



Consumers of Mental Health WA

Celebrating 20 years of working together

...as a lived experience community,
to **strengthen** and **advance the**
voice, leadership and **expertise**
of people with lived experience
of mental health issues.



**Consumers of
Mental Health WA**

Acknowledgment of Country

Consumers of Mental Health WA acknowledges Aboriginal Nations across Western Australia as the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live and work. We recognise their enduring connection to land, sea, and culture, and we reaffirm our commitment to listening, learning, and walking together in truth and respect. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. Sovereignty was never ceded.





Recognition of **Lived Experience**

Consumers of Mental Health WA recognises the collective and individual expertise of those people with a lived experience of mental health challenges, and those who have taken up their experiences within the tradition of consumer advocacy that we share in. We recognise the pioneers of our movement, who had to take those first steps grounded solely by the courage of their convictions and passion for justice.

We also recognise those peers who work tirelessly to continue this advocacy and expand on the changes we, as a movement, have made together over the last fifty years. It is critical, however, that our recognitions extend beyond the past of our movement and towards the current progress we are all working to enact – to pierce the walls and locked doors behind which so many of our peers still languish; locked away, unheard, and without the respect and rights they deserve. Recognising the value in our expertise should not only show us how far we've come, but it must also remind us just how much further there is to go in our collective struggle.

Introduction

At Consumers of Mental Health WA (CoMHWA), we're more than Western Australia's peak body for people living with mental health issues. We're a community – created by and for people with lived experience – coming together to help each other navigate the mental health system and drive positive change in the sector, society and our lives.

Our organisation was formed in 2005 by a group of people with lived experience on a mission to create a peer-driven community and a powerful collective voice. A voice against stigma and discrimination. A voice for respect, dignity and the rights of the lived-experience community.

Today, while our community and influence have grown, as WA's mental health consumers' association we're still a peer-led, grassroots organisation. We're always listening to our members and advocating for service level changes, enabling them to empower themselves in all aspects of their lives.

- **Systemic and individual advocacy.** Using our collective voice to advocate for positive change in the mental health system and enabling people to advocate for themselves.
- **Information, education and training.** From fact sheets, guides and online tools and resources to online training, webinars and in-person workshops.
- **Peer-support programs.** Peer-led initiatives and forums that provide a range of peer-to-peer support, supervision and workplace programs.

As a consumer-led organisation, Consumers of Mental Health WA (CoMHWA) is essential to achieving a strong, assertive, independent voice for social change that reflects the needs and priorities of those living with mental health issues. We are grounded in Peer philosophies of self-advocacy, equity, mutual rapport, self-empowerment, and self-direction.

This book is a small snapshot of CoMHWA's history. Our memories are our own and everyone will have different experiences from the past 20 years, and even pre-dating that. It is important to remember we are all here for the same reason; to make a collective change for the better within our mental health system.

We thank you for being a part of our history, and our future.

Brian Wooller and Lyn Mahboub





Why are we here?

Our Vision

We are working for a world where people with lived experience of mental health issues are self-directed, self-empowered, respected and connected to community.

Our Purpose

We strengthen and advance the voice, leadership and expertise of people with lived experience of mental health issues.

Our Promise

We work together, as a lived experience community, to amplify your voice and deliver positive change.

Our Values

- **Kindness**
- **Respect**
- **Integrity**
- **Social Justice**
- **Connection**
- **Courage**

“A huge congratulations to CoMHWA on all that it has achieved over a **remarkable 20 years!**

CoMHWA has worked tirelessly to stand by, and walk alongside, mental health consumers, to have their voices heard and to be a catalyst for change in the mental health sector. What a remarkable journey the organisation has been on!

Twenty years ago, there was little recognition of the crucial role that peers need to have in supporting mental health recovery and there was limited recognition of the role of individuals as the experts in their own lives. Day after day, week after week and year after year, the people who have made up CoMHWA over the years, and in the present, have challenged the status quo, have asked the hard questions and have courageously advocated for systemic change in the mental health sector. It has been, and is, an absolute champion of people with lived and living experience of mental health challenges, and it continues to be a leader in building a highly competent and compassionate peer workforce.

I feel privileged to have been a small part of CoMHWA's journey. I value that it is an organisation that has a strong strategic vision, whilst maintaining an equally strong connection to the individuals it supports and their own unique stories. It's an organisation with a clear head and a strong heart.

I can't wait to see what the next 20 years will bring.

With admiration and respect...CoMHWA,
keep doing what you're doing!”

Colette Wrynn

Where did we come from?

In the 1950's, psychiatry moved away from the dominant paradigm of 'treatment' in lunatic asylums, to a focus on containment, restriction and restraint of the medical model.

The medical model is, and was, premised on an idea that serious mental illnesses were mainly caused by chemical imbalances in the brain. In this view, treatment with psychotropic drugs, meant that people could be treated in the community. This was generally considered to be a more humane form of treatment than earlier alternatives.

Despite the change, the conditions of people remaining in mental health institutions were still not conducive to people's dignity, human rights and wellbeing. On the other hand, nor were the conditions that people encountered in the community – as at the time there were too few, or no, suitable services, nor were there the right accommodation options for people who'd been discharged from institutions.

Consequently, a stand was taken in the 1970's – 80s to uphold the human rights of people living with enduring and serious mental illness; a stand as such that a national enquiry was held across Australia. The "Inquiry Into the Human rights of People with Mental Illness" (also known as the Burdekin Report) was a recognition that for human rights in mental health to be upheld, the voices of people and their carers/families and friends must be heard.

Work continued into the 1990's and 2000's with another shift from the medical model towards a social model of mental health care; a human rights-based approach that all people, with or without mental ill health or disability, have access to a home, a job, something meaningful to do, pathways from poverty, access to dental care, health care and ultimately, a voice.

"CoMHWA's past begins, in my mind,
in the socio-political rallying call,
made from 60's to the present day,
for human rights and equality to be
upheld for all people."

Helen Lynes





Introducing WAMIAC

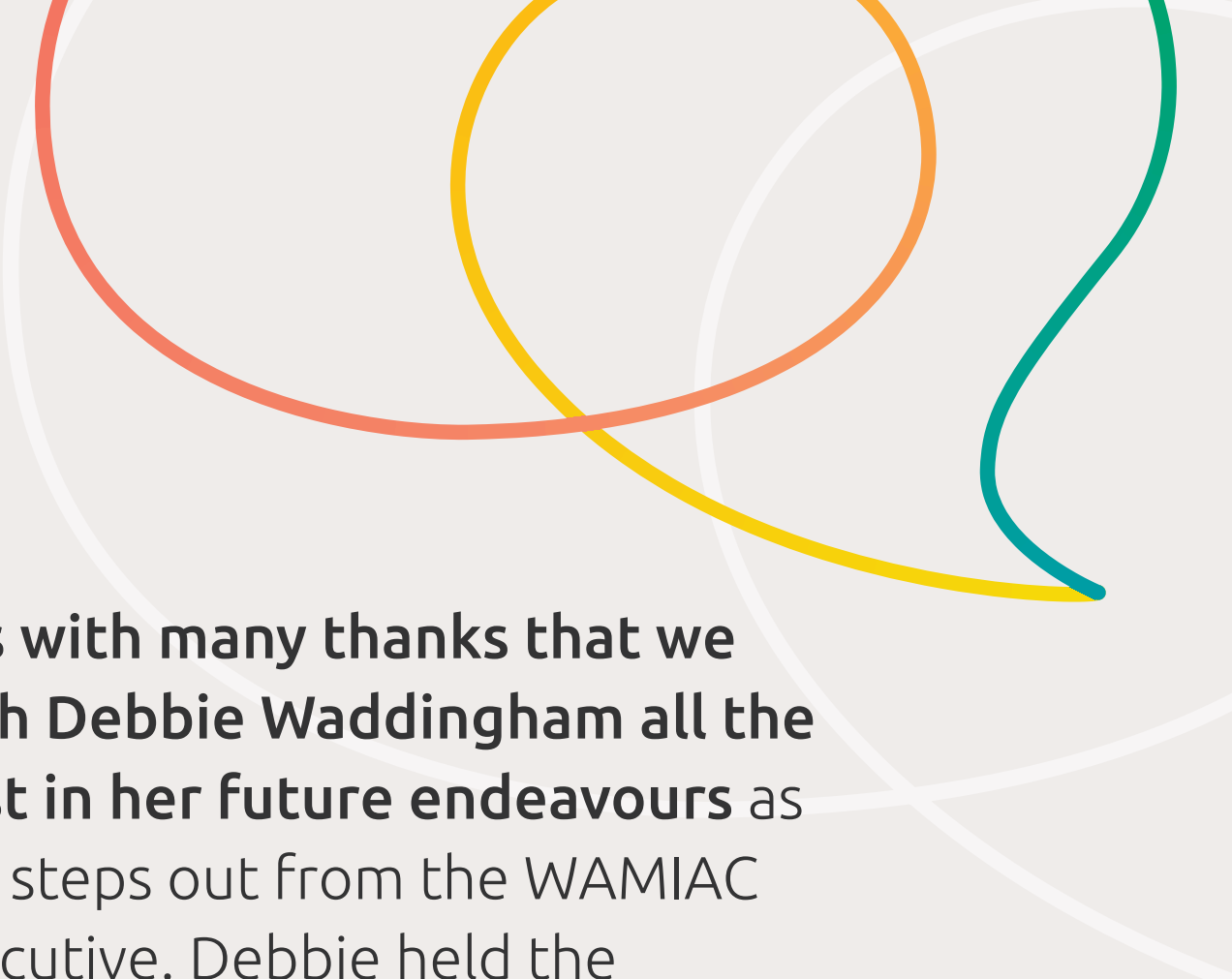
In 2003 the funding for the Health Consumers Council's Mental Health Consumer Advocacy Project (MHCAP) was cut. For consumers and consumer committees in WA, this meant they were left with no support.

Many individuals who had been involved in the MHCAP arranged a demonstration on the steps of Parliament House in Perth, attracting media attention about the funding cuts to the mental health sector organisations, noting the negative effects it would have on all communities. This small but powerful voice representing mental health consumers in WA were featured on news outlets, including the front page of the West Australian. From this demonstration, the idea of a consumer-led organisation was born.

These, and other dedicated individuals began to meet regularly at a coffee shop. Research began into forming a WA organisation, to be led by and for individuals with a lived experience of mental ill health. WAMIAC's inaugural Chair Debbie Waddingham flew to Melbourne to meet with the CEO of the Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council (VMIAC), who shared governance related knowledge such as needing a constitution, writing a strategic plan, setting objectives and complying with certain legislation. The time finally came to formally notify the WA public; a consumer-led, mental health organisation was being formed, and they were to be known as the Western Australian Mental Illness Awareness Council (WAMIAC).

Work continued with a volunteer management committee, and in 2005 WAMIAC was registered as an Incorporated Association. Running off small donations, WAMIAC received generous help from a number of established organisations who wanted to see a consumer-led organisation succeed. MIFWA provided an initial office space, the Western Institute of Self Help (WISH) provided a space to hold annual general meetings, WAAMH and the Health Consumers Council provided ongoing mentorship and support. Richmond Fellowship and their former CEO, Joe Calleja also providing guidance, but also offering an official office space in Cannington in 2007, and access to their own resources such as a printer, a computer, and use of their Boardroom.

In 2008, a new Constitution was drafted and with it, a new name. At the AGM that year, the small consumer membership voted on a new name, and the Consumers of Mental Health WA was decided on; CoMHWA for short.



“It is with many thanks that we wish Debbie Waddingham all the best in her future endeavours as she steps out from the WAMIAC executive. Debbie held the position of WAMIAC Chair for a number of years and has been a **tireless supporter of the growth of WAMIAC** since its inception. It was under Debbie’s leadership that WAMIAC obtained Incorporation and DGR (tax exemption) status.

Debbie’s long association with consumer activities is renowned both within WA and interstate. Knowledge of Debbie’s determination and tenacity in championing the cause of advocacy for consumers is well-known across an array of agencies as well as within the consumer community. Debbie’s detailed knowledge and experience has been a boon for the growth of WAMIAC and has proved valuable in building an organisation that can springboard into many diverse future endeavours.”

Sourced: 2007-2008 WAMIAC Annual Report

Timeline

Please note this is a brief summary of key moments of the consumer movement and CoMHWa's history and not an exhaustive list.

1992

- First National Mental Health Plan is released.

1996

- First State Mental Health Plan is released for WA.

1997

- Work begun on training consumers to run focus groups and gather the voices of people living with mental health challenges.
- Consumer consultants were recruited to hold various consultations with consumers, to inform submissions such as WAAMH's "Report for the Review of Tertiary and Secondary Services WA"

1999

- Planning commences to form the Mental Health Consumer Association of WA.

2000

- The West Australian Consumer Advisory Group (WACAG) won a Mental Health Division tender to provide consumer and carer advocacy training using a nationally accredited training package called 'the Kit'. This project had a steering committee made up of key collaborators – WAAMH, WACAG, Schizophrenia Fellowship of WA, Carer's Association, ARAFMI and the HCC Consumer Representative Training Project.

2005

- WA Mental Illness Awareness Council (WAMIAC) is registered as an Incorporated Association in June of this year.

2007

- WAMIAC has 25 members.
- Granted DGR (deductible gift recipient) status.
- Supported by MIFWA with an office and meeting space.

2008

- WAMIAC's name is officially changed to Consumers of Mental Health WA (CoMHWa).
- Richmond Fellowship (now Richmond WA) provide us with our first 'office' out of their Cannington building and a computer and phone.

2011

- Election commitment made of \$250,000 in recurrent funding, and CoMHWa is announced as the WA consumer peak body.
- CoMHWa is mentored by WAAMH.
- First service agreement signed between CoMHWa and the WA Mental Health Commission.

2012

- The CoMHWa 'comma' logo is produced, and a by-line created; "mental illness is a pause, not the end."
- Julian Gimpel appointed as CoMHWa's first Executive Director.
- Lease signed for a small office in West Perth.

2013

- Shauna Gaebler appointed as CoMHWa's new Executive Director.
- We move into our new, bigger offices in Cannington.

2014

- The launch of the WA Peer Supporters' Network.

2015

- Cert IV Mental Health Peer Work pilot project is launched, with North Metro TAFE, funded by the Mental Health Commission.
- DSO Peer Support Capacity Building project and NDIS Targeted Customised Information projects launched.

2016

- 10 year celebration held.
- OurVoice4Change project launched.

2017

- M3Q: My Medicines and Me project launched.

2018

- Inclusion for Mental Health, Paths2Wellbeing and Peer Choices projects launched.
- “We Speak Up” video campaign.

2019

- Co-Designing Futures project launched.
- Life Launchpad and ASPIRE project funding received.

2020

- Covid lockdown, all staff work from home and services continue.
- CoMHWa relocate again to Cloverdale and increase to over 20 staff.
- CoMHWa host TheMHS Consumer Day, online.
- Peers4Wellbeing project launched.

2021

- NDIS Access project launched.
- Peer Pathways mental health service navigation phone line is launched.

2022

- Peer Work Positives education program developed and launched.
- Shauna Gaebler announces her retirement.
- Sandra Higgins steps in as Acting CEO.
- Peer Supervision Training developed and launched.
- Peer Work Skill set pilot launched.

2023

- Darren Munday appointed as CEO.
- National Mental Health Consumer Alliance is formed between State and Territory consumer peak bodies.

2024

- Collaborate to Connect and My Voice, My Rights, My Way project funding received.
- CoMHWa increases to over 30 staff.
- CoMHWa receives considerably increased funding from the Mental Health Commission of WA to grow our systemic advocacy work, education and training programs, work relating to Aboriginal mental health, to establish mental health support groups and continue otherwise de-funded programs supporting local community.

2025

- 38 staff (as at July 2025).
- Successful community engagement programs and in-reach services in Acute Psychiatric Units across the metro area.
- Successful weekly-run, mental health peer support groups by, and for consumers.
- Nine teams, working across three offices.
- 3000 members across WA.

“CoMHWa has **enabled its members to be aware** of what’s happening in Perth’s mental health sector and to **hold those in key roles**, such as ministers and staff of the Mental Health Commission, **accountable for listening to the needs and desires** of those battling mental illness. It’s wonderful to be part of that transparency and accountability.”

Rahul Seth

Celebrating over 20 years of dedication

2025 sees Consumers of Mental Health WA (CoMWHWA) celebrate 20 years of incorporation. We have grown from a small group of people working from a café, to a large charity with multi-million dollars in funding streams, with dedicated office spaces and training rooms, because of the passion, dedication and hard work put in by a number of individuals wanting to make a difference to people living with mental health challenges in WA.

Making authentic, systemic change is hard. Sometimes it can take years of work to notice a small ripple of change, but knowing that ripple grows and makes a real change to people in our community is why we are here, and why we continue to tirelessly work towards changing the mental health system for the better.

We strengthen and advance the voice of people who are hardly ever reached, to ensure everyone has access to equal opportunity, self-empowerment and connection to community. We look forward to continuing our work, amplifying your voices and delivering positive change to the mental health system over the next 20 years, and beyond.





Our Community

Over the last 20 years there have been hundreds of individuals and organisations who have made significant contributions to the positive impact Consumers of Mental Health WA (CoMWHWA) has made for WA mental health consumers. While some names have been lost to history, we would like to acknowledge and thank the following for their contributions, including some of those who assisted in creating this book:

- Agnes McKay
- Agneta Hyland
- Amanda Habermann
- Amanda Olsen
- Anna Richards
- Ann White
- Barrie Pack
- Beverly Seth
- Brian Wooller
- Cathy Galli
- Darren Munday
- Debbie Waddingham
- Dene Marfleet
- Ethel Date
- Gerald Kirk
- Ginger Gordy
- Grace Toczylowski
- Helen Lynes
- Ingrid Bentsen
- Iren Hunyadi
- James Trott
- Jen Stacey
- Joe Calleja
- Juanita Fishwick
- Julian Gimpel
- Kayla Schembri
- Lloyd Marsh
- Lorraine Powell
- Lyn Mahboub
- Margaret Cook
- Maxine Drake
- Megan Mckrill
- Michael Turnball
- Neil Hackett
- Pat Latter
- Pauline Miles
- Peter Wright
- Prescott Harper
- Rhianwen Beresford
- Robyn Martin
- Sandra Higgins
- Sean Harrold
- Shauna Gaebler
- Steven Roebuck
- Sue Woods
- Susan Connolly
- Tatum Burkett
- Tina Ward
- Tracey Saggars
- Veronica Lawrance







Current/past staff

Aaron Ramshaw	Julian Robinson
Adam Ellison	Justine Kamprad
Aimee Sinclair	Lachlan Higgins
Aisling Blackmore	Lachlan Rodenburg
Alicia Beckingsale	Larissa Fisher
Ali Coats	Laura McWhae
Anabelle May	Laura Nelson
Arana Hudson	Leela James
Bee Hawker	Leah Fogliani
Ben Moodie	Leonie Auld
Bianca Nixon	Lisa Bailey
Bridget Clarke	Lobna Rouhani
Bronwyn Power	Lucy Haffenden
Caitlin Hellewell	Mad Magladry
Carissa Wright	Mace Clarion
Caro Nye	Maree Jones
Charles Foster	Mark Wynne-Davies
Chris Konrad	Marnie Kehoe
Chloe Harris	Melissa Russell
Clare Henderson	Michele Burnlar
Colette Wrynn	Miska Sharplin
Coryn Keith	Monti [REDACTED]
Damian Smith	Naomi Campbell
Danny Blackburn	Nate Jarvis
Danielle Barker	Neeka Zand
Danielle Lobo	Nicholas Da Silva
Danielle Stipanicev	Orli Nice
Danyelle Greyling	Phill Moncrieff
Darren Munday	Rachael Burns
Elena Mauén	Rebecca Banks
Elaine Ashurst	Reginah Kirumba
Ella Macnish	Renai Buchanan
Ellen Clifford	Rhianwen Beresford
Emily Beckett	Richard Papais
Emily Cole	Robin Litvins-Salter
Emery Wishart	Ruben Carley-Franklin
Gabriel Osborne	Rumbi Mudzengi
Gillian King	Sandra Higgins
Hanna Zurub	Sandra Morin
Helene Smith	Sasha Baker
Helen Condon	Shauna Gaebler
Hope Resta	Sia Spark
Jason Heard	Steven Holzman
Jamie Neal	Tanya Davies
Jennifer Crowther	Trish Tran
Joanne Khan	Tyr Berkana
Jo Fletcher	Vanessa Baker
Joy Wells	Vince Alessandro
Josh Hay	

“I am very **glad to have met** with the people of CoMHWA and congratulate them on a **very important service** to the Western Australian community. CoMHWA have in a very real sense **increased my social and work/study skills and relationships** and for that I am truly grateful.

Not having worked for the best part of a decade due to Mental Health and AoD concerns I am now currently studying and fruitfully looking toward meaningful employment and am already enjoying a very much improved meaningful life thanks to CoMHWA and its trainings, support and navigation services.”

Michael Payne

“CoMHWAs has proved lived
experience is essential
towards better outcomes
for policy and services.”

Pauline Miles





**Consumers of
Mental Health WA**

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