# Workforce Development Pathway 4 – Recruitment and Retention

*A recovery-oriented service requires the recruitment of staff with the appropriate values, attitudes and knowledge to support recovery processes, and retention through support for staff.*

**Recruitment and Retention**

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**What will you get out of this chapter?**

✓ The keys to successful recruitment and retention

✓ Values and attitudes based recruitment processes

✓ What to include in a job description

✓ Orientation and induction processes

✓ Tips for succession planning

✓ Strategies to improve retention

✓ How to enhance worker well-being and reduce burnout

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The workforce, in partnership with consumers and carers, is at the heart of achieving a recovery-oriented service system. **The development of recovery-oriented organisations emphasises the personal qualities of staff as much as formal qualifications, and seeks to cultivate the workers capacity for hope, compassion, acceptance, and other *values and attitudes commensurate with recovery*.**[83]

The immediate focus for managers of community mental health organisations is to recruit and retain staff within the funding constraints of the sector and in an environment where other sectors/organisations may be able to offer higher remuneration and career mobility. As demand for community based mental health services increases, as is predicted in the future, employers will find it increasingly difficult to fill job positions if the pool of qualified and trained workers does not increase.

In many community mental health organisations, management is often frustrated with the costly and time consuming demands of recruitment. In particular, managers report difficulties attracting staff who reflect the demographic needs of people accessing services.[84]

**Organisations need to be innovative in their approach to recruitment and retention.**
Managers play an important role in influencing a worker's commitment to an organisation.[85] Retention strategies include offering greater flexibility in work arrangements, training, increased responsibility, supervision, and access to a wide variety of work roles and learning opportunities.

This section provides information on recruitment and retention strategies, orientation and induction processes, and job design. These areas are crucial to staff development, and lay the foundations for future workforce development strategies and areas for professional development.

## What are good recruitment practices and procedures?

Recruitment is about defining a job role and finding a person and matching the two. How an organisation recruits is just as important as the employment opportunities it offers. Recruitment processes should be based on a thorough needs analysis of the organisation (see Workforce Development Pathway 7). Staff turnover is the perfect opportunity to review job descriptions to ensure that the position still reflects the needs as identified by the staff, consumers, carers and organisation. Recruitment is closely linked to organisational development as training, career guidance, and professional/personal development are all factors that attract staff to work in an organisation.[86]

Recruitment consists of 5 steps:

1. **Define** - the role and the type of person you need to satisfactorily complete this work

2. **Attract** - a pool of qualified and interested applicants (both within and outside the organisation) to the role

3. **Assess** - information about your applicants so that you can make an informed decision about which applicants have the required capabilities for the job

4. **Select** - the best person for the role

5. **Appoint** - make an offer of employment

**What are the advantages of good recruitment?**

- Higher retention of staff

- Better outcomes for consumers and carers

- Staff that can work well both independently and as part of a team

- Staff that is interested in ongoing learning and professional development

- Staff that is always looking to improve productivity and what is considered good practice

- Staff that is able to deal with and respond to change

- Staff that can inspire and teach peers

- Staff that incorporate recovery principles into every aspect of practice

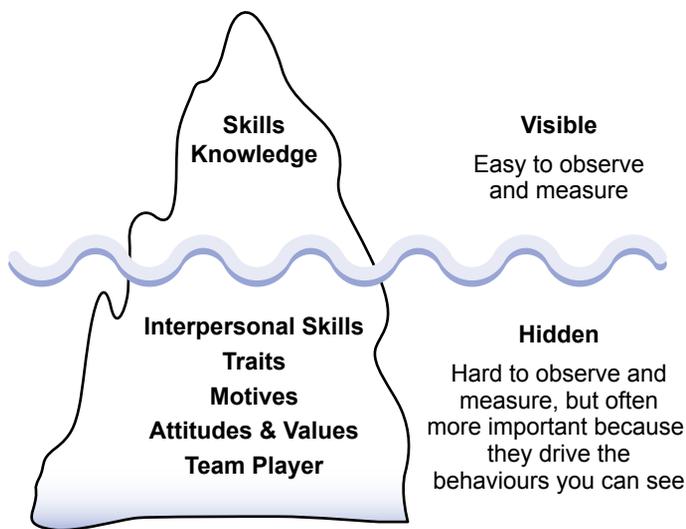## A values and attitudes driven approach to recruitment

The importance of values and attitudes in recruitment practices is about seeking people, and employing people, who can articulate a well-developed philosophical base that 'fits' with the organisation, for example, strengths-based and recovery-oriented frameworks. **If you can recruit someone who can demonstrate values and attitudes that align with the organisation and behaviour that matches this, you are far more likely to be able to retain them.**

There must be a pervading belief that every person who accesses the service is a whole and unique individual that has the capacity to recover.[87] **People who genuinely believe that recovery is possible for everyone will be better able to uphold hope, focus on the individual's strengths, and provide better support**[88]. Further, people who genuinely believe that the lived experience of mental health problems contributes to the richness of a contemporary mental health knowledge base[89] are better placed to deliver services within a recovery-oriented framework.

In recruitment practices, if these attitudes are sought after and upheld then the individual and the organisation are better placed to turn recovery principles into practice. The workforce, in partnership with consumers and carers, is at the heart of achieving a recovery-oriented service system.

If staff genuinely share recovery-oriented values and attitudes, it is possible to teach them anything because it is part of their own personal frame of reference. This can be referred to as the **'it' factor**, that is, they 'get' the organisation's goals and values. It is still important to consider 'technical skills' for the job role. **It is, however, far easier to train someone in specific skills if they have a willingness and capacity to learn, than it is to teach attitudes and values which influence behaviour and the quality of service.** This should be a fairly rigorous process, ascertained through scenario and problem-solving questions, reference checks and self-evaluations. A thorough orientation and induction program is also necessary to introduce new workers to the core values and attitudes of the organisation, and refresh existing staff.

Diagram 4 - The Iceberg Model of competency assessment

**Skills Knowledge**

**Visible**

Easy to observe and measure

**Interpersonal Skills**
**Traits**
**Motives**
**Attitudes & Values**
**Team Player**

**Hidden**

Hard to observe and measure, but often more important because they drive the behaviours you can see

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**Checklist for managers for hiring new staff member**

✓ Ensure up-to-date job description and key selection criteria

✓ Develop an employment advertisement

✓ Assess written applications for consideration

✓ Ensure appropriate selection process,
e.g. interview panel and questions, reference checks

✓ Offer of employment

✓ Orientation and induction

✓ Evaluate the recruitment strategy to determine its efficacy

**Develop a job description**

- Clearly and concisely state what responsibilities and tasks the job entails
- Key qualifications of jobs, i.e. basic competency or skills required
- The personal attributes that underlie superior performance

It is not feasible to provide a 'one size fits all' job description for managers to use for all community mental health positions, as they are simply too varied. However, there are some key things which MUST be included in all job descriptions:

- Title of the position
- Department
- Reporting pathway
- Overall responsibility
- Key areas of responsibility
- Other positions (internal and external) the person will work closely with
- Terms and conditions of employment
- Expected performance outcomes/key performance indicators

The accuracy of the job description is likely to be improved by gathering information from different sources to get different perspectives on the knowledge, skills, and responsibilities of a position. This can be achieved through talking to people in the same or surrounding roles.[91] Studies have shown that when prospective employees have a clear understanding of the job role through information provided by management and current workers, this leads to more successful recruitment and retention. Knowing the challenges and difficult nature of the work, i.e. having a realistic view of the job description, can help to avoid issues of stress and burnout.

Recruiting ATSI peoples, in both ATSI worker and other worker roles can be achieved through building networks with ATSI communities (word of mouth will be important). When recruiting ATSI peoples, it is very important to:

- Always include an ATSI person on the selection panel
- Allow flexibility within the position
- Ensure the individual understands the service your organisation provides and requirements of the position
- Ask ATSI communities to help write the job advertisement and position description (clear, everyday language)
- Consider options for on-the-job training

Managers need to review job descriptions to ensure that they respond to staff, consumer, carer or organisational changes, and also reflect the individuality of the advertised position. Job descriptions and advertisements should be **interesting and creative**, and managers can look to other organisations/on-line recruitment services for inspiration. **It is important that community mental health support work and its workforce is well-promoted to increase and reshape public perception of the sector.**

**Offer of employment**

The employment contract should always clearly state the required probationary period for workers, and the conditions of employment. One innovative idea is to create an employer recruitment calendar that clearly shows points of evaluation and review so that there is mutual understanding around this.

**Orientation and induction**

New recruits are often overloaded with information and existing staff are under time and work pressures, such that orientation and induction processes may not be prioritised. Organisations need to have the structure in place to ensure induction programs are followed. This includes a process of 'checking in' with new staff to ensure they have understood everything and are following

correct procedures. Effective orientation and induction helps new workers to understand their role and where they 'fit' within the organisation, and equips them with the tools they need to perform their work role.[92] To assist with orientation and induction managers should have:

1) Induction manual - This would include:

- Job description
- Code of Conduct/Practice
- An orientation/induction checklist
- Organisation's mission statement, values and philosophy, history
- Strategic Plan & Annual Report
- An up-to-date organisational chart (this should clearly outline all staff positions and clear career pathways and professional/personal development opportunities)
- Policies and Procedure Manual
- Orientation to the workplace, including OH & S issues (e.g. fire, security, emergency numbers)
- Literature orientation, i.e. relevant resources/reading material
- Agencies, networks, and partnerships
- Information about supervision, staff meetings, mileage, leave forms

2) Mentoring/'buddy' system

New workers are paired with an experienced worker from the same area to 'show them the ropes'[93]. Alternatively, a more formal mentoring system can be established in which new workers are matched with a more qualified and experienced mentor who will provide ongoing support and professional guidance.

This orientation period may also include an orientation to the Certificate IV in Mental Health Work (non-clinical), or particular modules, which may have been deemed a condition of employment. This qualification has been voluntarily agreed to by MHCC member organisations as the minimum standard for work in the community mental health sector in NSW.


## Succession planning

The success of the organisation's growth and sustainability depends on identifying and targeting suitable successors into key roles. A holistic view of succession planning looks at an individual's career motivation, current competence, future capability, and "job ready fit" to work to a particular role.[94] Strategic succession planning will simultaneously address recruitment, retention, and professional development strategies, as managers target the right people for the job. Succession planning also extends to supporting staff in transitioning between one job and another and how best to transfer information between staff and employers in new and old jobs.

Working towards best practice in succession planning:

- Identify positions that are critical to the overall success of the organisation
- Identify talent gaps
- Succession planning systems should be viewed developmentally rather than focused on replacing staff, that is, it is a continuous process
- Succession planning systems are constantly reviewed and evaluated, and respond to changes in the organisation
- Current staff should be involved in the process
- A range of strategies such as mentoring, training, and job rotation can be used to assist with smooth transitions between job roles

Managers should consider targeting the following groups in the recruitment process and provide incentives to attract other staff such as –

- **Consumer Workers and Carer Workers**
  (see Workforce Development Pathway 5)

- **High school students** - with the ageing of the current workforce it will be increasingly important to appeal to young people, both to promote community mental health as a viable career option and also to offer part-time or casual work in low level roles for short periods of time

- **University students** - recruitment of university students in part-time and semester break employment in lower level roles whilst they are studying. Undergraduate placements/internships could help to increase awareness of and interest in community mental health careers. Attract graduates with the opportunity to gain skills, experience and exposure to various service types through placement rotations in community based organisations over a 12 month period; provide one year of full-time employment with opportunities to apply to move to permanent positions at the end of the year

- **Return-to-work** for women due to the often part-time nature of community mental health support work

- **Career change** - for people considering a career change from professions which are about 'making money' to one where they can be 'making a difference'

- **Unemployed/underemployed** - opportunities to attract under-represented groups in the employment market, such as, middle-aged men and people who speak a language other than English at home

- **Mature age workers** - promoting the value of life skills and experience in the mental health field may attract older workers, who want to, or need to, work beyond retirement age

- Better engagement with people with **higher education backgrounds** and better 'use' of their specific skills and expertise, e.g. Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Occupational Therapists, Nurses, and General Practitioners. Thinking of innovative and attractive ways that they can contribute in a community mental health setting, e.g. professional development activities, rotations, part-time or contract work, in-services

- **Volunteers**

## Strategies to improve retention

Different demographics will need different strategies for retention. Managers will need to be targeted in how they appeal to different groups' needs and sensibilities. *Ask the experts -* **ask the current and prospective employees what they would find fulfilling and satisfying, i.e. reasons to apply for a job and reasons to stay in a job.**

Some retention strategies include:

- Greater flexibility in work arrangements
- Training/professional development opportunities
- Increased responsibility
- Access to regular supervision
- Access to a wide variety of tasks - interesting and challenging work
- Recognition for good work
- Encourage and support workers to balance work and family life
- Maintain good working relationships
- Provide workers with realistic expectations about the nature of the work, opportunities for professional development and career pathways
- Career Break schemes - e.g. take a break of one year away with deferred salary
- Study assistance programs
- Conduct exit interviews and use feedback for service quality improvement
- Demonstrating concern for the professional and personal well-being of staff with regard to work/life balance

Managers need to be mindful that some turnover is desirable and can in fact lead to organisational improvements. For example, turnover can be functional when poor performers, people not well suited to job roles and people who create conflict leave. New recruits can result in new ideas and increased enthusiasm, and they can also bring in new skills and higher levels of energy, vision and competence.[95]

## Enhancing worker well-being

### Stress and burnout

Tied to the concept of retention is the phenomenon of stress and burnout. Stress and burnout have been linked with increased turnover, reduced job satisfaction and organisational commitment and lower performance effectiveness[96]. The workers within the community mental health sector are a wonderful source of experience and expertise. For this reason, preventing stress and burnout and addressing current levels of stress and burnout is a crucial workforce development issue for the community mental health sector. This involves managers being aware of workers' personal and professional well-being, and providing opportunities for them to perform at their best level.

As part of staff development/retention strategies, managers can conduct sessions to raise awareness about stress and burnout and early warning signs. This could include a stress and burnout checklist to allow staff to identify their own symptoms, if any, and then identify strategies that may reduce these. There are other activities that can be used to promote personal and professional well-being and enhance retention. For example, team building activities that focus on work/life balance or an in-house survey with staff to gauge interest in the implementation of a workplace well-being program in the organisation.

The causes of stress and burnout are most likely to happen when there is an imbalance between demands and resources, i.e. high demands and low resources.[97]

For workers[98]:

- High workloads
- Role conflict and ambiguity
- Physical working environment
- Challenge of working in the health and human services sector

For managers[99]:

- Lack of perceived reciprocity
- Lack of perceived competency as a manager
- Lack of rewards for performance
- Excessive workload
- Younger and less experienced managers at greater risk

Table 2 - Signs of stress and burnout

| **Work performance** | **Physical symptoms** |
|---|---|
| Declining / inconsistent performance | Nervous stumbling speech |
| Loss of enthusiasm | Sweating |
| Accidents / uncharacteristic mistakes | Tiredness / lethargy |
| Increased time at work | Frequent headaches |
| Lack of holiday planning / leave requests | Hand tremor |
| Indecision | Rapid weight loss or gain |
| Memory lapses | Upset stomach |
| Criticism of others | Lack of interest in appearance / hygiene |
| Lack of cooperation with others | Increased alcohol consumption / smoking |
|  | Out of character behaviours |
| **Withdrawal behaviours** | **Emotional reactions** |
| Reluctance to give support to co-workers | Crying |
| Arriving late and / or leaving early | Irritability / moodiness |
| Extended lunch breaks | Over reactions to problems |
| Increased absenteeism | Temper outbursts |
| Reduced social interaction | Aggressive behaviour |
|  | Sudden mood swings |

[100]

Strategies that address stress and burnout are most successful when they involve organisational strategies, that is, a workplace systems top-down approach, as well as equipping the individual worker with resources and/or coping skills[101].

Organisational strategies to address stress and burnout are[102]:

1) **Provide and support professional development strategies,** for example:

   • Flexible learning options

   • Grants/scholarships for professional development opportunities

   • A range of in-house and external professional development activities

2) **Ensure fair and adequate remuneration and other awards,** for example:

   • Compensation in the form of flexible working conditions, such as Flexi-Time arrangements and job sharing

   • Provide acknowledgement and recognition, both public and private

   • Opportunities to act in higher duties

   • Opportunities to work on preferred activities

   • Attendance at workshops/conferences

3) **Promote and support career development,** for example:

   • Provide continuous opportunities for learning and skill development

   • Provide challenging projects

   • Mentoring - opportunity to become a mentor to more junior staff

   • Training that provides transferable as well as specific skills

   • Networking opportunities

   • Allowing job rotation or internal transfers

   • Paying for workers' membership of professional associations

4) **Promote a positive image of the community mental health sector,** for example:

   • Promote the success and value of programs within your service

   • Managers need to receive training on identifying and responding to signs of stress and burnout, both within themselves and staff. As the 'face' of the organisation it is important that managers realise the role they have in promoting a positive workplace culture

5) **Address organisational issues,** for example:

   • Job/service redesign - to address excessive workload pressures (a collaborative exercise between workers and managers)

   • Supervision and mentoring

**Happiness at Work…**

According to the Happiness at Work Index[103], the voluntary and not-for-profit sector contains both the largest proportion of happy people and the largest proportion of unhappy staff. This dichotomy could be due to the challenging but rewarding nature of working in that industry but also the tendency for lack of career development and frequently poor financial reward.[104] Happiness at work is important to consider in promoting personal and professional well-being, thus enhancing retention of the community mental health workforce. The workforce, in partnership with consumers and carers, is at the heart of achieving a recovery-oriented service system.

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### The top ten factors that make us HAPPY at work

(In rank order)                    Do we have this in our organisation?

- Friendly, supportive colleagues ❑
- Enjoyable work ❑
- Good boss or line manager ❑
- Varied work ❑
- Belief that we're doing something worthwhile ❑
- Feeling that what we do makes a difference ❑
- Being part of a successful team ❑
- Recognition for our achievements ❑
- Competitive salary ❑

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### The top ten factors that make us UNHAPPY at work

(In rank order)                    Do we have this in our organisation?

- Lack of communication from the top ❑
- Uncompetitive salary ❑
- No recognition for achievements ❑
- Poor boss/line manager ❑
- Little personal development ❑
- Ideas being ignored ❑
- Lack of opportunity for good performers ❑
- Lack of benefits ❑
- Work not enjoyable ❑
- Not feeling that what I am doing makes a difference ❑

**Tips to encourage good working relationships[105]**

- Foster communication and working relationships across the organisation giving employees opportunities to share ideas and experiences
- Encourage face-to-face communication where appropriate so that colleagues have more worthwhile discussions than email alone allows
- Encourage a culture where people can express feelings
- Learn to listen effectively and without judging, this will help you understand your colleagues better
- Ensure no staff member is working in isolation but feels supported and involved in the organisation
- Treat all team members with respect and be aware of cultural sensitivities
- Provide opportunities for socialising outside of work, e.g. family days. This will help employees relate to each other and may help with conflict resolution in the workplace
- Put positive working relationships at the heart of your organisational culture by including it as a guiding value

**Workplace example -
On Track Community Programs Inc Young Person Mentoring Program**

On Track has actively sought to employ and support younger people in our workforce as a strategy to address predicted workplace shortages due to the ageing population of our workforce. This trend will have implications not only for On Track, but the community as a whole. It is encouraging to work with dedicated young people who are community minded, have a sense of social justice and have a strong desire to develop their careers in mental health and disability services.

When a young person (under 25 years) is employed by On Track they are assigned a more experienced mentor who oversees their progress and provides them with internal supervision. Young workers involved in the program are encouraged to pursue their area of interest such as tender applications, policy and procedure development or management and are supported to take on special projects within their designated area. This mentoring program acts as both a recruitment strategy, i.e. it attracts young people to the organisation, and also a retention strategy, i.e. young people are supported and provided with opportunities for personal and professional development.

On Track has already benefited from the Young Person Mentoring Program through the successful development and implementation of 'Crossing the Bridge' - a project aimed at high school kids with young mental health consumers and young workers talking to them about the risks of drug and alcohol abuse and the link with mental health problems.

Another project that was initiated by a young staff member, and developed and implemented through the mentoring program, was the Cancer Council Grant for Tobacco Use Cessation. This young staff member attended a NSW MHCC NGO Mental Health Conference and was then inspired to apply for funds through the Cancer Council. The On Track project provides staff and consumer training in smoking cessation and the provision of Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT).