

# Practice Development Strategy

Local Connections – a social prescribing initiative

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Department  
of Health

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Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.

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In this document, 'Aboriginal' refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. 'Indigenous' or 'Koori/Koorie' is retained when part of the title of a report, program or quotation.

**ISBN 978-1-76131-681-4 (pdf/online/MS word)**

Available at <<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health-wellbeing-reform/local-connections-social-prescribing-initiative>>

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# Purpose

The Practice Development Strategy (the Strategy) aims to support the delivery of Local Connections – a social prescribing initiative, through strengthening key capabilities, professional development and support for link workers and Local Connections staff.

The Strategy outlines accountability for the Local Services and Department of Health in supporting the professional development of link workers.

# Background

## Local Connections – a social prescribing initiative

Recommendation 15.4 of the Royal Commission’s final report recommended that the Victorian Government establish one social prescribing trial per region in the Local Services. Trials will be initially established in six regions and these trials will support Local Services to refer people experiencing loneliness, social isolation, psychological distress, mental illness and/or addiction into non-clinical community groups to support community participation, inclusion and connection.

The trials were renamed *Local Connections – a social prescribing initiative* following feedback from co-design partners. Local Connections will:

- examine whether social prescribing can reduce loneliness and social isolation for adults and older adults (people aged 26 and over)
- test the skills and qualifications that are required for a link worker in the mental health and wellbeing context
- test social prescribing as a model for strengthening pathways between Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals and non-clinical, community-based activities and initiatives that support community participation, inclusion, and connection.

## Building a practice

Local Connections is a new service offering available in the first six Local Services. As a new “front door” to the public mental health and wellbeing system, the Local Services’ model, delivered through an integrated multidisciplinary model of care, will offer person-centred support.

Social prescribing is grounded in a holistic approach, focussing on individual need and aiming to promote mental health and wellbeing using non-clinical methods (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, UK, 2022). Local Connections is an opportunity to build a social prescribing practice in Victoria’s reformed mental health and wellbeing system, testing the value of dedicated resources to promote and support social connection and belonging.

An equally important part of establishing a sustainable social prescribing offering is a diverse and strong community and volunteer sector. This includes accessible spaces where people can access nature, take part in physical activity and movement, and engage with heritage, arts and culture (National Academy for Social Prescribing, 2021). This is referred to as the social prescribing ecosystem and represents part of the first level of the reformed Victorian mental health and wellbeing system. In addition to link workers providing support to consumers and carers, link workers play a critical role in supporting pathways to the community and supporting the social prescribing ecosystem to be safe, welcoming and inclusive.

## The role of the link worker

Local Connections was co-designed alongside 31 co-designers with diverse lived and living experiences of psychological distress, mental illness, and addiction. This initial co-design work outlined the experience of social prescribing to be applied in the Local Service context, and importantly defined the qualities, responsibilities, and experiences required of the link worker.

The link worker is central to the Local Connections service offering. They have a dual role, as they both:

- support the individual, their carers, families, and supporters to engage with non-clinical activities to benefit their mental health and wellbeing; and
- enable sustained engagement with local community organisations, clubs and activity providers, ensuring their groups are safe, welcoming and inclusive places for people to access and experience a sense of belonging.

The insight from this initial co-design work has been captured in three key products to support implementation and fidelity to the co-design aims, objectives and outcomes.

- Our Link Worker – Summary (**Attachment 1**)
- Social prescribing – the role of the link worker (**Attachment 2**)
- The social prescribing experience map (attachment 3)

## Using this document

The Strategy is designed to serve as a practical guide to support Local Services and link workers to continually develop their own skills and practice.

To help maintain fidelity to the co-design outcomes, the Strategy's areas of focus aim to support alignment with the qualities, responsibilities and experiences outlined in **Attachment 1 and 2**.

Core competencies are outlined within each area of focus. Furthermore:

- it is indicated which party – **Local Services** or **Wellbeing Promotion Office (Department of Health)** – carry primary responsibility to ensure link workers can access and participate in different forms of professional development.
- some examples of suggested professional development opportunities have been included but should be considered alongside all available options.

**Link workers are also encouraged to explore other professional development opportunities that will support their practice.**

## Additional resources

Local Services should read the Strategy together with key documents that guide Local Connections, including strategies that are shaping the reformed mental health system, recognising the broader context that Local Connections sits within. This includes:

- [Local Adult and Older Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Service Framework](#)
- The Social Prescribing Guidelines – Annex to Local Adult and Older Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Service Framework

- Social prescribing co-design products
  - Our Link Worker – Summary (Attachment 1)
  - Social prescribing – the role of the link worker (Attachment 2)
  - The social prescribing experience map (attachment 3)
- [Mental Health Workforce Strategy](#)
- [Our Workforce, Our Future Capability Framework](#)
- [Mental Health Consumer Workforce Strategy](#)
- [Mental Health Carer Workforce Strategy](#)
- [Lived and living experience workforce initiatives](#)

## Areas of focus

### Area 1: Support for consumers and carers

Link workers are social connection specialists that support consumers and carers to find a sense of belonging and connection in their local community (this may be a community of place, interest, culture or identity and may include online communities).

Support for consumers and carers is usually provided individually however limited groups may be delivered through Local Connections to provide a space for people to develop their skills and confident for social connections. This will include work outlined in the [Social Prescribing Experience Map \(Attachment 3\)](#) to identify what matters to the person, develop a plan with personalised goals and proactively check in and debrief on experiences. Work may also include skill and confidence building, such as managing social anxiety, building interpersonal skills and learning how to get to and from an activity independently.<sup>1</sup>

Key competencies for area one include:

- delivery of the social prescribing experience
- applying lived experience in practice
- working with people who have experiences as consumers and/or carers
- understanding and responding to loneliness and social isolation
- trauma informed practice

### Social prescribing experience

Link workers should aim to provide a personalised and holistic approach to support people to connect with activities that matter to them. As outlined in **Attachment 3**, identifying moments of connection and joy are key milestones that form part of the social prescribing experience. **Attachment 3** also emphasises the importance of proactive follow-up and engagement based on individual preferences, including interests (past/present/future), values and habits.

The role of the link worker is not to 'prescribe to' but to work with the person, to support them to identify interests and to build their skills and confidence in connecting in ways that bring the person joy, meaning and connection.

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<sup>1</sup> Social prescribing experience map, <https://statics.teams.cdn.office.net/evergreen-assets/safelinks/1/atp-safelinks.html>

Strong communication and interpersonal skills, including authentic engagement, are critical elements of providing this experience to consumers and are pre-requisite experiences for link workers (**Attachment 2**, slide 44). In addition, link workers should be developing experience and understandings of mental health and wellbeing, substance use and addiction and of culture and diversity including multicultural and multifaith, LGBTIQ+ and disability communities.

Resource	Responsible party	Method of delivery/access
Social Prescribing Experience Map	Wellbeing Promotion Office	<p>Provided in welcome pack emailed to link workers upon their commencement.</p> <p>Opportunity for further exploration and application of the Social Prescribing Experience Map through the Local Connections Community of Practice for link workers.</p>
Social Prescribing Experience Map	Local Services	Provide induction and ongoing opportunities to discuss practice through supervision and line management.
Professional development and supervision	Local Services	<p>Local Services should support experience in mental health and wellbeing and substance use and addiction for link workers through enabling access to supervision and ongoing training and development.</p> <p>Resources to support professional development may include:</p> <p>Mental Health Professional Online Development's learning portal: <a href="https://www.mhpod.gov.au/learning-portal/">https://www.mhpod.gov.au/learning-portal/</a></p> <p>CMHL's learning hub: <a href="https://cmhl.org.au/learning-hub">https://cmhl.org.au/learning-hub</a></p> <p>Mental Health Victoria's training and development opportunities: <a href="https://www.mhvic.org.au/training-development">https://www.mhvic.org.au/training-development</a></p>
Professional development and supervision	Local Services	Local Services should support understanding of Cultural Safety for First Nations and an understanding of diversity for link workers through enabling access to supervision and ongoing training and development.
Community of Practice	Wellbeing Promotion Office	The Wellbeing Promotion Office will deliver a community of practice to support discussion, reflection and learning for Local Connections staff.
Diverse Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework and Blueprint for Action	Department of Health	<p>The Department of Health is developing a Framework and Blueprint for Action to embed diversity, equity and inclusion in the transformation of the mental health system. The Framework and Blueprint for Action seeks to improve outcomes for multicultural and multifaith communities, LGBTIQ+ communities, and people with disability. The Wellbeing Promotion Office will circulate this when released.</p> <p><a href="https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health-wellbeing-reform/diverse-communities-mental-health-and-wellbeing-framework-and-blueprint">https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health-wellbeing-reform/diverse-communities-mental-health-and-wellbeing-framework-and-blueprint</a></p>

## Applying lived and living experience in practice

Lived or living experience was identified through the initial co-design work as a core component of the Local Connections link worker role. This may include lived experience as a consumer, carer, or both. Link workers should be supported to use their lived experience in ways that support both link workers and consumers of Local Connections.

Recognising the growth in the mental health and alcohol and other drug (AOD) lived experience workforce, the Department of Health is supporting a range of lived and living experience workforce (LLEW) initiatives, including the lived experience workforce program. Link workers should be supported by Local Services and the Wellbeing Promotion Office to access development opportunities through these programs as required.

Resource	Responsible party	Method of delivery/access
Lived Experience Workforce Development Program	Local Services and Wellbeing Promotion Office	Local Services to support link workers to engage in the Lived Experience Workforce Development Program. Where places are limited or full, the Wellbeing Promotion Office will, where possible, support and broker opportunities for Local Connections staff to engage in these supports.  <a href="https://www.vmiac.org.au/new-lived-and-living-experience-workforce-program-new-training-and-community-of-practice/">https://www.vmiac.org.au/new-lived-and-living-experience-workforce-program-new-training-and-community-of-practice/</a>  <a href="https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health-wellbeing-reform/new-programs-to-develop-victorias-lived-and-living-experience">https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health-wellbeing-reform/new-programs-to-develop-victorias-lived-and-living-experience</a>
Intentional Peer Support	Local Services	Local Services to support access to Intentional Peer Support training as required: <a href="https://www.sharc.org.au/sharc-programs/peer-projects/intentional-peer-support/">https://www.sharc.org.au/sharc-programs/peer-projects/intentional-peer-support/</a>  Organisational Readiness training is also available for organisations to support and sustain peer workforces: <a href="https://www.sharc.org.au/sharc-programs/peer-projects/peer-workforce-training/">https://www.sharc.org.au/sharc-programs/peer-projects/peer-workforce-training/</a>
Professional development and supervision	Local Services	Local Services should support appropriate use of lived and living experience through supervision. This may include discipline specific supervision, ongoing training and development.
Community of Practice	Wellbeing Promotion Office	The Wellbeing Promotion Office will deliver a community of practice to support discussion, reflection and learning for Local Connections staff.

## Working with families, carers and supporters

Families, carers and supporters may be connected to Local Connections in their role as a carer for someone participating in social prescribing or, be supported through social prescribing themselves. Understanding the nuances of carer needs will enable link workers to support carers to feel connected and supported through Local Connection offerings.

Local Services should reflect on the importance of peer-to-peer support for carers and how this can be supported through Local Connections, noting that link workers may hold lived experience as a consumer, carer, or both. Link workers should be supported to have the understanding and knowledge to support carers independent of their personal lived experience. This includes recognising potential differences between consumer and carer experiences, needs and expectations.

Resource	Responsible party	Method of delivery/access
Carer perspective supervision	Local Services	Local Services should have an understanding of the different support needs for family/carers lived experience workforce and provide access to relevant training and supports, including discipline specific supervision: <a href="https://www.thermh.org.au/files/documents/Corporate/carers-perspective-supervision-framework.pdf">https://www.thermh.org.au/files/documents/Corporate/carers-perspective-supervision-framework.pdf</a>



Professional development – carer perspective	Local Services	<p>Local Services should support link workers working from a family carer perspective to engage with carer perspective training and professional development opportunities.</p> <p>Resources to support professional development may include:</p> <p>CMHL’s Understanding Family/Carer Perspectives, Experiences and Needs training: <a href="https://cmhl.org.au/event/understanding-familycarer-perspectives-experiences-and-needs-0">https://cmhl.org.au/event/understanding-familycarer-perspectives-experiences-and-needs-0</a></p> <p>Tandem’s Carer Lived Experience Workforce supports: <a href="https://tandemcarers.org.au/Web/Web/Get%20involved/Carer-Lived-Experience-Workforce--CLEW.aspx?hkey=0d8426ed-1231-4d09-b910-ddee619d66cb">https://tandemcarers.org.au/Web/Web/Get%20involved/Carer-Lived-Experience-Workforce--CLEW.aspx?hkey=0d8426ed-1231-4d09-b910-ddee619d66cb</a></p>
Professional development – non carer perspective	Local Services	<p>Link workers should be supported to develop an understanding of the different needs and how to work with carers.</p> <p>The Department of Health is working with Tandem to re-launch five ‘Working with Families’ learning modules for clinicians. For more information, contact <a href="https://www.tandemcarers.org.au/">https://www.tandemcarers.org.au/</a></p>

## Understanding loneliness and social isolation

Loneliness and social isolation are now recognised as a public health priority. While there is an increased interest in addressing each of these risk factors for health and wellbeing, there is opportunity to improve understanding of loneliness and social isolation and the evidence-based approaches to reduce them.

Local Connections aims to examine the effectiveness of social prescribing in reducing loneliness and social isolation. It is therefore critical that Local Services and link workers have the skills and confidence to recognise, assess, relate, and respond to people experiencing loneliness and social isolation. Link workers can also contribute to reducing the stigma about loneliness within their communities.

Resource	Responsible party	Method of delivery/access
Social Connection Literacy Training 101	Wellbeing Promotion Office	The Wellbeing Promotion Office engaged Ending Loneliness Together to deliver Social Connection Literacy Training to link workers and other staff in Local Services. This training supports evidence-based and current understanding of loneliness and social isolation. This training is required for all link workers and strongly encouraged for all Local Services staff.
Social Connection Skills Building	Wellbeing Promotion Office	Building on the Social Connection Literacy Training, Ending Loneliness Together, were engaged to deliver the second module in Social Connection training. Social Connection Skills Building aims to provide link workers with the skills to support people experiencing loneliness. This training is required for all link workers and strongly encouraged for all Local Services staff.
Social Connection 101	N/A	Resource – This evidence-based guide developed by Swinburne University, provides an understanding of what social connection is, how it works, and some ways that it can be activated. It is accessible via: <a href="https://apo.org.au/node/314766">https://apo.org.au/node/314766</a>

Community of Practice	Wellbeing Promotion Office	The Wellbeing Promotion Office will deliver a community of practice to support discussion, reflection and learning for Local Connections staff.
Supervision	Local Services	Recognising the impact of vicarious trauma when working in loneliness, regular supervision should be used to discuss and reflect on current work with people experiencing loneliness and it's potential impact.

## Trauma-informed practice

Trauma informed practice is a strengths-based framework which is founded on five core principles – safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration and empowerment as well as respect for diversity. A deep understanding of trauma-informed and strengths-based practice was one of the three required pre-requisite experiences for link workers, identified through the co-design process (**Attachment 2**, slide 44).

Link workers should have an established trauma-informed practice and be supported to continually develop this practice. This core competency for link workers and location of the initiative within the Local Service will also support external referrals for social prescribing that may not be able to be supported through other social prescribing initiatives within the community.

Resource	Responsible party	Method of delivery/access
Professional development and supervision	Local Services	Local Services should support trauma-informed practice for link workers through enabling access to supervision, ongoing training and development.  Examples of supporting organisations and training include but are not limited to:  Phoenix Australia, leading work to established Transforming Trauma Victoria - <a href="https://www.phoenixaustralia.org/news/introducing-transforming-trauma-victoria/">https://www.phoenixaustralia.org/news/introducing-transforming-trauma-victoria/</a>  CMHL, delivering trauma-informed leadership, <a href="#">Trauma-informed Leadership Program   CMHL</a>  Blue Knot, delivering webinars and training to support understanding trauma and its impacts <a href="https://professionals.blueknot.org.au/professional-development-training/training-programs/">https://professionals.blueknot.org.au/professional-development-training/training-programs/</a>
Transforming Trauma Victoria	Local Services	The statewide trauma service delivers a range of training and supports for the mental health and wellbeing workforce in Victoria.  <a href="https://www.phoenixaustralia.org/news/introducing-transforming-trauma-victoria/">https://www.phoenixaustralia.org/news/introducing-transforming-trauma-victoria/</a>

## Area 2: Working in a multidisciplinary team

Link workers delivering Local Connections make up part of the multidisciplinary care offered by Local Services, alongside a range of clinical and non-clinical supports that may be included in a person's care plan as detailed in the [Local Service Framework](#). Link workers should be supported by Local Services to work collaboratively with other roles across the service including peer workers, mental health and AOD support workers and others as needed.

As outlined in the social prescribing guidelines, Local Services may apply an integrated multidisciplinary team model to deliver Local Connections where the functions of the link worker may form part of other roles within the Local Service. In this model, a Local Connections Lead should support social prescribing functions to be embedded across the multidisciplinary team.

Link workers hold a dual role in providing support for individuals and the social prescribing ecosystem, and strong collaboration with community engagement functions of the Local Service should be supported. See Area 3 for further information about community development and engagement to support link worker functions.

Key competencies for area two include:

- advocating for Local Connections as part of a multidisciplinary care approach
- supporting colleagues to recognise the strengths of social prescribing in their professional practice.

### **Advocating for Local Connections in a multidisciplinary team**

Link workers should be supported by Local Services to develop the skills and capability required to advocate for Local Connections as part of an individual’s care plan. This includes advocating for self, for clients and for the importance of lived and living experience roles in a care team. In addition, sharing the knowledge, skills and capabilities gained through delivering social prescribing within the locals may contribute to promoting the benefits of social prescribing, along with supporting shared solutions and holistic care.

Local Services should actively build understanding of Local Connections – a social prescribing initiative across the service, supporting people to understand it’s role and when and how to support people to connect with a link worker when required.

<b>Resource</b>	<b>Responsible party</b>	<b>Method of delivery/access</b>
Team meetings and case conferencing	Local Services	Local Services should support link workers to attend and contribute to processes that support collaborative care.
Professional development and supervision	Local Services	Local services should support link workers to embed advocacy and multidisciplinary approaches to their work through regular supervision and ongoing training and development.
Information sessions for evaluation recruitment	Wellbeing Promotion Office /Impact Co.	Impact Co. will deliver information sessions and supports to any staff members who may recruit clients to the evaluation of Local Connections.  Local Services are responsible for ensuring staff know about Local Connections, including the evaluation, particularly in the case of staff changes.

### **Influencing practice across the Local Service and community**

All Staff employed by the Local Service should be supported to understand social prescribing, including how Local Connections can complement an individual’s care plan and their own practice. This may include working with a link worker in a multidisciplinary team or understanding when and how to seek knowledge and advice from a link worker to strengthen support offered to consumers.

Link workers should be supported to engage with health care professionals in the community, such as GPs, to advocate for and promote Local Connections. This includes building internal and external referral pathways and building relationships to facilitate collaborative care.

Delivery of Local Connections is supported through proactive social prescribing, identifying who may be at risk of loneliness within the community and how Local Connection may in-reach for support. Developing an understanding of social prescribing and loneliness in the local community is essential to build referrals to the initiative for those most in need of support.

Resource	Responsible party	Method of delivery/access
Internal communications	Local Services	Local Services should build and embed understanding of Local Connections – a social prescribing initiative and the link worker across all staff. This includes supporting understanding of Local Connections at the point of intake and assessment and understanding of when Local Connections may be recommended as part of a person’s treatment and support
External communications and engagement	Local Services	Local Services should support understanding of loneliness and social prescribing in the community, and with potential referrers, to support the delivery of Local Connections. Local Services community engagement teams (where they exist) are well placed to support this.
Team meetings	Local Services	Local Services should support link workers to have opportunities to share their knowledge and expertise with all staff at the Local Service.
Training and professional development	Local Services	Local Services should find regular practice opportunities for link workers to share their skills and expertise and learn from colleagues. This may include job shadowing, share and learn sessions and professional development opportunities.  Local Services may also support link workers to engage in lived and living experience workforce leadership opportunities such as:  <a href="https://www.acn.edu.au/scholarships/lived-living-experience-workforces-university-scholarships">https://www.acn.edu.au/scholarships/lived-living-experience-workforces-university-scholarships</a>

### Area 3: Supporting welcoming and inclusive communities and pathways

Social prescribing seeks non-clinical solutions for what are, at their root, social rather than clinical challenges (Royal Society for Public Health, 2019). The dual role of the link worker aims to strengthen pathways from clinical services to the community to support social connections, recognising that social prescribing can only be as strong as the community that it is based in.

Key competencies for area three include:

- applying community engagement and development approaches as part of the dual role of the link worker
- strengthening referral pathways between Local Services/Local Connections and the community
- working with community-based activities to support safe, welcoming and inclusive spaces.

## Community engagement and development to support link worker function

The dual role of the link worker requires an understanding of community development, community engagement and health promotion principles to support capacity strengthening across the social prescribing ecosystem. Link workers are required to ensure community organisations understand and are supported to participate in Local Connections (**Attachment 2**, slide 42). Where the embedded model is applied, link workers may also work alongside community engagement workers and peer workers to support capacity strengthening through community development approaches. Managers and supervisors of link workers should have an understanding of the dual role of the link worker, including building on community development approaches to support practice development.

Resource	Responsible party	Method of delivery/access
Professional development and training	Local Services	Local Services should support link workers to undertake learning and professional development opportunities to support the dual functions of the link worker role including community development.  <a href="https://www.jeder.com.au/abcd-asset-based-community-development-participatory-community-building/">https://www.jeder.com.au/abcd-asset-based-community-development-participatory-community-building/</a>  Local Services may also support link workers to engage in training to build practical skills such as public speaking and facilitation.  <a href="https://groupwork.com.au/courses/facilitation-training-course-2/">https://groupwork.com.au/courses/facilitation-training-course-2/</a>
Professional development and training for the community sector	Link Workers	Link workers may connect community-based organisations with high level social prescribing training to build their understanding of how Local Connections can support their community and ways to get involved.  <a href="https://openwho.org/courses/social-prescribing-WPRO">https://openwho.org/courses/social-prescribing-WPRO</a>
Community of Practice	Wellbeing Promotion Office	The Wellbeing Promotion Office will deliver a community of practice to support discussion, reflection and learning for Local Connections staff.

## Strengthening pathways between Local Connections and the community

Local Connections relies on link workers developing and maintaining a strong relationship with community-based organisations and activities that are available in the area. Knowledge of the community is the foundation for promoting Local Connections, developing referral pathways and importantly, identifying needs, gaps and opportunities to support capacity strengthening. Link workers are encouraged to work with the community to facilitate referrals both into Local Connections and back to the community (**Attachment 2**, slide 37).

Resource	Responsible party	Method of delivery/access
Professional development and supervision	Local Services	Link workers should be supported to develop skills in promoting social prescribing and how it can support potential clients, community groups and the broader community.
Community of Practice	Wellbeing Promotion Office	The Wellbeing Promotion Office will deliver a community of practice to support discussion, reflection and learning for Local Connections staff.
Local resources and directories	Link Workers	Link workers may engage with local directories such as council databases or the Ending Loneliness Directory to build on knowledge of

		<p>what is happening in the local area, noting that many activities may not be registered.</p> <p><a href="https://endingloneliness.com.au/search/">https://endingloneliness.com.au/search/</a></p>
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## Supporting safe, welcoming and inclusive spaces

Link workers are responsible for identifying safe, welcoming and inclusive spaces and supporting referrals to activities that can be trusted by clients (**Attachment 2**, slide 37). This includes ensuring activities are safe, welcoming and inclusive for people from diverse communities including multicultural, LGBTQIA+ and disability communities. Link workers should work with community organisations to develop an understanding of the types of groups available, how they are run and information that might support people to feel safe and confident in attending an activity.

Link workers play both an informal and formal role in supporting community groups to be welcoming spaces. Examples of informal work include conversations and meetings with community group facilitators and volunteers to build understand of the experience of loneliness, mental illness, carers and trauma – and how to set up or run a group in an inclusive and welcoming way. Formal work in this category includes the delivery of training, webinars and information sessions to help build community awareness and understanding.

Local Services should support the provision of mental health and wellbeing training for community activities and organisations to enable safe, welcoming and inclusive spaces (**Attachment 2** slide 42). This may include connecting community groups and organisations with external training providers and should be guided by the needs and interests of community and groups. Training and upskilling opportunities can be supported by the Local Connections flexible funding pool, with 20 per cent of the funding pool to be used to support local community groups in recognition of the essential role of community in the trial. Link workers may also undertake train the trainer opportunities such as mental health first aid and eCPR to enable sustainability of supports on offer for community organisations.

Resource	Responsible party	Method of delivery/access
Train the trainer	Link Workers and Local Services	Local Services may support link workers to participate in professional development opportunities focused on building skills to deliver training for community groups. Community capacity building opportunities should be guided by the needs and interests of community organisations
Local Connections needs analysis	Local Services	Local Services should support link workers to develop a deep understanding of their local community through the development of a local needs analysis, as outlined in the Social Prescribing Guidelines, and use this to guide identification of needs and opportunities to support the community.
External training providers	Local Services	Link workers can support community groups to connect with and access local, external training and upskilling opportunities in line with the needs and interests of community.

## Area 4: Supporting self-care

Self-care refers to the activities and practices that we deliberately choose to engage in on a regular basis to maintain and enhance our health and wellbeing. Self-care may include physical, psychological, emotional,

spiritual and workplace/professional based practices. Link workers should be supported to establish and maintain practices that support self-care and wellbeing in their role.

Key competencies for area four include:

- working and developing in a new role
- vicarious trauma awareness and prevention
- drawing on lived and living experience in a safe and sustainable way.

### Working and developing in a new role

Local Connections is a new offering delivered within a new service and link workers will require supports to establish their practice within the Local Service. Link workers should have access to ongoing internal and external supervision to support ongoing self-reflection and to guide opportunities for professional development. Professional development training for link workers to draw on their lived and living experience should also be supported, along with supports to avoid potential challenges that may come with developing in a new role such as peer drift and burnout.

Resource	Responsible party	Method of delivery/access
Community of Practice	Wellbeing Promotion Office	The Wellbeing Promotion Office will deliver a community of practice to support discussion, reflection and learning for Local Connections staff.
Professional Development and Supervision	Local Services	Local Services should provide regular supervision and access to ongoing learning and development to support link workers to work within the scope of their role, avoid peer drift and identify ways to build self-care into everyday practice.
External Supervision	Local Services	Link workers should be supported by Local Services to engage in regular external/clinical supervision to support reflective practices and professional development planning.

### Vicarious trauma prevention and awareness

Vicarious trauma describes the cumulative impact of empathetic engagement with other people's trauma<sup>2</sup> and is similar to related concepts such as burnout, compassion fatigue and secondary trauma stress. Link workers should be supported to develop skills and knowledge in prevention and awareness of vicarious trauma to support self-care strategies and reduce their risk of experiencing vicarious trauma. The experience of loneliness, a key focus for Local Connections, has also been shown to spread through a contagious process, and spreads more strongly than perceptions of social connection<sup>3</sup>. It is important for Local Services to consider specific needs of link workers as they are likely to be working closely with people experiencing loneliness.

Resource	Responsible party	Method of delivery/access
Professional development and supervision	Local Services	Local Services should support vicarious trauma prevention and awareness for link workers through regular supervision and ongoing training and development.

<sup>2</sup> <http://vtpat.org.au/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2792572/>



Vicarious trauma training	Local Services	Local Services should support link workers to undertake training opportunities related to vicarious trauma prevention and awareness. For example: <a href="#">Managing Wellbeing and Recognising Vicarious Trauma</a>
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## Drawing on lived and living experience in a safe and sustainable way

Drawing on lived and living experience in a safe and sustainable way when working in a designated role is important to prevent burnout and ensure safe practices. Having clear boundaries and ongoing support to maintain healthy practices will contribute to maintaining sustainability of the role of the link worker. When working in rural and regional areas, maintaining boundaries and separation between work and life can be particularly important as there can be a higher chance of personal and professional experiences crossing over. Local Services should support link workers through ongoing practice development and supervision including reflective practices and self-care supports to maintain safe and sustainable practices.

For more information about applying lived and living experience in practice, see area one.

Resource	Responsible party	Method of delivery/access
Supervision and professional development	Local Services	Local services should create opportunities for link workers to debrief through reflective practices, including through external supervision and peer support opportunities.  Lived experience workforce and peer worker training opportunities can support link workers to build on skills for safe practices.  Centre for Mental Health Learning have a database of consumer and carer supervisors that are available to provide discipline specific supervision: <a href="https://supervision.cmhl.org.au/">https://supervision.cmhl.org.au/</a>  <a href="https://cmhl.org.au/event/lived-experience-workforce-training">https://cmhl.org.au/event/lived-experience-workforce-training</a>
Lived Experience Workforce Training opportunities	Wellbeing Promotion Office	The Wellbeing Promotion Office will share key Local Connections contacts with the Department of Health's Lived Experience Branch to support access to training opportunities.
Community of Practice	Wellbeing Promotion Office	The Wellbeing Promotion Office will deliver a community of practice to support discussion, reflection and learning for Local Connections staff.