

National Lived Experience Awareness Day



An Roinn Sláinte
Department of Health

Lived Experience

Lived experience expertise is the unique wisdom gained through directly experiencing and building a life when faced with significant life impacting challenges. While it's true that everyone has some experiences of distress and adversity, not everyone experiences significant challenges that take their lives in an entirely new direction, such as many people with mental health challenges, social exclusion, disability, or homelessness face. Lived Experience expertise complements clinical, professional and academic knowledge in shaping services and policies, and is applied in policy development, research, service design and delivery.

Applications of Lived Experience Expertise

Lived Experience expertise can be understood and applied at four levels

Personal: Supporting one's own recovery, resilience, and self-advocacy. Building identity, confidence, and empowerment.

Involvement / Engagement: Participation in consultation groups, advisory panels, and service user fora. Co-producing policy, research, and service design.

Workforce (Peer Roles): Lived Experience roles are primarily informed by life-changing challenges and experiences. Lived experience practitioners hold a range of roles within services: they help others on their recovery journeys by modelling what recovery looks like or by supporting them to navigate through health and social pathways. Roles include peer support worker, peer specialist in housing, intercultural workers and recovery educators.

Peer Leadership: People with lived experience leading organisations, networks, and advocacy movements. Influencing policy, training professionals, and embedding lived experience in practice.

Best Practice Examples

Ireland: Peer roles in HSE mental health services, service user reps in the HSE Patient Councils, Independent Living peer mentors, Traveller Primary Healthcare worker, Better Together, a peer-led recovery service, **Ruhama Peer Support Training** and the Reference Group for Sharing the Vision, hosted by Shine, that ensures lived experience is central to Ireland's national mental health policy - members contribute to monitoring, feedback, and advocacy, with structured support and remuneration.

International:

UK: NHS Mental Health Service User Leadership

Australia: Co-produced Lived Experience Workforce Frameworks

Canada: Peer-led Housing to Health Project

Global: Global Leadership Exchange Peer Leadership Paper, International Peer Leadership Network.

Benefits of Lived Experience Expertise

Improves services: More relevant, responsive, and effective.

Builds trust: Service users feel heard and respected.

Supports recovery: Promotes hope, empowerment, and resilience.

Shifts culture: From tokenism to genuine co-production.

Empowerment & Inclusion: Fosters dignity, agency, and equity.

Scale

Ireland has at least **430 paid lived experience roles** across 78 organisations, especially in mental health and social inclusion (The Housing Agency, Genio). The **MISHSoC initiative** (University of Galway, HSE, Genio) shows lived experience improves service design and monitoring for underserved populations.

Capacity Building

Scan the barcode to access free Lived Experience Orientation Training (1 hour).



Call to Action

All departments, organisations, and programmes are invited to **promote Lived Experience expertise** in your work. Make the voices and experiences of people with lived experience a **core part** of how you design and deliver services.

We encourage you to **build on or begin new ways** of including lived experience in your activities and decision-making. Let's work together to make services stronger, more inclusive, and more effective.

Then, **come celebrate your progress and achievements at next year's Lived Experience Awareness Day!**

For more information on resources: mhengage@hse.ie