

# Peer Work

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**What is it?**

**What do they do?**

If you've had any of these questions, you're not the only one! Peer work is not a new concept, but peer work in the mental health space has increasingly grown over the last few years. I'm going to hopefully answer some of these questions and explain a bit more about peer workers, including sharing some of my own experiences as a peer worker.

## What/who are peer workers?

Peer workers can also be called peer support workers, peer specialists, or peer practitioners, but **it's the "peer" part that makes them special.**



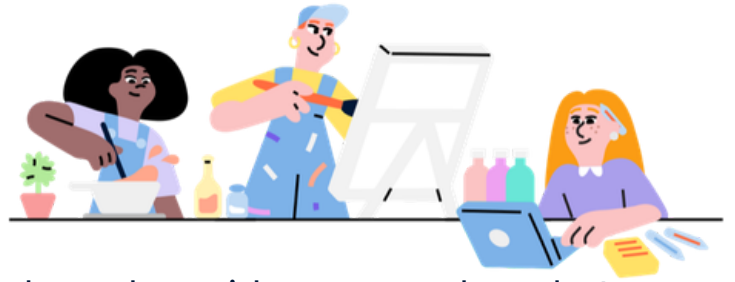
Peer workers are individuals who draw upon their own lived experiences of mental health challenges, suicidal distress and recovery, or their experiences as a family member or carer, to provide support to people accessing mental health care (NSW Health, 2026).

More broadly, peer work is a social movement that involves people intentionally sharing parts of their lived experience and modelling hope, while walking alongside people who may be facing mental health challenges. "It shifts from 'helper-client' roles to shared learning, focusing on communication, relational dynamics, and fostering hope" (Intentional Peer Support, 2026).

## How are they different to other mental health staff?

- Drawing upon their own **lived/living experiences** of mental health challenges is a core part of their role.
- They offer **non-clinical support**, unlike a psychologist or nurse for example. To explore other types of support, check out [Types of Professionals here](#).

## What do peer workers do?



The tasks and support that peer workers do and provide can vary hugely. It can include individual and group peer support, recovery planning and goal setting, help with navigating the mental health service system, individual and systemic advocacy, sharing coping strategies, and offering a non-judgemental space for people to feel heard. There are also specialised peer work roles, including carer peer workers, that focus on a certain area, like alcohol and drugs, youth, people with eating disorders and the LGBTQIA+ community.

## Where do peer workers work?

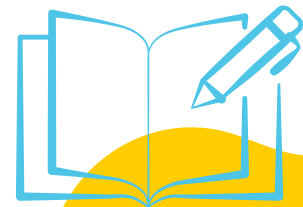
They can work in a variety of settings including:

- Community mental health teams
- Non-government/community-based organisations
- Emergency departments
- Hospitals
- Community outreach teams
- Even online via chats or forums

## My experience

As well as being a researcher, I'm a peer worker for a community-based organisation. My days involve a range of tasks including:

- Helping to facilitate art and therapy groups.
- Meeting one-on-one with people to understand their experiences and offer tailored support (sometimes this means sitting and chatting, other times we'll go grocery shopping or cook a meal together).
- Supporting people to navigate care or services (eg. finding new services or holding care team meetings).



### Learn more

If you're interested in learning more about peer work, check out [\*\*these videos\*\*](#) by the Mental Health Commission, or follow the [@LivedExperienceLab](#) for lived experience content.

Sending you confident, good vibes for the day,  
Zoe :)