

QuIHN Peer Work Charter



Preamble

Peer work is a unique and vital profession based on lived and living experience and expertise. In the alcohol and other drugs (AOD) sector, peer workers offer insight, empathy, and trust, connecting community with services. This charter recognises the value of peer work and sets out QuIHN's commitment to a community-led, ethical, strengths-based, and harm reduction approach.

1. Our Shared Commitments

Leading with Lived and Living Experience. We recognise lived and living experience as a vital form of knowledge that informs, strengthens, and enriches the AOD sector. Peer workers use their experiences with purpose—supporting others, reducing stigma, and advocating for systemic change. This work is built on **voluntary disclosure, self-determination**, and respect for each peer worker's autonomy in how, when, and if they share their story.

2. Connection and Community

Lived and living experience is grounded in its connection to community. Peer work involves shared **understanding, solidarity, and connection** to community.

By **remaining rooted in community**, we ensure our work stays authentic, accountable, and guided by the people it exists to serve.

3. Harm Reduction is Human Rights Work

Peer work is inherently rooted in **activism and the fight for human rights**. It is a response to systems that have historically criminalised, marginalised, and silenced people who use drugs. At its core, peer work challenges these structures by standing for justice, autonomy, and systemic change.

We recognise that people who use drugs have been denied basic rights—such as access to healthcare, freedom from discrimination, and the ability to make informed choices without fear of punishment. Peer workers confront these injustices by amplifying lived experience, resisting coercive systems, and pushing for policy and service reform.

Peer work is not neutral. It is grounded in solidarity, social justice, and the belief that everyone deserves to live free from violence, stigma, and state-sanctioned harm.

4. Practising Culturally Safe Care

Peer workers promote safety, choice, collaboration, and empowerment, while recognising the deep and lasting impacts of **colonisation, racism, systemic violence, and intergenerational trauma**—especially for **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples**.

We also acknowledge the trauma and exclusion faced by people who have experienced **criminalisation**, incarceration, and policing. These systems often cause harm, rather than healing, and disproportionately impact people who use drugs, people of colour, and those living with multiple layers of marginalisation.

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Peer work challenges harm by creating respectful, supportive spaces where people are treated with dignity and care—not labelled as disordered, punished, or controlled. It helps build a sector that is not just trauma-informed but also focused on justice and accountable to those most affected by systemic oppression.

5. Working Ethically and with Integrity

We commit to ethical, transparent, and relational practice. While peer work is not therapy, it is grounded in connection, trust, and shared experience. We honour the integrity of our roles by engaging in supervision, reflective practice, and self-care—ensuring our work remains sustainable and aligned with the values of the peer workforce. We are accountable not only to the people we support, but also to our communities and fellow peer workers—upholding a collective commitment to care, honesty, and integrity in everything we do.

6. Embracing Diversity and Inclusion

We honour the diversity within our peer workforce communities. While we come from different backgrounds and hold varied identities—as people who use drugs, LGBTQIA+ people, people with experiences of the criminal justice system, neurodivergent people, sex workers, and those living with multiple forms of marginalisation—we are united by a shared understanding of stigma, systemic barriers, and social exclusion. These shared experiences connect us. Peer work must actively challenge oppression and uplift the voices of all our communities, recognising that our strength lies in both our differences and our solidarity.

7. Building Collective Power

Peer work is not just about individual support—it is a form of activism, advocacy, and community leadership. As a workforce deeply embedded in community, we work to elevate the voices and experiences of people who use drugs, champion peer leadership, create genuine pathways for participation, and challenge systems that exclude or disempower. Peer workers are not only service providers; we are part of a collective movement for justice, dignity, and systemic change.

8. Strengths-Based Practice

We commit to seeing people as more than their experiences with drugs, trauma, or systems. We recognise and build on people's strengths, capacities, and goals. Peer work affirms hope, resilience, and the right of every individual to define their own version of what works for them.

9. Our needs as a Peer Workforce

We commit to advocating for the fair pay, recognition, safety, supervision and professional development of peer workers. Lived experience work must be respected and supported as a legitimate professional discipline. This includes access to reflective practice, co-design opportunities, and career progression.



10. Conclusion

Peer work is transformative. Grounded in lived experience, **community connection**, and collective wisdom, peer practice humanises systems, challenges stigma, and builds trust in ways no other role can. It is rooted in **solidarity**, standing with those impacted by marginalisation, and challenging the systems that devalue or control our lives. This charter is a commitment to upholding the values of the peer workforce and ensuring our work remains ethical, inclusive, and impactful centred in social justice, community, and care.