

**Pathways to
Peer Support
Work Resource**

Meeting demand: bolstering the mental health peer workforce in regional and remote Australia

A 2018 inquiry found that people living in rural and remote communities are impacted by mental health conditions at the same rate as major cities, yet face significant barriers to seeking care.

The development of the lived/living experience workforce, to complement the work of those with learnt experience of care, requires action.

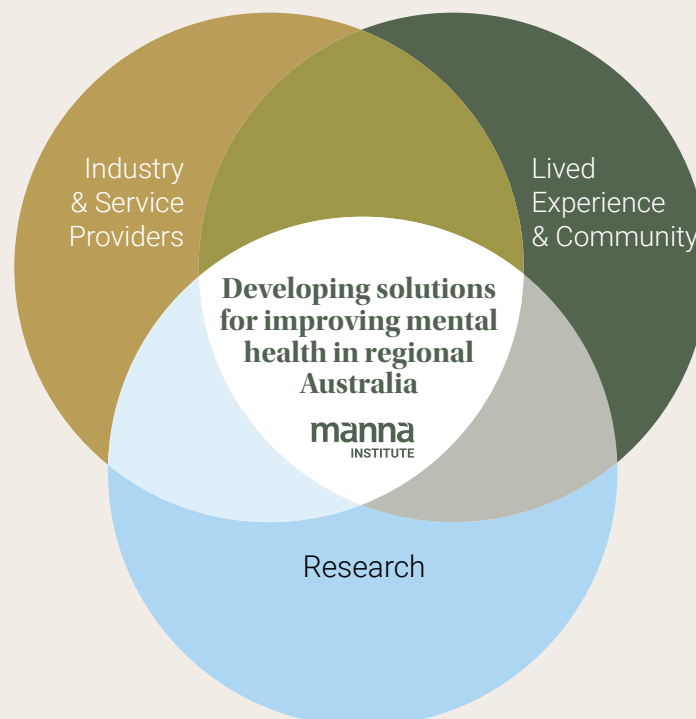
Manna Institute's ambition is to become Australia's leading research hub for regional mental health research and translation. Our research goal is to work with rural and regional communities to address complex mental health challenges, reduce morbidity and mortality, and alleviate pressure on health systems. Improving mental health has the potential to change

lives; boost living standards, social engagement, and connectedness; and drive economic productivity in the long-term.

One of our key research themes is examining existing and emerging workforce development across regional Australia. One workforce that our research will examine is the growing professional peer support workforce.

This research collaborative will focus on ways to support current workforce needs in regional Australia to strengthen future awareness of how to attract and retain workers.

At the core of this research collaborative is inclusivity, through meaningful collaboration with policy makers and all the workforces that deliver professional community health services.



Our goal is co-design strategies and research collaborations that centre on lived and learnt experience voices. Whilst the needs of priority populations are paramount, we also seek to understand the unique intersections of working and living in regional Australia and how this can strengthen professional experience.

¹Bishop, L., Ransom, A., Laverty, M., & Gale, L. (2017). Mental health in remote and rural communities. Canberra: Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia

Understand the Peer Workforce in Australia

A working definition of peer support

Peer support is a non-clinical alternative support based on mutual lived and living experience(s) of mental health challenges or suicidal ideation. Peer support services are increasingly offered within mental health and suicide prevention/postvention services by individuals who are trained to skilfully use their own personal experiences and the knowledge gained through their recovery in supporting others with comparable experiences as part of their recovery.

One-on-one peer assistance in mental health services is showing increasing promise, according to the available evidence. At the same time there are several studies that also point to benefits for peer workers choosing this as a career.

Lived experience leading the way; Peer support in mental health (2010) draws on the definition of peer support outlined by Bradstreet (2006) who points to **3 types of peer support**:

1. informal/unintentional and naturally occurring peer support
2. participation in consumer or peer-run groups/programs
3. and the use of consumers/service users as paid providers of services sometimes referred to as intentional peer support, peer professionals or peer specialists

Peer support services are effective in encouraging people to move from “patienthood to personhood”

Benefits include: decreasing hospitalisation and mental health service usage, reduction of symptoms of mental distress, increases in quality of life, improvements in social support and accommodation/housing, increased rate of volunteering and employment, less reliance on benefits, improvements in physical health (when this was targeted) and increases in use of recreational and community agencies. Peer workers have also been used successfully in education, evaluation and training roles. All roles may lead to the decrease of stigma as people in services and communities see consumers contributing to services in a positive way’.

“Walk the walk and talk the talk”

A summary of some peer support activities in IIMHL countries’ (2010)



²Schlichthorst, M., Ozols, I., Reifels, L. *et al.* Lived experience peer support programs for suicide prevention: a systematic scoping review. *Int J Ment Health Syst* **14**, 65 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13033-020-00396-1>

What type of jobs are available for the professional peer workforce?

Peer workers are most often employed in either formal peer support roles as mental health peer workers, working directly with consumers or carers, or as peer advocates, advocating for consumers or carers on an individual level and/or for system improvement. Peer workers can work across the mental health sector as well as within suicide prevention, disability, housing, and community services. Peer workers can work in any environment where people with a lived experience might engage with a service.

Peer worker and carer peer worker occupations are mostly in Australian organisations, such as the Department of Health, State, territory-based health departments, and other not for profit organisations.

The minimum salary range identified by the research suggests peer workers receive an average of AUD \$66,000 per year with several senior peer worker roles being remunerated upwards of AUD \$106,000.

Below are a few examples of the growing number of specialty peer roles.



Non-Government Organisation (NGO)

- Perinatal mental health
- Community mental health
- Volunteer mental health
- Volunteer suicide prevention
- Research and Policy
- Advocacy



Government

- Community mental health
- Mental health inpatient units
- [Suicide Prevention Outreach Team](#)
- Perinatal mental health
- Mental Health Intensive Care Unit
- [Peer Navigator](#)
- Peer Educator

Are there ways to get formal qualifications as a peer worker?

Yes, in addition to developing insight and capacity to reflect on becoming a peer worker, individuals can also seek out training opportunities to become a peer worker.

There may be smart and skilled fee-free Scholarships available

- Certificate IV in mental health peer work
- Diploma of Mental health

Are there many jobs available?

Currently in Australia the sector is experiencing an increase in peer worker jobs, most of the roles highlight a desirability to have a certificate IV in mental health peer work to gain employment, although many organisations are willing to employ individuals with the condition that you obtain the certificate IV within the first year of employment.

People with an interest in peer work should check the criteria for the peer role interested in, if you are in doubt contact the hiring manager listed on the job advertisement as they are often happy to discuss the role and any reasonable adjustments that they may be able to make for the successful candidate.

Is there scope for career progression?

Most Government and NGOs that have a peer workforce have begun to recognise the need for career progression and leadership opportunities. There are a growing number of senior peer worker roles and peer manager roles. Most state and federal governments also offer lived experienced roles that focus on advocacy and policy development. This is a good question to explore in an interview.

As a provider of services, how can I engage people who access services who want to utilise their lived experience to help others?

The Australian Government National Health Commission has developed a set of *Lived Experience Workforce Guidelines*. The Guidelines are primarily intended to inform decision makers, including employers and funding bodies and to support change across the mental health sector by improving understanding of the benefits of the Lived Experience workforce and by supporting employers to assess their local readiness and prioritise activities that support successful implementation.

You can view and download the National Lived Experience (Peer) Workforce Development Guidelines and companion documents by [visiting their website](#).

Where can I find more Peer Worker Resources

Australian Resources

- [NSW Health Mental Health Peer Workers](#)
- [Australian Government – Peer workforce role in mental health and suicide prevention \(PDF\)](#)
- [Australian Government – Lived Experience Workforce Guidelines](#)
- [Being – Peer Workforce Network](#)
- [TAFE – Mental Health Peer Work Library Services](#)
- [Lived Experience Australia](#)

Education

- [TAFE NSW – Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work](#)
- [SharC – Intentional Peer Support](#)
- [MHCC – Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work](#)
- [MHCC – Peer Leadership Skill Set](#)

Job Postings

- [I Work for NSW](#)
- [Seek](#)

International Resources

- [Scottish Recovery Network](#)
- [National Association of Peer Supporters](#)
- [World Health Organization- Meaningful engagement of people with lived experience of noncommunicable diseases and mental health and neurological conditions](#)

We are building place-based research capacity to improve mental health in regional, rural and remote Australia through the Regional Universities Network.

Would like to collaborate or connect further on this topic?

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