

The Melbourne Hearing Voices Declaration

Thursday 21st November 2013



The evidence indicates that

- Hearing voices is a common human experience.
- Some people experience voices as distressing and overwhelming while others integrate voices as a normal part of their lives. In the former case hearing voices can lead to a diagnosis of a mental illness.
- Recovery doesn't necessarily mean getting rid of voices. It is more often about reducing the distress that can be associated with voices, and learning to live with voices so one can get on with leading a meaningful and contributing life.

We believe

- Everyone can recover and the systemic holding of this hope is central to people's recovery.

We acknowledge that

- There are a range of myths about hearing voices that leave people isolated and imprisoned in their experience.
- People have different beliefs about where voices come from, and the right to hold those beliefs.

- The experience of hearing voices is meaningful and is often related to difficult emotions and life experiences, including past trauma.
- What is sometimes referred to as 'lack of insight' may also be considered as 'diversity' or 'unusual beliefs'. People are able to reduce their distress and get on with recovery without necessarily changing these beliefs.
- Through the leadership of those with lived experience, people have been able to come out from this isolation, learn to live with their voices and lead meaningful and contributing lives.
- Family, friends and carers can also experience profound isolation as a result of their loved one experiencing voices and they too can benefit profoundly from their loved one's recovery.
- Significant changes can be made to the systems designed to support people to recover through partnership between leaders with lived experience of voice hearing, their family, friends and carers, mental health practitioners, researchers and policy makers.

We are committed to:

1. Ensuring it feels safe for people to talk about voices and other unusual experiences
2. Working to enable increased hope, control and opportunity for people who hear voices and their families
3. Listening to the experience of voice hearers
4. Working with, rather than against, voices
5. Asking about and supporting people to address past trauma
6. Tackling myths and stigma about hearing voices
7. Supporting people to build skills that empower them to change their relationship with voices
8. As appropriate, building this declaration into our planning processes