

The shared and unique barriers to both lived and living experience work in AOD in Victoria

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Introduction: In the Alcohol and other Drug (AoD) sector, identifying as a lived and/or living experience (LLE) worker can mean an admission of engagement in an activity that is currently criminalised. Nevertheless, these workers exist, predominantly in harm reduction, across Australia. The benefits of their work to consumers and society are well established, but the unique challenges faced by this workforce are poorly understood. The study aims to identify the shared and unique challenges faced by AoD LLE workers to inform best practice approaches.

Method: Focus groups were run with LLE workers from the Victorian AoD sector and interviews were conducted with senior LLEs in roles supporting the sector providing supervision or training. Questions focused on workers' experiences and best practice. Thematic analysis was conducted to reveal the key themes.

Key Findings: While both lived and living experience workers described challenges, these challenges were more often described by living than lived experience workers. Further, living experience workers described more "discriminatory incidents" at work resulting in distress or impeding performance. Themes from interviews highlighted how stigma, drug-criminalisation, and workplace treatment models and policies contribute to the challenges faced by this workforce.

Discussions and Conclusions: Living experience workers face unique challenges that are driven by stigma, drug-criminalisation, and workplace models of care and policies. These challenges must be addressed to foster an effective and sustainable LLE workforce, to maximise benefits for people wanting to cease, reduce or safely use alcohol and other drugs.

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