

**Peer Workforce Development Strategy Launch**  
Tuesday 19 November 2019, 12.30pm – 1.00pm  
Mary Hadley Room, Hadley's Orient Hotel, Hobart

### Media Release

## New strategy paves the way for Tasmanian peer workforce

The Mental Health Council of Tasmania (MHCT), in partnership with the Tasmanian Government, will on Tuesday launch the Peer Workforce Development Strategy. Creating a robust peer workforce which leverages peer workers' unique qualification of lived experience is an essential step in Tasmania's move towards a nation leading integrated mental health system.

CEO of MHCT, Connie Digolis, said, "The important role of peer workers has for too long been overlooked, especially in Tasmania. Employing peer workers across all levels of service provides wide ranging benefits for the entire mental health sector. The skills, knowledge and insights that peer workers possess are invaluable assets in supporting mental health consumers through their recovery journey, and enhancing the workplaces and programs they are involved with."

National and international studies have shown that peer workers contribute towards better outcomes for consumers, better supports for families, friends and carers, and improved services across the whole of the mental health sector. Tasmania currently has the lowest percentage of peer workers amongst mental health care professionals of all states in Australia. The Peer Workforce Development Strategy aims to encourage and increase the engagement of peer workers and expand their roles across the state.

Jennie Hsu, who participated in a peer work trial facilitated by MHCT in early 2019, said, "The mental health system can be confusing and sometimes daunting. As a peer worker my lived experience gives me a greater understanding of some of these challenges and helps me play a key role in supporting others on their own recovery journey. Being a peer worker is a beautiful and empowering experience – not only for the people I support but also for myself."

The development of the Strategy follows lengthy consultations with mental health consumers, families, friends and carers, as well as key stakeholders from across Tasmania's mental health sector. It details a series of short, medium and long-term actions across six priority areas, designed to strengthen the state's peer workforce – a key action under the Government's 'Rethink Mental Health' plan.

Copies of the Strategy will be available at Tuesday's launch.

-Ends-

**There will be opportunity for photos, filming and short interviews during and at the end of the launch.**

**Media Enquiries:** Cat Delpero 0499 303 007 or Nick Sullivan 6224 9222 or [nsullivan@mhct.org](mailto:nsullivan@mhct.org)

**Available for Interview:** Connie Digolis, MHCT CEO. Jennie Hsu, Peer Worker.

**Please include the following crisis support services for any story regarding mental health or suicide.**

Lifeline: 13 11 14 [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467 [www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au)

beyondblue: 1300 22 4636 [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

**More information on safely reporting on mental illness or suicide can be found at**

<https://mindframe.org.au/> and <https://www.tascharter.org/>



## **Background**

Peer workers are people with a lived experience of mental ill-health and recovery, as either a consumer or family, friend or carer of someone with mental ill-health. They are employed in designated work roles to use their skills and knowledge acquired from their personal experience of mental illness and their use of mental health services. This lived experience is used to support consumers, families, friends and carers through their mental health journey and recovery process.

In the context of the Peer Workforce Development Strategy, 'peer workforce' refers to a professional, dedicated, paid workforce employed specifically for their lived experience of mental ill-health, recovery and support, as either a consumer or family, friend and carer. Though job titles and related tasks vary widely, a peer work role generally involves developing relationships, sharing personal experiences and knowledge, offering support and modelling recovery. The acknowledgment of lived experience helps to break down the traditional divides between consumers, families and carers and staff.

## **Evidence Base for the Peer Workforce**

Nationally and internationally, the peer workforce is a growing component of the mental health workforce. There is increasing evidence of the benefits of embedding lived experience in the mental health service system to improve the recovery-focus of services.

Peer work is an evidence-based practice that has been well researched and examined in Australia and globally. Studies confirm that peer worker provided, recovery-oriented, mental health services are highly valued by the people who use them and produce outcomes as good as, and in some cases superior to, services from non-peer professionals. Reviews and further information on the evidence for mental health peer work will be available at [mhct.org/peerworkforce](http://mhct.org/peerworkforce) following the launch of the Strategy.