

A Quick Guide to a strategy for building the strengths of mental health researchers and leaders in lived experience research

This Quick Guide was created by current Co-Design Leads: Sam, Julia, Ali, Amit, Elise, Gregor, Brenton, Sarah, Pam, Ineke and Tricia.

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Healing from the Ground Remastered '25
Created by Kamilaroi/Gamilaraay Artist,
Dennis Golding

Jargon buster – 'capacity building' could also mean 'building strengths'

Jargon buster – 'high income countries' could also mean 'developed' or 'First World' countries

Why does this research matter?

The ALIVE National Centre has created The Next Generation Researcher Network and The Lived Experience Research Collective. **This paper outlines the strategy for growing the strengths of mental health researchers** within these networks.

This paper looked at research published since 2008 and found that there are a lot of areas still lacking in terms of supporting mental health researchers and lived experience researchers in high income countries. There are also existing power imbalances between conventional and lived experience researchers in the field.

The authors describe how there is a need to promote lived experience researchers to become leaders in mental health research, alongside traditional researchers. The authors argue for **conventional researchers to be trained** to work better with lived experience researchers.

For whom does the research have relevance?

This research is most relevant for researchers and people involved in translating research into practice.

Primary Topic: Capacity building for early mid career academic and lived experience researchers
Main Audience: Researchers, service planning and support programs in community organisations, practitioners



What was the focus of the research?

This research focuses on how The ALIVE Centre networks support and connect people who want to build careers in research, people with lived experience who want to develop research skills, people who are affected by mental ill-health and practitioners. **The ‘strategy’ for building the strengths of mental health researchers within these networks** includes:

- A central coordination hub
- Co-leadership by lived experience researchers and traditional researchers
- Traineeships
- Building skills through short courses and a virtual learning studio
- Co-creation of resources
- An online peer discussion forum
- Yearly funding opportunities



Whose perspectives were shared?

Perspectives were shared from Research Collective members, lived experience researchers, co-leads of the networks, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and service members.

We noticed that community-based lived experience researchers were missing from the strategy and that this is a gap to be addressed in the future.



Key findings, why they matter and next steps

This paper explains the benefits of working together, even when it is not easy to work together. There are **significant gaps in how lived experience and conventional researchers come together**, and we must learn better ways to work together. This is important for future mental health research.

The authors state that this can be achieved by **research training for conventional researchers** and having continuous, organised, and coordinated ways to support new mental health researchers to create positive changes in the field.

What matters for us as co-designers with lived-experience of mental ill-health and carer, family and kinship group members

It is important to us that the sector recognises lived experience researchers, but also makes sure **the focus on building academic capabilities doesn’t divide lived experience researchers** and become another type of hierarchical structure within our sector. Not all lived experience researchers have the time or capacity to build academic research skills. **Community-based lived experience researchers**, like us, are interested in building relationships, not in building a career in research. This is just as important to support.

In the article, frustrations were highlighted around the **limited opportunities for First Nations researchers**. Our carer co-leads felt that adding Dennis Golding’s artwork in here was important to reflect that this should be a priority area.

"I actually don't think that most people are aware of their own power and how it is interpreted by other people"

- Gregor McDonald

(Co-Lead, Co-Design Living Labs Network, The ALIVE National Centre)

Citation and Full Paper:

Jazayeri D, Banfield M, Tapp C, et al. Capacity-building strategy for next-generation mental health research: embedding a national network infrastructure to grow mental health researcher capabilities and mental health lived-experience research leaders: BMJ Mental Health 2025;28:e301554. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjment-2025-301554>