

Strengthening Lived Experience Leadership for Transformative Systems Change: A South Australian Consensus Statement

Our Vision

We believe unequivocally that now is the time for lived experience leadership to be developed and embedded in our systems. The need is visible and the conditions for change are right. The vision for lived experience leadership and future services are where humanity and connection are centred and where people with lived experience meaningfully and equally contribute at all levels, to the point that it becomes the norm.

Through taking action together a more holistic approach will guide change, and ensure that our language, power, and mindsets, shift beyond biomedical and 'illness' dominated narratives. Upholding rights, giving control to people to determine their own lives and authentic co-design are essential foundations of the changes we seek. Services where people are valued, compassionate care is standard and accountability exists, offer people seeking support a better experience of care and better outcomes for their lives. Systems are strengthened when discrimination and tokenism are minimised and where peoples' dignity is prioritised.

Leadership across the system, including by and with people with lived experience, is core to this vision being realised and is itself a key driver of the broader systems change that the mental health and social services sector require.

Our Actions

As a collective we believe that the following actions will contribute to fundamental change, and we are committed to bringing them to fruition:

1. Increase the presence of lived experience leaders in governance. Ensure more lived experience designated director positions with boards, statutory councils and commissioning groups.
2. Learning and cultural change programs of lived experience leadership are arranged with executive leaders, staff and communities focussing on diversity of lived experience leadership, supports, preferences and working through stigma and othering.
3. Strengthen learning pathways and leadership skills development for people with lived experience and enable and encourage opportunities for them to lead and provide advocacy. Enable easier access to professional development and formal qualifications.
4. Fund leading lived experience organisations to develop and deliver networking activities, including coordination of information, activities and events that support local lived experience leadership, community initiatives and voice across diverse population groups. Focus on intersectionality.
5. Enable resource flows for meaningful co-production of all services and programs. This should include training of co-production facilitators and chairpersons, and funding equal places at the table for lived experience advisors and leaders.
6. Promote lived experience leadership and accountability measures through service agreements, KPIs and, where appropriate, regulatory frameworks and legislative processes.
7. Ensure models of care include equal recognition of lived experience workforces and peer support.
8. Ensure range of organisational and sector infrastructure for the effective recognition, valuing and embedding of the lived experience workforce.

In February 2021 over 40 mental health, social sector and lived experience leaders gathered to decide a path forward for enabling lived experience leadership to thrive and have impact across South Australia. This document represents eight key actions that all agreed as priorities for systems change and should collectively be pursued to make our shared vision a reality.

We invite you, with courage and conviction, to join us in ensuring lived experience leadership is recognised as the key lever for transformative systems change in South Australia. If done properly, lived experience can transform the way, the how and the why through which we make difference in the world.

Consensus Statement Context:

In 2019 the SA Lived Experience Leadership Advocacy Network (LELAN) and UniSA's Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Research and Education Group (MHSPRE) were successful in gaining two years of funding from the Fay Fuller Foundation to establish the Activating Lived Experience Leadership (ALEL) project. The ALEL project was designed as a participatory action research (PAR) and community development project, bringing people together to improve the way that lived experience leadership is defined, recognised and utilised at the systems level.

This Consensus Statement is the result of working with mental health, social sector and lived experience leaders to determine actions we can all take to embed, and leverage lived experience across South Australia.

For more information, resources and background reports visit the project page at www.lelan.org.au/alel

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