



Snapshot – WA Country Health Service

WA Country Health Service (WACHS) employed five LE (Peer) Workers in Community Mental Health and Mental Health Inpatient Units in 2019. Initially employed in Bunbury and Kalgoorlie, the program has now expanded to Albany, Broome, and Esperance with other regions to follow. LE (Peer) Workers are also employed at the Safe Place in Kununurra, and LE (Peer) Educators are integral members of the Broome Recovery College. WACHS recently commenced Lived Experience Consultants to provide additional expertise on developing the organisational lived experience agenda. WACHS Peer Support Workers are a mix of consumers Consumer and Carer workers provide consumer, family carer and clinical education, health system navigation, personal skill development, carer support, and care transition support.

People who have accessed Peer Support Workers have reported that they have felt more heard and hopeful and connected with the service on a personal level. Clinical staff note that people are more engaged and proactive with their recovery.

Embedding lived experience perspectives into a tertiary public mental health service has its challenges. Changing organisational structures, culture and historic ways of working, particularly around stigma and professional boundaries is an ongoing process. However organisational readiness and support measures allows WACHS to address these changes across the wider workforce. Actions include:

- ensuring senior management support of a LE (Peer) program with targets included in the Strategic Plan
- identifying allies to challenge outdated and exclusionary attitudes and processes
- providing opportunities for LE (Peer) staff to present on lived experience perspectives at all levels of WACHS
- educating clinical staff and management on the benefits of lived experience engagement
- having multi-faceted management along with team and LE (Peer) supervision systems.

For the Peer Support Workers, actions include:

- Subsidising and supporting Peer Support Workers to gain Certificate IV Mental Health Peer Work
- providing internal Peer to Peer practice reflection and external supervision
- having at least two Peer Support Workers in a team for collegial support and role visibility
- connecting Peer Support Workers with each other as much as possible

WACHS are continuing to improve and refine:

- governance structures to include lived experience within the clinical space,
- professional development and support for line managers of Peer Support workers
- the development of LE (Peer) career pathways from introductory career level to senior management and across WACHS
- attraction and retention strategies for LE (Peer) peer workers within regional, rural and remote communities

WACHS is looking to expand the lived experience workforce to be in all regions, across a variety of roles in clinical spaces and position levels.

