Final Report: Peer engagement in harm reduction: development, implementation and evaluation of best practice guidelines for British Columbia

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UBC Ethics Certificate #: H15-00126

a) Major accomplishments in this project.

The Peer Engagement and Evaluation Project (PEEP) aims were to:
1) Empower and inspire peer leadership,
2) Expand peer engagement and peer networks, and

PEEP met and exceeded these aims and accomplished more than we thought possible.

PEEP engaged people who use drugs, or ‘peers’, in every aspect of the research project. In 2015 we focused on building a team of peer advisors and collecting data. We hired, trained and grew a team of five peer research assistants, one from each of the regional health authorities. Soon after, we conducted 13 peer-facilitated focus groups across these regions, followed by a participatory data analysis and validation process. Over the course of this work, it has been important to stay connected. PEEP held team teleconference calls bi-weekly (for the first 18 months) then weekly (for the next 18 months) where we worked collaboratively on materials and shared what was happening regionally. We have also met in-person as much as possible. In addition to traveling to peers’ local health regions for focus groups and knowledge translation, PEEP has met as a team 7 times in person and engaged in hands-on work and training. Trainings have included Research 101, focus group facilitation, qualitative analysis and knowledge translation.

We collaboratively developed the first versions of the Peer Engagement Best Practice Guidelines for BC Health Authorities, and a companion piece - A Guide for Paying Peer Research Assistants; both were informed by the focus groups. Stigma was a major issue that emerged from the focus groups – this was a topic that the peer research assistants wanted to focus on. A Knowledge Translation Coordinator was employed to work with the peer research assistants to develop the Compassionate Engagement Modules – an interactive photo series that addresses stigma. The PEEP team developed an infographic of the focus groups results that could be shared with the community in an accessible way.
The peer engagement best practice guidelines and paying peer guides were presented to health authority leadership who approved taking them to their staff. The team was committed to take the findings back to the communities who had participated in the focus groups. Thus in 2017, we held 14 ‘convergences’ across 7 communities, which included 99 providers, 120 peers, and 30 public health leaders. At these convergences we shared the knowledge translation materials and conducted a brief survey with service providers about the accessibility and effectiveness of the materials. Knowledge gathered from participants in the convergences, shaped the second version of the Best Practice Guidelines, which includes A brief overview of the peer engagement principles and practices and the Peer Engagement Principles and Best Practices: a guide for BC health authorities and other providers (version 2). The brief overview was developed after feedback was given about the accessibility of the larger document (which is over 50 pages). The How To Involve People Who Use Drugs resource from BCCDC’s Toward the Heart program was also updated with input from peers and informed by the lessons learned in developing the Best Practice Guidelines.

Paying Peers

Through hiring peers, collecting data, and returning to the communities over 36 months, we learned that paying peers in community-based work is faced with ongoing challenges. Thus we partnered with the BCCDC and ran a short study to develop payment standards for peer work at the BCCDC. From this, we co-developed Peer Payment Standards for short term engagements and updated the Paying Peers in Community Based Work: an overview of considerations for equitable compensation (version 2). With financial support from the Peter Wall Institute we worked with a graphic designer and professional printer to make the materials, including the Best Practice Guidelines and payment resources, more attractive, and have a consistent look.

PEEP as an advisory group and knowledge translation

The team noted that PEEP has been engaged as a ‘go-to’ advisory group for all things regarding peer engagement and requiring peer input. The group has advised on multiple projects and products, including a Good Samaritan Drug Overdose poster, and an infographic on Language Matters. They also provided into a 2016 Peer Primer about the role of peers for the BC Overdose Action Exchange. PEEP has shared its materials and findings through several academic avenues: five peer-reviewed publications, and 16 conferences locally and internationally (see appendix 1). The group was also interviewed as part of the Peter Wall Solutions News series in 2017.

Adopting peer engagement in British Columbia

Peer engagement has become the standard for developing equitable and responsive harm reduction solutions across BC. In April 2016, a state of emergency was declared due to the dramatic increase in fentanyl poisonings and deaths across BC – the crisis continues today. Since the crisis was declared, we have witnessed an increase in the number of peer-initiated, peer-led, and peer-engaged responses. Examples of peer-based public health and social responses include the numerous overdose prevention services and policy task groups that are either run or informed by peers. Since the uptake of peer engagement methods across BC, PEEP’s resources have become the gold standard for best practices. Before PEEP materials were released, we received numerous requests for the Best Practice Guidelines and have distributed copies of the Guide across British Columbia, Canada and abroad.
Impact of fentanyl and need for supports

The fentanyl crisis across BC and North America has directly and indirectly had an impact on the project and our team. The peer research assistants and other research staff work on several projects outside of PEEP, including those in overdose response environments. Stress, trauma and burnout forced some team members to take a step back from the project either temporarily or permanently. We hired additional staff and focused on providing additional support through this time, and the team became a main source of ongoing support. We realized that peer worker support is a major gap in most engagement projects. We highlighted this challenge and provided recommendations in the Best Practice Guidelines on how to best support peer work. However, there is still much to learn. We successfully wrote a Health Canada funding application that will study these issues in 2018-2019.

The PEEP project was participatory in nature from beginning to end – the peer research assistants informed the approach, materials, and legacy of the project. Together we learned a great deal about the nature of participatory work and constraints that projects can sometimes place on the needs of the community. While it was our goal to be peer informed and respond to peer needs; however funding, time and other resources made this difficult. Participatory work is resource intensive – the staff, finances and support to run a true participatory (or peer engagement) project is often underestimated. However, resource constraints are not a valid reason to exclude the affected community. We learned that transparency and clear expectations mitigated frustration or tension in these circumstances.

We recognize the growth, expertise, and invaluable resource that the PEEP peer research assistants have become. We truly could not have done this project without them. To maintain the integrity of PEEP’s guiding principles (e.g. sustainability, accountability) the BCCDC identified funding for the PEEP research assistants to continue their work as the PEEP Consultation and Advisory Board meeting by phone weekly.
### PEEP activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Description</th>
<th>Purpose of the KT Activity</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Result of KT</th>
<th>Challenges or Lessons Learned</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convergences with community (n=7)</td>
<td>Share the focus group materials and PEEP materials</td>
<td>PEEP team; People who use drugs (n=120)</td>
<td>Increased capacity for engagement; enhanced peer network</td>
<td>Accessibility of materials and increase opportunity for peer engagement for participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Convergences with providers (n=7)</td>
<td>Introduce peer engagement principles and share the best practices; enhance capacity to do peer engagement</td>
<td>PEEP team; Service providers (n=99)</td>
<td>Increased knowledge of peer engagement and the best practices; capacity for community engagement</td>
<td>Organizational and leadership support was essential; lack of support and resources undermines meaningful engagement</td>
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<td>Leadership presentations (n=4)</td>
<td>Gain leadership buy in of peer engagement principles and support to share the best practice guidelines</td>
<td>PEEP team; Health authority leadership (n=30)</td>
<td>Support and endorsement of the peer engagement and the best practices</td>
<td>There is often a disconnect between leadership and service providers or the ‘front line’</td>
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<td>Conference presentations (n=9)</td>
<td>Share our findings and methods with other academics and audiences</td>
<td>PEEP team; Academics, students, service providers, peers, general public</td>
<td>Increased awareness of peer engagement; promotion of participatory work</td>
<td>More support (financial and personal) for peers and research assistants to attend conferences was needed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer-reviewed publications (n=5)</td>
<td>Share our findings and methods with other academics and audiences</td>
<td>PEEP team; Academics, students, service providers, peers, general public</td>
<td>Increased awareness of peer engagement; promotion of participatory work</td>
<td>Capacity of the project and support for staff to devote to writing and publishing work was needed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Best Practice Guidelines versions 1 &amp; 2 (brief and long)</td>
<td>To provide a guide to meaningful peer engagement for service providers</td>
<td>PEEP team; Health Authority staff and other service providers</td>
<td>Promotion of peer engagement principles and practices</td>
<td>Health authority leadership and resources are needed to promote meaningful work</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Guide to Paying Peer Research Assistants</td>
<td>To provide a guide for equitable pay in peer-based work</td>
<td>PEEP team; People who pay peers (employers)</td>
<td>Promotion of equitable peer pay</td>
<td>Financial systems change frequently; challenges are ongoing</td>
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<td>Compassionate engagement modules</td>
<td>Address stigma through an interactive photo series</td>
<td>PEEP team; Co-facilitated by and for peers and providers</td>
<td>Decreased stigma and increase compassion in health and harm reduction settings</td>
<td>Organizational and leadership culture change is needed to address systemic stigma</td>
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<td>Infographic</td>
<td>Translate the focus group findings back to the community in an accessible way</td>
<td>PEEP team; People who use drugs; service providers; general public</td>
<td>Translate the focus group findings and PEEP goals</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language Matters</td>
<td>A guide to non-stigmatizing language related to people who use drugs</td>
<td>PEEP team; People who use drugs; service providers; general public</td>
<td>Social inclusion and compassion for people who use drugs</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trainings</td>
<td>PowerPoint trainings of research, knowledge translation, and data analysis methods</td>
<td>PEEP team</td>
<td>Build capacity and skills for the peer research assistants</td>
<td>Develop and deliver trainings using multiple modes of communication</td>
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Appendix PEEP Resources: Publications and Reports

PEEP Publications:


Featured article


PEEP Reports:


A brief overview of the peer engagement principles and practice. Jan 2018


PEEP Infographics and brief 1 or 2-page summaries:

How to involve people who use drugs. Revised Dec 2017 (2-page Dos and don'ts)
http://www.towardtheheart.com/resource/how-to-involve-people-who-use-drugs/open

Language matters; 4 guidelines to using non-stigmatizing language Dec 6, 2017 (1-page infographic)
http://www.towardtheheart.com/resource/language-matters/open

Peer Engagement and Evaluation Project (One page project overview) http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/PEEP%20infographic%20v08[1].pdf


PEEP Conference Presentations


Pauly B, Greer A, PEEPS, Buxton J. Paying people with lived experience: an opportunity for equity in harm reduction Dialogue space presentation 25th Harm Reduction International Conference, Montreal. May 14-17, 2017


Greer A, Buxton JA. Paying people with lived experiences in community based work: Challenges and opportunities for inclusion and equity. Poster presentation CPHA annual conference; Public Health 2016, Toronto June 13-16, 2016

Buxton JA, Amlani A, Greer A, Mobach J, and PEEP Research Team. PEEPing into the lives of people who use drugs and understanding how their experiences are shaped by provider attitudes. Oral presentation CPHA annual conference; Public Health 2016, Toronto June 13-16, 2016
