Lived Experience Governance

Sophie Moore

ELGP 2026 Research Summary

What is Lived Experience?

“Lived Experience (LE) practitioners use their experiential knowledge and understanding to create culturally safe spaces where truth-telling and human-centred thinking is privileged.

When you add Lived Experience to an organisation’s governance, it enriches strategies and reduces the harm which many of their systems and services, often unwittingly, can have on the people they are here to serve,” **Pauline Boscato, Board Director, Mental Health Matters 2**

What are the benefits of LE in operations and governance?

01 Ethics

LE governance principles are concerned with equity, inclusivity, social justice and human rights.[1]

02 Funding

Meaningful and demonstrated LE engagement is an increasing requirement from funders.[2]

03 Risk Awareness

LE board members can identify unforseen risks, service gaps and barriers to access.[3]

04 Cost Benefits

Return on investment for peer work has a real dollar value. In mental health, studies on LE peer work show it returns $3.27 for every $1 invested.[4]

05 Improved Outcomes

LE improves client/participant engagement in services, reduces harm, improves service quality, and promotes empathy and understanding.[5]

Role of the Board in Supporting Lived Experience

Strategic Priorities

Support people with lived experience to contribute to the planning, design and delivery of systems, structures, policies, processes, practices, programs and services.[6]

Resourcing

Adequate resourcing to support LE partnerships, co-production, and best practice in evaluation including continuous improvement cycles, with timeframes which allow for delivery.[7]

Contracts

Requirements for LE put into contracts and preference given to lived experience contractors/businesses.[8]

Board Composition

Mentoring future board members and LE staff, including site visits to connect board members with emerging issues, and succession planning, recruiting for intersectionality.[9]

Dignity in Risk

Building in risk tolerance for people exercising self-determination and autonomy, including choices and decisions which make have a less-than ideal result.[10]

Share Power

Authenticity and transparency around decision making - outlining the who, what, when, where and why. Creation of LE sub-committees, asking for LE staff to present to the board.[11]

References

1. E. Hodges, A. Leditschke, and L. Solonsch, The Lived Experience Governance Framework: Centring People, Identity and Human Rights for the Benefit of All, prepared by LELAN (SA Lived Experience Leadership & Advocacy Network) for the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum and the National PHN Mental Health Lived Experience Engagement Network (Canberra: Mental Health Australia, 2023).
2. Institute of Community Directors Australia, "What Not-for-Profit Leaders Need to Know in 2026," Community Directors Intelligence, February 2026, https://www.communitydirectors.com.au/articles/what-not-for-profit-leaders-need-to-know-in-2026
3. Australian Institute of Company Directors, Elevating the Client Voice: Resource for NFP Boards (Sydney: Australian Institute of Company Directors, April 2024), https://www.aicd.com.au/content/dam/aicd/pdf/tools-resources/nfp-governance-principles/elevating-the-client-voice-resource-for-nfp-boards.pdf
4. Social Ventures Australia, "The Value of a Peer Operated Service," SVA Quarterly, February 22, 2017, https://www.socialventures.org.au/our-impact/the-value-of-a-peer-operated-service/.
5. H. Mah, R. Dobson, and A. Thomson, "The Importance of Lived Experience: A Scoping Review on the Value of Patient and Public Involvement in Health Research," Health Expectations: An International Journal of Public Participation in Health Care and Health Policy 28, no. 2 (2025): e70205, https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.70205
6. Hodges, E., Leditschke, A., Solonsch, L., Singh, J. & Blazewicz, T. (2023). A Toolkit to Authentically Embed Lived Experience Governance: Centring People, Identity and Human Rights for the Benefit of All. Prepared by LELAN (SA Lived Experience Leadership & Advocacy Network) for the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum and the National PHN Mental Health Lived Experience Engagement Network. Mental Health Australia, Canberra.
7. L. Byrne, H. Roennfeldt, and P. O'Shea, Identifying Barriers to Change: The Lived Experience Worker as a Valued Member of the Mental Health Team: Final Report (Brisbane: Queensland Government, 2017)
8. Hodges et al., A Toolkit to Authentically Embed Lived Experience Governance.
9. L. Byrne, L. Wang, H. Roennfeldt, M. Chapman, L. Darwin, C. Castles, L. Craze, and M. Saunders, National Lived Experience Workforce Guidelines (Canberra: National Mental Health Commission, 2021).
10. Hodges, Leditschke, and Solonsch, The Lived Experience Governance Framework.
11. Alana Fisher, Noni Jervis, Madelyne Bisby, Milena Gandy, Andreea I. Heriseanu, Taylor Hathway, Atria Rezwan, Nickolai Titov, and Blake Dear, "Engagement of People with Lived Experience in the Design and Development of Digital Mental Health Interventions: A Scoping Review of Engagement Characteristics and Impacts," Internet Interventions 43 (2026): 100914, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.invent.2026.100914