



**Black Dog
Institute**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workforce Guide: A Learning Tool for All Peer Workforces and Organisations

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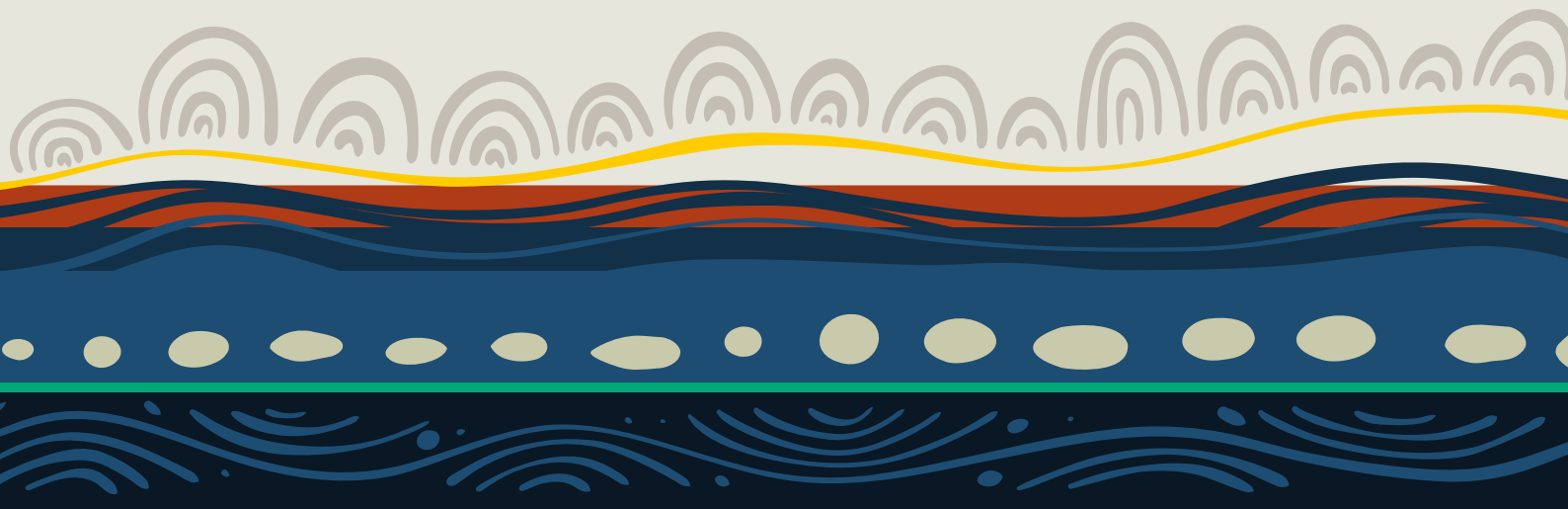


We acknowledge that this guide was written on stolen land.

We acknowledge all of the traditional owners of this continent known as 'Australia', who have nurtured the earth, air, waters, skies, and cosmos since the Dreaming, and we acknowledge their continuing, ongoing, and ancestral connection to this land now and forever.

We acknowledge First Nations knowledges and systems have governed and sustained this earth for over 60,000 years before colonisation, and it is these systems and knowledges that can also provide solutions to many of the societal (e.g. equity and justice) and existential issues (e.g. climate change) we are all facing today.

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Acknowledgements by the Working Group

This has been a genuine process of inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, lived experiences and generous contributions to this guide which has been ably co-ordinated, organised and assisted by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre and in particular Nathan Meteoro who was able to skilfully translate our diverse views and inputs, into a coherent, user-friendly document. Without Nathan and his craftsmanship, we would have struggled.

We can all feel extremely confident to put our names on this document, as co-authors, because of this culturally appropriate and safe process on genuine co-design and inclusiveness, and the trust of each other, and the contributions that we were able to make based on our different lived experiences and expertise. We were all involved in every step of the way with the development and writing.

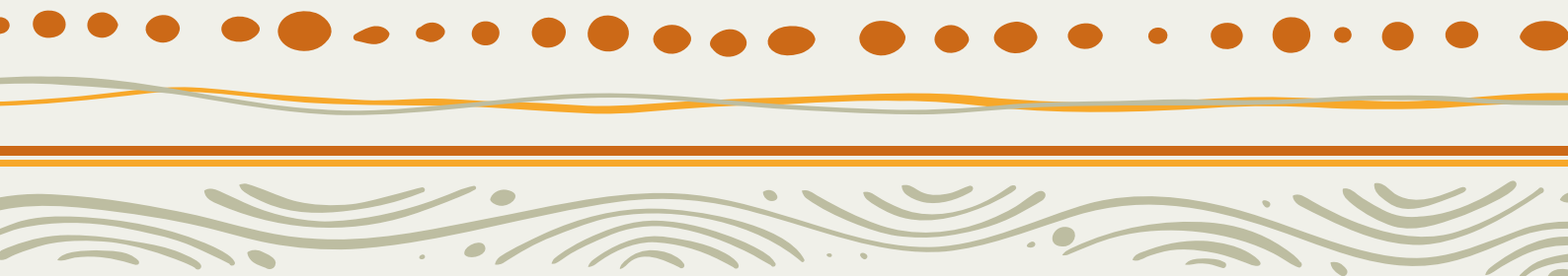
This way of working with us sets a new standard which differs significantly from usual practice working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, where our lived experiences, cultural knowledge, practices, traditions, systems, governance, values, are taken from us and used by others, who then are seen as the “experts”.

Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to help create a better environment for communities to be supported on their Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) journey.

For organisations, whether you are at the beginning of your journey in peer work, or already on the peer work path, this guide will support you in providing a framework for establishment, sustainability, and continuous improvement.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers, this guide is to help you recognise what your role and responsibilities are in supporting community members, and what you should be expecting from the organisations you work with.



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Glossary of Terms

These are commonly used terms used within this guide. The terms highlighted are words that may have different meanings to the way they are typically used.

Term	Meaning
Accept/Acceptance¹	A collective term that refers to the following components: Acceptance Practices – Understanding, controlling, and owning your sphere of influence. Acceptance Experiences – Things that form and maintain positive affect; e.g. valuing, loving, and respecting.
Activated	An alternative to the word ‘trigger’, to mean the surfacing of a strong emotional response.
Anti-Lateral Violence/Lateral Kindness	The active, intentional effort and ongoing commitment to not engage in lateral violence, where individuals enact acceptance, respect, and love towards others within their communities/groups.
Anti-Racism	The ongoing, active, intentional effort and commitment to combat racism in all of its forms.
Best Practice	The procedures or programs that have been shown by evidence (such as research or results over time) to be the most effective or to achieve optimal outcomes.
Community	An understanding of community from an Aboriginal perspective must appreciate the importance of relationships to Aboriginal people, as well as our collective history and lived experiences. The concept of community can refer both to nationhood for Aboriginal people, or to the connections between Aboriginal people within and across nations developed over time. ²
Connection/ Connectedness³	Bonds that link us personally, professionally, organisationally, or societally that can provide familiarity, sustenance, meaning and purpose.
Country	“Country is the term often used by Aboriginal peoples to describe the lands, waterways and seas to which they are connected. The term contains complex ideas about law, place, custom, language, spiritual belief, cultural practice, material sustenance, family and identity.” ⁴
Decolonisation	The undoing of colonialism, the unequal relation of politics, whereby one person or nation establishes and maintains dependent territory over another. ⁵
Decolonising	The process of engaging in decolonisation.
Diversity and Inclusivity	The notion and understanding that First Nations Peoples are not homogenous, have different perspectives, and respecting these differences by not assuming that what works in one community will work in all communities.
Evidence	Knowledge uncovered that has undergone scientific analysis or is based on demonstrated experience or information extracted from scientific literature. Specifically, evidence encompasses First Nations knowledges, research methodologies, and data analysis practices that sit outside of western scientific definitions of ‘evidence’.
Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration	This declaration outlines the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership across the Australian mental health system in order to achieve optimal mental health and suicide prevention outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
Healing/Healing Journey	Often referred to as ‘recovery’, healing in the First Nations sense refers to a “holistic process, which addresses mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs and involves connections to culture, family and land.” ⁶
Interconnectedness⁷	The ever-constant flow of cause and effect. The understanding that everything we do has influence on individuals, family, community, nature and beyond.
Lateral Violence	Harmful actions or behaviours within marginalised or oppressed communities, where individuals or groups from the same community engage in actions that perpetuate oppression, discrimination, or violence against their own members. It often stems from historical trauma and systemic inequalities within the community and can hinder efforts to address external forms of discrimination and oppression.
Lived Experience of Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Challenges	The personal experience of mental health, alcohol and other drug challenges or caring for or about someone with these experiences.

Lived Experience of Suicide	The personal experience of suicide, suicidal thoughts, feelings or actions. It also includes the personal experience of caring for someone during a suicidal crisis, bereavement by suicide or being touched by suicide in another way.
Lived Experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples	The personal and collective experience of the impacts of colonisation on the Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. See page 13 for a definition in first section of guide.
Lived Experience (Peer) Worker	A Lived Experience (Peer) worker is an individual who has had a personal life-changing experience of mental health, alcohol and other drug challenges and or suicidal crisis (including thoughts, feelings or actions) or a family member or significant other ⁸ who has, or is caring for, or about someone with these experiences, or who has been bereaved by suicide, and has training and professional development in their practice.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience (Peer) Worker	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work is Social and Emotional Wellbeing work undertaken by a skilled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community person with shared knowledge, experience and understanding as other community members for the purpose of helping community members to be heard, supported, respected and empowered in their Social and Emotional Wellbeing healing journey.
Mental Health	This is a positive concept relating to resilience, enjoyment of life and social connection. This state of wellbeing increases the ability of individuals and communities to realise goals and potential, to cope with the normal stresses of everyday life, to work productively and to contribute to society.
Mental Health Condition	A 'mental health condition' typically refers to a clinically diagnosed disorder that significantly interferes with a person's cognitive, emotional or social abilities. Examples include anxiety disorders, depression, bipolar disorder, eating disorders and schizophrenia.
Mentorship (Peer, Clinical and Cultural)	Guidance provided by others to improve peer work practice. Usually referred to as 'supervision', mentorship covers clinical supervision, cultural supervision, and formal/informal mentorship structures.
Protective Factors/ Protective	Characteristics, capacities, relationships, circumstances or resources that can increase a person or community's health and wellbeing and decrease the likelihood of suicidal behaviour. These factors may be present at the individual or family level or at broader social, cultural or institutional levels, although not all individuals or groups may be protected in the same ways or to the same extent.
Racism	Racism is a deeply ingrained and systemic belief in the inherent superiority of one race over others, leading to discrimination, prejudice, and unequal treatment of individuals or groups based on their race or ethnicity. It involves the exercise of power and privilege by one racial group to the detriment of others. Racism can manifest at both the individual and systemic levels and can result in unequal access to opportunities, resources, and social privileges for people of different racial backgrounds.
Respect⁹	Positive energy produced for others through admiration, and appreciation.
Reciprocity/ Reciprocal¹⁰	Two-way positive exchange of energy. This can be between individuals, organisations, and societies. It is often multi-directional, with many reciprocal exchanges occurring at the same time.
Responsibility¹¹	Understanding to whom, and what you do for others. Responsibility can be both individual and collective. When this is deeply understood and progress is made towards fulfilling responsibilities, we produce positive energy.
SBLGBTIQA+/ Rainbow Community	Sistergirl, Brotherboy, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer/Questioning, Asexual and more. The term 'Rainbow community' is often used to describe this collective of diverse genders and sexualities.
Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB)	Refers to the basis for both physical and mental health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. This holistic concept includes but extends beyond conventional concepts of mental health and mental health challenges, recognising the importance of cultural determinants of health such as relationships with family, kin and community, and connections to land and sea, culture, spirituality and ancestry, as well as social determinants such as employment, housing and education.
Social Justice	Justice is the concept of fairness. Social justice is fairness as it manifests in society. That includes fairness in healthcare, employment, housing, and more. In a socially-just society, human rights are respected and discrimination is not allowed to flourish. ¹²

To Note

Prior to reading this guide, we ask you to suspend your current understanding and knowledge of lived experience and peer work as the terminology used and the meanings behind commonly used terms likely have a different meaning in this context. We emphasise the use of the glossary to help reframe the typical understanding of each of the terms.

The Western Australia Lived Experience (Peer) Workforces (Framework) refers to a distinction between lived experience (lower case 'l', lower case 'e'; referring to an individual's lived experience) and Lived Experience (capital 'L', capital 'E'; referring to a 'designated' Lived Experience role) where an individual has training and professional development in the discipline.

Whilst there is a difference between these two terms, in the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work, lived experience is seen as a central part of all Peer Work roles, it is a driver of people's reasoning to work in this space. Their experience influences their work regardless of whether or not lived experience is made explicit. The designated/non-designated distinction referred to in the Framework is not always applicable in this context however we respect the utility of these terms in order to advance peer work as its own discipline and highly encourage readers to engage with this framework as this guide sits alongside it.

Where the term is capitalised in this guide, it reflects a professional role of someone having training to use their experience of mental health, suicidal crisis or alcohol and other drug challenges in a professional role, rather than an individual's lived experience that might be more culturally relative. Having this experience is a driver of people's reasoning to work in this space. Their experience influences their work regardless of whether it is mentioned explicitly.

Additionally:

- The terms 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' and 'First Nations' are used interchangeably throughout the guide to respect the diverse preferences of terminology.
- The terms 'peer work' and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work' are also used interchangeably.
- Social and Emotional Wellbeing is both abbreviated as SEWB and not abbreviated for emphasis throughout the guide.

All quotes were provided by First Nations Working Group members and community members. Where relevant, information was redacted to protect the identification of communities.

For more information about the process of the construction of this guide, please see Appendix 1.



What is Peer Work in the Social and Emotional Wellbeing Space?

The Flow and Interconnectedness of Peer Work

Picture a river, like the Derbarl Yerrigan, or any river of significance. The water moves upstream, downstream, moving over stone and sustaining life. Often parts of nature such as plants, leaves, bark, and wildlife enter the river, but the river keeps moving, manoeuvring in and around the environment in the direction it needs to go, but rarely forceful. There is a fluidity or flow to the river, navigating through nature, but does this with ease. The flow of the river is peer work.

Peer work is the flow between different knowledge systems, different worlds, and different environments. It navigates the space in between First Nations and western knowledge systems and the many worlds that First Nations Peoples must find their way through every day. Peer work flows with an exceptional strength and capacity to understand, negotiate, and balance the difference of often competing systems.

Peer work is part of who First Nations Peoples are. It is part of cultural obligations, it is woven into heritage and is foundational to taking care of one another and Country. It is the deep, interconnectedⁱ, reciprocalⁱⁱ, respectfulⁱⁱⁱ relationships that First Nations People have for each other.

Peer work sees people as whole, not through silos like western society likes to, but cuts through the silos and sees things holistically. It is a way to see all the knowledges, all of the worlds at once, as the river also does, connecting out into the seas. It provides insight into the interconnectedness of

systems, while understanding that it is a requirement to be part of that interconnectedness. Being part of the interconnectedness is experiencing the systems clash with one another, as rivers do through earthquakes and storms. The clashing of systems in our society, in the context of Australian society is the impact of colonisation¹³ which has been to the detriment of First Nations Peoples.

Similar to how we have peers in school connected by the environment of school and peers in sport connected through teammates, peer work as it exists today as a discipline and profession is the empowerment, support and connection^{iv} to others through shared experiences.

In a wellbeing context, through the shared experience of colonisation, peer workers (those who engage in the practice of peer work) know that people sit across different

knowledge systems and worlds and understand that it is no longer good enough to support people's wellbeing through a western perspective or ideology. Peer workers know that practical application of skills and knowledge, storytelling¹⁴, collective decision-making¹⁵, use of metaphor¹⁶, and yarning¹⁷ contribute to healing and regularly utilise these in their practice.

Looking widely, peer workers operate in an organisational context which is mostly informed and grounded in western knowledge systems that emphasise rigid structure.¹⁸ This is through written communication, policies and procedures, position descriptions, and adherence to state and national legal requirements. Organisations provide a system that has the capacity to enable the peer worker to be successful, and support the communities that they have a responsibility^v to serve.

Our Focus: Peer Work in Organisations

It is important to clarify that the concept of peer work is an innate part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures and collectivist cultures broadly. Therefore, when referring to peer work it is acknowledged that this is central to community^{vi} responsibility and occurs outside the responsibilities that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have in their work context regardless of their role (peer work focused or otherwise).

Whilst this is the 'norm' amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, the focus of this guide is to discuss paid Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work positions within organisations who employ them.

We emphasise that it is highly likely that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples within your organisation or workplace are already doing this work, and this guide focuses on:

- Formalising, recognising, and appropriately remunerating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work*.
- How organisations can provide an environment of cultural responsiveness to support and retain peer workers minimising the potential harm that organisations can place on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.



ⁱ See definition of Interconnectedness to understand what this word means in this context.

ⁱⁱ See definition of Reciprocity to understand what this word means in this context.

ⁱⁱⁱ See definition of Respect to understand what this word means in this context.

^{iv} See definition of Connection to understand what this word means in this context.

^v See definition of Responsibility to understand what this word means in this context.

^{vi} See definition of Community to understand what this word means in this context.

*Note: The notion of 'peer worker' can refer to frontline 'direct peer support' work and the broader Lived Experience (Peer) workforces given the overlap in cultural and organisational responsibilities. First Nations Peoples bring, and are informed by their Lived Experience¹⁹ in their roles regardless of whether the role itself is 'Designated'. This applies to frontline positions and others such as policy, evaluation, and leadership positions.

Peer Work, Everybody Benefits

Explored in a later section, there are various reasons why organisations should employ peer workers, and these benefits can be achieved by getting peer work right. Table 1 outlines a few of these benefits for organisations, Peer Workers and the Community, with the full benefits table provided at Table 11 (page 54).

Benefit	Benefit to the Organisation	Benefit to the Peer Worker	Benefit to the Community
Social Justice	Contributing to moving from a deficit focus to a strengths-based model of wellbeing.	Provides a sense of belonging and purpose to the peer worker.	Community members are heard and supported on their Social and Emotional Wellbeing journey. ²⁰
Economic	Represent good value for money through reduced reliance on inpatient services. ²¹	Being paid to continue a cultural practice that has been present for over 60,000 years.	Communities get more effective care, with support provided likely to be quicker than other mental health professionals.
Organisational	Greater organisational reputation within community by doing peer work right, which may result in communities engaging with your organisation more.	Peer worker brings the community insight into the organisation.	Communities build trust with local organisation based on the positive interactions they are having with the organisation.

Table 1: Key benefits of employing peer workers to organisations, peer workers, and the wider community



Lived Experience and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience

The concept of 'lived experience' is the experience of an event that has happened or is happening to you or someone you care about. In this context, it is specifically referring to a lived experience of mental health condition, alcohol and other drug use challenges, and suicidal crisis (thoughts, feelings and actions). It also refers to the experiences of caring for those with the aforementioned experiences. Mainstream definitions of 'lived experience' often describe impact on the individual but does not mention the family, community or collective impact.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expressions of Lived Experience is notably different to mainstream expressions of Lived Experience. This is because of the ongoing impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.²³

For First Nations People, experiences of living have been passed down for thousands and thousands of years. It is surviving, it is thriving, and it is caring for one another and Country. Experiences are the foundation of relationships and of knowledge. First Nations Peoples are connected by experience, lived experiences of suicide, of alcohol and other drug or mental health issues and conditions, caring for others and caring for community. Past and ongoing colonisation has meant that First Nations Peoples have lost and continue to lose knowledge and relationships which is felt at a community and nation-wide level.

Considering this, the current working definition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lived experience is:

A lived experience recognises the effects of ongoing negative historical impacts and or specific events on the Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It encompasses the cultural, spiritual, physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of the individual, family or community.

Furthermore, people with lived or living experience of suicide are those who have experienced suicidal thoughts, survived a suicide attempt, cared for someone through a suicidal crisis, been bereaved by suicide or having a loved one who has died by suicide, acknowledging that this experience is significantly different and takes into consideration Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples ways of understanding Social and Emotional Wellbeing.ⁱ

Bringing It All Together: What is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work?

If
Peer Work is the empowerment, support and connection to others through the shared (lived) experience of being impacted by colonisation.

and
Lived experience is the personal and collective experience, of the impacts of colonisation on the Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

then thinking about both of these concepts applied together in an organisational setting,
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work is Social and Emotional Wellbeing work undertaken by a skilled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community person with shared knowledge, experience and understanding as other community members for the purpose of helping community members to be heard, supported, respected and empowered in their Social and Emotional Wellbeing healing journey.

ⁱ The definition is considered a 'working' definition as not to speak for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We note that it is very likely that the definition itself will change over time and depending on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are free to adapt the definition to their context and needs, referencing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre.

Social and Emotional Wellbeing

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work is grounded in Social and Emotional Wellbeing, which is a multidimensional, holistic model of health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

The SEWB model encompasses the following wellbeing domains:

- Connection to Spirit, Culture, and Country – A strong relationship to your heritage including the physical places your family comes from.
- Connection to Family, Kinships, and Community – Relationships between you, your immediate family, and wider community.
- Connection to Body, Mind, and Emotions – Physical and mental wellbeing.

These domains are broadly impacted by:

- Social Determinants (Socioeconomic status, racial discrimination).
- Political Determinants (Issues regarding self-determination and sovereignty).
- Historical Determinants (Historical oppression and colonisation).
- Cultural Determinants (Cultural continuity, resistance to assimilation).



Figure 1: A visual representation of social and emotional wellbeing²⁴

These determinants and connection to the wellbeing domains are dynamic and are highly influenced by the expressions and personal experiences. As outlined in Figure 1, the interconnection between expressions, experiences, determinants, and connections are what comprise the 'self'. This concept of 'self' is viewed as inseparable from and woven into family and community in a collectivist culture. Each aspect of SEWB is interdependent and viewing wellbeing from this perspective assists in understanding the complexities and interconnected experiences a person may have.ⁱ

Expanding on the above SEWB model, further aspects of importance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work is outlined under the headings below.

Decolonising Structures

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work as a discipline is also decolonising as it directly challenges the current paradigm of wellbeing which is individualistic and focuses on the mental and physical health of the individual in relation to themselves. This paradigm is a western, colonial construct. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work by its nature focuses on the Social and Emotional Wellbeing of the individual and the selfⁱⁱ in relation to community, incorporating aspects of support that address domains beyond physical and mental health. This paradigm is collectivist and based on thousands of years of experiences of thriving prior to colonisation.

Having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peer workers across all aspects of service design and delivery including education, governance, research and leadership in addition to frontline support roles promotes decolonising of these structures and highlights the importance and effectiveness of holistic community development approaches.

Cultural Responsiveness

Cultural responsiveness defined by Indigenous Allied Health Australia is:

Strengths-based, action orientated approaches that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to experience cultural safety. It is a negotiated process of what constitutes culturally safe service provision as decided by the recipient of that service delivery. It is about the centrality of culture and how that shapes each individual, their worldviews, values, beliefs, attitudes, and interactions with others. It requires strengths-based approaches and recognises that if culture is not factored into all accessible services across the country, the quality and probable impact of the care and services are likely to be diminished.²⁵

Cultural responsiveness is at the core of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work as the application of cultural knowledge is implicit in the work and communities beyond service delivery. It centres the peer, their experiences, what they're needing, and responding to their needs in way that aligns with First Nations ways of Knowing, Being, and Doing.

Centrality of Culture

The act of peer work centres culture in all aspects as peer work is a practice that has been occurring for over 60,000 years which encompasses notions of respect, reciprocity, and connection. It places the relationship and experiences at the centre which are the foundation of First Nations ways of Knowing, Being, and Doing. This also allows communities to operate in the way that works for them, rather than imposing a single way of doing peer work. Centring culture is actively anti-colonial, and reclaims power for First Nations Peoples.

Self-Determination

Peer work contributes to self-determination of First Nations Peoples in providing space for First Nations People to communicate what works for each other, and their communities. Peer work provides a level of autonomy in doing what works best for First Nations peoples, decided by First Nations Peoples. It seeks to remove the power imbalance that exists with other health professionals as the foundation of peer work is a relationship connected by shared experiences, not by the qualifications one possesses.

At its core, peer work is practicing what has always occurred which is caring for each other and Country.

Diversity and Inclusivityⁱⁱⁱ

First Nations Peoples are not homogenous, there are hundreds of countries, with distinct lore, language, culture and perspectives on different things. When it comes to perspectives on just about anything, there is significant diversity in perspectives from First Nations Peoples. This is the same with peer work.

At its core, the principles underlying peer work may be shared, but the end goal or way they are implemented will be different from community to community. For example, what will work for Noongar Peoples will look different to Yawuru People, or Bunuba People. What will work in the Kimberley region will be different to what will work in the Pilbara.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is understanding that each person has different identities, (e.g. gender, sexuality, experiences, ethnicity, Country) and that people have fundamentally different experiences of walking through life because of the combination of those identities.²⁶ For example, the experiences of a young Noongar woman who lives in Boorloo (Perth), will be different to an older queer Wongi woman living in Kalgoorlie.

Although they share in parts of their identities (e.g. being a woman, and being First Nations), their mob, the place they live, and their sexuality and/or gender identities also shape the way they experience the world.

Applied to peer work, it is understanding that each person comes with different experiences that in a lot of ways are different to your own and respecting that difference.

ⁱ The word 'complex' is used to describe the many factors and variables that go into something, for example raising a family, or what it means to be human. This is contrasted to the term 'complicated' which describes a clear goal in mind, where the process may be difficult or unclear such as launching a rocket ship.

ⁱⁱ This conception of self is grounded within a collectivist perspective that views the self as inseparable from, and embedded within, family and community

ⁱⁱⁱ See definition of Diversity and Inclusivity to understand what this word means in this context.

Acceptance and Respect for SBLGBTIQA+ Identities

Amongst First Nations communities in Australia, and across the world, there has always been a space of diverse genders and sexualities. The SBLGBTIQA+ community is a community in and of itself, and is subject to not only the compounding layers of historical/political/social determinants that contribute to the experience of being a First Nations person, but the addition of those same determinants affecting SBLGBTIQA+ peoples. The experience of 'diversity within diversity' illustrates the resilience and strength of the First Nations Rainbow community.

Often First Nations Peoples talk about walking in 'two' worlds, however for the First Nations Rainbow community, it can extend beyond 'two' worlds. There is the western world, the cultural world, the queer world, the black queer world, and navigating the safety across all of them.

In a peer work context, understanding that the experiences of the First Nations Rainbow community are different, cultivating a space where these experiences can be shared openly, and knowing where your personal limits are critical when thinking about support.

Accessibility

Amongst Aboriginal languages there is no word for 'disability'.²⁷ Taking a person centred approach means that we are being attentive to any needs and requirements someone may have to operate in the world easier. Currently the western world does not provide adequate provisions for people who have accessibility needs, as the presumption of society is that people are able bodied, and follow 'typical' brain development and 'functioning'. This is amplified for First Nations Peoples.²⁸

Peer work takes people as they are and works with them, with acceptance of the different needs that people have rather than stigmatising or excluding. This encompasses meeting the needs of diverse bodies, brains, and spirits.

What Makes a Good Peer Worker?

There are many positive attributes that make a good peer worker, whether they are working in direct peer support or other areas such as policy, research, or leadership. In addition to the above factors, peer workers:

Attribute	Description
Non-judgmental	Accepting people as they are without making negative assumptions or perceiving them negatively.
Shares their story safely	Knows when it is appropriate to share their story and what level of detail to share as to not activate others.
Act and promote lateral kindness	Doesn't engage in gossiping, bullying or shaming of others.
Create a safe space free from racism	Peer work is often one of the few spaces where people are free from racism. Good peer workers enable a racism-free space in their practice.

Table 2: Attributes of good peer workers

The latter attributes of acting and promoting lateral kindness and providing a safe space to be free from racism are unique to peer workers in the First Nations context given that the impact of colonisation has resulted in lateral violence²⁹ and racism.³⁰



Why Do We Need Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers in frontline positions provide a space for healing outside the typical ‘helping’ roles such as social workers, counsellors, and psychologists which are often difficult to access in rural and remote settings, who additionally may not know the community or understand the community setting. Peer workers who are in systemic roles such as policy, leadership, evaluation and advocacy can provide a wider perspective on peer work applied to community settings, highlighting the importance of peer work not only from a specific geographical area, but across communities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers understand community dynamics, are often located within communities themselves, and relate to others through their shared experiences which are unique to them. In the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context, these shared experiences are grounded in experiences of colonisation unique to that community context and spans across all sectors including mental health, suicide prevention, alcohol and other drugs, and justice.

Adopting the notion that what works for the most marginalised in society will work for everyone³¹, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work provides ways of working that can be applied to all peoples.

“ By connecting through shared experiences, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work actively minimises power imbalances by focusing on the relational connection and recognising that individuals are the expert of their own experience. ”





The Role and Responsibilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers, whether in direct peer support roles, or the wider workforce, (e.g. in leadership, education or research, as a manager of a program or peer organisation, or on a board) sit in the space in between, walking between the organisational space and being the ear into the experiences of community while supporting community members in their Social and Emotional Wellbeing healing journey. The role of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Worker is to be a connector, which is to link two or more things together. Peer workers connect to community members from their shared experiences, connect community with services, and connect organisations to understand community needs.

Regardless of the position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers hold, they have the following responsibilities:

- Meaningfully and purposefully sharing parts of their story safely to maintain connection and Social and Emotional Wellbeing.
- Provide hope and inspiration to community members through their own Social and Emotional Wellbeing healing journey.
- Provide support and advocacy for community members in their Social and Emotional Wellbeing healing journey.
- Be fully informed of the services within their community across relevant areas (e.g. mental health, alcohol and other drugs, suicide prevention).
- Connect with professional services and other appropriate services as required by community members.
- Engage in and be open to continuous professional development.
- Understand their role as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Worker as noted in the position description.
- Be non-judgmental and provide input that is grounded in their personal experiences but recognise and embrace the diversity and difference in perspectives of First Nations Peoples.
 - Treat all people with respect and hold space for intersectional experiences such as their gender, sexual orientation, or other personal characteristics.
- Ensure that community members privacy and confidentiality are protected in accordance with ethical standards, legal requirements and your organisations policies.
- Provide a culturally responsive, strengths-based approach and proactively move away from deficit discourse.
- Promote and embody lateral kindness, with a zero tolerance for lateral violence for themselves and others.
- Have an ongoing commitment to being anti-racist in their practice as a peer worker.
- Understand their self-care and boundaries (such as when they are activated) around their own self-care throughout the work.
- To keep their spirit and heart strong throughout all of their work.

The Role and Responsibilities of Organisations

Organisations are critical in creating an environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work to flourish. The organisation's role is to create organisational conditions to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers to do their role, and to play an advocacy role for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work within the Social and Emotional Wellbeing space. There must be reciprocity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers and the organisations that employ them.

Organisations have a responsibility to:

- Ensure the continued sustainability of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workforce.
- Commit to the Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration.³²
- Ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers are treated with respect and hold space for intersectional experiences such as their gender, sexual orientation, or other personal characteristics.
- Ensure that the organisation operates in a culturally responsive and supportive environment that promotes positive mental health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing across the peer workforce from a strengths-based Social and Emotional Wellbeing perspective.
- Have an ongoing commitment to anti-racism and anti-lateral violence practice within the organisation.
- Provide flexibility in work arrangements for peer workers, in accommodating the differences that this workforce has compared to other workforces.
- Provide a clear position description to peer workers that provides direction and clarity about the role, informed by fully understanding the role of a peer worker and their contribution to the community.
- Provide clear communication and direction to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers regarding their role and expectations.
- Not always rely on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples within your organisation for all First Nations related enquiries (e.g. asking them to do an Acknowledgement of Country at every meeting).
- Ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers receive appropriate training and support to assist community in a culturally responsive way.
- Ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers privacy and confidentiality are protected in accordance with ethical standards and legal requirements.
- Continuously learn and improve organisational procedures, knowledge and skills related to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers in their roles.
- Have a zero tolerance for lateral violence and racism, with this being embedded in all policies and procedures.



Walking Between Two Worlds: The Space Between Organisational and Community Responsibilities

We acknowledge that many of the noted responsibilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers also cross over with community responsibilities. There is often a “Walking between Two Worlds” experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. This is amplified in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work in navigating the organisational world which employs and pays them, but also the challenge in distinguishing between the job in relation to the organisation and community obligations. This can be a challenge when the responsibilities for both are almost the same. Additionally, there is conflict between cultural obligations and legal organisational requirements, for example, when an individual mentions suicide it may be a requirement by the organisation to report it, but this may happen in community contexts out of hours.

There are also circumstances in organisational contexts where individuals voluntarily engage in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work outside of their existing role in that organisation. For example, in Derby, there were mental health workers taking people fishing out on Country, this was something they added onto their role because it was something they needed to do to ‘fill their cup’. Often, First Nations Peoples in peer work roles talk about their experiences of volunteering outside of their work hours to support individuals who needed additional help. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in workplaces outside of designated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work roles are not obligated to engage in that work, and should be remunerated if they do.

Although both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers and organisations have a responsibility to ensure those clear boundaries are enacted, organisations generally have significant power and resources to provide benefit to the communities they serve.

In unpacking the responsibilities of organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work, a clearer picture emerges about how organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers can help each other, and the communities they serve.

“ It’s previously not been paid and seen as an obligation to families and kinship. ”

“ There are lots of expectations we are placing on individuals that are not being rewarded because it’s a passion project. ”



Social and Emotional Wellbeing Practice and Peer Work - Decolonisation in Practice

Strengthening the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workforce is a decolonising practice. Western conceptions of health and wellbeing are grounded in a deficit model, focusing on dis-ease, and dis-harmony which primarily does not focus on positive human experiences. Social and Emotional Wellbeing practice through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work actively frames wellbeing away from deficit perspectives and towards holistic wellbeing which incorporates notions of Spirituality, Culture, and Country which are often not highlighted in mainstream mental health discussions. Importantly, this practice is not only applied in the mental health space, but also other areas such as primary healthcare, justice and alcohol and other drugs.

Social and Emotional Wellbeing provides a preventative framework, rather than an 'interventionist' framework. It centres Culture, and it is adaptive rather than re-active. In the practice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work, this workforce has a strong role to play in maintaining strength in people when they are feeling strong as much as they are there to support those with disturbed Social and Emotional Wellbeing.



Exploration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work Responsibilities

The responsibilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers can broadly be categorised in to advocacy responsibilities, SEWB practice responsibilities, and organisational responsibilities. Table 3 details what these are and what they look like in action.

Advocacy Responsibilities	Organisational Responsibilities	SEWB Practice Responsibilities
<p>This refers to the responsibilities that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers have in their roles to connect the people they are supporting into wider systems and professionals such as health services and legal services should they require to. They play an active role beyond connecting, keeping aware of appropriate services beyond what may be available in a community setting. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers are responsive to broader social, cultural, and technological contexts³³ when they advocate for the people they support in instances where they may experience difficulties in engaging in other systems.</p>	<p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers are employed by organisations which may include institutions such as universities TAFEs, government agencies, or health service organisations. Organisations provide the systems and structures that surround Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers to enable them to do their jobs effectively. These responsibilities reflect not only the expectations that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers should have of organisations, but how they should also fulfil them.</p>	<p>These responsibilities involve the practice of Social and Emotional Wellbeing as it relates to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Worker, and their contribution/support to community. It is about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Worker taking care of themselves, so they are able to care and advocate for others. It is understanding their own boundaries and being mindful of their own journey to cultivate reciprocity as they walk alongside individuals or undertake their peer role. It is also respecting the diversity and difference of the people they are working with, being mindful of their own biases and assumptions, and actively challenging them to better support others.</p>

Note: The column of responsibilities above can be adapted to form a position description, and the column labelled 'What does this look like in practice...' are suggestions for how an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Worker can meet those responsibilities and/or form the basis of professional development goals.

Advocacy Responsibilities

Responsibility	What Does This Look Like in Practice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers?
Provide support and advocacy for community members in their Social and Emotional Wellbeing healing journey.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Actively navigating services alongside community members in their healing journey, ensuring that they are supported throughout the process, and liaising with services as required to ensure their protection. ▪ Understanding that for some individuals such as those who identify as SBLGBTIQA+, there may not be specific services within that community, so an awareness of state-wide or national services that support these communities is required. ▪ Building relationships with organisations that are outside their own circle/ community context. ▪ Knowing, understanding and communicating (and in some instances, establishing) clear referral processes for community members they are supporting. ▪ Knowing the limits of their own knowledge, and practicing humility knowing when they are not the best person to support the community member.
Be fully informed of the services within their community across relevant areas (e.g. alcohol and other drugs, justice, health).	
Connect with professional services and other appropriate services as required by community members.	

Table 3a: Responsibilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers and what this looks like in action

Organisational Responsibilities

Responsibility	What Does This Look Like in Practice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers?
Engage in and be open to continuous professional development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Abide by and learn from mentorship practices. ▪ Commitment to learning in the areas of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Sharing your story safely (e.g. media training) – Confidentiality requirements – Balancing between the professional and community life – SBLGBTIQA+ identities and communities. ▪ Undertaking other training such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Certificate IV in Peer Work – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health First Aid – Indigenous Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (I-ASIST).
Understand your role as a Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Worker (as per your position description).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Understanding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The boundaries of your role as determined by your position description – Who you are working with (is it a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary team? Who is in your team?) – Mentorship structures that are in place. ▪ Being accountable to community, for community members to understand your role clearly.
Responsibility to ensure that community members privacy and confidentiality are protected in accordance with ethical standards and legal requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Being transparent and honest about the boundaries of disclosure with community members and communicating the circumstances in which you are required to mandatory report.

Table 3b: Responsibilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers and what this looks like in action

SEWB Practice Responsibilities

Responsibility	What Does This Look Like in Practice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-Led Peer Workers?
Provide hope and inspiration to community members through their own Social and Emotional Wellbeing healing journey.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognising your own journey, and where you have come from, acknowledging the significance of your story in supporting others. Reflecting on the impact of intergenerational trauma and how your journey of overcoming intergenerational trauma can help support and empower others. Understanding that you and the community members you walk alongside have a shared history and lived experience that connects you, and that your existence is resistance to colonisation and colonial systems.
Be non-judgmental and provide input that is grounded in your personal experiences but recognise and embrace the diversity and difference in perspectives of First Nations Peoples.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledging and understanding the rich history and experiences of First Nations peoples part of the SBLGBTIQA+ communities. Understanding the compounding layers of historical, political/legal, and social determinants that contribute to their experiences of being both Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and belonging to the rainbow community.
Treat all people with respect and hold space for intersectional experiences such as gender, sexual orientation, or other personal characteristics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the practice of asking for pronouns of the people you are working with. Being sensitive to the similarities and differences of the rural and remote contexts compared to metropolitan contexts. Relating through your common experiences rather than being an expert over other community member's experiences, particularly if there are specific identities and experiences you may not share. Using your self-awareness to acknowledge that you have prejudices, biases and assumptions about other people and their identities, and to continuously unpack and work on them to better support community members.
Provide a culturally responsive, strengths-based approach and proactively move away from deficit discourse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactively seeking out and engaging in mentorship.ⁱ Being mindful of your community and cultural obligations that may sit outside your role. Not assuming a person has an understanding of culture or a cultural perspective because they are First Nations. Working with the community member to determine what might work best for them, not what you think works for them.
Understand self-care and boundaries throughout the work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be aware of the things that activate you. Be aware of when you need additional support yourself.
Share their story safely to protect the communities they support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being mindful not to overshare to unintentionally activate community members.
Promote and embody lateral kindness, with a zero tolerance for lateral violence for themselves and others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not engaging in bullying, gossiping, or shaming others. Provide a space free from racism, discrimination, and lateral violence in your practice.
Have an ongoing commitment to being anti-racist as a peer worker.	

Table 3c: Responsibilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers and what this looks like in action

ⁱ Note: See definition of mentorship in glossary – Mentorship is inclusive of cultural mentorship.

Organisational Readiness for Peer Work

Social and Emotional Wellbeing practice is interconnected with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work. SEWB practice is in the spirit of peer work, but often can only be effectively demonstrated when the layers of systems that the peer worker operates in support the peer worker to work in this way. A peer worker cannot embrace the principles of SEWB practice embedded in their role if the organisation does not facilitate an environment which supports this.

Implicit to many of the peer worker responsibilities is the role of organisations in facilitating the environment for those responsibilities to be fulfilled.

For example;

For a Peer Worker to...	Organisations Should Provide...
Engage in and be open to continuous professional development.	Support and financial investment for peer workers to engage in professional development activities.
Understand and communicate their self-care and boundaries (such as when they are activated).	An environment by which peer workers are open to sharing and communicating their self-care and boundaries.
Understand the boundaries of their role.	A detailed position description and education of their colleagues and the wider organisation about peer work.
Undertake mentorship.	A budget, framework, and structure for mentorship.
Understand the legal requirements relating to confidentiality and mandatory reporting.	Information about legal requirements and their implications for practice, escalation pathways, and culturally appropriate support structures.

Table 4: Organisational actions that allow peer workers to fulfil their responsibilities

Whilst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers look to fulfil their responsibilities to the communities and the organisations that employs them, the organisations must fulfil their responsibilities to the peer workers.

There are foundational organisational structures that are required to ensure the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers can do their roles to the best of their abilities.

Organisations change over time³⁴, have a reputation³⁵, have power³⁶, and are judged by their actions. In peer work practice this means that the peer worker is not only bringing their lived experiences and skills to the community or community member they are supporting, the research they are undertaking or the project or policy they are advising on (depending on the Lived Experience role they are working in), but also everything that the organisation represents and all the decisions that has ever impacted the community.

This means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers and organisations are in a reciprocal relationship where the result of any imbalance of this relationship impacts the Social and Emotional Wellbeing of community members.

In recognising that organisations (as entities) hold greater power and privilege in the relationship with peer workers, (and by extension community through access to resources) organisations have a greater responsibility to the communities they serve. This is to create the conditions to allow peer work to thrive which not only benefits community, but the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers, which then benefitsⁱ the organisation.

ⁱ The word 'benefit' in this instance does not refer exclusively to economic benefits, as there are social, spiritual, and emotional benefits which over time may also result in economic benefits.



Exploration of Organisational Responsibilities

Similar to responsibilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers, organisational responsibilities are interconnected. They are interconnected through the following areas:

Area 1: Systemic Advocacy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work

This describes the commitment an organisation has to elevating peer work in the systems that they operate in. This involves inward facing actions such as tracking of process and outcome data to assist in organisational reporting and wider advocacy, and outward facing actions such as pitching to funding bodies the importance of peer work and pushing for additional funding.

These responsibilities speak to an ongoing responsibility to continually raising the profile of peer work. If there is a commitment to employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers, there is a responsibility to advocate for its value. Table 5 outlines the corresponding responsibilities, example actions and potential outcomes.

“...each community will be different regarding diversity, each state is different. You have to sell it through promotions, you want the community to accept the product (peer work) and it will lead to strength.”

“It’s about how you engage with the communities and people, how you contribute towards the shift to make it strength-based and strong, it’s about engaging key stakeholders and about selling the product (peer work), making it buyable to the community. How you structure that it has to be in line with community, culture, and context.”

Responsibility	Actions: What does this look like in practice for organisations	Outcome
<p>Ensure the continued sustainability of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workforce.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ongoing monitoring and tracking of both process data (e.g. number of peer workers, interactions with community members), existing workforce experiences, and outcome data (what impact does it have on community) to apply for ongoing funding and continuous quality improvement. ▪ Development of growth and progression pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers that provide ongoing opportunities for increased remuneration that reflects greater responsibilities, and professional development. ▪ Advocating to funding bodies, partnering services, all levels of government, and state and national organisations about the importance of peer work. ▪ Evaluating peer work activities to contribute to the evidence base and to be able to sustainably apply for further funding. ▪ Providing opportunities for connection between peers (e.g. communities of practice) to encourage shared knowledge and learning, and remove isolation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continued peer workforce positions to meet community demand. ▪ Better communication of the impact of peer work which raises the profile of peer work. ▪ Detailed feedback to peer workers about their holistic effect on community. ▪ Evidence to illustrate the wellbeing impacts of peer work on community which can be utilised to apply for further funding and advocacy. ▪ Better connected, collaborative workforces.
<p>Commit to the Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration</p>	<p>Make a public commitment to upholding the Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit Declaration).</p>	<p>Better outcomes for First Nations Peoples.</p>

Table 5: Example actions and their likely outcomes of engaging in responsibilities relating to systemic advocacy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work



Area 2: Organisational Understanding and Respect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their Diversity

This describes the organisational responsibilities that relate to their role in truly understanding and respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their diversity. This involves acknowledging and understanding the diversity Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have in their culture, language, and the acknowledgment and understanding of 'diversity in within diversity' such as the SBLGBTIQA+ community and being proactive in their local community.

Table 6 outlines the corresponding responsibilities, example actions and potential outcomes.

“ We should acknowledge the validity of different people’s cultural practices, they will be different and one is not more important than another... We can talk about regions, remote, isolation, urban and not to put one ahead of another, and not privileging one particular area over another. ”

“ It’s important we capture an understanding of a ‘third’ space in gender and others that don’t fit within a gender binary ”

National Network Members at the ILEC Annual Gathering



Responsibility	Actions: What does this look like in practice for organisations	Outcome
<p>Ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers are treated with respect and hold space for intersectional experiences such as their gender, sexual orientation, or other personal characteristics.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employment of male, female, and gender diverse individuals across the peer workforce contributing to ensure culturally responsive engagement. ▪ Acknowledging the validity of different people’s cultural practices and being flexible and responsive to the differences in cultural practices across geographical (e.g. metropolitan, regional, rural, remote) or community contexts. ▪ Requirement that every individual in an organisation undertakes cultural responsiveness training. ▪ Acknowledgement and understanding of the ‘third’ space in gender beyond a male/female binary, and others that don’t fit within the gender binary. ▪ Being proactive about involvement in community activities and calendar events (not simply approaching individuals/ organisations for one-off events such as National Reconciliation Week). ▪ Commitment to understanding the diversity of First Nations perspectives including the Rainbow (SBLGBTQIA+) community beyond tokenistic notions, providing detailed educative pieces on the diversity of First Nations Peoples. ▪ Use of pronouns in organisational communications. ▪ Acknowledgement and understanding of First Nations Cultures and what that may mean in a workplace setting specific to staff and the local context. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Peer worker perspectives are respected and meaningfully woven into decision-making regarding person centred care (for frontline peer support and within other roles such as policy, leadership, and research). ▪ Organisation understands the meaning and purpose of First Nations specific calendar events. ▪ Organisation builds genuine and meaningful relationship with First Nations community organisations.
<p>Ensure that the organisation operates in a culturally responsive and supportive environment that promotes positive mental health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing across the peer workforce from a strengths-based Social and Emotional Wellbeing perspective.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proactively partner other organisations that have peer workers to appropriately resource peer work needs within communities and linking peer workers with other peer workers for mentorship and peer support opportunities. ▪ Removing the hierarchy between clinical workers and Peer workers through actions such as peer workers participating in planning discussions and ensuring representation of peer workers at discussions relating to people’s wellbeing. ▪ Integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work into organisational strategic plan. ▪ Requirement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work /lived experience representatives on organisation committees/boards in addition to frontline positions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organisation staff understands that First Nations Peoples come from hundreds of Countries/Groups from across the continent with unique perspectives, language, and culture that share different perspectives. ▪ Organisation is conscious of ‘diversity within diversity’ such as the SBLGBTQIA+ community within First Nations communities and recognises differences within the rainbow community.
<p>Have an ongoing commitment to anti-racism and anti-lateral violence practice within the organisation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Publicly communicate commitment to anti-racism and anti-lateral violence. ▪ Clearly communicated escalation pathways to address any discriminatory behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fair, confidential and transparent complaints processes that support anti-racism and anti-lateral violence in organisations.

Table 6: Example actions and their likely outcomes of engaging in responsibilities relating to Organisational understanding and respect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their diversity

Area 3: Responsibility to Establish Culturally Responsive Organisational Processes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-Led Peer Workers

This talks to organisational processes and procedures that accommodate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers. Importantly, these responsibilities interface directly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers as these are protective mechanisms to enable them to do their roles well for an extended period of time. Success of organisational processes and procedures mean that peer workers are less likely to burn out and take extended leave due to burn out. These are broadly split into two categories, organisational processes that are operational in nature, and organisational processes that are structural in nature.

Operationally, this includes an appropriate position description, culturally responsive mentorship, and providing flexible work arrangements given the dynamic nature of peer work.

Structurally, by ensuring representation across all relevant organisational areas, this shows commitment by the organisation about the way it sees Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work.

Table 7 outlines the corresponding responsibilities, example actions and potential outcomes, both from an operational and structural perspective.

“ Three days cultural leave is not practical – If you’re practicing and going out lore, it’s not three days or five days, we’re looking at three-four weeks and some families can decide as to whether someone is on leave. ”

“ There are confidentiality and boundaries between the professional and community life.... That’s unique to these roles and organisations don’t always get how difficult that is. ”



Responsibility	Actions: What does this look like in practice for organisations	Outcome
<p>Provide flexibility in work arrangements for peer workers, to accommodate the differences that this workforce has compared to other workforces.</p> <p>Fully understanding the roles of peer workers and providing flexible work arrangements to match the dynamic nature of peer work.</p>	<p>Operational</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish a culturally responsive mentorship structure co-developed alongside the peer worker. ▪ Understand, communicate, and frequently update knowledge on community resources and strengths to assist peer work practice. ▪ Being proactive in supporting the professional development goals of peer workers through financial or operational support (such as dedicated time during work hours to attend professional development activities). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Peer workers are able to perform their role and have established clear boundaries regarding their work. ▪ Peer workers are able to provide better support to community members and have multiple structures of support in their roles. ▪ The organisation becomes more culturally responsive and maintains connection with community which makes peer workers' roles easier. ▪ Peer workers are supported and are able to support community effectively.
<p>Provide a clear position description to peer workers that provides direction and clarity about the role, informed by fully understanding the role of a peer worker and their contribution to the community.</p>	<p>Structural</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shape and frame the peer work position description that appropriately outlines the role and responsibilities of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Worker that acknowledges and respects the cultural knowledge, expertise, value, and benefits that a peer worker brings to an organisation, looking beyond or in addition to 'traditional' qualifications (such as degrees) in the selection criteria. ▪ Removing perceived or constructed hierarchies between clinical workers, and Peer workers (including researchers, front-line support roles and leadership) through actions such as peer workers participating in planning discussions and ensuring representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers at discussions relating to people's wellbeing. ▪ Requirement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work /lived experience representatives on organisation committees/boards in addition to frontline positions. ▪ Allocation of resourcing for peer workers to ensure their attendance and representation at appropriate Boards/ Committees, networking and training opportunities (including for frontline workers). ▪ Integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work into organisational strategic plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communities and organisations receive clear messaging about the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work. ▪ Helps to create a culture where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work is well embedded. ▪ Allows for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers to have their perspective valued and there are appropriate provisions to balance this work and their frontline position at the same time.
<p>Provide clear communication and direction to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers regarding their role and expectations.</p>	<p>Understand and communicate the boundaries between professional and personal life and proactively assisting peer workers to navigate this through culturally responsive mentorship and wellbeing support.</p> <p>Establish a culturally responsive mentorship structure co-developed alongside the peer worker.</p> <p>Engagement of Elders for the purposes of mentorship and continuity of cultural knowledge.</p>	<p>Public commitment which increases accountability to community.</p>

Responsibility	Actions: What does this look like in practice for organisations	Outcome
<p>Responsibility to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers receive appropriate training and support to assist community in a culturally re-sponsive way.</p>	<p>Being proactive in supporting the professional development goals of peer workers through financial or operational support (such as paid time out to attend professional development activities).</p> <p>Financial or operational support for peer workers to engage in training recommended by organisation as part of their roles.</p>	<p>Peer workers are empowered and their professional development enables them to provide a better service to community members.</p>
<p>Responsibility to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers privacy and confidentiality are protected in accordance with ethical standards and legal requirements.</p>	<p>Provide guidance to peer workers about the limits to confidentiality and in which situations would confidentiality be required to be breached.</p> <p>Explore and implement appropriate insurance that covers the ethical responsibilities of peer workers in their work with communities (e.g. Insurance that covers out of hours work for peer workers).</p>	<p>Better outcomes for First Nations Peoples.</p>
<p>Responsibility to continuously learn and improve organisational procedures, knowledge and skills related to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers in their roles.</p> <p>Not always rely on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples within the organisation for all First Nations related enquiries (e.g. asking them to do an Acknowledgement of Country every meeting).</p>	<p>Not relying on First Nations Peoples to provide all First Nations knowledge to the rest of the organisation.</p> <p>Understand, communicate, and frequently update knowledge on community resources and strengths to assist peer work practice and being culturally responsive to communities.</p> <p>Public organisational commitment to cultural responsiveness and engaging in proactive steps to work towards it.</p> <p>Implementation of an Acknowledgement of Country/Welcome to Country protocol for organisations.</p> <p>Ensuring multidisciplinary teams are connected to, and have an understanding of peer workers, privileging the perspective of peer workers.</p> <p>Educating all staff about the role of peer workers.</p> <p>Information about peer work woven into all new staff induction packages which explains the importance of peer work and the role of peer work.</p>	<p>Organisation understands that it is the responsibility of all staff and people to educate themselves and each other on First Nations knowledge.</p>
<p>Have a zero tolerance for lateral violence and racism, with this being embedded in all policies and procedures.</p>	<p>Creation and implementation of separate anti-racism and anti-lateral violence policies.</p> <p>Share the anti-racism and anti-lateral violence policies publicly and with other organisations.</p>	<p>Thriving First Nations workforces that are better able to undertake their role and serve the community.</p>

Table 7: Example operational and structural actions and their likely outcomes of engaging in responsibilities relating to establishment of culturally responsive organisational processes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers



Getting Peer Work Right

As both the roles and responsibilities of peer workers and organisations have been explored, it is important to understand how to get peer work right. This involves both peer workers and organisations upholding their respective responsibilities to benefit the communities they are serving. This section explores the below **interconnected** areas, and how both organisations and peer workers can work together to best support communities. Each area is described with key considerations noted and aspects that are considered core, or adaptable to getting it right in addition to recommended implementation steps where applicable. A guide to terminology of this section is provided at Table 9.

Area	Example Organisational Responsibility	Example Peer Worker Responsibility
Establishing culturally responsive mentorship*	Collaborate with the peer worker to create a culturally responsive mentorship structure that works best for the peer worker.	Communicate specific culturally responsive mentorship needs beyond the minimum standard established by organisation.
Considering the local context	Understand and communicate community and geographical considerations to peer workers.	Notify organisation of shifts and changes in community relating to their work.
Communicating transparency regarding peer work	Understand and communicate the realities of peer work to prospective peer workers looking to take up the role.	Understand the realities of peer work and the support that the organisation is required to provide to them should they take up the role.
Cultivating an environment of self-care	Spot the signs of when peer workers aren't doing well.	Monitor and take care of Social and Emotional Wellbeing to the best of their ability.
Supporting Training and Professional Development*	Communicate training expectations and provide accommodations for peer workers to complete required training and support for professional development activities.	Complete required training relevant to role in order to support community members and think about and communicate opportunities for professional development.
Establishing boundaries	Communicate and reinforce expected boundaries of peer workers in their support of community members.	Maintain personal/professional boundaries while supporting community members to protect themselves and community members.
Role flexibility and leave accommodations*	Provide appropriate provisions and flexibility for peer workers in their roles including leave and shape organisational policies to reflect cultural considerations to accommodate for the dynamic nature of peer work roles.	Communicate flexibility requirements or requests as soon as practical and understand organisational policies regarding leave.

Table 8: Area of getting peer work right, and example organisational and peer worker responsibility to contribute to getting it right

Term	Description
Description	Outline of the area of peer work to get right.
Key consideration	Factors that influence getting the area of peer work right.
Core Component	Compulsory and critical component of getting peer work right.
Adaptable Component	Aspects of this area that are also compulsory and critical, but are highly flexible to the local context.
Recommended Implementation Steps	Brief steps and guidance about how this area can be done right.

Table 9: Guide to terms used in this section

*Recommended Implementation Steps Provided on the Following Pages;
 Establishing Culturally responsive Mentorship - Page 39
 Training and Professional Development - Page 47
 Role Flexibility And Leave Accommodations - Page 51

Establishing Culturally Responsive Mentorshipⁱ

Description

Culturally responsive mentorship is a critical aspect of getting peer work right. Arguably, it is one of the single most important aspects as effective mentorship is integral to peer workers staying in their roles. Mentorship provides an outlet to discuss role-specific challenges, the balancing of professional and community obligations, and broader support that sits external to the role.

Culturally responsive mentorship for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Worker may be a mix of Cultural mentorship, Peer worker-to-Peer worker support, and Clinical mentorship but at a minimum requires Cultural mentorship. Culturally responsive mentorship may occur individually or in a group setting.

“ I had a large cohort of students in the course. Everyone has lived experience across many of the topics covered. It was a daily occurrence where we had two to three people become upset from content that we discussed and needed crisis support. At the time we had no other clinical supervision. There was EAP [Employee Assistance Program] available but crisis call-outs weren't available. So I was teacher, I was counsellor, I was friend, and I was Auntie to them. It actually got where I started feeling physically ill to the point of needing clinical mentorship otherwise I said I wouldn't be working here much longer. ”

Key Considerations

Diversity of First Nations Peoples

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers bring not only their lived experience, but other intersections of their identity to their role, which means that mentorship provisions have to take into account other factors such as culture, gender identity, sexuality, age, and lived experience into the establishment of culturally responsive mentorship. This may be through the preference of a male/female/gender diverse mentor, an individual from the SBLGBTIQ+ community, or an individual within or separate from their cultural group.

Confidentiality

Mentorship is a confidential space, and the wishes of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Worker must be respected with regard to the stories and experiences they may share in mentorship sessions within reason. Similar to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work itself, there are legal limitations to confidentiality which should be communicated from the outset.

Boundaries

Mentorship is not the same as the practice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work, and therefore there needs to be considerations regarding the balance between community and role obligations, particularly if the mentor is someone known to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Worker. This is not to say that someone known cannot be a mentor, but in some situations it is an inevitability and boundaries should be established from the outset and logged for transparency.

Core Components of Culturally Responsive Mentorship

Cultural Mentorship

Cultural mentorship is mentorship that contextualises activities from the perspective of culture to facilitate the development of cultural responsiveness.³⁷ It centres culture and First Nations ways of Knowing, Being, and Doing rather than approaching it from a western perspective.³⁸ This is critical as it allows space for acknowledging the impact of colonisation and its effects on First Nations Peoples.

This differs from clinical mentorship which usually does not centre culture and First Nations ways of Knowing, Being, and Doing. It is not to say that clinical mentorship cannot, but rather that it does not the majority of the time. It is often the case that First Nations clinicians offer both cultural and clinical mentorship as they frequently navigate the many worlds First Nations Peoples operate in.

Frequency of Mentorship

Mentorship must occur at regular intervals to establish a routine and reinforce its importance. Organisations must be proactive in their scheduling and rescheduling (if applicable) of mentorship at an interval determined by both the peer worker, the organisation, and the mentor. The organisation must uphold the importance of mentorship, and provide adequate resourcing so that the peer worker can undertake mentorship in a manner which is not at the expense of their client care work or within their own free time.

Co-Creation of Mentorship Plan

Any mentorship plan must be co-created by the organisation and the peer worker. Whilst there may be a recommended plan or minimum standard within the organisation, any deviation from this will need to be informed by the peer worker. This plan may include (but not limited to):

- Frequency of mentorship
- Preference for mentor
- Preference for mentorship time
- Length of time of mentorship session
- Type of mentorship (there may be a mix of cultural mentorship and clinical mentorship, but with cultural mentorship at a minimum)
- Accommodations for mentorship (e.g. technological requirements and accessibility requirements)

Adaptable Components of Mentorship

What Mentorship Activities Look Like

Mentorship activities are not limited to sitting in a room, mentorship may look like:

- Debriefing about the day watching the sunrise or sunset
- Going fishing
- Going for a walk
- Going for a drive
- Video-calling whilst doing the above activities.

The important aspect is that Mentorship is happening, regardless of the context.

Pictured: Aunty Raeylene Mckenna, Uncle Tony Lee, & Aunty Vicki Mckenna



Who Can Mentor?

In respecting First Nations ways of Knowing, Being, and Doing, mentorship is not only restricted to other peer workers, or health professionals. However, in line with organisational or legal requirements, it may be mandatory. Given a core component of mentorship is cultural mentorship, incorporating Elders as mentors demonstrates an understanding as an organisation that cultural authority lies with them and is a public recognition of that fact.

Mentors may not be located within the community the peer worker is working in. In fact it may be more beneficial for a mentor that sits outside the community. For example:

“In (redacted small community health service with peer workers) if there’s fighting in the community, it’s really important to have mentorship for the workers there. Quite often if you go to a specific person for mentorship in that community, family members can gang up on you, so support has to be someone non-biased and someone they feel like they can talk to”.

This consideration will vary from community to community, from, so understanding the local context is critical to establishing what mentorship may look like, and by whom.

Recommended Implementation Steps

1. The organisation undertakes due diligence in scoping existing mentorship structures, understanding the community context and other relevant factors that may shape the mentorship structure.
2. Workshop the mentorship structure with existing peer workers, or community broadly to develop a structure that works best for the community.
3. Formalise the mentorship structure as a minimum standard for the organisation.
4. Collaborate with new and existing peer workers to determine a system that works best for the peer worker based on the minimum standard for the organisation.
5. The organisation is to coordinate and make accessible the initial establishment and ongoing implementation of mentorship structures for the peer worker. e.g. such as financial resources, technological requirements (if virtual/online mentorship), and reminders to the peer worker.
6. Make the mentorship structure public as a resource for other organisations to adapt and utilise.
7. Regularly revise mentorship standards and individual peer worker mentorship structures.
8. The organisation is to continue to uphold the importance of peer workers undertaking mentorship, including commitment to rescheduling missed sessions, providing support and resources to fill gaps left when peer workers undertake mentorship, allowing flexibility around the peer worker's service delivery and outcomes in order to prioritise the attendance of mentorship.



Local Considerations

Description

Each context an organisation and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Worker works in has its own specific considerations. This may be geographical (metropolitan, rural, remote), demographic (e.g. religious beliefs of a region, age, gender) and cultural. Other considerations that are Country specific such as saltwater/freshwater, terrain, seasons and weather events all play a role. Additionally, the colonial history of a Country such as the impact of massacres, dispossession, and mission sites also should be taken into consideration. These factors are to be taken into account by both organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers.

Key Considerations

Geography

The impact of geography on the way peer work operates is substantial. Across metropolitan, rural, and remote areas the availability of services and the extent to which communities balance walking in two worlds can differ significantly. Organisations must understand the area they are providing services to and communicate this to current or future peer workers. Peer workers that notice shifts and changes relating to local community should notify organisations to ensure that the organisation is culturally responsive to changing dynamics in communities. Geography also has implications for connecting with other peer workers, mentorship structures, engaging in self-care activities and training/professional development activities.

Diversity of First Nations Peoples

Relating to local considerations, it is important for organisations to understand the diversity of First Nations peoples within the communities that peer workers are supporting. This will assist in planning for how many peer workers may be recruited for, and the diversity of the peer workers to be recruited. Demographics such as age, gender diversity, sexuality, religious beliefs, languages spoken and culture need to be taken into account when considering the local context.

Core Components

Meeting Community Needs

The most critical component of taking into account local considerations is to meet community needs. What is required by community will differ from place to place, the local community needs to make the decisions about what will work for them. In providing autonomy, choice, and self-determination to communities, this will lead to success.

Organisations should constantly have community needs at the forefront of their organisational activities which should inform peer work practice.

By meeting community needs, peer workers have clearer direction in their support and align the pace they are working to support community members with the pace the wider community needs are being progressed.

Organisations to Scope and Understand the Local Community Context and Communicate That to Peer Workers

Organisations are required to deeply understand the communities they are working with. They are to know what services that go out to those communities, what the current challenges are those communities are facing, accessibility requirements (e.g. does the community have internet issues?) and the community/family structures that exist. Organisations should not rely on peer workers for this information, rather that the information peer workers provide should supplement the knowledge the organisation already has. Peer workers can also provide insight into the accuracy of existing organisational perceptions of community. Additionally, organisations should understand what the current perceptions of peer workers are within the communities they support and think about how they can build the profile of peer workers as leaders within those communities.

Organisations to Resource for the Local Context

In conjunction with scoping and understanding the local community context, getting peer work right means that peer workers should be resourced to accommodate for community requirements. For example if it is known that community members that are being supported don't have mobile phones, mobile phones should be resourced for which may be beneficial for their Social and Emotional Wellbeing. If access to communities can only be done by physically travelling there, vehicles should be resourced and appropriate work time allocated for peer workers to travel safely.

Peer workers should also be notified from the outset the resourcing needs of communities and importantly what is available to support communities. This should be reviewed at regular intervals.

Organisations to Understand Significant Periods of the Year That May Impact Peer Workers either Personally or Within Their Roles

Communities may have significant times of the year which may mean an influx of visitors, or that contact may be difficult. This could be related to lore, but also significant community events that happen throughout the year such as specific festivals, sporting events and weather such as seasonal flooding and extreme heat. It is essential to factor this into the planning for the provision of peer work. Additionally, peer workers themselves may have community obligations they need to engage in which must also be noted and factored into the provision of peer work.

Adaptable Components

Location of Peer Worker

As mentioned in culturally responsive mentorship under 'who can mentor', it may be more beneficial for the peer worker not to be located in the community they are supporting, for similar reasons. However, this decision is dependent on the local context and should be considered on a case-by-case basis and guided by the peer worker and their manager/team leader.

How Resources May Be Allocated to the Local Context

Funding is a concern for many organisations that employ peer workers, and therefore fully accommodating the needs of a local context may not be possible. However there are other ways that resources may be allocated to be responsive to community needs:

- Moving funding out of temporary/fly in fly out positions directly into peer work, or resourcing of peer work.
- Working in partnership with other organisations within the community, or ones that service the community.
- Partnering formally with community leaders for the provision of support.
- Organisation and peer worker co-applying for grants to fill resourcing needs.

An essential requirement to this is for organisations to be discussing directly with communities they are supporting about how they can meet their needs and being transparent about the current resourcing that is available.



Communicating Transparency Regarding Peer Work

Description

The reality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work is that it can be often difficult and challenging. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work can be likened to constantly staring into a mirror that reflects personal and collective lived experience. This mirror also reflects the personal and collective strength of community and is primarily the view that is shown.

Communicating the truths about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work is imperative for organisations so that prospective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers can make an informed choice about whether this is a job they would like to undertake. Genuinely valuing and celebrating peer work involves recognising that it is inherently meaningful, effective but challenging work.

Key Considerations

Understanding Community Needs

If an organisation understands the community they are working with, this allows them to be honest in informing prospective peer workers about the work they are getting into. This allows prospective peer workers choice and autonomy, and not to be taken by surprise when they begin working as peer workers.

Balancing Community and Professional Obligations

Peer workers are at the forefront of balancing community and professional obligations as they are directly engaging with communities. Organisations should communicate the extent to which this may be the case, depending on where the peer worker is located and who they may be providing support to.

Core Components

Organisations Being Honest About the Benefits and Challenges in the Promotion and Recruitment of Peer Work and Peer Work Positions

Organisations are to communicate all aspects of peer work to all people interested in taking up peer work roles. Aspects including talking about their lived experience openly, non-judgement of people they work with, the current state of peer work and remuneration rate. Being transparent in the recruitment and selection process will support a successful process.

“ Organisations need to actually have an honest conversation upfront about the warts and all about what the job entails, not just to talk about the saving part of it, but also the other parts of it, such as stress and difficulties for yourself. ”

Prospective Peer Workers Are to Engage in Self-Reflection and Assess Whether They Think They Are the Right Person to Do This Role

Engaging in peer work is meaningful and rewarding, but it is not for everyone. The practice of peer work itself combined with navigating the many systems (mental health, alcohol and other drugs, justice) together can be demanding. Thinking about whether or not you are the right person to engage in this work is pivotal. Peer work will require you to share your lived experience and you should be comfortable enough in your journey to do so.

Organisations to Consider the Readiness of the Prospective Peer Worker

Whilst it is up to individuals to recognise whether or not they should engage in peer work, from a liability perspective, organisations should be checking to see whether from their perspective the individual is ready to engage in peer work. How this can be done is explored in the adaptable components section on page 45.

“ There is a need to not self-judge and for us to be clear that not undertaking this work makes you any lesser. People feel like they have to do this work, but it doesn't mean they're best equipped to do this work. It doesn't make you any lesser to not do this work. ”

Organisations Being Genuine in Their Commitment to Peer Work

The way organisations show that they are being genuine about peer work can be seen in many ways. One way is remuneration of peer work roles and the requirements needed to become a peer worker. For example, if a peer work role requires a tertiary qualification but is paid at a low rate, this illustrates the organisation's lack of commitment to the discipline. In parallel, if a peer work role emphasises cultural knowledge and community experience but is paid at a low rate, this also illustrates the organisation's lack of commitment to the discipline. Consideration should be placed on what the person is actually doing, and placing respect value on peer work, rather than solely on the presence of 'formal' or non-'formal' qualifications.

As there can be restraints on funding, an example of an incentive to show commitment can be intentionally reducing the advertised salary, and providing the reduction as a bonus to peer workers at the end of the year. Additionally, it is worth looking at non-monetary/non-salary benefits that could be provided to the peer worker to recognise their good work³⁹ ie. nominations for awards, end-of-year or end-of-peak-period celebrations, positive workplace culture, further leave, enjoyable team-building activities, and funding of self-care activities.

Adaptable Components

How Peer Work is Advertised

Ultimately how peer work roles are advertised will differ from community to community, and largely should be determined by the community. However, some aspects that are central to any advertisement is showing how life changing it can be to be working with community, and the value that peer work can bring to communities. Additionally, the organisational benefits of peer work can be communicated, such as provision of cultural leave, flexibility, culturally responsive mentorship and training and professional development opportunities.

How to Assess Whether a Prospective Peer Worker is Right for the Role

There are many ways in which this can be done, however from an organisational perspective that covers legal requirements a First Nations Health Professional in a regulated discipline and covered by insurance can assess the readiness of prospective peer workers.



Cultivating an Environment of Self-Care

Description

Mentioned in the section Communicating Transparency of Peer Work, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work is stressful, difficult, and will bring up emotions. Cultivating an environment of self-care is essential to balance the challenging parts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work with the many benefits that this work provides. It is also protective of all involved in peer work such as Community, the peer worker and the organisation.

It protects the Community by illustrating that the peer worker practices what they preach, reinforcing its importance and contributes the continuity of care and social capital of peer work within the community.

It protects the peer worker's wellbeing and they can continue to support Community by not burning out.

It protects the organisation because they save time and money on recruitment and onboarding, and ensures the continuity of care for community members.

Key Considerations

Self-Care Looks Different for Each Peer Worker

What self-care looks like will be different from peer worker to peer worker. It is important to be accommodating of different self-care strategies. It may be that peer workers need to take a step away from community for a number of days to talk through their issues, or utilising the Social and Emotional Wellbeing Wheel to guide their own self-care. Additionally it may be reaching out to a community member who has supported them in the past.

Warning Signs of Someone Not Doing Well

Job performance is often a marker of wellness, however given the nature of peer work this is not always the case.⁴⁰ There may be signs of someone not doing well that can be identified before job performance is impacted. Below are a list of signs that may be indicative of a peer worker not doing well:

- Disengagement
- Being resentful of the work
- Taking off from the job/ disappearing acts
- Relationships with family/friends/colleagues beginning to change
- Verbal outbursts
- Working back late or out of hours
- No longer being comfortable in sharing their experiences or lived experience story/journey
- No longer feeling satisfaction in sharing lived experience.

Core Components

Self-Care/Support Plan Co-Created and Implemented

A self-care/support plan is to be co-created by the peer worker and organisation and implemented. Aspects of this plan should include (but are not limited to):

- How often the organisation checks in with the peer worker.
- How much time/funding is available for a peer worker to engage in self-care activities.
- Identification of self-care activities and current supports.
- Signs of when the peer worker is not doing well so organisations understand when they may need to be more proactive in reaching out.
- Clear pathway for when peer worker needs to take a break or seeking guidance to navigate a difficult situation.

- Current and ongoing cultural obligations of the peer worker and ways the organisation can accommodate this.
- References to the mentorship plan (see Establishing Culturally Responsive Mentorship section at page 37)
- Making time for peer workers to check in with themselves.
- Organisational support structures beyond mentorship structures in place.

This self-care/support plan is the responsibility of the organisation to enforce in order to retain staff and prevent burn-out. The above activities ideally should be accommodated for within work hours and the above aspects where practical should be informed directly by the peer worker.

Adaptable Components

What is Contained Within Self-Care/Support Plan

The aspects listed above should be core aspects of a self-care/support plan. However, every individual is different regarding their support needs and so every person's self-care/support plan will look different.

“ We need to identify what are those early signs that are starting to create stress for peer workers... that would be useful so rather than getting to the point where someone's had enough. There hasn't necessarily been that recognition earlier so it's about articulating what those possible or potential signs of stress or duress for them could be, and how they might be able to alleviate them. ”

The People of ILEC: (Some) Representatives of the National Network, Advisory Group, and Staff



Training and Professional Development

Description

In the western knowledge system in which most organisations operate in, 'formal' qualifications are social currency. However, depending on the context, there can be evidence to show that there is a level of understanding about a specific area. Individuals engaging in training or professional development activities that are relevant to their roles as peer workers provide a structure for understanding a topic in addition to providing evidence to show others that they are knowledgeable in a certain area. This has significant implications particularly around understanding legal requirements of peer workers as it relates to their roles.

Key Considerations

Minimum Training Standards/ Requirements for Peer Workers

This is an emerging space and so minimum training standards and/or requirements is still in development. At the time of writing, many roles in Western Australia require a certificate in mental health or relevant qualification, or are willing to work towards these qualifications. This is an area we encourage organisations to set standards for themselves and make public so others can take inspiration and model what other organisations are doing, saving time in development of their own.

Core Components

Training and Professional Development is Embedded in the Position Description

This solidifies training and professional development as a requirement and responsibility which both illustrates the value the organisation places on it, and the prospective peer workers' commitment to it.

Development of a Training and Professional Development Plan Co-created Between the Organisation and Peer Worker

A plan co-created by the organisation and peer worker should be made to keep the organisation accountable to provide opportunities for training and professional development, and for the peer worker to be accountable to completing the training. As part of this plan, there should be regular check-ins regarding progress and a commitment that all training and professional development activities to occur within work hours, and if not, time in lieu must be implemented.

Organisational Planning and Budgeting Specifically for Training and Professional Development Activities for Peer Workers

In showing commitment to the value of peer work, organisations should be planning and budgeting specifically for training and professional development activities. This will be dependent on how many peer workers the organisation employs, and the training/professional development needs that may be specific to that community context. Additionally, depending on the location, activities may be required to be online, or travel may be required, so planning and budgeting should take this into consideration. Furthermore, this ensures that the peer worker's client care outcomes are adjusted where they are needed to be undertaking training. This means that any potential gaps in client care are resourced and the expectations are adjusted to reflect time away spent undertaking training.

Adaptable Components

Implementation of Training and Professional Development

Taking into account that First Nations Peoples walk in two worlds, there are some that are more familiar with First Nations knowledge systems than western knowledge systems, and vice versa. Given that training and professional development is often structured utilising western knowledge systems, individuals who are more familiar with First Nations knowledge systems may take some time to adapt to the style of western knowledge systems. Therefore, the way in which a peer worker may complete training and professional development may be different. For example, in committing to completing a Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work, it may be being flexible in the number of units that are undertaken and understanding that it may take longer than expected to complete the Certificate IV course.

Types of Training to Be Undertaken

Training requirements for peer workers is an ongoing and emerging area. Below are qualifications and trainings that are recommended to be critical to people in peer work roles:

- Certificate IV in Mental Health and Mental Health Peer Workⁱ
- Media trainingⁱⁱ
- SBLGBTIQA+ training
- Cultural responsiveness training
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific mental health/ suicide prevention such as Mental Health First Aid for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, or I-ASIST

The adaptability of this is that people will have varying levels of training about different areas, and there is work to be done in development of minimum training and professional development standards for peer workers.

Additionally, it is important to consider ceremony and lore activities as training and development. If peer workers indicate their preference for engaging in structured cultural learning periods, organisations should consider this of equal importance as training embodied within the western knowledge systems.

Recommended Implementation Steps

1. Organisation to allocate budget for training and professional development.
2. Establish training and professional development standard within organisation for peer workers, guided by local community and existing peer workers.
3. Make public the training and professional development standard and communicate this in all advertisements for peer workers.
4. Co-create training and professional development plan with new peer workers for activities beyond the minimum standard considering any accessibility requirements.
5. Implement training and professional development plan with new peer workers monitored during check-ins with manager.
6. Make reasonable adjustments to training and professional development plan.
7. Review minimum standard regularly to update on any new developments in the peer work space.

Establishing Boundaries

Description

Alongside self-care, establishing boundaries is an area for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers that runs parallel. For peer workers, understanding your personal boundaries relating to your own limits and what you share, in addition to boundaries relating to your role is important to maintain support provided to Community. Organisations assist in reinforcing both personal and role boundaries for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers.

Key Considerations

Confidentiality and Legal Implications

As discussed in Establishing Culturally Responsive Mentorship on page 26, there are legal limits to confidentiality. Peer workers should be mindful of the legal implications of the stories they share. For example, if sharing a story about a personal experience of suicidality because of sexual abuse, this is a different level of sharing where legalities have to be considered. Organisations should be well informed of these legalities and should reinforce these boundaries regularly. Additionally, there are legal implications of sharing stories about other people, for example if a community member mentioned that they had robbed a petrol station while suicidal, they can accidentally implicate a person in the sharing of that story.

Cultural and Professional Obligations

The dance between cultural and professional obligations has been discussed throughout this guide, but it becomes front of mind when thinking about the establishment of boundaries. The interplay between cultural and professional obligations will vary from person to person, however professional obligations should be made clear by the organisation the peer worker is working for. These boundaries are within control of both the peer worker and the organisation which should allow the peer worker to focus on their cultural obligations which may always exist outside their role as a peer worker.

Core Components

Organisation to Provide a Clear Position Description That Outlines the Role and Responsibilities of Peer Workers

This allows the peer worker to understand their role and can communicate boundaries clearly to others. Additionally, this allows peer workers to be transparent with the person they are working with about boundaries regarding themselves, and confidentiality boundaries too. Culturally appropriate resources may need to be created to assist the peer worker to communicate their role boundaries to clients and community members.

Peer Worker Sharing Their Story Safely and Understanding When They Are Activated

Peer workers should understand when they are being activated. It can be the case that peer workers may not have a strong awareness of things that activate them because of the passion that they have about this work. Additionally, as peer work involves more than one with lived experience coming together, it is about being mindful not to overshare and activate others. Lived experience stories should be shared in a safe and open way that is of mutual benefit to the peer worker and the person they are supporting.

Peer Workers Understanding the Limits of Their Support and When They May Be in a Situation Where it is Beyond Their Skillset

Peer workers may be the first assistance during a crisis, but are not responsible for a psychological intervention. Clear referral processes onwards should be established by organisations for the protection of the peer worker and community members. Understanding the limits of support peer workers provide can be made clear by a clear position description and organisations consistently communicating the boundaries.

Organisations Regularly Checking Boundaries of Peer Worker

Organisations should regularly check the boundaries of the peer worker which can be supported by a strong mentorship structure and appropriate training and professional development. If an organisation leads the setting of boundaries or leads reminders on this, it can help the peer worker to save face with community. There may be instances where it can be hard for a peer worker to communicate the boundaries of their role at times without impacting on their client/community relationships so organisations may be required to lead these discussions.

Adaptable Components

What Checking Boundaries Looks Like

As breach of boundaries varies from situation to situation and person to person, organisations may utilise discretion as to when boundaries may be breached in line with the position description of the peer worker and mentorship documentation. If a peer worker is receiving cultural mentorship, boundaries that specifically relate to the overlap between cultural and professional obligations may already be addressed or are in the process of being addressed.

“ There’s some people that are really passionate and they just want to tell everyone their story but it’s not helpful, they’re not ready, or they’re not doing it safely. You might have your story and your passion, but there’s something else there that you need to enable you to do your work...

I think that’s what separates a good peer worker from just an okay one. It’s about how much to share and about helping rather than burdening.

“ I needed a manager that put in the boundaries for me when I couldn’t do it myself, and enforces those boundaries for example them telling me ‘you’ve done this for so long you need to take a break.’ ”

”

Role Flexibility And Leave Accommodations

Description

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work is dynamic, constantly shifting, and each day brings a different set of circumstances to navigate. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers are flexible and attend to the needs of the people they are supporting. Organisations and Peer Workers must work together to be flexible in the structure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work positions, and provide reasonable leave accommodations that take into consideration not only the role but cultural obligations the Peer Worker may have.

Key Considerations

Cultural Obligations

As mentioned frequently in this guide there is a balancing of cultural and professional obligations that is required for peer workers. Peer workers may be in communities that have similar cultural obligations, and decisions regarding flexibility for cultural obligations can impact community perception of organisations. For example, if there are inadequate provisions for cultural leave in an organisation, communities can view the organisation in a negative light regardless of whether the organisation is a non-Indigenous or a community organisation.

Establishing Boundaries

Role flexibility and leave accommodations go hand in hand with establishing boundaries. Allowing autonomy and choice for peer workers in how they navigate their professional work may improve their wellbeing and retain peer workers in the long run.

Core Components

Organisation to Accommodate Cultural Leave Within Policies and Procedures

Part of being a culturally responsive organisation is accommodating the cultural needs of their peer workers, and staff broadly. Many cultural leave policies are not adequate enough for peer workers to meet cultural obligations such as lore. Changing existing organisational policies and procedures, or the provision of cultural leave in employment contracts are two ways in which cultural obligations can be accommodated which shows an organisational commitment to respecting Culture.

Honest, Reciprocal Communication Between Organisations and Peer Workers About Things That Are Happening

Often life situations may crop up that are difficult to navigate and time away from a persons role may be required. Organisations can provide an environment of honesty and sharing, particularly if they are cultivating an environment of self-care. In circumstances like these, organisations can clearly communicate what the job security of a peer worker looks like if long absences are needed. Reciprocally, peer workers should communicate anything that may be going on for them in the event that a long absence may be required. This allows both parties to be clear and navigate any circumstances that require a long absence proactively, rather than reactively.

Organisation to Accommodate Flexibility for Hours Worked

Hours worked in peer work can be irregular (compared to jobs that are traditionally 9-5) and often you can be tapped on the shoulder off the clock. Organisations that recognise this can accommodate flexibility for peer workers. For example, if a peer worker works long hours multiple days in a row, in recognition of the long hours, the peer worker can take time in lieu in recognition of the hours worked. This can be made mandatory with extra hours logged to be taken at another time.

“ (With) Peer work you'll never get rid of the idea that you're always going to get pinged off the clock but if you have good managers they can make changes in your job design and structure. ”

Adaptable Components

What Flexibility Looks Like for Peer Workers

Peer workers have different needs and requirements for flexibility. Some may choose to take time off specifically, and others may choose to focus on work that isn't directly frontline for the extra work they do. It is important to allow peer workers choice in determining what might work best for them.

Other Forms of Leave That Can Be Implemented

Beyond cultural leave, other leave can be advocated for or implemented such as:

Mental Health/Wellbeing leave

Leave specific for mental health days or activities that focus on improving wellbeing. Importantly this is not a single day for mental health leave, but it may be multiple days or weeks dependent on the communities geographical location and other factors.

Reflection Leave

Time away to focus on themselves solely for reflective activities e.g. Taking time away to read books/ engage in activities that facilitates self-reflection about their role.

Recommended Implementation Steps

1. Organisation to review existing policies and procedures and note any existing considerations for cultural leave or flexibility of roles that relate specifically to peer workers (in front line positions or otherwise)
2. On completion of review, regardless of whether there are provisions in place, seek feedback on the implementation of those policies and procedures from peer workers and how they can be amended for peer workers within work hours.
3. Co-create new/existing provisions with peer workers utilising components and considerations noted in this guide.
4. Implement the revised provisions for cultural leave and flexibility of roles for new and existing peer workers within the organisation.
5. Make public the changes to policies and procedures for other organisations to utilise or take inspiration from.

“ Three days cultural leave is not practical – If you're practicing and going out lore, it's not three days or five days, we're looking at three-four weeks and some families can decide as to whether someone is on leave. ”



A Note on Organisational Psychosocial Risk

As of 24 December 2022, in Western Australia, revised Work Health and Safety Laws have determined that a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) must eliminate or minimise psychosocial risks and hazards so far as is reasonably practicable.

A psychosocial hazard is anything that could harm an individual's mental health and can include aspects such as lack of role clarity, poor support, and bullying.

At the time of writing this guide, this is an emerging space, with work being undertaken to understand what this means practically for organisations. However, many psychosocial hazards are addressed through the practical steps outlined in this guide.

In the peer work context, should the provisions in this guide be followed, this can mitigate organisational psychosocial risk significantly. Following the Getting Peer Work Right table (page 36) ensures that an organisation is taking positive steps towards mitigating psychosocial risk.

Table 10 outlines the domains of getting peer work right mapped to specific psychosocial hazards that they may protect against.

Domain of Peer Work	Psychosocial Hazard ⁴¹
Establishing Culturally Responsive Mentorship	Poor support Traumatic events or material Conflict or poor workplace relationships and interactions Poor organisational justice Remote or isolated work
Considering the local context	Remote or isolated work Poor physical environment
Communicating transparency regarding peer work	Traumatic events or material Job demands Poor organisational justice
Cultivating an environment of self-care	Violence and aggression Bullying Harassment, including sexual harassment Poor organisational justice Conflict or poor workplace relationships and interactions
Supporting training and professional development	Poor organisational change management Conflict or poor workplace relationships and interactions Poor organisational justice Inadequate reward and recognition
Establishing boundaries	Lack of role clarity Low job control Job demands Violence and aggression Bullying Harassment, including sexual harassment
Role flexibility and leave accommodations	Low job control Inadequate reward and recognition Poor organisational justice Poor organisational change management

Table 10: Domains of getting Peer Work right mapped to psychosocial hazards

Value of Peer Work

Benefits and Impact of Embracing Peer Work in Organisations

It is important to reiterate that the word 'benefit' in this instance does not refer exclusively to economic benefits, as there are social, spiritual, and emotional benefits which over time may also result in economic benefits.

The benefits of peer work are interconnected, whereby the social justice, economic, and organisational benefits will significantly overlap. For example, shifting an organisational system grounded in a deficit model based in western knowledge systems towards a strengths-based model like Social and Emotional Wellbeing/First Nations knowledge systems, establishes and contributes to long-term economic sustainability for the organisation, the peer worker, and the wider community. This shifts socioeconomic status through investment in peer work, which improves the broader community economy.

Social Justice and Equity Benefits

Investing in peer work is contribution to progressing a strong and emerging field of work that has been present for over 60,000 years prior to colonisation. Taking peer work seriously contributes to self-determination and empowerment of First Nations Peoples and communities. Getting peer work right for First Nations Peoples is getting it right for everyone.

Economic Benefits

Mentioned in the Western Australia Lived Experience Framework, a recent evaluation forecasts that for every dollar invested in a 100% peer operated service, approximately \$3.27 of social and economic value is expected to be created.⁴²

Every dollar invested in First Nations services and businesses returns approximately \$3.41 in social value⁴³. For First Nations Peoples, services that are led by and for First Nations Peoples contribute to social cohesion⁴⁴, greater engagement in community activities⁴⁵ (e.g., sport) and healing⁴⁶ which all have significant economic value beyond the social value initially created by investment in First Nations services and businesses.

The presence of mainstream peer work results improved engagement with service users, more sustained treatment outcomes, a reduction in critical incidents, and less need for urgent care. This leads to benefits to the broader health workforce such as increasing staff retention and wellbeing⁴⁷. As the cost of turnover ranges between 25-100% of an employee's salary⁴⁸, and the significant economic cost of the impact of mental health challenges and racism⁴⁹, having an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workforce is economically beneficial for organisations, peer workers, and the communities they serve.

Additionally, as less time may be required to build rapport and connection due to connecting through shared lived experiences, this allows community members to feel heard and supported sooner than if seen by another mental health professional which can lead to significant economic benefits through effectiveness of the care.

Long term this may reduce health system burden, and burden on other social systems.

“ It costs more than 40k a year to get a single agency worker (e.g. Doctors and nurses) out here – having a peer workforce we're more likely to have more meaningful relationships with staff. It might take 5 or more visits from psychologists visiting our communities to engage in meaningful conversations with their clients. ”

“ It's about putting the resources to the strength that is known and evident in communities. The people are there, but they require the resources to enable them to do the best job. ”

Organisational Benefits

Organisationally, there are benefits beyond social justice and economic benefits. Broadly, investment in getting peer work right is a retention strategy given the self-determination and empowerment focus of the work. Getting peer work right creates a work environment and culture of responsibility, and practices what the peer workers provide to communities, within the organisation itself.

It is also an opportunity for organisations to showcase that they are engaging in best practice as a promotional point and encouraging other organisations to follow suit. Getting peer work right is a reference point for organisational readiness not only just to get peer work right, but also cultural responsiveness.

Benefit	Benefit to the Organisation	Benefit to the Peer Worker	Benefit to the Community
Social Justice	<p>Contributing to the self-determination and empowerment of First Nations Peoples.</p> <p>Contributing to moving from a deficit focus to a strengths-based model of wellbeing.</p> <p>Contributing to Closing the Gap targets.</p>	<p>Continuation of a cultural practice that has been enacted for over 60,000 years.</p> <p>Contributing to moving from a deficit focus to a strengths-based model of wellbeing.</p> <p>Contributing to Closing the Gap targets.</p> <p>Provides a sense of belonging and purpose to the peer worker.</p>	<p>Community members are heard and supported on their Social and Emotional Wellbeing journey.⁵¹</p> <p>Contributing to moving from a deficit focus to a strengths-based model of wellbeing.</p> <p>Contributing to Closing the Gap targets.</p> <p>Upholds the principle of ‘Nothing About us Without Us’.</p>
Economic	<p>Represent good value for money compared to other mental health professionals such as psychologists (when referring to roles that provide direct peer support) and through reduced reliance on inpatient services.⁵⁰</p> <p>Potentially easier to recruit for, tapping into local expertise.</p> <p>High potential for more effective care, having peer workers who already know the community provide support.</p> <p>Funding saved through the provision of peer work can be utilised to grow the peer workforce.</p> <p>Getting peer work right will retain staff saving on recruitment costs.</p> <p>Contributing to Closing the Gap targets which have broader economic benefits.</p>	<p>Being paid to continue a cultural practice that has been present for over 60,000 years.</p> <p>Provides economic security to the peer worker.</p>	<p>Communities get more effective care, with support provided likely to be quicker than other mental health professionals.</p> <p>unity capacity building by training peer workers local to community, which stimulates the community economy.⁵²</p>
Organisational	<p>Greater organisational reputation within community by doing peer work right, which may result in communities engaging with your organisation more.</p> <p>Opportunity to promote that the organisation is undertaking best practice in peer work, leading the way and showing other organisations the value of doing peer work right.</p>	<p>Peer worker is proud to work for an organisation that is genuinely investing in peer work practice and getting it right.</p> <p>Peer worker more likely to stay in their role due to organisation implementing best practice.</p> <p>Peer worker brings the community insight into the organisation.</p>	<p>Communities build trust with local organisation based on the positive interactions they are having with the organisation. For example, if an individual is engaging in a counselling service and wanting to take a break from the service, because of the relationship with a peer worker, when they’re ready to re-engage it’s easier to start and continue the support.</p>

Table 11: Benefits of employing peer workers to organisations, peer workers, and the wider community

The Future of Peer Work

When looking beyond the responsibilities of organisations and peer workers and wider into advocacy of peer work, there are other avenues that peer work can be recognised for the value that it brings. For peak bodies and state and national organisations, the funding and implementation of the following activities will emphasise the importance of, and commitment to the value that peer work brings. These are separated into systems recommendations and organisational recommendations.

Systems Recommendations

These recommendations look to equip peer work as a discipline with autonomy, decision-making capacity, and power. Typically funded or implemented through peak bodies, state government commissioning agencies, federal and philanthropic foundations.

Recommendation	Description
Establishing a Centre of Excellence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work which houses resources, opportunities, and support to employers of peer workers and a national peer association.	An organisation that provides leadership, best practice, research and evaluation, and development specifically for peer work.
Establishing a local/state Community of Practice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers.	Network of peer workers state-wide or within a given region to establish connection, share knowledge, provide mentorship and receive support.
Establishment of an Aboriginal Advisory Group to oversee the implementation and regular revision of the peer workforce guide which will integrate learnings from practice.	Ongoing revision based on community learnings will be critical to ensure that this is a living document, being constantly responsive to experiences of organisations, peer workers, and community members.
Fund the adaptation of this guide to specific contexts.	Taking the learnings from this guide, translating the learnings and lessons into other areas such as state specific contexts, communities and cultural groups such as SBLGBTIQA+.

Table 12: Wider systems recommendations for the peer work discipline

Organisational Recommendations

These recommendations provide organisations avenues to publicly show their commitment to peer work beyond establishing culturally responsive foundations for peer work to thrive.

Recommendation	Description
Development of a Lived Experience framework specific to the organisation with references to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work to show public commitment to peer work.	A lived experience framework that states organisational commitment and how lived experience will be woven into their operational activities.
Explore opportunities of setting up cadetships/ traineeships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers.	Creating a pathway for future peer workers or others who would like to move into peer work.
Integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers and lived experience into leadership positions.	Demonstrates commitment and organisational value of peer work by having peer workers in leadership positions.
Documenting and publishing adherence to the activities explored in this guide and the outcomes for the organisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Work, and broader community.	Demonstration of public commitment and accountability to community by publishing organisational progress on peer work activities.

Table 13: Wider organisational recommendations for the peer work discipline

Conclusion

Undertaking peer work is a journey for organisations and for those who directly support and seek positive change for community. It is a continuous evolution with ongoing education, professional development, and adapting to the everchanging community and societal circumstances.

In the way that peer work is the flow and interconnectedness of navigating systems, organisations too are constantly navigating systems for their own sustainability.

Peer work in an organisational context exists to support the health and wellbeing of community and the productivity of community. It assists in alleviating health disparities by professionalising an activity that has worked for thousands of years and will continue to work for thousands of years.

In being culturally responsive, peer work should not be seen in isolation, they should be integral, and part of the organisation. From policies, to procedures, to practice, effective integration of peer work means that communities are getting best practice support which they deserve.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workers and organisations cannot be separate from one another, they must work together.

By peer workers and organisations upholding their responsibilities to each other, and to community, peer work is done right.

When peer work is done right, it benefits everyone.



Government of **Western Australia**
Mental Health Commission

The development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workforce Guide (guide) was supported by the Mental Health Commission (Commission) as part of the Western Australian Government's commitment in creating meaningful partnerships.

This guide is the first of its kind in Australia and is dedicated to supporting communities in leading their own Social and Emotional Wellbeing journey. The Commission encourages organisations across Western Australia to use this guide to establish, sustain, and continuously improve their own Aboriginal Lived Experience (Peer) Workforces.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Overview of Process

Planning

What did we do:

- Planned for Co-Design/Co-Creation at the outset.
- Agreed that all working group members will be co-authors on this guide with their consent.
- Agreed that all working group members would be remunerated for every engagement throughout the process.

Selection of Working Group Members

What did we do:

- Utilised the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre's National Network and National Advisory Group to recruit working group members.
- Recruited a predominantly Western Australia group, with working group members who sit outside Western Australia having significant experience being involved in national projects relating to peer work and are sharing directly from their lived experience.
- Where recruitment was not possible out of those groups, we utilised our own connections to obtain appropriate representation.
- Emphasised recruiting for diversity of the group (male/female/geography/SBLGBTIQA+ status) to have diverse input into the guide.

Workshop

What did we do:

- Engaged a First Nations facilitator for this workshop.
- Engaged a First Nations psychologist to provide support for this workshop.
- Workshopped what an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workforce Guide would look like.
- Scheduled the first monthly meeting for the guide to review draft sections of the guide.

Drafting

What did we do:

- Working group members decided on the story and structure of the guide. The writing strictly adhered to the story and structure determined by members. Any deviation from the story or structure, permission was sought from the working group members.
- Development and writing of the guide was always done in a way that respected and held space for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authorship and ownership of the content.
- Kept a detailed log of all feedback from working group members and integrated all feedback into the draft guide for all working group members to see.
- Monthly meetings between working group members to work on sections that were drafted and sent beforehand.
- Scrapped/re-wrote/added sections based on the group feedback.
- Out of session contributions were remunerated, including time spent reading the draft sections.
- Regular meeting with the Western Australian Mental Health Commission for updates and presenting to various Working Groups and community organisations.

Completion

- Did a targeted Request for Quote to First Nations organisations that could design this guide.
- Final guide group meetings and individual catch-ups with group members unable to attend to obtain sign-off on final draft.
- Seek confirmation of authorship across all group members.



Endnotes

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