

Living and lived experience speakers

Living and Lived Experience (LLE) representatives play a vital role in sharing firsthand accounts of using or having used alcohol and other drugs (AOD) and their experiences in accessing health, community and AOD treatment services. They tell stories of experience and strength, and this advocacy enhances community knowledge, challenges stigma, and contributes to improved service delivery. As the AOD sector spotlights the value of LLE and the peer workforce, LLE representatives are increasingly being called upon to speak at network events, in the media, planning, and policy meetings.

This guide is aimed at LLE representatives and event organisers. It provides recommendations and points for consideration to ensure that these engagements are empowering and meaningful and that the conditions around engagement are supported, organised, and considered.

We want to thank all LLE representatives for their valuable contribution to this impactful advocacy by sharing their stories and expertise and the NADA Consumer Advisory group for their contribution and consultation in developing this guide.

Active advocacy

The stigma surrounding drug use is a real issue faced by LLE people, and this stigma perpetuates harmful stereotypes and creates barriers to inclusion. To develop better systems and cultures for those who use or have used drugs, we must challenge stigma and discrimination and engaging LLE representatives has the ability to do so if done correctly. Organisers and LLE representatives need to remain conscious that drug use is a personal issue surrounded by a variety of opinions and beliefs and individual experiences within harm minimisation, treatment, and approaches. The stories shared by LLE representatives may not always be the shared views of the audience, but all hold value and place within an AOD context.

The aim is to centre the voices of people with LLE through personal experience and open conversations to develop cultures and organisational structures that facilitate co-design in policy and program development and delivery. Engaging LLE ensures services are truly responsive in prioritising the needs of people who use or have used drugs.

Considerations

Expertise

The expertise of LLE representative speakers is highly specialised and deserves recognition. Remember that people with LLE come from diverse backgrounds and communities, with varying experience in AOD and accessing services. Additionally, they have different skills, experience, and confidence levels when communicating their expertise.

Purpose

Consider which aspects of your personal experience of AOD, accessing services, or supporting someone will support your message for the audience. Consider how your knowledge and experiences can help reduce stigma, provide context, or advocate for systemic change. Avoid singling out individual services and instead strive to inspire systemic change through personal experiences.

Role

Consider using a variety of forums, such as keynote speakers and panel members, facilitating working groups, interview panels, or one-on-one consultations tailored to the project's specific needs. Ensure the role and purpose of the event are clear before offering or accepting speaking engagements.

Planning

Meaningful engagement with LLE representatives requires involvement from the beginning of the project cycle. Proper planning and recruitment must allow enough time for representatives to plan, prepare and familiarise themselves with the project and its intention. Ensure your recruitment strategy considers and recruits LLE representatives who are best suited based on their experience, interests and strengths.

Autonomy

When seeking speakers for an event, event organisers should consider the speaker's right to autonomy while ensuring alignment in values and key messages. This is achieved through a consultative process between speakers and organisers. It's crucial to support safe storytelling for speakers and audience members by respecting the speaker's right to share their experiences honestly and without control or censorship.

Safe storytelling

As you prepare to speak to an audience, it's important to reflect on what you want to share and how you want to share it. Consider the key messages you want to convey and how to communicate them effectively. You should also consider the level of personal information you feel comfortable sharing and what your audience needs to hear to understand your message. Remember that details are often optional, and it's essential to prioritise your well-being and safety as a speaker.

Find out more about Safe Storytelling through NUAA and MHCC

Event details

Event organisers should provide all the details about the event and speaking requirements well in advance. They should confirm that the speakers have received the information to allow enough time for consideration and feedback. They should also provide as much supporting information as possible, including questions for a panel or meeting agendas. Organisers should also advise if there will be a question-and-answer session, the expected number of attendees, media presence, sponsor influence, and any known conflicting views that may affect the speaker.

Online presence and anonymity

Representatives and organisers should consider how speakers are represented in any online platform. LLE representatives must be fully informed about the extent of marketing and the use of personal details, such as social media. Organisers must be respectful and accurate in representing and using any information related to LLE speakers. In case the event will be recorded, all parties should clearly understand the distribution and

usage of the material, including the measures that can be taken to revoke it. Representatives need to evaluate their comfort level and the potential impact their participation in the event could have on their community profile and anonymity.

Privacy and legal considerations

It is important to note that in NSW, the use of substances is still considered a criminal offence, therefore, it is crucial to consider the possible repercussions. It is essential to approach the matter with sensitivity, as it may impact not only the individual but also their community. When discussing this matter, it is necessary to be mindful of how it may affect others and, if requested, respect people's privacy by omitting or altering details.

Resources

Organisers should liaise with LLE representatives to identify the necessary financial, administrative, and other resources to undertake the role. Event organisers must ensure an adequate budget for remuneration and expenses and clear agreements about payment, travel, accommodation (if required), equipment, and support materials.

Importance of remuneration

Recognising that LLE people are experts with unique skills and experiences is essential. They should be compensated for their time and expertise like any other project staff or professionals. Although not all speaker events are paid, LLE speakers should be paid for their time and expertise whenever possible or when other representatives are compensated.

Transparent and fair payments NADA strives to ensure that consumer payments are consistent, transparent, and fair. Refer to the [NADA Consumer Engagement Policy](#) for guidance on remuneration fees.

Considerations for reimbursement

- Determine payment and reimbursement arrangements before their participation. Ensure this is confirmed in writing.
- Discuss and negotiate assistance arrangements, such as travel costs, printing, time, and other relevant expenses, based on individual needs.
- Ensure LLE representatives are paid and processed promptly to reduce turnaround time.

Support

LLE representatives should note that sharing personal stories can bring up unexpected emotions during and after the event. Engaging in this kind of work requires having a support network in place. Organisers should also ensure that support contacts are easily accessible. If you need any further assistance or information, please don't hesitate to contact the NADA Consumer Engagement Coordinator.