

Peer Support Association

**Strategic Plan
and Development Strategy**

**Outcomes of the Strategic Development Day for Peer Supporters
29th November 2014**

Hosted by CoMHWA and Carers WA

Peer Support Association – Strategic Plan

Executive Summary

This Strategic Plan and Development Strategy presents outcomes of the Strategic Development Day for Peer Supporters, hosted by Consumers of Mental Health WA (CoMHWA) and Carers WA.

The Day provided an opportunity for peer supporters across sectors to develop a peer-led vision of peer support in Western Australia and to plan ways forward for valuing and enhancing peer support practice.

Both the Strategic Plan and Development Strategy were developed in order to provide strong foundations for the future Peer Support Association.

The Strategic Plan outlines the vision and values of a peer-led Peer Support Association in Western Australia, together with 3 key focus areas, with accompanying, objectives and strategies, which were:

- Focus Area 1: Networking, Sharing and Mutual Support
- Focus Area 2: Knowledge, Skills and Capabilities
- Focus Area 3: Advancement, Acknowledgment and Recognition of Peer Support

The Development Strategy, or Way Forward, that was identified, focused on actions for peer support that are sustainable and achievable, and which stand to progress the aims of a future Association.

It was agreed that, similar to a Professional Association, the Association will need to begin with a base of volunteers who bring passion and drive.

Participants on the day therefore moved that the Peer Support Association be progressed by:

- Establishing, via Expression of Interest, a Peer Led Advisory Group to be hosted by CoMHWA
- The Peer Led Advisory Group choosing and progressing sustainable and achievable goals across the 3 Focus Areas of the strategy, to strengthen the value of a peer-led network, as the first step forwards in preparing for the establishment of the Association

The Strategic Plan was circulated to the WAPSPG membership for peer supporter comment, and approved by the newly established Peer Led Advisory Group on 28th March 2015.

Peer Support Association – Strategic Plan

Introduction

A *Strategic Development Day for Peer Supporters* was held on 29th November 2014, hosted by Consumers of Mental Health WA (CoMHWA) and Carers WA.

The Day provided an opportunity for peer supporters across sectors to develop a peer-led vision of peer support in Western Australia and to plan ways forward for valuing and enhancing peer support practice.

Strategic invitations were sent to peer representatives from GLBTIQ, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, CALD and the drug and alcohol sector to guide inclusive strategies and a holistic approach to peer support. The day attracted 14 participants, representing mental health consumer and carer peer perspectives and trauma peer support.

For the purpose of the Day peer support was recognised as a relationship of “giving and receiving help founded on key principles of respect, shared responsibility, and mutual agreement of what is helpful.” (Mead, 2003).

The specific objectives for the Day were:

- To explore priorities of Peer Supporters and Peer Support Practitioners, including the potential establishment of an appropriate network or association; and
- To develop steps forward (ie a peer-led Peer Support Development Strategy).

The results of the Peer Support Practitioners Support Group Forum on 11th June 2014 were referred to throughout the Day and provided valuable input.

The outcomes of the *Strategic Development Day* were:

- The decision to create a Peer Support Association as a longer-term direction;
- Development of the Vision, Values and Strategies for the future Peer Support Association, framed as a Strategic Plan; and
- Agreement on a Peer Support Development Strategy – the way forward.

This strategic planning work will provide strong foundations for the future Peer Support Association.

Acknowledgments

The Peer Led Advisory Group wish to thank and acknowledge Carers WA and CoMHWA for hosting this event on behalf of peer supporters in Western Australia and also Liz Pattison Consulting for strategic facilitation of the workshop.

Definitions

The following working definitions were used for the *Strategic Development Day*:

Peer support

Peer support is a relationship of respect, support and reciprocity between people who identify a significant, shared identity and/or experience. It may be paid or unpaid, formal or informal, between individuals or family members/carers, and from a variety of sectors and walks of life.

In formalised peer support roles (Peer Support Practitioners)

Someone formally engaged to provide and facilitate peer support with the intention of enhancing the wellbeing of their peers

See **Attachment 1** for concepts shared at the *Strategic Development Day* in relation to the benefits of peer support and shared vision.

Peer Support Association:

Scope

The Peer Support Association is inclusive and welcomes all people involved in peer support, formal and informal, from all sectors and walks of life.

Vision

Peer support is accepted, recognised, acknowledged and utilised as a key role in society and at the heart of humanity

Values

While recognising each journey and peer support situation is unique, we uphold the following values:

Respect	Appreciating each person, their dignity, experience and decisions; trusting and relationship between people
Compassion	Empathy, walking alongside and listening; the comfort and support we can be to each other in life's crises
Self-empowerment	Empowering relationships; choices; self-understanding and self-care; having a voice and being heard
Inspiration	Hope and possibility; belief and innovation; without stigma
Humanity	Fellow-feeling and connection; inclusiveness; valuing and supporting each other through the human journey; feeling less alone through connecting with others with lived knowledge and understanding

Key Focus Areas

The Association's Strategic Plan is built around three interlinked focus areas:

1. Networking, Sharing and Mutual Support
2. Knowledge, Skills and Capabilities
3. Advancement, Acknowledgement and Recognition of Peer Support

Focus Area 1

Networking, Sharing and Mutual Support

Objectives

- To create a network for peer supporters, independent from employers and organisations, ie Peer to Peer (PTP).
- To provide the forum for peer supporters to be connected, sharing stories, supporting each other and reducing isolation.
- To provide social and emotional support and enable wellness for peer supporters.
- To create a safe environment for peer supporters - somewhere to talk about issues and be understood as well as to access more formal support.
- To advocate for one another.

Strategies

1. Priority 1:
Host a catalyst event to attract peer supporters and bring them together to create connections and support.
2. As an ongoing initiative, map the scope of peer support across sectors, communicating with peer supporters to get them onboard and be part of the Association.
3. As an ongoing initiative, find out what peer support people need and how best to deliver.
4. Create flexible access to mutual support (eg help line, debriefing) to be available as needed.
5. Identify what is available for peer support workers (employed and volunteer, across sectors) when difficulties occur in relation to their peer support work. Evaluate how the Peer Support Association can assist, eg:
 - Advocate for required peer-led support.
 - Work in partnership with mediation services.
 - Utilise the skill sets amongst ourselves.
 - Walk alongside.
 - Provide information.
 - Create a hot line.
6. Identify ways to engage, include and assist “grass roots” peer led, peer support groups, recognising the difference they make to people’s lives.

Focus Area 2

Knowledge, Skills and Capabilities

Objectives

- To create a forum for knowledge sharing amongst peer supporters.
- To ensure peer support education is peer led, consistent, relevant and meets standards.
- To enable access to peer support education for peer supporters across all sectors, to develop skills, capabilities and pathways.
- To enable access to mentoring and promote peer supervision for peer supporters.

Strategies

1. Provide peer-to-peer mentoring (including training in how to be a mentor).
2. Develop guidelines and advocate for peer-to-peer supervision to be in place, across sectors.
3. Advocate for co-production of peer support education and extend the provision across sectors.
4. Host workshops, seminars, conferences and guest speakers to meet the needs of peer supporters and “grass roots”, peer led, peer support organisations.
5. Introduce a Peer Support newsletter.
6. Link to, and work with, the Mental Health Commission’s Peer Workforce Advisory Group.

Focus Area 3

Advancement, Acknowledgement and Recognition of Peer Support

Objectives

- To be the peak body for peer support – the voice, evidence-base and centre of knowledge and expertise.
- To be approached for policy advice by peer supporters, government and organisations.
- To raise awareness of the critical role, value and benefits of peer support and achieve systemic change.

Strategies

1. Identify opportunities to advocate for peer support, from the unique peer-led perspective, to create credibility and collaboration for the Peer Support Association.
2. Set standards for peer support from a peer led perspective.
3. Increase employer awareness and uptake of peer support roles and standards, across sectors.
4. Identify research needs, create research partnerships and commission / undertake research to create the evidence-base for peer support.
5. Seek opportunities to raise community awareness and promote shared understandings of peer support (e.g. Charter of Peer Support).
6. Create collaborations and partnerships, locally, nationally and internationally.
7. Establish a consultancy arm to give policy advice, provide services from a peer led perspective, and raise revenue for the Association.

Peer Support Development Strategy

The Way Forward

The following action was agreed at the Peer Support Development Day, 29th November 2014:

1. Overall Approach

The overall approach will be:

“Big vision, clear direction, small steps forward together”

(ie the same underpinning approach as for peer support itself).

2. Peer Support Association

- As a longer term goal, create a Peer Support Association as an independent incorporated body (with Constitution, Charter and Management Committee).
- The scope of the Peer Support Association will encompass all forms of peer support, formal and informal, and all sectors.
- The Peer Support Association will have a “Peer Support Practitioners – Mental Health” branch, reflecting the significant existing commitment to formalised peer work roles within the mental health sector.
- The Association, similar to the way that professional associations are established and managed, will have a strong base of volunteers bringing passion and drive. The aim would also be to develop funding, income streams and capacity for paid support.
- Initial funding will be required for website, pamphlets, events and research.
- CoMHWA will provide in kind support.

3. Peer Led Advisory Group

- It was suggested and agreed that CoMHWA will host the group who will lead the development of the Peer Support Association, on the basis that CoMHWA:
 - has been funded by the Mental Health Commission of Western Australia to facilitate the development of a peer support network/association and
 - has an inclusive membership/network criteria based on lived experience of distress/wellbeing (aligned with holistic/cross-sectoral approaches to peer support).
- The first step will be to introduce a Peer Led Advisory Group, hosted by CoMHWA.

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- The aim is for the Peer Led Advisory Group to have a mix of skills, experience, strengths and sectors.
- Expressions of Interest for the Peer Led Advisory Group will be sent to:
 - Participants at the Strategic Development Day.
 - All other members/potential members of the WA Peer Support Practitioners Group.
- The Peer Led Advisory Group will be ongoing.
 - Its initial priority will be to set and achieve priority actions based on the 3 key Focus areas identified in the Strategic Plan, focused on actions that are sustainable and achievable, which stand to progress the aims of a future Association and to benefit peer supporters.

4. Strategic Plan

- The Strategic Plan for the Peer Support Association developed at the Peer Support Development Day will provide clear direction for the way forward.
- Once priority actions have been achieved and the Peer Led Advisory Group is ready to steward the progression of the strategic Plan towards an organisational establishment stage, the Strategic Plan will be reviewed in broad, inclusive consultation with peer supporters in Western Australia.

Attachment 1

Concepts shared at the Peer Support Development Day, 29th November 2014:

Benefits of Peer Support

- Giving people hope.
- Authentic support – non clinical or medicalised.
- Equality – no hierarchy; not dictating.
- Feeling less alone because someone understands (a person able to say “I know”).
- Level of confidence in a person who has travelled the path.
- Sharing what worked for them – empowerment and knowledge sharing.
- Learning from each other.
- Mutual relationship – honest, builds trust.
- Greater self understanding, options and choices.
- Dignity and respect.
- Role models and mentoring.
- Examples of recovery; recovery can happen.
- Forming a network around you. Connection. Stopping isolation.
- Inclusion.
- Advocacy.
- Consistent, sustainable human connection.
- It can be incredibly rewarding to plant a seed and then be no longer needed.
- Every experience is personal and different; recognising each journey and peer support situation is unique.
- Peer support groups emerge.

What is the mutuality of peer support?

- It is humanity, survival – coming together in a community. It’s natural within people.
- It’s an altruistic role. Empathetic. We get something back.
- To walk alongside.
- It reaffirms a sense of purpose.
- Mutuality can be different for formal and informal peer support. Formal peer support has defined boundaries.
- It is important to be open to be helped as a peer worked.
- Is it always mutual?
 - It can be difficult / traumatic – trauma can be for either party.
 - It is important to be aware of the triggers for vicarious trauma and to have professional supervision and support available.
 - There are risks in relationships plus amazing benefits.

Vision for Peer Support

- People have a valued place in the world, recognition and acknowledgement.
- People are fully supported (they don’t fall through the cracks).
- Trust and relationships between people.
- Seeing the person holistically.

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- Peer support allows people to be the best version of themselves in the roles they choose.
- Two people meeting each other and exposing their vulnerability. Our vulnerability becomes strength.
- The comfort and support we can be to others in life's crises.
- A society where:
 - We all care.
 - People have the courage to ask for help and can speak openly about their experience without stigma, discrimination and prejudice; resonating with others.
- Peer support is accepted, recognised, acknowledged and utilised as a key role in society and at the heart of humanity – qualified by experience – valuing and supporting people through the human journey.