

# National Mental Health Consumer Alliance



1 March 2023

The Hon. Emma McBride MP  
Assistant Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention  
Assistant Minister for Rural and Regional Health  
PO Box 6022  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Via email: [assistant.minister.mcbride@health.gov.au](mailto:assistant.minister.mcbride@health.gov.au); [emma.mcbride.mp@aph.gov.au](mailto:emma.mcbride.mp@aph.gov.au)

**RE: Establishment of national mental health lived experience peak body (consumers)**

Dear Minister,

Thank you for inviting the National Mental Health Consumers Alliance ('the Alliance') to update you on our plans for the establishment of a national mental health lived experience peak body for consumers.

The Alliance is the representative body for lived experience mental health consumers across Australia. It is comprised of the lived experience consumer peak bodies in each state and territory where a jurisdictional peak exists. Collectively, the Alliance directly represents 7,000 members/supporters with mental health lived experience, and we are proudly governed and operated by people with lived experience.

The Alliance strongly supports your aim to put "the voices of people with lived and living experience at the centre of decision making as we work together to create a fairer, improved system that meets the needs of Australians". The Alliance is firmly committed to achieving this goal with all governments, the mental health sector, and those with a lived experience to build an equitable mental health system.

The Alliance was established in 2019 for the very purpose of establishing a consumer national peak, drawing on the strong local connections that each state body has in each jurisdiction.

The Alliance believes the establishment of a consumer national peak must involve a ***genuine and ongoing*** co-design process with lived experience consumers. To this end, we believe the consumer peak body should be a federated structure of existing state bodies, enabling a consistent, reliable, and accountable two-way information flow between the national peak and thousands of lived experience consumers in local communities. We believe that the Alliance - with its established networks and relationships of trust with lived experience mental health consumers - is the only entity that can achieve this result, particularly in rural and regional areas.

The Alliance has the existing membership structures, infrastructure, experience, and State/Territory government mandates to establish an inclusive and distributed consumer peak in the next 3-6 months. Over the past four years, the Alliance has built mechanisms for a consumer national peak to 'hit the ground running'. This has included developing options for the best-practice governance of an independent charitable entity, founded and controlled by lived experience mental health consumers, accountable to each state/territory lived experience peak. Alliance members have been involved in the discussions about the creation of a consumer national peak for more than a decade, and can ensure all previous work is incorporated into the peak's establishment.

# National Mental Health Consumer Alliance

The Alliance understands that First Nations, CALD and LGBTQI+ mental health consumers have distinct voices and imperatives and is committed to a national peak design that ensures their genuine inclusion in the governance and operation of the consumer national peak.

The Alliance acknowledges the important role of key organisational stakeholders - such as the Department of Health and Aged Care, the National Mental Health Commission, Lived Experience Australia, Mental Health Australia, SANE Australia and the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum – in the establishment of a consumer national peak, and looks forward to working with these entities.

While there is a lot of hard work ahead of us, Alliance members have set aside resources to ensure we can partner with your government to create a lived experience consumer national peak that is driven from the grassroots up. To this end, we have organised a 'Consumer Lived Experience National Peak Workshop', which will be held in Canberra on 20 March 2023. We be extending invitations to yourself, your Department and officials from the Department of Health and Aged Care to this event.

We understand the urgency in establishing a lived experience national peak, with this 'next step' involving direct engagement between the Alliance and your Department. We look forward to the Alliance and your Department working together on this very important project.

Our nominated contact is Darren Munday, who can be directly contacted via email at: [ceo@comhwa.org.au](mailto:ceo@comhwa.org.au) and by phone on 0422 190 689.

Yours sincerely

**Dalane Drexler**

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