Victorian Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Peer Workforce Core Competencies

What Are Core Competencies?

Core competencies are the capacity to successfully perform a role or function. They are often described as the knowledge, skills, and abilities a person needs to have to effectively perform a role or job.

About the Victorian AOD Peer Workforce Core Competencies

The AOD peer workforce is at a critical time in its development. Many peers have been trained and are working in a variety of settings, but questions remain regarding peer roles, duties and philosophies. In an effort to create a broader and deeper understanding, reduce workplace tensions and develop effective peer worker roles, a set of agreed core competencies is necessary. These core competencies outline what peer workers do and how they go about their role, thereby assisting with community, sector and agency understanding of peer work.

The development of these competencies is an activity supported by the Strategy for the Alcohol and Other Drug Peer Workforce in Victoria (2019). SHARC and Victoria's Peer Workforce Community of Practice have worked together with key stakeholders to identify critical knowledge, skills, and abilities required for the contemporary AOD peer worker. The goal is that these core competencies will inform peer worker training programs, position descriptions, and career development for peer workers.

The Victorian AOD Peer Workforce Core Competencies

1)   Peer workers encourage self determination

This competency outlines how peer workers are not outcome focussed, that they work alongside someone in the navigation of a journey that is self-determined. Peer workers:

- Respect a peer's right to choose the pathway they believe will work best for them
- Offer peers the dignity of risk, allowing them to make their own choices that may involve risk but can also lead to personal growth
- Encourage and empower peers to take responsibility for themselves
- Are not outcome focussed in their relationships and meet peers where they are at
- Explore options and co-create new ideas on how to proceed, rather than providing advice or having a personal agenda of what should be accomplished

2)   A peer workers primary focus is on peer to peer relationships

These competencies encompass the primary focus of the peer worker which is to build relationships. Relationships require interpersonal skills to connect, navigate relational parameters and sustain. Peer workers:

- Focus on connection as the priority in their role
- Embody empathy and compassion, the ability to understand and share the feelings of another
- Are authentic and honest and navigate the relationship in a way that works for both
- Offer hope through connection, identification and validation of experiences

- Set clear expectations of the peer support relationship and mutually navigate boundaries
- Practice communication and listening skills that exemplify being present with others

3) Peer workers operate as an equal, within a defined role

This competency provides direction on mutuality and navigation of a peer relationship within a defined role. Peer workers:

- Form relationships based on mutuality, an equal sharing of responsibility for the relationship
- View peer relationships as co-learning opportunities
- Facilitate respect and cultivate relationships with peers that evokes power-sharing and reciprocity wherever possible
- Do not label or diagnose individuals
- Operate within the requirements of their workplace and parameters of their role

4) Peer workers demonstrate the power & possibility of change

This competency describes the importance of purposeful disclosure of lived experiences and how our experiences can be used to demonstrate the power & possibility of change. Peer workers:

- Role model the power and possibility of change
- Ensure purposeful and intentional disclosure when sharing their lived experience
- Recognise when to share experiences and when to listen
- Normalise experiences through identification with others
- Describe personal practices and help peers discover practices that work for them

5) Peer workers understand best practice peer work and seek opportunities to increase their knowledge and skills

This competency relates to peer workers having a sound knowledge and skill base to practice peer work. It also points to the importance of peer worker specific training, and seeking opportunities for ongoing professional development. Peer workers:

- Understand application of the peer role in formalised settings and adhere to organisational, legislative and ethical requirements
- Recognise the limits of their knowledge and seek assistance from others when needed
- Recognise the limits they have as a professional and personal resource
- Seek peer worker specific supervision and networking opportunities
- Seek opportunities to increase their knowledge and skills of peer work
- Engage in self-reflective practice to maintain a level of self-awareness required to fulfil the role
- Advocate for the value of lived experience and champion the consumer voice in service development and provision

6) Peer workers embrace diversity

This competency highlights the diversity of communities and individuals we work with and the practice of inclusion: creating an environment where we all feel respected and valued for our uniqueness. Peer workers:

- Understand forms of diversity including (but not limited to) age, disability, ethnicity, gender, education, race, religion, sexual orientation, and lived experience
- Embrace a full range of approaches to change and recovery, from harm reduction to abstinence

- Are mindful and curious about differences and diversity and how this impacts the peer relationship
- Respect differing worldviews and embrace them as potential learning opportunities
- Understand even through others may share similar life experiences, the range of worldviews and responses may vary considerably
- Are trauma informed, recognising the role trauma plays in the lives of themselves and others
- Respect the cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices of peers
- Recognise the unique nature of each person's journey and the emotional experiences common to many

References:

Lived Experience Workforce Strategies Stewardship Group (2019). Strategy for the Alcohol and Other Drug Peer Workforce in Victoria. Self Help Addiction Resource Centre (SHARC): Melbourne.

This project was made possible by funding from the Department of Health and Human Services

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Developed by Peer Projects, Self Help Addiction Resource Centre Inc. (SHARC), 2019.