

PEER WORKFORCE:

**A PRACTICAL NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR EMPLOYING
PEOPLE WITH LIVED-LIVING EXPERIENCE OF USING DRUGS
AS HEALTH, HARM REDUCTION AND AOD WORKERS**



Acknowledgment of Country

AIVL acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live and work. We pay our profound respect to Elders past and present. Always was, and always will be Aboriginal land.

We celebrate the stories, culture, wisdom and traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and thank Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are part of the AIVL Network and community for the unique and essential contribution they make to the lives of our people, our environments, our communities and our work.

Acknowledgment of Community

AIVL acknowledges the legacy of the Peers who went before us and those who continue to strive for equity and social justice in the face of criminalisation. We reaffirm our commitment to work alongside our community of people who use drugs, challenging stigma and discrimination in all their manifestations.

What is the National Framework?

The Peer Workforce: A Practical National Framework for Employing People With Lived-Living Experience of Using Drugs as Health, Harm Reduction and Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Workers is a guide for organisations thinking about or already employing peer workers and people with lived-living experience of using drugs.

"Our sector should be a safe space for people who use drugs."

Stakeholder 1, National Peak Organisation.

The National Framework uses harm reduction principles, evidence, peer expertise and experience. The information and guidance will be useful for organisations including:

- AOD services.
- Harm reduction services.
- Community health services with harm reduction and AOD programs.
- Lived-living experience teams and organisations.
- Research centres.
- Peak organisations.

Shared experiences foster community, and community keeps us safe, in a world with so much discrimination.

IZZY



How Was the National Framework Developed?

Australia's national peer-led peak Drug User Organisation, AIVL, in partnership with its network of state and territory drug user organisations, the National Centre for Education and Training in Addiction (NCETA) and other stakeholders, have developed this Framework.

People with first-hand experience working in peer organisations and the peer workforce have led the development of the information and guidance provided in it.



What Do Peer Workers Do?

Peer workers and people with lived-living experience of using drugs are diverse and skilled. They have been vital to the success of Australia's HIV and hepatitis C responses and have played significant roles in shaping harm reduction and AOD policies, services and programs.

Peer workers may currently use drugs or have used drugs in the past. They work in roles that range from frontline services to leadership and governance, and in harm reduction, AOD, health and social services, research institutes and government departments.

Peer workers with lived-living experience of using drugs are people who:

- are recognised by their community as having the same or similar concerns and experience and whose experience of intense stigma and discrimination related to their illicit drug use has changed their sense of self and/or their world view.
- intentionally use their lived-living experience to benefit their community of people who use illicit drugs, while nurturing inclusivity and equity.
- are safe and supported to share their experience in roles that range from frontline services to leadership and governance.

Peer workers harness their unique and specific expertise, knowledge, and experience to benefit organisations, services, teams and the communities they serve. Peer workers have led organisations, programs and services to:

- Prevent and respond to blood-borne viruses, injecting-related harms and overdose.
- Provide safer using peer education, referral and support, new injecting equipment, drug checking and drug treatment.
- Develop and advocate for drug law reform, respond to stigma and discrimination, improve and innovate services.
- Implement better, safer, more respectful programs and services.

The decades of experience peer-led organisations and peer workers have is increasingly being recognised across the health, harm reduction and AOD sectors. More people are identifying their lived-living experience of using drugs and its importance to their work. More organisations, services and programs are employing peer workers in various positions.

However, the criminalisation, stigmatisation and discrimination often experienced by peer workers with lived-living experience of using drugs is specific, unique and severe. Guidance for how to appropriately support the peer workforce and development of shared understandings of peer work is essential to ensure the safety and effectiveness of peer workers.

Because We Are
Living It.

NIKKAS



Experience matters
It makes us who
we are and
it forms our
identity. No one
can take that from
us!

CHRIS.



Guiding Principles

These guiding principles have been developed by peer workers and people with lived-living experience of using drugs. Peer workers, people with lived-living experience of using drugs and the organisations and services where they are employed, should always strive to understand, support, promote and demonstrate these principles.

Identity

PEER WORKERS' DIVERSITY IS PEER WORKERS' STRENGTH.

Peer workers share the lessons learned from wide-ranging experiences, connections to culture and varied identities with their diverse communities.

PEER WORKERS WORK FROM A FRAMEWORK OF SOCIAL JUSTICE.

Human rights, compassion, equity and self-determination are integral to harm reduction and the work peer workers do to support their communities.

PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS ARE PART OF EVERY COMMUNITY.

People who use drugs come from every culture and ethnicity, and every sexuality and gender, every socioeconomic status, and every city, town, or region.

Leadership & Connection

PEER WORKERS' CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY IS IRREPLACEABLE

People use different drugs in different ways at different times. The drugs used, the contexts in which they are used, the expertise developed with experience, and the language and cultures shared within communities connect peer workers to their peers.

PEER LEADERSHIP IS VITAL

Peer-led organisations and peer leaders have decades of experience to draw on in managing the impacts of criminalisation and supporting the peer workforce.

PEER WORKERS ARE RECOGNISED AS PEERS BY THEIR COMMUNITY

Peer workers speak for their community when their community agrees to their representation. They are not expected to represent communities whose lived-living experience they don't share just as people with other lived-living experience do not represent them.

Equity & Empowerment

PEER WORKERS DESERVE RESPECT AND EQUITY

Peer workers must be given at least the same pay, conditions, opportunities, and respect as people doing similar work.

PEER WORKERS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE INTENTIONALLY

Peer workers have the right to share their experience when they feel safe and believe it is beneficial for their community.

PEER WORKERS DESERVE TO BE HONOURED

The responsibility peer workers take on when identifying with criminalised communities deserves to be respected, honoured, supported and protected.

Importance & Value

PEERS ADD VALUE TO THEIR WORKPLACES

Peer workers have unique knowledge and insights from their lived-living experience that underpins effective advocacy, policies and programs. Peer workers' authentic connection to community adds value and credibility to organisations and teams.

PEER WORKERS' SHARED EXPERIENCE IS UNIQUE AND ESSENTIAL

Shared experience of criminalisation, stigma and discrimination facilitates trust, understanding and honesty between peer workers and their peers.

PEER WORKERS ARE ESSENTIAL TO SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

Peer workers' expertise, connection, capacity and commitment are what makes them essential in positions ranging from frontline services to leadership and governance in harm reduction, alcohol and other drug, and peer-led drug user organisations.

*Experience matters because
it's how we make connections,
build trust and empower people.*

Fiona



What will the National Framework provide?

Australia's peer-led Drug User Organisations have decades of experience to share. Many of the state and territory drug user organisations involved in developing the National Framework are developing or already provide peer workforce programs and guiding information for their local contexts.

The Peer Workforce: National Practical Framework for Employing People With Lived-living Experience of Using Drugs as Health, Harm Reduction and AOD Workers will be available soon.

It will contain information on topics including:

- Preparing organisations for the employment of peer workers.
- Recruitment strategies.
- Peer mentoring, support and supervision.
- Developing policies and procedures.
- Management tips.

If you are interested in receiving a copy of the National Framework, register here to receive a copy as soon as it is available.





The National Peer Workforce Framework is a partnership between AIVL, the national peer-led peak drug user organisation, each of the state and territory peer-led drug user organisations, and the National Centre for Education and Training (NCETA). The Australian Alcohol and Drug Council (AADC), the state and territory peak AOD organisations, and many other researchers, peak organisations with peer workforces, and stakeholders have informed its development.