

Engaging lived expertise to help shape better mental health prevention decisions

PREVENT-MH is a national project commissioned by the National Mental Health Commission and delivered by the Sax Institute.

The project will develop a computer-based simulation model to help decision-makers explore how prevention and the social and economic conditions of people's lives may influence mental health outcomes and future demand for services across Australia.

Why focus on prevention and the conditions that shape mental health?

Mental health is influenced by much more than healthcare. Factors such as housing security, education, employment, income, social connection, safety and access to support can impact people's experience of mental health challenges.

PREVENT-MH will bring together research, data and expert knowledge to explore "what if?" questions - for example, what might happen over time if governments invest earlier in prevention or change policies affecting these wider conditions. Lived experience expertise is part of the knowledge base that will form the foundation for the project.

What is the model for?

The model is intended to help decision-makers:

- explore different prevention, policy and investment options;
- consider how a range of actions may work together;
- identify potential benefits, trade-offs and unintended effects; and
- understand where earlier action may have the greatest long-term benefit.

The model will support thinking and decision-making; it will not predict the future with certainty or prescribe a particular policy.

Its findings will depend on the evidence, data and clearly documented assumptions that underpin the model.



Why are you being invited?

Research and datasets cannot always show how systems work in people's lives, where systems create barriers, or which outcomes matter most to consumers, families, carers and communities.

The National Mental Health Commission recognises that people with lived and living experience and their families, carers and kin hold valuable knowledge that may not be visible to policymakers or captured in data.

Consumer, family, carer and kin perspectives are related but distinct. Each brings different knowledge about how mental health challenges, services, systems and policies are experienced. The project will seek to understand these perspectives, rather than treating lived experience as a single or uniform perspective.

Participants lived experience expertise is a substantive source of knowledge for this project. It will complement and help make sense of research and data, so that the model reflects real-world patterns, priorities and consequences.

National consumer, family, carer and kin peak bodies will support the project to identify appropriate engagement pathways and help ensure that a diversity of perspectives is included. Participants will be identified through a transparent process that considers the perspectives, backgrounds, communities and forms of expertise needed at different stages of the project. Further information about the selection process and the role of the national peaks will be provided before participation is confirmed.

Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples may require a distinct, culturally appropriate approach. This will be guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations and will recognise the importance of culturally safe ways of sharing knowledge.

How could participants' expertise influence PREVENT-MH?

Lived experience expertise will inform the project at key stages.

Participants' contributions may include:

- shape the system map by identifying important drivers, pathways and relationships;
- highlight missing factors, barriers and unintended consequences;
- inform how prevention options and outcomes are framed;
- help refine the "what if?" scenarios explored by the model; and
- review and help interpret emerging findings so they are meaningful, understandable and grounded in real world experience.

The pathway below summarises how lived experience expertise is intended to connect with research, data, modelling and feedback.



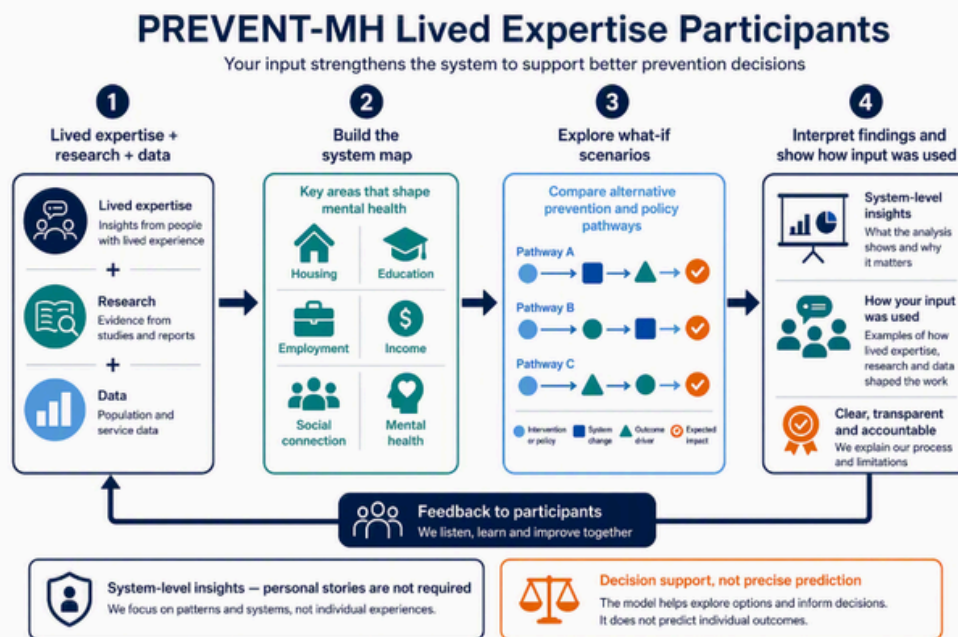


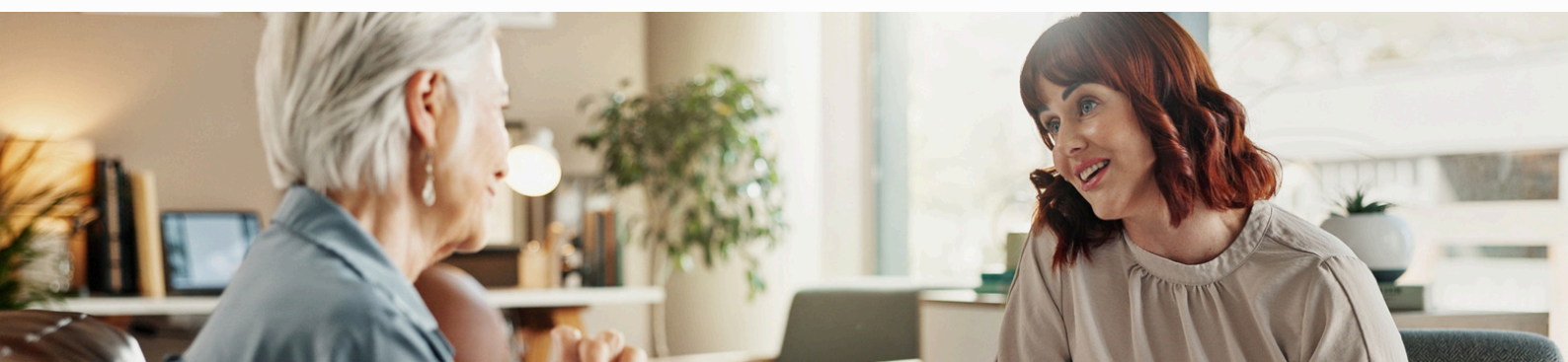
Figure 1: How lived experience expertise can influence PREVENT-MH: from shaping the system map and scenarios to interpreting findings and seeing how input was used.

What can you expect from taking part?

Participation will involve structured discussions, workshops or review opportunities at points where participants' input can genuinely influence the work. Participants may contribute alongside policy, research, technical and community participants, or through focused consumer, family, carer or kin discussions where this better supports safe and meaningful participation.

Participants are not expected to speak for every consumer, family member, carer or kin, and do not need to disclose personal experiences. The focus is on the knowledge you have developed from experience, particularly insights about shared patterns, system barriers, what helps, what is missing and what matters to people and communities.

Before each activity, participants will receive clear information about its purpose, what they will be asked to contribute and how their input may influence the project. Preparation and briefing materials will be provided in advance and, where possible, in accessible formats. Participants will be advised about available accessibility adjustments, wellbeing supports and options for briefing and debriefing. The project is committed to respectful, inclusive and considered participation.



Following engagement activities, participants will be provided feedback about what the project heard, how their input has influenced the work and what will happen next. Where suggestions cannot be incorporated, the project will explain this clearly, including the reasons why. Participants may also be invited to comment on whether their contributions have been accurately understood and reflected.

Participants will be paid for their time and reimbursed for any travel costs, in line with the Commission's paid participation policy. This does not apply to people participating as part of their professional role.

Your expertise can help ensure PREVENT-MH is shaped not only by what can be measured, but also by what matters to consumers, families, carers, kin and communities.

