

Industrial advocacy and wins for the lived-living experience workforce: The role of AOD sector peak bodies and partnership

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Background: Upwards of 90% of the non-government AOD workforce in Australia is employed under the conditions of the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services (SCHADS) Award, and lived-living experience is not currently recognised. In 2024, the Fair Work Commission commenced a review of the SCHADS Award to address what it identified as a range of gender-based undervaluations, particularly for lower paid workers. The restructuring of the Award proposed by the Fair Work Commission, while improving wages and conditions for workers in some social and care industries, had the unintended effect of significantly eroding conditions and lowering rates of pay for AOD workers.

Description of Model of Care/Intervention: The proposed Award restructure presented significant risks for current AOD workers and long term AOD workforce sustainability. In response, the Australian Alcohol and other Drugs Council (AADC) partnered with the Australian Services Union (ASU) to undertake an advocacy campaign to improve the restructured Award and ensure that the voice of the AOD sector was present in formal industrial proceedings.

Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation: While a final decision is yet to be made at the time of writing, the penultimate Award draft is a significant improvement on earlier versions. Most importantly, lived and living experience is recognised as a qualification with the draft Award structure – a first for any Award in Australia.

Conclusion and Next Steps: This presentation highlights the importance of the role of AOD peak organisations have in shaping the environment that AOD services operate within, and the wins that can be achieved through advocacy. AADC will continue to work with the ASU and participate in advocacy campaigns to improve conditions for AOD and wider community sector workers.

Implications on communities, practice, policy and/or First Nations communities: The presentation illustrates how advocacy successfully prevented the erosion of AOD worker conditions, and enabled lived and living experience to be formally recognised in an industrial agreement.

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