

Beyond Participation: Embedding Lived and Living Experience Partnership in Alcohol and Other Drug Research Practice

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Background:

People with lived and living experience (LLE) of alcohol and other drug (AOD) use increasingly contribute to research, policy, and service design. However, involvement often remains consultative, with limited attention to the organisational, relational, and workforce structures needed to support meaningful partnership. Efforts to strengthen LLE participation have largely focused on preparing community members to engage with research systems, rather than examining how researchers and institutions must adapt their practices to support equitable collaboration.

Description of Program of Work:

This presentation describes an evolving program of work embedding LLE expertise and co-design practices within an Australian AOD research partnership. LLE perspectives are integrated across governance, qualitative design, data collection, interpretation, and dissemination. Activities include peer researcher training and mentoring, co-delivery of interviews, and collaborative reflexive practice informed by ongoing learning across peer, advocacy, and early career research roles.

Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation:

Early implementation highlights the importance of relational trust, role clarity, flexibility, remuneration, and organisational support in enabling meaningful collaboration. Embedding peer workforce development within research processes strengthened engagement and supported more reflexive and contextually responsive research practice, while also revealing tensions associated with institutional processes, emotional labour, and resourcing constraints.

Conclusion and Next Steps:

This program demonstrates the importance of moving beyond symbolic inclusion toward sustained partnership within AOD research. Ongoing work will examine barriers and facilitators to LLE partnership, explore perceptions of identity and contribution among LLE researchers, and further develop skills and expertise among peer and early career researchers.

Implications on communities, practice, policy and/or First Nations communities:

The program highlights how co-interviewing, peer mentoring, and collaborative reflexive practice can support meaningful LLE partnership in AOD research and inform workforce development approaches that strengthen the applicability of findings to AOD treatment settings.

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