

Peer Work Leadership Statement of Intent

A National Professional Association for Mental Health Peer Workers

Peer work leaders from Queensland, Victoria and NSW and colleagues from the USA participated in an International Initiative for Mental Health Leadership match in Brisbane on 27 & 28 February 2017.

The Australian peer work leaders resolved to issue a '**Statement of Intent**' that would communicate our intention to form a national professional association for the Australian mental health consumer peer workforce. We feel that such statement is necessary to provide the focus for national consultations to occur that will lead to the development of a peer-run organisation that can support and sustain the development of the peer workforce across all sectors.

The 'Statement of Intent' is supported by the international peer work leaders who attended the match – Gary J Parker, Executive Director Kansas Consumer Advisory Council for Adult Mental Health and Sherry Tucker, Executive Director Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network. Both Kansas and Georgia offer certified peer specialist training, certification and support.

Rationale

A national peer work organisation is essential for our growing workforce and it would aim to support and develop our profession in similar ways to other professional bodies such as the Australian Psychological Society, the Australian Association of Social Work, Occupational Therapy Australia and the Australian College of Nursing.

Peer workers must lead the development of models of peer practice, so that our work retains its authenticity, mutuality and reciprocity in a diverse and expanding range of services and employment.

Professional certification of the peer workforce in both Kansas and Georgia allows peer specialists to claim Medicaid reimbursements for peer support services. In a similar way a national professional association of peer workers may allow the workforce to actively participate in the commissioning of mental health funding through Primary Health Networks (PHNs).

History

- The **4th National Mental Health Plan (2009)** included a number of strategies which supported the Peer Workforce including the establishing a certified peer specialist workforce. Following the release of the 4th National mental Health Plan there was a Peer Work Forum held in 2011 led by Community Mental Health Australia, National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum and the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council. The idea of a peer workforce forum began as a discussion between the NSW Consumer Advisory Group (CAG) and the Mental Health Coordinating Council.

- In response to the 4th National Plan, the **National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum (NMHCCF)** released a position statement with the action, ***“Develop supported networks and strengthen leadership of the mental health consumer and carer identified workforce.”***

Under the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Identified Workforce Strategy, a formal national network of consumer and carer identified workers should be established to provide a support mechanism for local support networks and a forum for sector development.”

(Supporting and developing the mental health consumer and carer identified workforce – a strategic approach to recovery – A position statement of the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum, 2010)

- The **National Peer Workforce Forum** held in Sydney in February 2011 identified that the establishment of a peer worker professional association as *‘the next possible step for Peer Workforce Development.’*

(Final Report on the National Mental Health Peer Workforce Forum, May 2011, p.12)

- **Peers Australia.** In August 2011, at the TheMHS Conference workshop, Peers Australia: A National Association for the Promotion of Peer Work’ held a workshop:

“Peers Australia is a peer lead initiative to ascertain and, if relevant, develop a professional association to promote peer work in mental health service provision and recovery, and to support peer work through the establishment of national practice standards and professional networks. Peers Australia has developed eight objectives associated with the purposes of the organisation: advocacy, research, training, quality, standards, promotion, support and professional development.”

(Peers Australia: A National Association for the promotion of Peer Work. TheMHS Conference 2011)

- Recommendation from **Health Workforce Australia’s Mental Health Peer Workforce Study (2014):**

“Establish National Mental Health Peer Workforce Development Guidelines for use in a range of settings inclusive of:

- Agreed definitions.
- Key roles and functions.
- Guiding principles and a code of ethics.
- National capabilities for peer workers and supervisors (including diversity).
- Principles for employment and reasonable adjustment.
- Training and support.
- Practical resources.
- Supervision, coaching, and mentoring.
- Dissemination/implementation approach.”

(Health Workforce Australia [2014]: Mental Health Peer Workforce Study, p22)

- **National Mental Health Commission**

“Mental Health Peer Work Development and Promotion

The continued development and promotion of the mental health peer workforce remains a priority for the Commission and the Australian Government. Mental Health Peer Work has been an area of focus for the National Mental Health Commission since our establishment in 2012. The development and promotion of the mental health peer

workforce has been recommended as part of our 2013 National Report Card and the 2014 Contributing Lives, Thriving Communities report.

The Summary of Actions within the Australian Government Response to Recommendations to the Review of Mental Health Programmes and Services states:

“The Commonwealth...recognises the value of a mental health peer workforce, and will explore the inclusion of peer workers and other low intensity service providers as part of the development and trial of a stepped care approach. The National Mental Health Commission has also progressed important work in this area and will be looked to in building upon existing work and further promoting the mental health peer workforce as an important component of quality, recovery-focused mental health services.””

(from Website)

- **NSW Mental Health Commission**

- **“Developing the peer workforce**

- Peer worker roles are integral to the concept of lived experience at all levels – including peer support to consumers and carers, peer mentoring, peer leadership, policy development and research. People with lived experience of mental illness should be part of all workforces that deliver services to client groups with a significant number of people who experience mental illness.

Further action is required to build a supportive infrastructure to ensure the peer workforce is embedded in the culture of service delivery to people who experience mental illness. Services and agencies need to consider how to attract a mix of peer leaders and new staff, create support structures, develop career pathways and support training and development specific to this workforce. This would include access to training such as the Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work within the first year of paid employment for all peer workers with government and community-managed organisations. Peer workers should also have access to formal supervision or mentoring by a person with lived experience.

Creating training, development and supervisory structures for an emerging workforce can challenge services in relation to the initial investment. This should be seen as an opportunity for sharing resources across the sector, not a deterrent.

Actions

8.2.1 NSW Health will implement the Framework for the NSW Public Mental Health Consumer Workforce

8.2.2 In developing the NSW Mental Health Workforce Plan, as described in Investing in our workforce, p. 97, NSW Health, in consultation with the NSW Mental Health Commission, will incorporate the needs of the peer workforce informed by the lived experience of people with mental illness. This would include:

- education, training and accreditation of peer workers
- the full spectrum of roles that peer workers may fill (such as educators, support workers, advocates and managers)

- recognition and integration of peer workers as team members in the delivery of mental health services
 - the governance structures that will be required to support peer workers in the workplace, including pathways for career progression.
- 8.2.3 Family and Community Services will develop peer worker roles in its front-line services. This could be through a partnership with one or more community-managed organisations which have a developed peer workforce.
- 8.2.4 Benchmarks must also be set to stipulate peer worker numbers across the public mental health system, the community-managed sector and the broader government service sector, including housing, disability and justice.”

(NSW Mental Health Commission (2014). *Living Well: A Strategic Plan for Mental Health in NSW*. pp101-102)

Mission

The professional association for peer worker will set the standards for certification, education, training and practice in peer work.

It will promote and regulate the peer work profession in Australia and represent peer workers by ensuring strong and sustainable development of the profession, the maintenance of accountability and the meeting of benchmarked standards.

It will enable peer workers to work collaboratively to lead the transformation of mental health and human services into recovery-oriented and trauma informed places that promote the strengths, hopes and dreams of each individual.

It will seek to develop collaborative and equal, partnerships with other professionals who work in mental health and human services.

The professional association will seek to always empower consumers of mental health services to participate in the development, governance and operation of mental health and human services. We will help promote hope and recovery that is led by each consumer, individually.

Objectives

- Promote the profession of peer work
- Establish, monitor and improve practice and ethical standards
- Contribute to the development of peer work knowledge and research
- Develop, review and accredit the education standards for peer work
- Advocate for personal choice, social inclusion, opportunity and the development of stigma free communities, workplaces and services.
- Drive the transformation of mental health and human services to be truly recovery-oriented and trauma informed
- Promote and facilitate members’ professional development and life-long learning
- Represent and advocate for the interests of members as a group

(Adapted from the Australian Social Work Association’s Objectives)

Funding

The establishment of the professional association for peer workers will require funding support from government, and this should be from state and federal sources. Peer workers

are employed in state funded public hospitals and national and state funded community and peer run organisations. Peer workers are also employed in private mental health settings.

As the workforce and memberships grows subscriptions will make up an increasing proportion of the associations funding.

First steps

1. Promotion of the 'Statement of Intent' through the IIMHL website and IIMHL Updates.
2. Identification of key stakeholders in each state and territory.
3. Formation of a steering group to progress consultations and planning for the association.
4. Securing funding to hold a 2nd National Peer Workforce Forum.
5. At the forum, Peer work leaders from each state and territory will meet to establish the professional association, its charter and its governance.

Call for support

The Peer Work leadership match asks for the support of IIMHL delegates, Mental Health Commissions, governments and services for the establishment of a national professional association for peer workers.

IIMHL Match participants:

The Lived-experience Workforce: A Look at Diversity and Breadth of Roles that Lived-experience Workers are Making Their Own

- Eschleigh Balzamo - General Manager, BrookRed
- Jenna Roberts - Consumer Participation Officer, St Vincent's Hospital
- Sage Green - Acting CEO, Being
- Tim Heffernan – Mental Health Peer Coordinator, South Eastern NSW PHN (former Chair, New South Wales Public Mental Health Consumer Worker Committee)
- Sherry Tucker - Executive Director, Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network
- Gary Parker - Executive Director, Kansas Consumer Advisory Council for Adult Mental Health