PEER PRACTICE CAPABILITY FRAMEWORK™

A capability model for developing a safe, effective lived experience workforce

Peer Practice Lab™
Institute for Peer Workforce Practice

Consultation Draft - Version 1 - Mar 2026

Foundations

Acknowledgement of Country

Peer Practice Lab acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live and work throughout Australia. We recognise the enduring connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to land, waters, culture, and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and acknowledge the strength, resilience, and wisdom of First Nations peoples. We are committed to promoting cultural safety and respect within the development of the lived experience workforce.

Recognition of Lived Experience

Peer Practice Lab recognises the profound value of lived experience in shaping compassionate, human centred support systems. Individuals who draw on their personal journeys bring unique insight, empathy and hope to others navigating similar challenges. We honour the courage required to transform personal experience into support for others and are committed to strengthening the lived experience workforce through safe practice, capability development and professional recognition.

Introduction

As the peer workforce expands across sectors, capability expectations have developed unevenly. Some sectors have mature peer development models, while others are still defining safe role design and supervision approaches. This creates possible risks for both peer workers, organisations and the people they support.

The Peer Practice Capability Framework™ responds to this gap by providing a cross sector capability architecture to support safe, effective and sustainable peer practice.

The Peer Practice Capability Framework™ has been developed to support individuals and organisations to:

- define good peer practice
- support the development of peer workers
- strengthen workforce capability and safety
- provide structured professional development pathways.

The framework identifies eight core capability domains that underpin effective peer practice across health and human services sectors.

About Peer Practice Lab

Peer Practice Lab is an Australian initiative committed to strengthening the peer and lived experience workforce across health and human services. Through the Peer Practice Capability Framework™, Peer Practice Lab provides a structured approach to developing the capabilities, skills, knowledge and behaviours required for safe, ethical and effective peer practice. The framework supports capability assessment, targeted professional learning and the development of sustainable career pathways for peer workers. In doing so, Peer Practice Lab contributes to the growing recognition of lived experience as a critical component of contemporary service systems.

Why this framework now

Across health and human services, the peer and lived experience workforce is growing rapidly. While this growth reflects increasing recognition of the value of lived experience, workforce capability development has evolved unevenly across sectors.

Some sectors have established peer workforce models, while others are still developing safe role design, supervision approaches and career pathways. This variation creates both opportunity and risk.

Without clear capability development approaches, peer roles may be under supported, inconsistently defined, or unintentionally shaped by clinical or organisational expectations rather than peer practice principles.

The Peer Practice Capability Framework™ has been developed to support a more consistent, safe and sustainable approach to peer workforce development across sectors.

Workforce challenges this framework addresses

Initial consultation and sector discussions suggest several common workforce challenges:

• Lack of shared language describing peer capability
• Inconsistent supervision capability and support structures
• Role confusion between peer and clinical workforces
• Limited structured career development pathways
• Variability in training quality across sectors, or training too sector specific
• Risk of becoming 'clinicalised' reducing peer identity
• Limited cross sector portability of peer skills
• Workforce sustainability, vicarious trauma and burnout risks

This framework aims to provide a structured capability foundation to help address these challenges.

What this framework is / is not

The Peer Practice Capability Framework™ is a workforce development guide designed to support safe, effective and sustainable peer practice across sectors.

It is intended to:	This framework **is not** intended to be:
• Define core peer practice capabilities	• A clinical competency framework
• Support workforce development conversations	• A compliance checklist
• Inform supervision and reflective practice	• A performance management tool
• Guide professional development planning	• A replacement for sector specific peer frameworks
• Support career pathway development	• A prescriptive training curriculum
• Provide a shared language for peer capability	

Rather, it provides a capability foundation that organisations and sectors may adapt to their own context.

Relationship to existing peer workforce frameworks

This framework is not intended to replace existing peer workforce frameworks developed within specific sectors such as mental health, suicide prevention, alcohol and other drugs or community services.

Instead, it provides a cross sector capability architecture that may complement existing frameworks by identifying transferable peer practice capabilities.

This approach supports greater workforce portability, shared capability language, and collaboration across sectors while respecting sector specific practice guidance.

Who is this framework for

This framework may be useful for, Peer and lived experience workers, Supervisors of peer workers, Service managers and leaders, Workforce development teams, Training providers, Commissioners and funders, and Researchers and policy leaders.
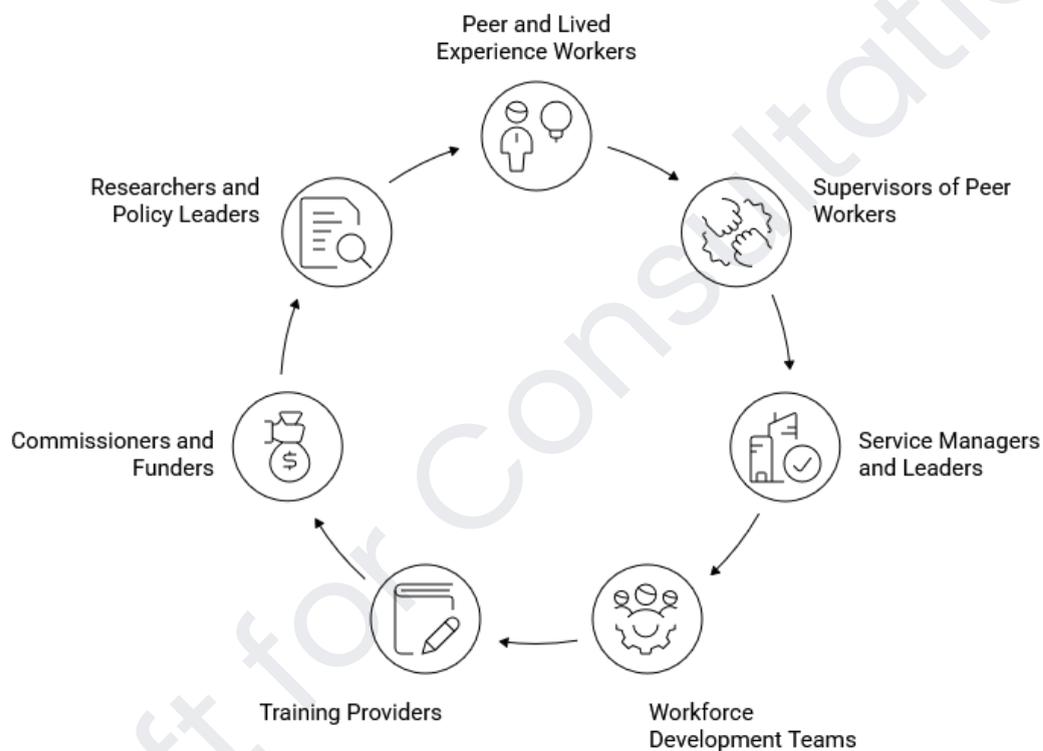
It is designed to support both individual capability development and organisational workforce planning.

How organisations may use this framework

Organisations may use this framework in several ways, including:

• Supporting peer role design and recruitment
• Informing supervision and reflective practice
• Identifying professional development needs
• Supporting performance conversations
• Designing workforce development strategies
• Informing service design involving peer roles
• Supporting quality improvement initiatives

The framework is intended as a developmental tool rather than a compliance instrument.

Theoretical Foundations of the Peer Practice Capability Method™

The Peer Practice Capability Method™ is informed by established literature recognising peer practice as relational, experiential and capability based. The method does not propose a new theory of peer support. Rather, it synthesises existing theoretical and practice frameworks to support structured workforce capability development for peer and lived experience roles across health and human service contexts.

The method is grounded in foundational peer support theory, particularly the work of Mead, Hilton and Curtis (2001), who describe peer support as a relational process based on mutuality, shared experience and meaning making rather than a set of clinical interventions. This framing positions peer practice as distinct from traditional helper and recipient models and highlights the importance of relational, ethical and identity based capabilities.

The framework is also informed by recovery oriented and rights-based approaches to care. The World Health Organisation (2021) identifies peer support as consistent with person centred and rights based service systems that promote autonomy, participation and recovery. This situates peer practice not only as an interpersonal approach but as part of broader system shifts toward dignity, self determination and inclusion.

Relational practice literature further informs the approach by emphasising that peer capability cannot be reduced to procedural competence alone. Effective peer work depends on relational judgement, boundaries, ethical use of lived experience and reflective practice. The National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health (NCCMH, 2019) similarly emphasises the integration of knowledge, skills and attitudes while cautioning against the risk of diminishing the relational foundations of peer roles.

The method also reflects capability based workforce development approaches, which focus on whether practitioners can apply safe and effective practice in context rather than simply complete training. Organising the framework into capability domains and developmental stages reflects this understanding and recognises that practice develops through supported experience and reflection over time.

Finally, the method is consistent with experiential and reflective learning literature (Kolb, 1984; Schön, 1983), recognising that peer capability develops through cycles of learning, application and reflection. This is particularly relevant in lived experience roles where professional capability is closely connected to self awareness, ethical judgement and reflective supervision.

Taken together, these literature supports the Peer Practice Capability Method™ as a structured approach to peer workforce capability development that recognises lived experience as expertise, centres relational practice, and supports capability as developmental rather than static.

Capability Levels

Each domain describes capability development across three levels:

Foundation	Practitioner	Advanced
Entry level peer worker capability.	Confident and consistent peer practice.	Leadership and workforce development capability.

The framework is designed to be cross sector, recognising that while service contexts vary, the core capabilities of peer practice remain consistent.

The eight domains of the Peer Practice Capability Framework™ translate these theoretical foundations into an applied workforce model. Peer Identity and Safe Use of Lived Experience express the lived experience and mutuality foundations of peer work. Relational Practice, Boundaries and Ethical Practice, and Reflective Practice operationalise relational and reflective learning principles. Cultural Safety and Inclusive Practice and Systems Navigation locate peer work within real service environments and structural inequities. Peer Leadership recognises that mature peer practice includes influence, mentoring and contribution to workforce development and service improvement.

Explanation of the Framework

The Peer Practice Capability Framework™ illustrates how effective peer practice develops. At the centre is Peer Identity, grounded in lived experience, which forms the foundation of peer work. Surrounding this are the capability domains, the core skills, knowledge and professional practices that enable peer workers to safely and effectively support others. The outer layer represents capability levels, recognising that peer practitioners develop over time from foundational skills through to advanced capability and leadership. Together, the model highlights that strong peer practice is built on lived experience, strengthened through structured capability development, and supported by continuous professional growth.

Peer Practice Capability Framework™

Capability Levels

Stages of development and leadership

Capability Domains

Skills and practices for effective support

Peer Identity

Core foundation of peer work
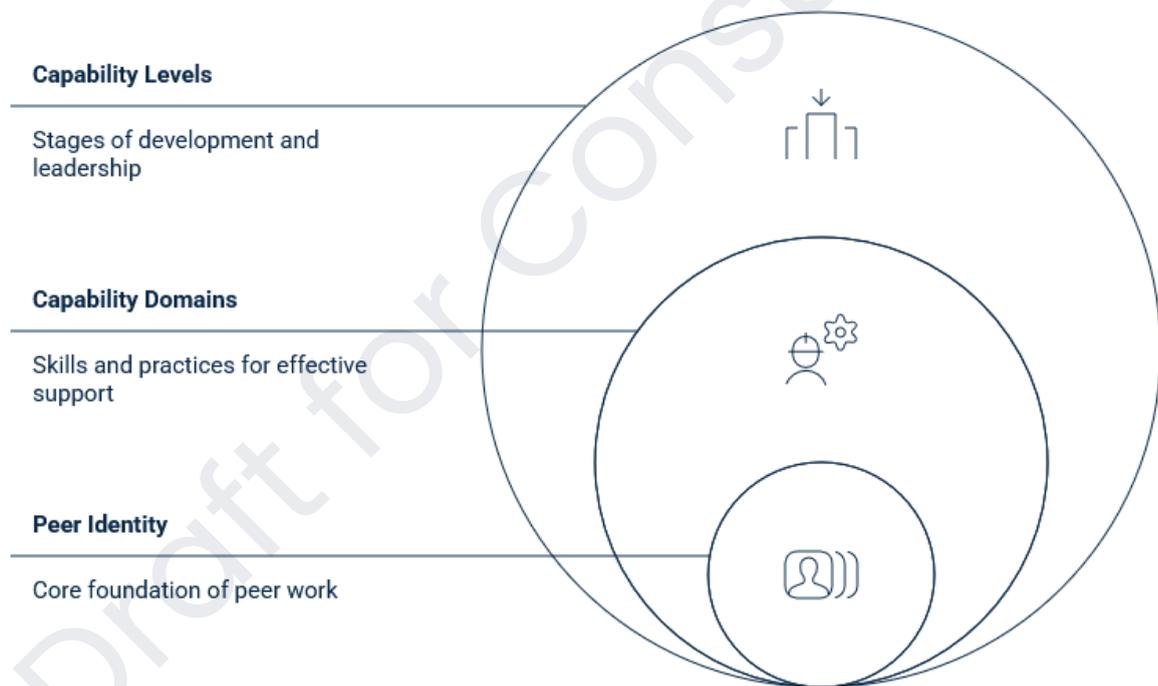
Capability Domains Overview

Peer Identity

Safe Use of Lived Experience

Relational Practice

Boundaries and Ethical Practice

Cultural Safety and Inclusive Practice

Systems Navigation

Reflective Practice

Peer Leadership

Principles of Peer Practice

Peer Practice Capability Framework™ Principles

Peer practice is grounded in shared experience, mutuality, and respect. The following principles underpin the **Peer Practice Capability Framework™** and inform how peer work is understood and applied across *health and human service settings*.

1. Lived Experience as Expertise

Peer work recognises lived and living experience as a valuable form of knowledge. Peer workers draw on their own experiences to support others . in ways that foster hope, connection, and understanding.

2. Mutuality and Shared Understanding

Peer practice is built on authentic human connection and shared understanding. Relationships are characterised by empathy, respect, and recognition of common humanity.

3. Safety and Ethical Practice

Peer workers practise in ways that prioritise safety, appropriate boundaries, and ethical decision making. Responsible use of lived experience is central to safe peer practice.

4. Respect for Diversity and Cultural Safety

Peer work recognises and respects the diversity of people's identities, cultures, experiences, and communities. Peer practice actively seeks to promote culturally safe and inclusive environments.

5. Hope, Empowerment and Recovery

Peer practice supports individuals to recognise their own strengths, possibilities, and pathways forward. The role of peer workers is to support others to explore what recovery, wellbeing, or change means for them.

6. Reflection and Continuous Learning

Peer workers engage in reflective practice to understand their experiences, maintain wellbeing, and continually strengthen their practice.

The Peer Practice Capability Method™

The Peer Practice Capability Framework™ is applied through a structured capability development approach referred to as the Peer Practice Capability Method™. The method brings together three key elements: capability domains, developmental capability levels, and practical learning pathways. Together these components provide a structured way for individuals and organisations to understand, develop, and strengthen peer practice capability over time.

The method is designed to support workforce development across diverse health and human service settings while recognising the unique contribution of lived experience roles.

Peer Practice Capability Framework™ – Domains

Domain 1: Peer Identity

Capability definition: Understanding and embodying the values, principles, and ethics of peer work.

Peer Identity

Foundation Behaviours
Understands types of lived experience peer worker roles and own identity.
Understands the core values of peer support.
Recognises the importance of self care.

Practitioner Behaviours
Articulates their specific role of lived experience peer work in the context of other peer work identities.
Applies ethical principals in practice.
Demonstrates self awareness and manages personal wellbeing.

Advanced Behaviours
Mentors other peer workers in developing their own peer identity.
Understands when and how to advocate for the recognition of peer work within the organisation.
Contributes to the development of peer work standards and guidelines.

Example scenario: A new peer worker is learning about various lived experience peer work roles and when to share their story safely. An advanced peer worker provides guidance and support, helping them to develop a safe and ethical approach.

Domain 2: Safe Use of Lived Experience

Capability definition: Using lived experience in a way that is safe, ethical, and beneficial for both the peer worker and the people they support.

Safe Use of Lived Experience

Foundation Behaviours

Shares lived experience appropriately and safely.
Understands the potential impact of sharing lived experience.
Seeks support when needed.

Practitioner Behaviours

Uses lived experience to build rapport and trust.
Sets boundaries when sharing lived experience.
Reflects on the impact of sharing lived experience.

Advanced Behaviours

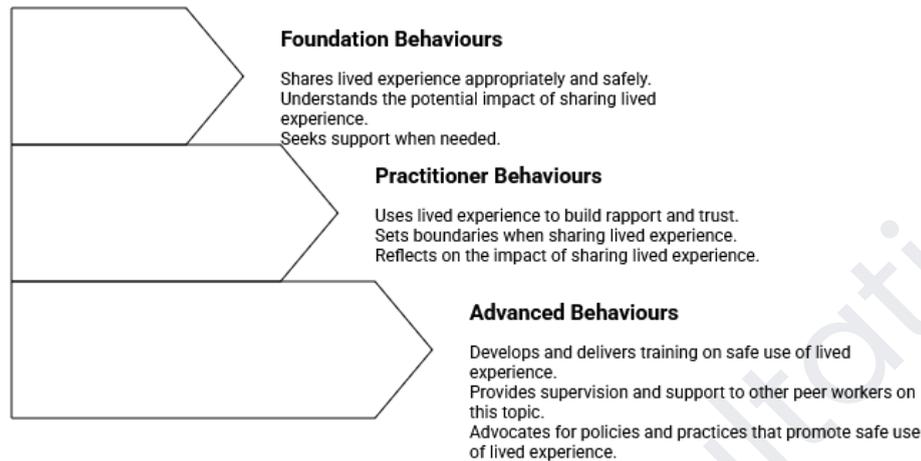Develops and delivers training on safe use of lived experience.
Provides supervision and support to other peer workers on this topic.
Advocates for policies and practices that promote safe use of lived experience.

Example scenario: A peer worker is supporting a client who is experiencing similar challenges to what they have faced. The peer worker uses their lived experience to provide hope and inspiration, while also setting boundaries and safe language to protect both their own wellbeing and the clients wellbeing.

Domain 3: Relational Practice

Capability definition: Building and maintaining effective relationships with people we support, colleagues, and other stakeholders.

Relational Practice

Foundation Behaviours

Listens actively and empathetically.
Communicates clearly and respectfully.
Builds rapport with people we support.

Practitioner Behaviours

Uses effective communication skills to build strong relationships.
Manages conflict effectively.
Works collaboratively with colleagues and other stakeholders.

Advanced Behaviours

Leads and facilitates team meetings.
Provides mentorship and guidance to other peer workers.
Develops and delivers training on relational practice.

Example scenario: A peer worker is facilitating a support group. They use their relational skills to create a safe and supportive environment where participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences.
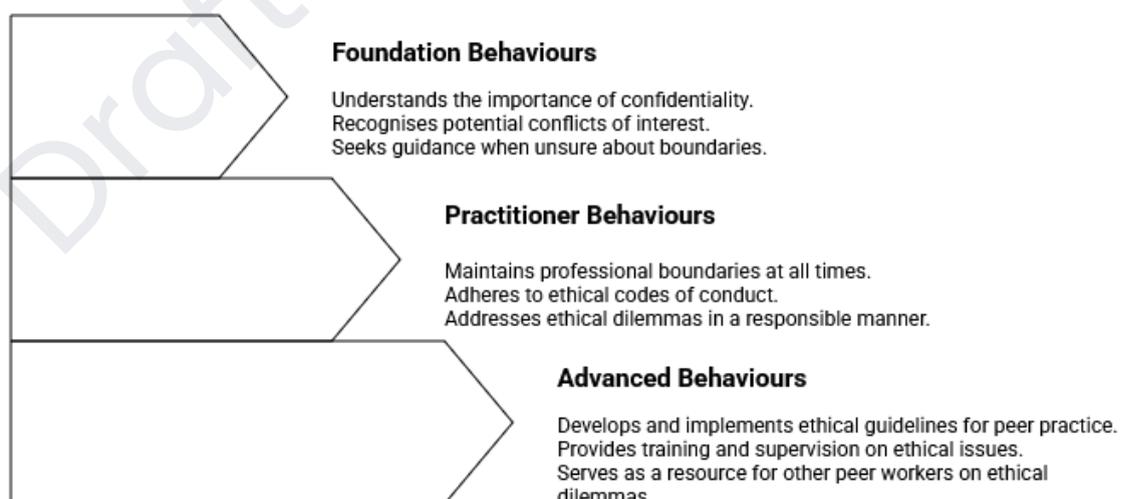
Domain 4: Boundaries and Ethical Practice

Capability definition: Understanding and adhering to ethical principles and professional boundaries in peer practice.

Boundaries and Ethical Practice

Foundation Behaviours

Understands the importance of confidentiality.
Recognises potential conflicts of interest.
Seeks guidance when unsure about boundaries.

Practitioner Behaviours

Maintains professional boundaries at all times.
Adheres to ethical codes of conduct.
Addresses ethical dilemmas in a responsible manner.

Advanced Behaviours

Develops and implements ethical guidelines for peer practice.
Provides training and supervision on ethical issues.
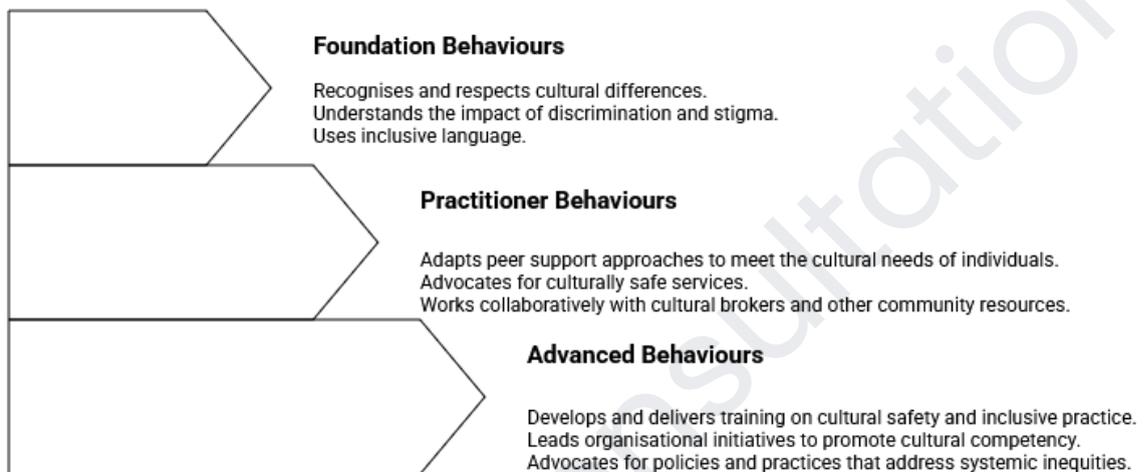Serves as a resource for other peer workers on ethical dilemmas.

Example scenario: A peer worker is offered a gift by a client. The peer worker respectfully declines the gift, explaining the organisation's policy on boundaries and ethical practice.

Domain 5: Cultural Safety and Inclusive Practice

Capability definition: Providing peer support in a way that is culturally safe, inclusive, and respectful of diversity.

Cultural Safety and Inclusive Practice

Foundation Behaviours

Recognises and respects cultural differences.
Understands the impact of discrimination and stigma.
Uses inclusive language.

Practitioner Behaviours

Adapts peer support approaches to meet the cultural needs of individuals.
Advocates for culturally safe services.
Works collaboratively with cultural brokers and other community resources.

Advanced Behaviours

Develops and delivers training on cultural safety and inclusive practice.
Leads organisational initiatives to promote cultural competency.
Advocates for policies and practices that address systemic inequities.
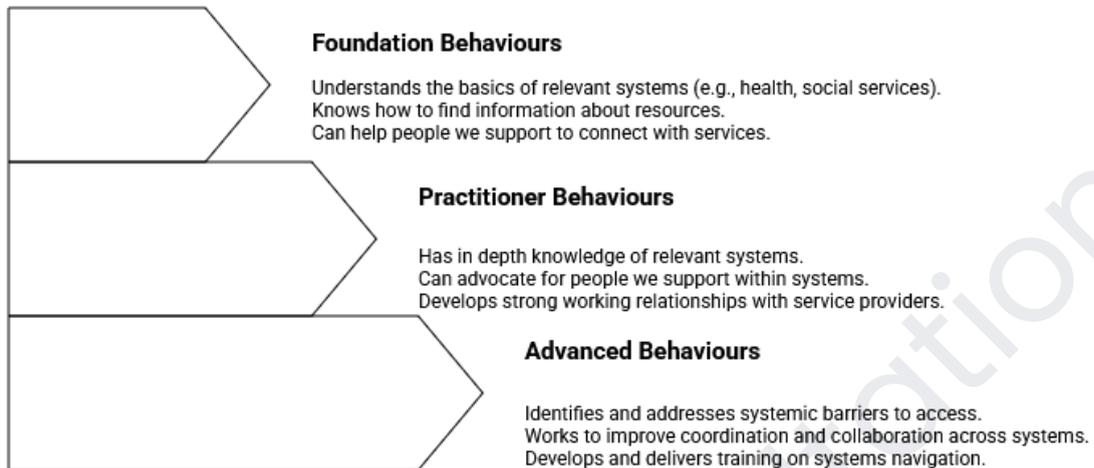
Example scenario: A peer worker is supporting a client from a different cultural background. The peer worker takes the time to learn about the client's culture and adapts their approach accordingly.

Domain 6: Systems Navigation

Capability definition: Helping people we support to navigate complex systems and access needed resources.

Systems Navigation

Foundation Behaviours

Understands the basics of relevant systems (e.g., health, social services).
Knows how to find information about resources.
Can help people we support to connect with services.

Practitioner Behaviours

Has in depth knowledge of relevant systems.
Can advocate for people we support within systems.
Develops strong working relationships with service providers.

Advanced Behaviours

Identifies and addresses systemic barriers to access.
Works to improve coordination and collaboration across systems.
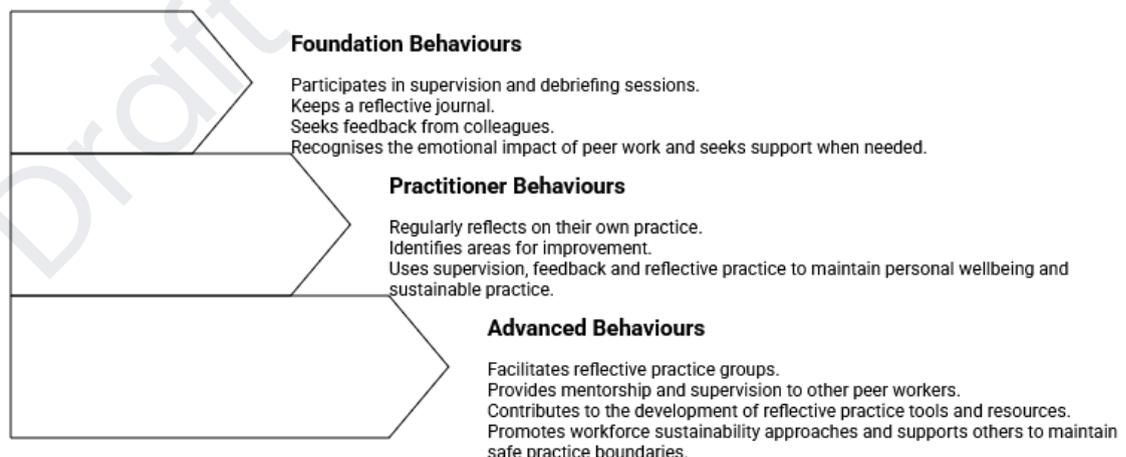Develops and delivers training on systems navigation.

Example scenario: A peer worker helps a client to navigate the process of applying for disability benefits. The peer worker provides information, support, and advocacy to help the client succeed.

Domain 7: Reflective Practice

Capability definition: Engaging in ongoing reflection on one's own practice to improve effectiveness and promote professional growth.

Reflective Practice

Foundation Behaviours

Participates in supervision and debriefing sessions.
Keeps a reflective journal.
Seeks feedback from colleagues.
Recognises the emotional impact of peer work and seeks support when needed.

Practitioner Behaviours

Regularly reflects on their own practice.
Identifies areas for improvement.
Uses supervision, feedback and reflective practice to maintain personal wellbeing and sustainable practice.

Advanced Behaviours

Facilitates reflective practice groups.
Provides mentorship and supervision to other peer workers.
Contributes to the development of reflective practice tools and resources.
Promotes workforce sustainability approaches and supports others to maintain safe practice boundaries.

Example scenario: A peer worker reflects on a challenging interaction with a client. They identify ways they could have handled the situation differently and develop a plan for improving their communication skills.

Domain 8: Peer Leadership

Capability definition: Taking on leadership roles within the peer workforce and advocating for the value of lived experience.

Peer Leadership

Foundation Behaviours

Volunteers for leadership opportunities.
Participates in committees and working groups.
Shares their ideas and perspectives.
Understands how service systems impact people accessing support.

Practitioner Behaviours

Leads projects and initiatives.
Mentors other peer workers.
Advocates for the peer workforce within the organisation.
Advocates for improvements informed by lived experience.

Advanced Behaviours

Shapes policy and practice at the organisational and system levels.
Represents the peer workforce at conferences and other events.
Advocates for the expansion of peer roles and opportunities.
Influences organisational or sector development of peer workforce practice.

Example scenario: A peer worker leads a project to develop a new peer support program. They work collaboratively with other peer workers, staff, and stakeholders to design and implement the program.

Framework Development Methodology

The Peer Practice Capability Framework™ was developed through an iterative process combining lived experience insight, professional practice knowledge and review of relevant peer workforce literature and frameworks. The development approach sought to balance conceptual rigour with practical relevance for the peer and lived experience workforce across health and human service settings.

Initial development was informed by engagement with individuals with lived experience and professionals working in peer roles across DFV, homelessness, adult mental health and related service sectors. These insights contributed to the identification of core capability domains and the articulation of safe, ethical and relational peer practice.

A targeted desktop review of international literature and existing competency frameworks for peer workers was also undertaken. This included research on peer

support, recovery oriented practice and lived experience workforce development, as well as existing competency and capability frameworks used internationally.

Version 1 of the Peer Practice Capability Framework™ represents an initial articulation of these capability domains. Ongoing consultation with peer workers, lived experience leaders, service organisations and researchers will inform future refinement and development of the framework.

Developing and Recognising Capability

Use of the Peer Practice Capability Framework™

The Peer Practice Capability Framework™ is intended as a practical resource to support the development, strengthening and recognition of the peer and lived experience workforce across health and human services.

The framework may support:

• Professional development conversations for peer workers
• Supervision, mentoring and reflective practice
• Design and implementation of peer roles
• Workforce capability planning
• Training and education discussions
• Strengthening recognition of lived experience as professional expertise

The framework does not prescribe a single model of peer practice. Rather, it provides a shared capability language that supports diverse peer approaches across sectors and service contexts.

Developing and Recognising Capability

Capability in peer practice develops through experience, reflection, supervision and ongoing learning rather than through knowledge testing alone.

Organisations may support capability development through approaches such as:

• Structured reflective supervision
• Self assessment capability reflection
• Practice discussion and scenario reflection
• Professional development planning
• Peer mentoring and communities of practice
• Examples of practice or reflective portfolios

Additional capability development resources may be explored in future versions of the framework. The framework is intended to support developmental conversations rather than competency judgement.

Relationship to training and qualifications

The Peer Practice Capability Framework™ may support alignment with vocational education pathways, micro credentials and recognition of prior learning approaches.

Future versions may explore how capability development aligns with formal training pathways while maintaining the distinct relational and experiential foundations of peer practice.

The framework is not intended to replace qualifications, but may help inform workforce development discussions and enhance career pathways options for peer workers across sectors.

Consultation and Next Steps

Consultation and Refinement

The release of Version 1 of the Peer Practice Capability Framework™ represents an initial step in the development of a shared capability approach for the peer and lived experience workforce. The framework is intended to evolve through consultation with peer workers, lived experience leaders, service organisations, researchers, educators and policy makers.

Feedback and practical application will inform ongoing refinement to ensure the framework remains relevant, practical and grounded in the experiences of the workforce it seeks to support.

Peer Practice Lab welcomes collaboration and dialogue with individuals and organisations interested in contributing to the continued development of the framework.

Next Steps

The immediate priority following the release of Version 1 is consultation with the peer and lived experience workforce and the organisations that commission, employ and support peer roles. Insights from this consultation will inform Version 1 Final of the framework.

Future development priorities may include:

• Refinement informed by sector consultation
• Development of capability development resources
• Exploration of capability assessment approaches
• Alignment with professional learning pathways
• Development of communities of practice
• Research and evaluation partnerships
• Resources to support sustainable peer workforce development

Through these developments, Peer Practice Lab aims to contribute to the ongoing strengthening, sustainability and recognition of the peer and lived experience workforce across sectors.

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Peer Practice Capability Framework™

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