

## Principles for collaborative partnerships with people with lived or living experience in research projects

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**Introduction:** There has been increasing recognition of the value of involving people with lived or living experience in research processes as equal project partners rather than simply as research participants. Much has been published about collaborative participatory approaches to research, but there is limited practical guidance for involving people with lived or living experience as equal partners in respectful and ethical research processes. The Service Users' Survey of Outcomes Satisfaction and Experience (SUSOSE) Project has taken a collaborative participatory approach to the design of an experience measure, involving alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) service users and peer workers with lived and living experience of drug use as part of the project team.

**Approach:** An evaluation involving ongoing reflection, a facilitated workshop, and anonymous written feedback was undertaken with members of the SUSOSE Project Advisory Group, representing a range of stakeholders including service users, peers, service providers, and policymakers/funders. A thematic analysis identified key principles and practical guidance for involving people with lived or living experience of ATOD use as partners in research projects. The evaluation was supplemented by an examination of literature on collaborative participatory approaches in community-sector contexts.

**Key Findings:** A successful collaborative partnership has included creating a safe and respectful environment that values and utilises the skills and experiences of all partners, and that focuses on facilitating equity in participation. Other principles include: a shared understanding of values and motivations; honest communication; and attention to ethical practice. Practical activities that were used in this project to achieve, build and maintain each of these collaborative-partnership principles have also been identified.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** The collaborative re-design of the Service Users' Survey of Outcomes Satisfaction and Experience (SUSOSE) saw the survey successfully tested in the field in 2023. The ongoing contribution of the Project Advisory Group has highlighted a number of guiding principles and activities for successful collaborative partnerships in ATOD research.

**Implications for Practice or Policy:** The Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association (ATODA) and the Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation and Advocacy (CAHMA) will be using the principles and activities identified through this process to develop a guide for working collaboratively with people with lived and living experience of ATOD use.

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