

# Fast Track

## Summary



Te Pou o te  
Whakaaro Nui

PLATFORM

## CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE MENTAL HEALTH & ADDICTION COMMUNITY SUPPORT WORKFORCE

*Fast Track* is a companion paper to *On Track: Knowing where we are going* (Platform Trust & Te Pou o te Whakaaro Nui, 2015), which proposed a fundamental transformation of the mental health and addiction (MH&A) system.

The support workforce is the focus group for this paper because it is one of the largest parts of the MH&A workforce and it has, arguably, the most significant role to play in implementing the policy shift towards a transformed MH&A system.

Given that the MH&A sector is aiming to create a more integrated health and social system, the support workforce is uniquely positioned to make a valuable contribution to that objective, principally because it is one of the few workforce groups already working in almost every part of the wider health and social system.

*Fast Track* focuses attention on those actions in the national *Mental Health and Addiction Workforce Action Plan* (Ministry of Health, 2017) that will help know, grow and develop this critical part of the MH&A workforce, so that it is better equipped to play its part in a responsive and effective health and social service system, both now and in the future.

### Defining the support workforce

Whilst there are a plethora of job descriptions, *Fast Track* focuses on two broad categories of support worker, as follows:

1. All mental health and addiction support workers.
2. Specifically, peer support workers who are employed in roles where it is essential to be identified as someone who has lived experience.

One of the challenges for workforce planning is that these two categories of support work are not homogeneous. In many respects, the diversity of the work and the breadth of roles reflects the diversity and complexity of the local communities that support workers operate within. In addition, support work is not just a MH&A phenomenon. They can also be found in a wide range of working environments - including disability, aged care, social services and culturally specific services. For these reasons, the similarities and differences between the different types of support workers in both categories will need to be teased out as part of a process of engaging with the wider sector.

Differences aside, the unifying feature that is common to all support workers, in all work settings, is the distinctive nature of the relationship between the support worker and the consumer (Hennessy, 2015)<sup>1</sup>. This is especially the case for peer support workers where the values of mutuality and experiential knowledge are particularly important (Te Pou o te Whakaaro Nui, 2014, p. 5)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Hennessy, J. L. (2015). *The contribution of the mental health support worker to the mental health services in New Zealand: an Appreciative Inquiry approach*. (Doctor of Philosophy), Auckland University of Technology. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10292/9192>.

<sup>2</sup> Te Pou o te Whakaaro Nui. (2014). *Service user, consumer and peer workforce: A guide for managers and employers*. Auckland, New Zealand: Te Pou o te Whakaaro Nui.

## SUMMARY OF KEY QUESTIONS FOR SUPPORT WORKER FORUMS

Te Pou o te Whakaaro Nui and Platform Trust are intending to host a number of forums over 2017/18 for support workers to discuss the issues that have been raised in *Fast Track*. The following questions offer possible areas to focus on at these forums.

### Developing the MH&A support workforce – 5 focus areas



#### 1. Retention and recruitment

- ▶ What do we know about the breadth and diversity of roles that constitute 'support work'?
- ▶ How do we grow and strengthen the peer support workforce?



#### 2. Training and development

- ▶ What do support workers perceive to be their training and development needs, both now and in the future?
- ▶ What do peer workers perceive to be their training and development needs, both now and in the future?



#### 3. Professionalism

- ▶ To what extent does the support workforce want to develop a distinct professional identity?
- ▶ What are the advantages and disadvantages of self-regulation, credentialing or professional registration for the mental health and addiction support workforce?
- ▶ How do these issues affect the peer support workforce?



#### 4. Education and career pathways

- ▶ What do we already know about the educational and career pathways of the support workforce?
- ▶ What else do we need to find out?
- ▶ What is the impact of MH&A workforce redesign on the future educational and career pathways of the support workforce?



#### 5. Role clarification

- ▶ What are the similarities and the differences between what support workers do and what peer support workers do?
- ▶ What tasks and functions are considered to be in-scope for support work and what is out-of-scope?
- ▶ What tasks and functions are considered to be in-scope for peer support work and what is out-of-scope?

### Access the *Fast Track* report

Visit <https://www.tepou.co.nz/initiatives/NGO-workforce-development/106> to access the full report or order a hard copy.

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