national mental health lived experience peak bodies – one representing consumers, the other representing carers, families and kin.

