

ADVICE TO THE COMMISSIONER FOR MENTAL HEALTH

The Valuing Lived Experience Program

Friday 8 April 2022

BACKGROUND

On Thursday, 10 February 2022, the Mental Health Advisory Council (MHAC) received a presentation by Dr David Hodgson, Senior Lecturer Social Work School of Occupational Therapy, Social Work and Speech Pathology and Ms Lyn Mahboub, Clinical/Professional Fellow: Lecturer Lived Experience Academic from Curtin University's School of Allied Health, Faculty of Health Sciences.


The Valuing Lived Experience Program (VLEP) is an Australian-first initiative and was developed by Lyn Mahboub and Associate Professor Robyn Martin. The aims of this program are to 'meaningfully embed the voices of people with lived experience of mental distress, trauma and use of health and community services; into the education of students, academics and professionals'. Detailed information about the program can be found at https://espace.curtin.edu.au/bitstream/handle/20.500.11937/10272/245754_245754.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y

In providing this advice the MHAC bears in mind that it has continuously identified that the weakness in mental health practices is essentially related to training, development and supervision, particularly with respect to understanding and embracing lived experience perspectives. Often this has been considered to be due to an inadequacy of topics' content in developed programs. The VLEP presentation was received by MHAC with considerable interest, as it brought to the forefront material important for all those involved in delivering services in the mental health sector.

The VLEP contained principles and values that are relevant to all those involved, whether they be nurses, psychiatrists, allied health practitioners, support workers, family members/carers and consumers, suggesting cross discipline relevance. This relevance was tested by feedback from students in social work, nursing and occupational therapy. Among the values used are 'the social determinants of wellbeing', 'attention to power' and being 'informed by critical theory and critical thinking'. The content of the program is importantly 'aligned with policy, frameworks and accreditation requirements', so for example the Mental Health Standards of Practice are reflected in VLEP. The spectrum or framework of participation used was a further development of the tried and tested spectrum used successfully internationally by the International Association of Participation.

It is the belief of MHAC that this program is so important and relevant that it should be *core* training for the mental health sector and in addition should be integrated into all practice delivery training.

For too long aspects and specialisms in mental health services have been compartmentalised or siloed. Through utilising this program the services can become truly co-produced without minimising the knowledge and skills of psychiatrists and nurses etc, or those who have lived



experience. The potential of this program is that services become relevant to those with lived experience whilst utilising the highly skilled knowledge of service providers.

The VLEP is currently featured in two national projects:

1. The Training Scoping Review being conducted by the Lived Experience Leadership and Advocacy Network (South Australia) on behalf of the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum (NMHCCF).
2. The LET(s) LEAD Academy, a transformational leadership development program being run in partnership with the Yale University Program for Recovery and Community Health, the NMHCCF and the National Primary Health Network Mental Health Lived Experience Engagement Network. The VLEP features in Week 5 of the program which is running between February and November 2022. Further information about this program is available at: <https://nmhccf.org.au/news/nmhccf-and-mhleen-partner-with-yale-university-on-leadership-program>.

MHAC would like to emphasise the VLEP work as possibly the most important curriculum content that members have encountered, particularly in light of the transformational projects being planned.

ADVICE/RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council recommends supporting and expanding the Valuing Lived Experience Program in order to operationalise this integrated approach as part of the transformation of mental health services.

Sincerely



Margaret Doherty

CHAIRPERSON

Mental Health Advisory Council

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