

# A GUIDE TO BUILDING AN IMPACTFUL AND MEANINGFUL MENTAL HEALTH LIVED EXPERIENCE CAMPAIGN



## WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR

Marketing, communications and staff building storytelling/ awareness campaigns engaging with individuals who identify as having lived experience of mental health issues.

## HOW THIS GUIDE WILL HELP

Lived experience storytelling can be very powerful and impactful, however, it's important that you accurately portray the people who are sharing their stories with you, that you treat all stories with respect and great care, and you provide your audience with relevant pathways to support.

This guide will walk you through the best practice steps to ensure you both protect the reputation of your organisation, and the wellbeing of those sharing their stories with you and your audience.

## Sharing lived experiences of mental health can:

- Reduce stigma.
- Encourage support-seeking behaviours.
- Encourage individuals to speak up.
- Create a sense of belonging, connection and support.

## WHAT IS A MENTAL HEALTH LIVED EXPERIENCE CAMPAIGN?

A mental health lived experience campaign is a campaign that shares the story, or stories, of individuals that identify as having lived experience of mental health distress to provide a sense of connection with your audience.

For example, sharing an impactful story about an individual who has been through a challenging situation in life or an individual who may manage a mental health condition.

This could be used in such campaigns as:

- Internal campaigns that promote and support workplace wellbeing programs.
- External campaigns that link to support your organisation offers, such as fundraising appeals, marketing collateral or service promotion.
- Employer branding exercises that showcase your organisation's wellbeing initiatives to potential staff or clients.

Or it could be something else entirely ...





## THE POWER OF **STORYTELLING**

Storytelling is a highly impactful way to make your message resonate with an audience.

Moreover, mental health lived experience campaigns have the additional power to reduce stigma of mental health and encourage individuals to access support available to them.

Not only does storytelling benefit the utilisation of services, such as employee assistance programs or a mental health support tool, but lived experience campaigns can provide people with a unique sense of connection and belonging that can have profound benefits to one's mental health and wellbeing.

## HOW TO GET STARTED WITH A **LIVED EXPERIENCE CAMPAIGN**

If your organisation is deciding to run a mental health lived experience campaign, it is important that the development of the campaign is:

- ✓ **Executed in a considered and thoughtful way** – that means being really intentional about what you want to achieve and how you're going to do that.
- ✓ **Developed safely** – that means making sure you're considering the needs of both your lived experience expert and your audience.
- ✓ **Created with a genuine impact in mind** – that means creating a campaign with purpose.

Most importantly, it is crucial that the workplace has a clear purpose behind why they are looking to engage with lived experience for the campaign. When this purpose is not clear, the campaign can appear insincere and/or hollow.

Your purpose will also help you formulate and develop your mental health lived experience campaign, including how it looks, feels, and the impact it has.

**There are eight key considerations** that are important to take into account when developing a campaign to ensure it is both impactful to your audience, while ensuring that individual stories are safely shared, which we delve into further.

### **Eight key considerations for a lived experience campaign**



- 1 Identify the most important topic.
- 2 Know when the timing is right.
- 3 Make it specific.
- 4 Think creatively.
- 5 Ensure you consider inclusivity and representation.
- 6 Be mindful of the language you use.
- 7 Tell the story from the heart.
- 8 Create a two-way conversation.

1

## IDENTIFY THE MOST IMPORTANT TOPIC

As a starting point, alongside the purpose, it is critical to be thinking about what the most important topic is for your audience (this might need to be looked at as more than one theme if you're appealing to different segments).

This will also extend into identifying the audience that the campaign is for. This will help you focus the storytelling campaign.

**It's always good to start with the question, 'What problem are we trying to solve?'**

### Choose specific over broad

Having a campaign on the topic of 'mental health' may seem like a good idea, but being broad can make it harder to achieve your outcomes and make a meaningful impact.

This will help you create a more targeted campaign and give it a better chance of success. You may want to consider pulling together a working party or ambassador group internally who might be able to support formulating and brainstorming the topics that will best suit your target audience.

For an employee campaign, that could look like identifying pain points for your employees. For an external campaign, that might be understanding what resonates most with your typical customer/donor/stakeholder.

### What this could look like in practice

If your employees are struggling with challenges working from home, formulate a campaign around 'working from home challenges' to have a bigger impact than a broad 'mental health' campaign.



2

## KNOW WHEN THE TIMING IS RIGHT

It is important to consider the readiness and maturity of your audience as to whether they will respond positively, effectively and with impact to the storytelling campaign.

**This is particularly important for internal campaigns, where such factors as staff engagement can have a really big impact to a campaign's performance.**

When considering timing, it is also important to consider whether there may be any negative or unintended impacts from running a specific or broad storytelling campaign. For example, running a campaign that coincides with the anniversary of the loss of a colleague, or talking about positive work practices while navigating a disruption like a restructure.

It is important that lived experience individuals feel safe enough to share their stories, particularly if you're using internal staff. If they're not, it could be an indicator that your organisation may not be ready and instead needs to work on improving psychological safety before embarking on a lived experience campaign.

Some organisations may also be experiencing an unhealthy culture, beyond what a storytelling campaign can solve, and there may be actions that need to happen prior to running a mental health lived experience campaign, internally or externally.

### What this could look like in practice

**Before commencing your campaign consider things such as:** anniversaries of events, public days of note (for example Pride Month, NAIDOC Week etc.) that may create unintentional outcomes, and individual experiences that may align to particular times of year, such as the anniversary of a loss.





## MAKE IT SPECIFIC

Mental health isn't always something that an individual can easily isolate to one specific moment, as a lived experience story will likely span across a person's entire life.



**However, for an effective campaign, it is worthwhile supporting lived experience individuals to be able to identify key moments in their story that they have felt were a defining moment for them.**

For example, some specific defining moments in the workplace could include:



Reaching out for support from their manager for the first time.



Calling an EAP and having a great conversation.



Experiencing a mental health condition.



Telling a colleague that they need support.

**The most effective way to get to the heart of a story is to provide guiding questions to the individuals to ensure they provide specific examples and scenarios.**

This not only helps to develop the final storytelling piece but also helps the individual to be able to structure their responses and their thinking when sharing their story with you.

Ensure the questions you ask are targeted, specific and stay aligned to the defined purpose, making sure they are relevant and purposeful. Be prepared to share these questions with the individuals involved in the campaign as part of the preparation process.

4

## THINK CREATIVELY

Typically, when we think about telling a story, we immediately think of sharing a story verbally in real-time.

**With a campaign, we might expand that thinking to a recorded interview or a speech, however there are many ways that a story can be told.**

For example, stories can be shared via a creative means including poems, articles, videos, paintings, or a song.

Many of us are accustomed to things being done a certain way, and yet the most emotive and inspirational content is usually unique and attention-catching.

**Think about what options you can provide individuals to share their story in the most authentic way for them, as that is going to be what creates the most genuine and impactful output.**

If resources allow, it can be useful to set up an internal ambassador group to support with the purpose and help define the plan for the campaign. This group can brainstorm different ways to tell the individual stories. Remember to try and include individuals who have lived experience themselves in this group to ensure their voice is incorporated into the design of the campaign.

### What this could look like in practice

**The sky's the limit.** You may want to consider what medium is relevant to either or both your lived experience individual or your audience. For example, a campaign that touches on childhood memories could be expressed through childhood drawings. If your audience is less visual, you might want to think about how music or a podcast could enhance the story you want to share.



5

## ENSURE YOU CONSIDER INCLUSIVITY AND REPRESENTATION

Not everyone in your audience will relate to every story that is shared.

**Many successful storytelling campaigns allow the audience to identify with the storyteller themselves.**

This is why it's important to consider a broad representation of different cultural and community backgrounds that are representative of your audience demographic. This means considering cultural background, nationality, age, sexual orientation, and/or gender.

**It's important to ensure that individuals feel recognised, acknowledged, and represented in the campaign.**

This is important when considering the language used, how stories are represented, and ensuring cultural humility when engaging with individuals and sharing their stories.

Some cultures will also find it much harder to acknowledge and speak up about mental health than other cultures, so it is important to be aware of this prior to the campaign development.



6

## BE MINDFUL OF THE LANGUAGE YOU USE

Language has significant power, and for many generations, the negative association of mental health has been confirmed by the use of words to describe it.

### It's important to be mindful of the words you use to frame mental health.

The guide below has been designed to help you the negative associated words that may support stereotypes.

Instead of ...	Try ...
Mental illness	<b>Mental health condition</b>
Mentally ill person OR Schizophrenic	<b>A person with a mental health condition OR A person with schizophrenia</b>
Committed suicide	<b>Passed away by suicide / lost to suicide (see breakout box for more detail)</b>
An individual <i>suffers</i> from a mental health condition	<b>An individual experiences a mental health condition</b>
Mental institutions, mental hospital	<b>Mental health support services</b>

### Campaigns about suicide

There are very specific guidelines about how to communicate about suicide. The language you use is very important in this situation, as it can potentially be

triggering. You can learn more about best practice when it comes to communicating about suicide by visiting the communicating about suicide page at [mindframe.org.au](http://mindframe.org.au).

7

## TELL THE STORY FROM THE HEART

To tell a mental health story effectively, the story needs to be shared in an authentic way that aims to capture the hearts of the audience and translates into positive behaviours.



### Your goal is for your audience to feel something and take an action beyond the final content piece.

To do this, it is best to take the approach of sharing how lived experiences feel, rather than focusing on the mechanics that led to a series of events.

Telling a personal story can be incredibly confronting and it can be even more so when a story isn't shared in the same way that an individual may have thought they told it. It is easy to unintentionally dramatise or sensationalise a story to create an impact, but this can be very difficult for the individual sharing.

It is important to frame a story responsibly and remember it isn't your story to change. It is worthwhile sharing the final content piece with the individual to gain their consent with the story that has been created for them, from their words.

### What this could look like in practice

If you have a lived experience individual sharing a trauma, create a safe space for them, and ask open, thoughtful questions that allow them to share their story in a meaningful and heartfelt way. Taking a genuine and caring approach will put you on the right path.





## CREATE A TWO-WAY CONVERSATION

Think about developing the campaign in a way that enables a two-way conversation that can get people talking. Lived experience storytelling is about creating connection.

When considering how to encourage others to engage with stories, be mindful that the individual who shared may find it hard if there are any negative responses to the story.

Think about how to support that individual before, during and after they've shared their story and ensure there is a way of monitoring or guiding engagement to ensure it is safe and enjoyable for all.

### What this could look like in practice

If you're sharing a lived experience story over a social media platform, make sure you clearly communicate where it will be shared, and how you intend to moderate comments.



## REMEMBER THIS IS SOMEONE'S STORY THAT IS OUT THERE 'FOREVER'

Make sure you consider what time the story is being released for both impact and reach of audience, but also for the individual who has shared. Follow up with the individual and stay continuously in touch.

Lived experience campaigns have the ability to change the way we think, feel and behave. They give us the unique opportunity to feel connected to something greater than ourselves and to feel courage when otherwise we may not feel OK.

Lived experience campaigns can be the difference between a workplace's health and wellbeing programs being left on the shelf and individuals engaging and accessing the support they need.

Be mindful, patient and purpose-driven in developing a lived experience campaign and let the magic of the stories do the rest.

