



ACT
Mental Health
Consumer Network

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**Submission: Proposal for a Peer-Led Service
within Mental Health, Justice Health, Alcohol
and Drug Services (MHJHADS)**

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Submission: Proposal for a Peer-Led Service within Mental Health, Justice Health, Alcohol and Drug Services (MHJHADS)

This submission has been prepared by the ACT Mental Health Consumer Network (the Network) in response to the invitation from Mental Health, Justice Health, Alcohol and Drug Services (MHJHADS) to provide feedback to the proposal for a Peer-Led Service within MHJHADS, drafted in partnership with the MHJHADS Peer-Led Service Reference Group for a Peer-Led Service within MHJHADS.

The Network is a consumer-led peak organisation representing the interests of mental health consumers in the ACT in policy and decision-making forums. The Network is committed to social justice and the inclusion of people with experience of mental illness. Run by consumers for consumers, our aim is to advocate for services and supports for mental health consumers that better enable them to live fuller, healthier and more valued lives in the community.

The Network held a consumer forum and additionally received feedback from consumers via email in relation to the draft proposal for a Peer-Led Service within MHJHADS. This submission incorporates the feedback we received from these processes. This feedback is based on the request that consumers focus on Section 2 of the proposal and, more specifically, sections 2.1 to 2.4. MHJHADS provided questions for feedback and consumer responses are included within this submission.

General comments

The Network welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the MHJHADS draft proposal. Consumer feedback supports the concept of a peer-led service in the ACT but consumers highlighted their concern in relation to a service that may be placed solely within MHJHADS and not a broader inter-connected, cross-sector organisation for peer workers.

Consumer feedback to the MHJHADS draft proposal for a Peer-Led Service included that ethical considerations must be included in the development of processes to ensure the workplace safety of peer workers within MHJHADS. This is considered essential based on information received from consumers and their experience working in peer identified roles within MHJHADS and Canberra Health Services.

Consumer Response to MHJHADS questions

Question 1: What are your views about expanding the peer workforce in MHJHADS?

Consumers support the expansion of a peer workforce as a greatly valued workforce and noted the ACT is lagging regarding engagement of peer workers compared to other states and territories. This expansion is considered best placed to be supported and overseen by an overarching independent organisation, similar in structure to the ACT Recovery College, enabling inter-community engagement, training and support.

Supports for peer workers employed by MHJHADS are considered essential, and the development of processes must be underpinned by ethics and standards to ensure the safety of workers within the workplace. Feedback received from consumers, some of whom have previously worked in peer worker roles within MHJHADS, clearly indicated particular concerns in relation to a stated history of lateral violence, bullying, and a lack of training and other supports in their roles.

Feedback included that any expansion within MHJHADS must be co-designed and co-produced with consumers more broadly than those working internally at MHJHADS to ensure the views and concerns of consumer more broadly are represented in this vital project.

Question 2. What do you think are the benefits/disadvantages to ACT community in expanding the peer workforce in MHJHADS?

Consumers discussed the benefits and disadvantages and their feedback follows.

The benefits discussed included:

- closer connections within the ACT community based on the engagement of peer-workers
- support to navigate the health system
- an increase in mental health literacy
- recovery and hope focus
- focus on up-stream services in prevention rather than down-stream crisis

Disadvantages were more in line with 'concerns' rather than consumers feeling there were any disadvantages to the expansion of peer work. These concerns included:

- concerns regarding insufficient training

- the need for clarity regarding the expectations of peer worker roles
- employment constraints that could lead to peer workers needing to ‘toe-the-line’ as MHJHADS/ACT Health employees, rather than operating in the best interests and expressed wishes of consumers
- concern regarding the AHA 3 award level entry for the peer worker roles

Question 3. What do you think are the benefits/disadvantages to the MHJHADS peer workforce in creating a new peer-led team?

Feedback included that a team for peers is a benefit and supportive for peer-workers employed within MHJHADS. It is essential that a clear framework is developed outlining governance structures, clear role expectations and duties and the purpose and direction of the team and individuals.

Disadvantage (concern) – there is a strong need to create a safe, positive working environment for peers and non-peers alike to work together collegiately for the benefit of both themselves and the consumers receiving care.

Question 4. Within MHJHADS, which teams/areas do you see peer workers (both consumer peer workers and family & carer peer workers) being best used?

Peer workers are needed in various settings across MHJHADS and need to be diverse, have a range of skills and have knowledge in the area in which they are operating.

Feedback included that peer workers should be engaged at the start of a consumer’s journey and include asking the patient about their expectations at the beginning of their stay or access to Canberra Health Services (CHS). Peer workers should also be involved patient discharge and in connecting consumers to appropriate community supports either within MHJHADS or in non-Government organisations (NGOs). Part of the peer workers’ role could also be to follow up on whether or not the person’s needs and reasonable expectations are being met.

Question 5. If the project is funded, what is your preference for how you would you like to be able to provide feedback across all stages of development?

Consumers expressed significant concern that there is not an ACT Mental Health Consumer Network Consumer Representative role included in the MHJHADS Peer-Led Service Reference Group. Feedback also included that any Reference Group

should include a multi-diverse range of members, such as people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds.

Consumers also stressed that the framework and processes must be co-designed with consumers rather than merely with input via consultations with consumers. Suggestions included seeking position descriptions from organisations with similar peer workers, such as St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney.

Any other comments?

In the future, consumers wish to see peer workers more prominent in the community mental health sector to continue support and focus on the recovery journey for well-being. Consumer feedback included an example that peer workers in the United Kingdom have been involved in Police, Ambulance and Clinical Early Response (PACER), rather than a clinician, as this has many benefits to support the de-escalation of difficult situations and build rapport whilst also being very cost effective.

Conclusion

Overall, the Network supports the expansion of a peer-led workforce in the ACT. The Network welcomes the opportunity to provide further input into future drafts and to assist with any guidance for systemic changes and subsequent procedure development. In particular, the Network would welcome the opportunity for the inclusion of one if not two Consumer Representative positions on the Reference Group for this project to provide agency to the process and demonstrate and build upon the strong working relationship between MHJHADS and the Network as the peak body for consumers in the ACT.