



Orygen Lived Experience Strategy

2026-2028

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Acknowledgements: Orygen acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands we are on and pays respects to their Elders past and present. Orygen recognises and respects their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationships to their ancestral lands which continue to be important to First Nations people living today.

Orygen would like to recognise the lived experience workforce, the teams that work alongside them, as well as people and families with lived experience whose collective work and contributions have informed this strategy.

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Contents

Foreword	4
Introduction	6
Glossary of key terms	7
Lived experience work and lived experience participation	8
Orygen's current lived experience initiatives	9
The Strategy	11
Scope	11
Vision	11
Our strategic pillars	11
1. Allyship	12
2. Culture	13
3. Connection	14
4. Leadership	15
5. Training and Support	16
What does success look like?	18
For the organisation	18
For lived experience workers	18
For young people and their families	18
Summary	19
References	20

Foreword



Professor Pat McGorry AO **Executive Director**

Our Lived Experience Strategy is the next step in our longstanding commitment to valuing and embedding the expertise of young people and their families, carers, and supporters in everything that we do at Orygen. For more than 30 years, Orygen has ensured that young people and their families play an important role in our work, whether that be through youth participation, the lived experience workforce, and more recently in our governance. We've affirmed this commitment recently, through the development of our Lived Experience Workforce Framework, recruiting our inaugural Head of Lived Experience, and appointing a young person to our board.

As pioneers in the design and delivery of youth mental health research, services and systems, we understand that young people with lived experience bring unique insights. Young people bring a strong sense of hope that systems and treatments can be improved, and families also play a significant role in the recovery of young people. We've been fortunate to draw on the collective wisdom of our lived experience workforce and participants. The Lived Experience Strategy builds on this, setting a clear path for how we continue this critical work across Orygen.

I am motivated to bring this strategy to life, strengthening our existing initiatives and continuing to foster an environment where people with lived experience are a core part of our work. By working closely with our lived experience workforce, participants and partners, we can lead by example and help shape how this work is taken forward across youth mental health.



Rafi Armanto

Head of Lived Experience

Integrating lived experience, and recognising it as an equal form of expertise, requires more than just an ideological commitment; it requires a plan. This is exactly the intention behind the Orygen Lived Experience Strategy. This strategy draws on five years of consultation, engagement and insight from our lived experience workforce and Youth Advisory Councils. It aims to strengthen our internal capability and clarify the role we can play in advancing this important part of the youth mental health sector.

For many years, the involvement of people with lived experience in youth mental health has been reactive to the changing demands of the sector. From the growth of the lived experience workforce to the evolving need to involve people with lived experience in governance, this kind of systemic integration work is complex for an organisation with such a wide area of focus. We now have an opportunity to move beyond reactive approaches and build a more mature system of structures, and an organisational environment and workforce that will deliver lasting, sustainable impact – for both our organisation and youth mental health more broadly. We recognise our role in leading practice in youth mental health, and it is time that we do the same with lived experience in an intentional way.

This Lived Experience Strategy gives us the plan we need – a strategic plan with tangible actions matched with transparency and accountability to our people and the broader sector. Now the real work begins, to recognise this commitment to the workforce but also to young people and their families. At a time when we are seeing commitments towards the expansion of lived experience leadership, workforces, and involvement slowing down, Orygen is proud to affirm our commitment to this critical part of the mental health system.



Introduction

Orygen's Lived Experience Strategy 2026–2028 (the Strategy) is a commitment to meaningful change in the youth mental health system. Realising the Strategy will require investment across all levels of the organisation to strengthen existing initiatives and create an environment that supports sustained growth of our lived experience workforce and engages people with lived experience in decision making processes.

Underpinned by the Lived Experience Workforce Framework and the National Lived Experience Peer Workforce Development Guidelines, this strategy illustrates how our values and principles shape our organisational practice, foster a thriving lived experience workforce, and establish Orygen as a global leader in embedding lived experience in youth mental health.

Glossary of key terms

Language is important in supporting people to identify and understand lived experience roles and how they intersect with other youth mental health concepts. These are key terms and definitions outlined in the Orygen Lived Experience Workforce Framework (the Framework). (1)

- **Consumers:** People who identify as having a lived experience of mental ill-health, who have used mental health services, and/or those who have received treatment. (2)
Although *consumer* is used commonly across the sector, Orygen typically refers to consumers as **young people**, often represented in **youth lived experience** roles.
- **Designated roles:** Designated lived experience roles include any position that requires lived experience as an essential criterion in the position description.
- **Families, carers, and supporters (families):**
Families refers to any people who provide care and support to a young person experiencing mental ill-health. Family members may include parents, siblings, relatives, chosen family members, housemates, partners, or friends. Families play a key role in the lives of young people and make fundamental contributions to the understanding and treatment of mental ill-health, as well as to their recovery outcomes.
While some services may use *carer/s*, Orygen uses the **family/families** and **family lived experience**.
- **Lived experience:** Lived experience refers to past, present or ongoing personal experience of mental ill-health, or the experience of caring for and supporting a person living with mental ill-health. This may also include how experiences intersect with mental ill-health, system navigation, and recovery. Some other terms used to describe people with lived experience include: consumer, carer, and consumer or carer lived experiences. (3)
- **Lived expertise:** The process of applying what has been learned through a person's lived experience to inform and transform systems, services and individual outcomes for those impacted by mental ill-health. (4)
- **Participation:** The active involvement of young people and people with lived experience (including families) in organisational decision-making, planning, and program/project design.
- **Peer work:** A vocational discipline in which employed individuals with a personal or family lived experience of mental ill-health and recovery provide support to others living with similar experiences. Peer workers are trained to share their lived experience intentionally to support others in their recovery. Peer work often focuses on individual relationships with young people or families.
- **Lived experience (peer) workforce:** The collective term for designated lived experience workers who use their experience to inform their work.
- **Young people:** People between the ages of 12–25 years. Orygen also refers to its service-users as young people. Other services may use alternative terms such as *client* or *consumer*.

Lived experience work and lived experience participation

The mental health sector is best placed to meet community needs when people with lived experience are actively engaged, involved, and included in decision-making. This is achieved through the appointment of people with lived expertise to designated lived experience roles, and through participation programs that engage people with lived experience as partners, collaborators, or volunteers with expert knowledge, insight and perspective.

The practice of lived experience work at Orygen is guided by the Framework, the first of its kind for any youth mental health organisation in the world. The Framework establishes a collective understanding of lived experience work within Orygen, emphasising its critical role within the organisation. It outlines the key concepts, values, principles and enablers necessary to support lived experience workers as a core part of Orygen’s workforce.

While the Framework centres around designated lived experience workforce roles, its values, principles, and practices also apply to the broader engagement of young people and families with a lived experience of mental ill-health (for example, youth participation or co-production activities).

The table below (derived from the Framework) clarifies and summarises the key differences between lived experience work and lived experience participation.

ATTRIBUTES	LIVED EXPERIENCE WORK	LIVED EXPERIENCE PARTICIPATION
Role type	Formal, paid employment within an organisation.	Temporary, paid or voluntary roles providing support in project, policy or strategic decision-making.
Scope of involvement	Ongoing employment, embedded in teams, projects, and programs.	Project-based or time-limited involvement.
Level of responsibility	Defined roles, responsibilities and accountabilities to the employing team or organisation.	No formal operational responsibility for organisational initiatives. Provides feedback, input or advice.
Goal	Directly supports and improves services through day-to-day work.	Offers insights and expertise to inform decision-making within an organisation.
Relationship to the organisation	Formally affiliated with an organisation through contracted employment.	Affiliated with an organisation through association.
Example	A Peer worker employed in a mental health service.	A young person participating in a youth advisory group during the development of a program.

Orygen's current lived experience initiatives

Orygen is a leader in the practice of lived experience engagement in youth mental health. Orygen's pioneering work in youth participation and peer support have contributed to the expansion of these practices in youth mental health services, both within Australia and globally.

Orygen has contributed to the collective development and understanding of lived experience in youth mental health through:

- the development of peer support resources for the youth mental health sector
- the delivery of the Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work,
- the delivery of innovative models of peer support in digital mental health, for international students, and in Individual Placement and Support (IPS) settings
- the 2020 publication of a policy paper titled: *Side by Side: Supporting Youth Peer Work in Mental Health Services*, in collaboration with peer workers based around Australia, and
- research projects focused on peer support within youth mental health settings, including both youth roles and family peer work roles.

Within Orygen itself, the growth of the lived experience workforce, and increasing sector focus on the involvement of consumers and their families in organisational decision-making processes,

have reflected the need for the knowledge and expertise of people with lived experience to inform systems. Orygen has expanded its lived experience workforce and initiatives across all functional areas through roles and programs such as:

- youth and family peer support across physical and digital services
- peer research
- training through the Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work
- youth and family lived experience participation programs.

Young people's lived experiences are also represented formally in Orygen's governance structures, with a Youth Board Director position, as well as Youth Advisors on the board, and several subcommittees. The expertise of young people with lived experience is also represented within organisational advisory groups such as the Orygen Youth Advisory Council (YAC), Orygen Digital's Youth Advisory Group (YAG), and several research YAGs.

To understand the collective experiences of the lived experience workforce, and identify potential areas of growth, Orygen's Head of People Safety and Wellbeing completed a Psychosocial Review of the lived experience workforce. The findings of the review form key actions within this Strategy.





The Strategy

Scope

- The lived experience workforce across Orygen’s clinical services (in-person and digital), research, policy, knowledge translation, and other enabling functions.
- Lived experience participation structures that support the involvement of young people and their families in Orygen’s initiatives, activities, and programs.
- Orygen’s role in advocating for internal cultural change and sector leadership.

The Strategy outlines actions to address existing organisational gaps and advance Orygen’s lived experience work. All functional areas will be encouraged to develop their own divisional Lived Experience Plans, in collaboration with the Head of Lived Experience, to guide the implementation of the Strategy within their work context.

These actions will be delivered across a three-year period (2026–2028), in line with Orygen’s broader organisational Strategic Plan. They will be governed by a Lived Experience Strategy Steering Group (the Steering Group) comprising critical organisational roles, as well as the Youth Advisory Council (YAC) and other lived experience workforce representatives. The Head of Lived Experience will prepare and deliver quarterly reports on the Strategy to the Steering Group, the Executive Leadership Team (ELT), and relevant Board subcommittees.

Vision

Derived from the framework, Orygen’s vision for lived experience consists of four key focus areas:

- **A valued workforce:** Orygen has a thriving lived experience workforce that is considered and resourced as a core part of the organisation and its initiatives.
- **A supportive culture:** Lived experience involvement is meaningful and purpose-driven, and is supported and embedded across the organisation as an expected part of Orygen’s work.
- **A visible commitment:** Orygen actively demonstrates its commitments to lived experience work and contributes to sector-wide conversations about lived experience in mental health settings.
- **Accountability to young people and their families:** Orygen ensures its lived experience initiatives respond to the needs of young people and their families, and adapt to evolving expectations for engagement across the sector.

Our strategic pillars

The strategic pillars that uphold this Strategy are informed and adapted from the Framework’s enablers of **allyship, connection, culture, leadership, and training and support**. Each pillar outlines key areas of focus, opportunity, and action to deliver outcomes for the organisation, the lived experience workforce, and – most importantly – young people and their families.

1. Allyship

Aspiring to allyship means actively championing, understanding, and promoting the role of lived experience at Orygen. This Strategy calls on all team members in non-designated roles to use their positions of power and influence – guided by lived expertise – to create the conditions that make lived experience perspectives visible with Orygen and across the youth mental health sector.

FOCUS AND OPPORTUNITIES	ACTIONS	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote shared responsibilities in driving best-practice lived experience involvement between lived experience workers and the broader workforce. Ensure the purposeful involvement of young people, families, carers, and supporters in decision-making. Strengthen genuine partnerships with First Nations lived experience bodies, organisations, and communities to ensure Orygen’s services reflect Indigenous knowledge, leadership, and self-determination. In addition, build partnerships with organisations representing priority populations such as LGBTQIA+, young people with disabilities, those experiencing homelessness, rural and remote young people, and multicultural communities. 	<p>1.1 Develop, introduce, and deliver organisational readiness training to equip staff with knowledge and tools to work respectfully alongside lived experience colleagues.</p>	July 2027	Lived Experience Leads (LEL), People, Experience and Wellbeing (PEW), Knowledge Translation (KT)
	<p>1.2 Engage external training organisations and lived experience groups representing priority populations – including First Nations – to upskill Orygen’s leaders and staff on lived experience approaches and knowledge.</p>	Ongoing	Executive Leadership Team (ELT)
	<p>1.3 Create a consistent orientation program and training standards for new lived experience staff across the organisation.</p>	July 2027	LEL, PEW
	<p>1.4 Embed lived experience involvement expectations into all team objectives and key performance indicators.</p>	July 2026	Governance, Planning, and Performance, Youth Participation, PEW
	<p>1.5 Establish a Family Advisory Council and other mechanisms for family, carer, and supporter involvement.</p>	December 2026	ELT, Youth Participation

INTENDED OUTCOMES

- The perspectives and contributions of young people with a lived experience of mental ill-health and/or other intersecting identities, their families, carers, and supporters are represented within Orygen’s decision-making structures and participation programs.
- Non-lived experience leaders are guided by lived expertise to actively champion lived experience initiatives and work.
- Lived experience workers feel supported by their team and the broader organisation, and do not feel a need to justify or explain their roles.

2. Culture

A strong culture recognises that the unique perspectives and contributions of people with lived experience are critical to upholding the work of this Strategy. It involves fostering an organisational service culture that views lived experience as a valuable form of knowledge, critical to any conversation about youth mental health. It is a culture that recognises lived experience as a respected workforce and provides ongoing opportunities for career development.

FOCUS AND OPPORTUNITIES	ACTIONS	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop clear pathways into lived experience work and participation through education, mentoring, early-career opportunities, and equitable recruitment practices that increase access to lived experience roles. Shift from tokenism to a genuine recognition and respect for lived expertise within the workforce by actively celebrating the contributions and achievements of lived experience workers, young people, and families, across all programs. Integrate lived experience expertise into policies, practices, and decision-making frameworks. Support teams to use the Framework to strengthen consistent and meaningful engagement. 	2.1 Adjust recruitment, policy, and project processes to prompt lived experience involvement or engagement by default, where relevant.	December 2026	PEW
	2.2 Build relationships and partner with grassroots mental health organisations to expand Orygen’s reach to young people and families in the community.	Ongoing	Policy and Engagement
	2.3 Celebrate and promote the contributions of lived experience workers and initiatives through award-nominations, hosting symposiums, and leading communications campaigns.	Ongoing	Communications and Fundraising
	2.4 Develop and refine cadetships, internships, mentorships, and placement programs for young people and families to enter the lived experience workforce.	December 2028	Policy and Engagement
	2.5 Develop a Lived Experience Employment Policy outlining lived experience roles and required conditions.	July 2026	Head of Lived Experience (HoLE), PEW
	2.6 Record and evaluate the impact of lived experience initiatives across the organisation.	Ongoing	ELT, HoLE, Youth Participation

INTENDED OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people and family lived experience is recognised as a core form of expertise alongside those with learned and laboured knowledge of mental health. (5) Lived experience workers access a supportive workforce with psychosocial safety embedded within organisational practices and ways of working. The contributions of people with lived experience are celebrated internally, and shared with pride externally. The development of a workplace culture that supports open disclosure of mental ill-health, distress and experiences of the mental health system.

3. Connection

Connection means actively involving lived experience workers and people with lived experience in Orygen’s initiatives to ensure they meet the needs of the young people and families they work with and advocate for. It also recognises the roots of lived experience involvement in grassroots movements and maintains a sense of connection to broader sector work. Finally, it focuses on building cohesion across Orygen’s lived experience activities.

FOCUS AND OPPORTUNITIES	ACTIONS	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build purposeful relationships and partnerships with lived experience organisations, peak bodies and sector leaders to strengthen Orygen’s position as a pioneer in youth mental health lived experience work. Implement participation and peer support standards that align with standards set by peak bodies, leading organisations, and relevant associations across Orygen programs to ensure internal practices are connected. Work with sector partners to deliver lived experience focused initiatives and programs, and to promote these initiatives to Orygen’s workforce and lived experience participants. 	3.1 Formalise employment pathways into Orygen positions, programs, and initiatives for the Orygen Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work students.	December 2026	PEW, KT, LEL
	3.2 Develop a consistent approach and understanding of peer work across all Orygen peer work programs.	December 2027	LEL, Orygen Digital (OD), Primary Clinical Services (PCS)
	3.3 Develop strategic partnerships with lived experience organisations and leaders.	Ongoing	Policy and Engagement
	3.4 Expand Orygen’s role in supporting the youth lived experience workforce outside the mental health sector and across the broader youth sector.	Ongoing	KT, Policy and Engagement
	3.5 Actively support and develop the involvement and visibility of Orygen experts at lived experience and youth participation events, conferences, and conversations.	Ongoing	ELT, Youth Participation
	3.6 Host a Youth Lived Experience Workforce Forum bringing together the workforce and experts through experience.	July 2027	Policy and Engagement, KT

INTENDED OUTCOMES

- Clear and visible pathways for engagement between teams and people with lived experience, whether that be through the workforce or participation.
- Centralised lived experience leadership and support functions to reduce silos and foster collaboration.
- Strong partnerships with lived experience-led organisations, peak bodies, and broader sector representatives who share a similar desire to see lived experience work grow and flourish.
- Young people and their families have a consistent experience when engaging in participation activities, regardless of who is facilitating them.
- Young people and their families have a consistent experience of peer support as they move across Orygen’s clinical and digital mental health services.

4. Leadership

Building leadership pathways within the lived experience workforce and empowering people with lived experience to lead Orygen’s activities is key to making lived experience central to Orygen’s work. This Strategy establishes processes for Orygen to strengthen its leadership in youth mental health and to champion lived experience involvement across the sector.

FOCUS AND OPPORTUNITIES	ACTIONS	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document, refine and promote the application of Orygen’s Lived Experience Framework and Strategy across the organisation to strengthen and showcase internal expertise in lived experience. Develop future lived experience leaders by embedding their perspectives across strategy, service design, policy, education and organisational functions through designated roles. Promote the distinctive strengths of Orygen’s lived experience expertise across workforce development, digital mental health, and youth mental health research, and strengthen our influence in shaping youth lived experience practice nationally and globally. 	<p>4.1 Create a centralised lived experience leadership function that supports teams across the organisation with practice wisdom, support, and a shared strategic direction.</p>	July 2027	ELT, PEW, HoLE
	<p>4.2 Establish a lived experience supervision and leadership mentoring program.</p>	July 2028	HoLE
	<p>4.3 Increase the number of lived experience roles and involvement in organisational governance.</p>	December 2028	ELT, Youth Participation
	<p>4.4 Showcase Orygen’s lived experience work and involvement at conferences, awards, and partnerships with other organisations.</p>	Ongoing	ELT
	<p>4.5 Recruit centralised lived experience leadership roles within Orygen’s research functions to support peer researcher leadership and lived experience participation.</p>	June 2027	Research, HoLE, Youth Participation
	<p>4.6 Maintain and update the lived experience section on Orygen’s website and intranet to share frameworks, training and learnings with other organisations and the broader sector.</p>	December 2026	HoLE, Communications and Fundraising

INTENDED OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workforce and community lived experience perspectives are represented in governance and decision-making across the organisation. Lived experience leadership is embedded across the organisation and expertise in this work is recognised as essential to leading, supporting, and driving initiatives. Entry-level roles and career pathways, including leadership positions, for people with lived experience are visible and well-developed.

5. Training and Support

Providing adequate training and support is critical to helping people to enter and thrive in the lived experience workforce, and to participate meaningfully in lived experience involvement activities. Alongside supervision, co-reflection, and communities of practice, it is also essential to establish structures and processes that make these activities purposeful and sustainable.

FOCUS AND OPPORTUNITIES	ACTIONS	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in supervision, training, and career development to retain skilled and passionate lived experience workers, and strengthen Orygen's capacity to grow the youth mental health lived experience workforce. Support people in lived experience roles with the knowledge, training, and understanding they need, including embedding the Lived Experience Framework in their practice. Enhance the capacity of Orygen staff members to work with young people and families to develop and deliver lived experience participation opportunities. 	5.1 Formalise lived experience infrastructure funding in all programs with a lived experience component to support supervision and leadership structures.	December 2027	Finance, ELT
	5.2 Develop internal training and professional development programs for lived experience workers.	July 2028	ELT
	5.3 Develop an onboarding program and refresh introductory resources for all Orygen lived experience workers.	December 2028	PEW, LEL
	5.4 Develop and publish frameworks for key lived experience roles and initiatives – for example, a Peer Support Framework, Lived Experience Research Framework, and a Lived Experience Participation Framework.	December 2028	LEL, OD, PCS, Research, Youth Participation
	5.5 Provide consistent scopes of practice for lived experience roles across Orygen through the development of workforce guidelines and common lived experience position descriptions.	July 2026	PEW, LEL
	5.6 Roll out the Youth and Lived Experience Participation Training Modules across the organisation.	December 2027	Youth Participation

INTENDED OUTCOMES

- Orygen's workforce is trained, supported and prepared to work purposefully and knowledgeably with people with lived experience and the lived experience workforce.
- Regular and structured professional development initiatives are available to support the lived experience workforce.
- Standardise lived experience qualifications, competencies, and experience levels across the organisation.



What does success look like?

The impact of this Strategy and all lived experience programs and initiatives must be measured and evaluated. By committing to this Strategy, success is defined for each stakeholder group as follows:

For the organisation

- Lived experience is recognised as a key organisational strength and enabler of Orygen's work.
- There is clear organisational understanding of and engagement with the purpose and direction of the lived experience workforce.
- The perspectives of people with lived experience are central to organisational decision-making at all levels.
- Orygen is seen as an employer of choice for the lived experience workforce, and continues to play a leading role in the development of lived experience practice, particularly within the youth mental health sector.
- The families, carers, and supporters of young people are key stakeholders in the work that we do moving forward.

For lived experience workers

- Orygen's lived experience workforce benefits from secure, sustained, and purposeful employment.
- The lived experience workforce is seen as core to achieving Orygen's vision and mission, and a key part of clinical services, research, and teams that include designated roles.
- Supportive team environments that facilitate constructive and respectful engagement with the workforce.
- Lived experience workers can access appropriate training, professional development, and supervision to be able to progress within the workforce.
- Inclusive and accessible recruitment processes and working environments support people with lived experience to perform their roles successfully.

For young people and their families

- Orygen visibly advocates for the needs, priorities and perspectives of young people living in Australia, and their families, carers, and supporters.
- Entry-level pathways into the lived experience workforce and lived experience participation initiatives are promoted and visible.
- Orygen provides established platforms and processes for people with lived experience to share their expertise within the decision-making structures of the organisation.
- Young people and their families access consistent peer support approaches across all clinical and digital programs and services at Orygen.
- Young people and families with lived experience feel heard and know their contributions are meaningful in every participation activity in which they engage.



Summary

The Lived Experience Strategy sets out Orygen's commitments, objectives and outcomes that build a strong foundation for the long-term sustainability and success of its lived experience workforce and participation activities. To remain a leader in youth mental health lived experience initiatives, Orygen must align with contemporary practice and drive internal innovation to share this expertise across the sector.



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