

Lived experience at the Commission

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System reflected a new approach and commitment to working with lived experience. A key observation of the Royal Commission's final report was that the system will only be safe and effective – and will only lead to genuinely improved outcomes – if the system is designed, delivered and overseen in partnership with people who have a lived experience of that system.

This underpins the leadership design of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission, which has appointed designated Lived Experience Consumer and Carer commissioners. The Commission has designated lived experience functions:

- to elevate the leadership, and support the full and effective participation, of consumers and carers in decision-making processes
- to develop and support the leadership capabilities of lived experience
- to design and deliver initiatives to develop awareness and understanding of people's experiences of mental illness and distress
- to promote the role, value and inclusion of families, carers, supporters and kin.

Our Lived Experience Team

In response to the Royal Commission recommendation 28 'Developing system-wide roles for the full and effective participation of people with lived experience of mental illness or psychological distress', the Commission has developed a specific lived experience stream within the organisation.

Led by the two Lived Experience Commissioners, Maggie Toko (Consumer Commissioner) and Jacqueline Gibson (Carer Commissioner), the Lived Experience Team now includes a range of designated roles, including a General Manager who is part of the Commission's Executive team, a manager and two Senior Lived Experience Advisors. Further roles within the team, including policy roles, will be recruited to support consumer and carer project and policy development.

The Lived Experience Team provides critical internal consultancy across the full range of the Commission's functions and is also building a portfolio of work through a range of projects related to functions as set out in the Act.



“The foundation of my work lies not in abstract policy or distant directives but in the voices and lived experiences of families, carers, and supporters – those who often find themselves unheard, lost in the vast machinery of Victoria’s public mental health and wellbeing system. It is their stories, their quiet struggles, that inform every focus, every direction, every priority that guides the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission.”

Jacqueline Gibson, Lived Experience, Carer Commissioner

Embedding lived experience

The Lived Experience Team is building the foundations, policies and structures for a growing lived experience program through targeted activities. These include projects like developing inclusive internal recruitment policies, reviewing all internal policies and protocols, and working alongside colleagues to develop meaningful and effective approaches to working with services.

The Lived Experience Team is an integral part of the Commission. The team ensures that the perspectives and expertise of consumers, families, carers, supporters and kin are fully integrated, by working collaboratively across the organisation, including Resolutions, Communications and Engagement and Performance Management. The team’s influence extends throughout the organisation, shaping strategic direction and enhancing operational efficiency. At the same time, the team also has its own portfolio of projects, and receives organisational resources and support to achieve its objectives. This dynamic interplay between contributing to the broader organisational goals and advocating for its own needs exemplifies the team’s critical role in both driving and supporting the work and objectives of the Commission.

The Lived Experience Plan

Critical in guiding the strategic work of the Lived Experience Team is the Lived Experience Plan, a foundational document of the Commission that covers all 32 functions of the Commission that are in its legislation. It looks to ensure that the Commission is driven by lived experience across all its work and functions.

The Lived Experience Plan is sponsored by the Lived Experience Consumer and Carer commissioners and is being developed through targeted engagement with subject matter experts from the lived experience sector including, consumer and carer peak bodies, previous lived experience commissioners (from other jurisdictions), academic experts and current and former service users and their carers.



“My highlight since joining the Commission has been developing the LE Plan. It brings together long-standing advocacy from the sector, fused with the key lived experience recommendations from the Royal Commission’s reports. It’s progressive, enabling and provides clear direction for how we want to improve the system.”

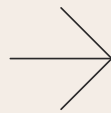
Danilo Di Giacomo, General Manager, Lived Experience

The Lived Experience Plan will be launched in the second half of 2024, and considers metropolitan and regional perspectives, and is built on the following five goals:

- 1**
 - Embed lived experience values in the culture of the Commission and be an exemplar organisation for lived experience and inclusion
- 2**
 - Define lived experience leadership and facilitate pathways across the sector and communities
- 3**
 - Integrate lived experience in and across the governance and performance measurement of mental health and wellbeing system and services, with shared power and increased accountability
- 4**
 - Listen to the voices and meet the diverse needs of people engaging with the Commission and the wider mental health system
- 5**
 - Strengthen understanding of people's diverse lived experience and the role of the MHWC through collaborations, partnerships and community engagement

Advisory mechanism for the Commission

The work of the Lived Experience Team has included developing a comprehensive lived experience engagement strategy and mechanisms through which the Commission will seek strategic advice and expertise into the monitoring of both the Lived Experience Plan and broader strategic priorities of the Commission over time. Establishing a Lived Experience Advisory Group mechanism is included in the Lived Experience Plan and will be established in the next financial year.



Lived experience is embedded in everything we do at the Commission. Throughout this report, you will notice that we have flagged some lived experience highlights. These highlights demonstrate how our lived experience goals are reflected across every aspect of our work.