

Lived Experience Advocates for Mental Health and Addictions

“NOTHING ABOUT US, WITHOUT US!”

Mandate

LEAMHA is a coalition led by people with lived experience of mental health and/or substance use challenges. We work to amplify the voices of individuals and communities, ensuring that decisions and policies reflect those most directly impacted—guided by the principle “nothing about us, without us.”

By people with lived experience, we mean those who have navigated mental health and/or substance use challenges, including those related to barriers and other experiences with mental health service systems and those related to experiences of discrimination and oppression. We recognize that language and identities continue to evolve, and we are committed to shaping our definitions together in ways that reflect our diverse realities.

Our advocacy grows from the roots of the consumer/survivor movement, challenging systemic barriers, and calling for community-driven solutions. We honour the leadership of Consumer/Survivor Initiatives (CSIs) as vital spaces for healing, resistance, and innovation.

We ground our work in the frameworks of Peer Support and Disability Justice. Peer Support guides us in practicing mutuality, compassion, and shared power, while Disability Justice offers a foundation for centering intersectionality, collective access, and cross-movement solidarity.

Together, these frameworks shape our commitment to building communities where everyone can belong, access support, and thrive—beginning in Ontario, expanding across Canada, and representing these values on a global stage.

Mission

LEAMHA advocates for systemic change in Ontario, across Canada, and globally. Grounded in Peer Support and Disability Justice, we amplify voices, challenge barriers, and promote community-driven solutions for all to access support and thrive.

Scope

Scope Description

LEAMHA is a coalition led by people with lived experience of mental health and/or substance use. Our scope is to shift systems and policies by centering on lived voices, practicing peer support, and building community-driven solutions. We take a harm reduction and Disability Justice approach, knowing that healing and justice come from reducing harm, sharing power, and creating spaces where everyone belongs.

In Scope

- Advocacy led by lived experience to influence local, provincial, national, and global policy.
- Peer-led representation at events, conferences, and decision-making spaces
- Creating and sharing knowledge (op-eds, zines, policy briefs, research partnerships)
- Building community through newsletters, storytelling, and collective organizing
- Engaging in resistance and pushback, grounded in risk assessment and collective safety
- Networking with decision-makers in ways that protect our independence and values
- Amplifying community initiatives aligning with our values in a way that honors their work and sustains our relationships with funders.

Values

- **Lived Experience Leadership:** We believe people with lived experience of mental health and substance use health must lead in shaping the systems, policies, and communities that impact our lives.
- **Beyond the Medical Model:** Our experiences and cultures extend beyond diagnoses and treatment. Recovery means a whole life—rooted in housing, community, income, and joy—not just services.
- **Human Rights and Dignity:** We affirm the basic human rights of all people, especially those facing systemic barriers. Housing, income, employment, and access to care are not privileges, but rights.
- **Trauma-Informed and Peer-Led:** We ground our advocacy in peer support, compassion, mutuality, and shared power, ensuring that no one is left behind.
- **Resistance and Solidarity:** We resist shame, stigma, and systemic oppression, and act in solidarity with broader movements for justice, equity, and liberation.
- **Proactive Advocacy:** We don't wait for change—we push for it. We challenge systems, policies, and practices that cause harm, and we advocate community-driven solutions

with grounded harm, and we advocate community-driven solutions rooted in justice and equity.

- **Harm Reduction:** We affirm harm reduction as a lifesaving, dignity-affirming approach that respects people's choices, reduces stigma, and creates safer communities.
- **Right to Self-Determination:** We believe every person has the right to make decisions about their own body, health, and life—free from force, coercion, and judgment.
- **Intersectionality and Justice:** We root our advocacy in Disability Justice, acknowledging that struggles against racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and colonialism are interconnected.
- **Community and Peer Power:** We honor Consumer/Survivor Initiatives (CSIs) as vital services and fight for fair funding and resources for peer-led programs

Reconciliation, Anti-racism, Anti-oppression, Diversity & Inclusion:

LEAMHA aims to incorporate the principles of Reconciliation, anti-racism, anti-oppression, diversity and inclusion by striving to include and center members from Indigenous, black, racialized and immigrant communities, for example, who may find it difficult to access services. This coalition also aims to ensure representation across intersectional dimensions, including but not limited to the Francophone community.

Confidentiality Principles:

Members of the **Lived Experience Advocates for Mental Health & Addictions (LEAMHA)** may be privy to confidential information concerning individuals with lived experience, coalition business, and partner organizations. All such information, whether shared verbally, in writing, or electronically, is to be treated as strictly confidential.

1. **Scope:** Confidentiality applies to all discussions, documents, decisions, and occurrences within coalition meetings and activities.
2. **Non-Disclosure:** Personal information or lived experience shared by members shall not be disclosed outside the coalition without explicit consent. Collective or non-identifying information may only be shared for advocacy purposes as approved by the coalition.
3. **Virtual Protocols:** As meetings are mostly conducted via Zoom, members shall ensure they join from a secure environment, refrain from recording sessions, and not distribute meeting links or materials to unauthorized parties.
4. **In-person meetings:** Occasionally, in-person meetings will be held.

5. **Obligation:** All members are responsible for upholding confidentiality as a condition of participation. Breaches may result in a review of membership.

Comfort Agreement / Policy of Conduct:

A few edits were made to the old comfort agreement, and it's a 'Living document' that will be reviewed periodically.

[LEAMHA Comfort Agreement.docx](#)

Goals and Objectives

6-Month Goal (Foundation Phase)

Goal: Build LEAMHA's base, centering mutual support, harm reduction, and lived experience leadership.

Objectives & Details

1. **Create our foundation together**
 - a. Finalize Terms of Reference, Mandate, Vision, Mission, Values, Comfort Agreement
 - b. Define membership roles, quorum, and decision-making practices rooted in shared power.
 - c. Promote the advocacy coalition across service users with the agency and other stakeholders/ community partners
2. **Strengthen our relationships**
 - a. Conduct monthly LEAMHA meetings
 - b. Reach out to allies and decision-makers with a peer-led, harm reduction lens.
 - c. Begin conversations with Ontario Health.
3. **Lift our voices**
 - a. Launch a website to document our advocacy and campaigns.
 - b. Launch a community newsletter/zine that showcases peer voices and community initiatives.
 - c. Publish first op-eds/blogs centering on lived experiences.
4. **Show up as a coalition.**
 - a. Participate in events, conferences, and committees to represent lived voices.

- b. Engage in at least one resistance initiative with care, collective decision-making, and risk assessment.

1–2 Year Goal (Growth & Influence)

Goal: Expand LEAMHA’s reach, deepen our advocacy, and strengthen our collective identity.

Objectives & Details

1. **Shape policy through lived knowledge**
 - a. Co-create policy briefs rooted in lived experience and harm reduction
 - b. Build relationships with researchers who respect peer leadership
2. **Sustain our storytelling**
 - a. Publish a quarterly zine/newsletter featuring community voices
 - b. Use social media to amplify grassroots initiatives in a diplomatic, funder-conscious way
3. **Grow our coalition**
 - a. Secure regular seats at provincial/national advocacy tables
 - b. Expand membership across Ontario, centering diverse communities
4. **Nurture peer leadership**
 - a. Develop and deliver peer-led advocacy and leadership trainings
 - b. Host roundtables and public education sessions that center on harm reduction and peer support practices

5-Year Goal (Movement-Building & Global Reach)

Goal: LEAMHA becomes a leading peer-led coalition shifting mental health and substance use policy, rooted in collective care, resistance, and justice.

Objectives & Details

1. **Transform policy and systems**
 - a. Influence provincial and national policy frameworks with lived experience leadership
 - b. Be recognized as a key voice for peer-led, harm reduction-based advocacy
2. **Grow our knowledge and storytelling**
 - a. Publish community-rooted reports and academic articles co-created with peers
 - b. Build LEAMHA’s zine and website into leading platforms for peer-led advocacy knowledge
3. **Stand in global solidarity**
 - a. Represent LEAMHA in international advocacy forums

- b. Build alliances with global harm reduction, disability justice, and peer support movements
- 4. **Secure sustainability**
 - a. Build solidarity across movements for housing, harm reduction, and disability justice
 - b. Develop stable funding streams to sustain peer-led independence.

LEAMHA Membership Plan

Recruitment Criteria

Eligibility

- 18+ years of age
- Lived experience of mental health and/or substance use challenges
- Alignment with LEAMHA values (peer support, harm reduction, disability justice, intersectionality)
- Interest in advocacy and systemic change
- Commitment to regular attendance and participation for the six-month membership period.
- Open to learning and supporting peers.
- Geographical scope: regions covered under Krasman Centre funding (Ontario focus: North York (City of Toronto), York and Simcoe (South)

Application Process

- Applications submitted through the LEAMHA website (with Terms of Reference included as part of the application). A form will be embedded on the website.
- Alternate form formats will be available: audio/video submissions, paper forms, or assisted completion with a coordinator during a meeting
- Membership is capped for 12-month periods to allow for turnover and accessibility. All members commit to an initial 6-month term, renewable after check-in and feedback form/meeting.

Absence Policy

We understand that mental health and life circumstances can affect availability. Members may miss up to **two meetings in six months or three meetings in one year**. Please let the group know when possible. This policy supports care for one another while keeping the coalition connected and accountable.

- Over 6 months, 2 absences are acceptable—3 per year.
- Please try to give prior notice of absence if possible.

Membership Structure

General Members: Individuals who join through the application process and form the membership body.

Membership Renewal: Renewal occurs every 6 months, based on participation check-ins and feedback from the member. Self-accountability is the key value.

Honorarium: 25 Dollars

Impact on membership numbers:

- Providing an honorarium to all members directly limits the number of people who can join the coalition at one time, at least until additional funding is secured.
- To balance this, we are considering a **6-month commitment period**, with the option for members to renew for another 6 months.

Turnover and renewal:

Term Length & Renewal: The membership is for **one year**, with the option to **renew once for a second year** (maximum of two consecutive years).

Staggered Terms:

To support continuity, we **stagger membership terms**. This means not all of us start or finish our terms at the same time, so the coalition always includes members with experience and context. Staggering helps us share knowledge and make transitions smoother.

Staying Connected Beyond Two Years:

If we reach the two-year limit, we can choose to stay connected in **non-member or advisory ways**, without an honorarium, if it feels sustainable and we wish to continue contributing.

Membership Cap:

- To be set annually based on available budget and resources

Membership Benefits: Participation in coalition decision-making, advocacy opportunities, and peer support. A 12-month renewal allows flexibility and reduces barriers for members.

Attendance & Engagement Practices

Baseline Participation: 40% of members present for a meeting to commence and for votes to count (quorum)

Meeting Frequency: Once per month, with opportunities for additional advocacy work as needed

Time Commitment: 1.5-2 hours/month for meetings + additional hours for advocacy projects (flexible and voluntary)

Attendance Policy:

- Members are required to notify us in advance if they are unable to attend a meeting.
- Missing **two meetings without notice** → The coordinator will check in with the member.
- Members may take **guilt-free pauses**; they can rejoin after a 12-month renewal cycle if needed.

Voting & Quorum Policy

Quorum Requirement: 40% of members must be present for decision-making or voting

Voting Rights: All general members have one vote

Consensus Practice: Strive for consensus; when not possible, decisions will be made by majority vote with quorum

Communication & Connection

Communication Platform: A group communication channel (to be chosen collectively for accessibility, e.g., WhatsApp, Signal, Slack, or email list)

Peer Support Culture: Communication should align with LEAMHA values — respect, trauma-informed, harm reduction, inclusivity & accessibility-focused

Check-ins: Regular space for emotional check-ins and support during meetings

Meeting Structure

Frequency: Monthly general meetings (virtual or hybrid where possible)

Facilitation: Krasman coordinator will be the facilitator and eventually members can chair to share power and build leadership skills

Agenda-Setting: Drafted collaboratively by coordinators and members, circulated in advance

Meeting Structure:

- Opening round/check-in
- Updates & agenda items
- Discussion & decision-making
- Next Steps and Task allocation
- Closing reflections & peer connection

Secretariat – Role Description

Purpose

The Secretariat provides **administrative and coordination support** to the coalition. It is not a member's body, does not hold decision-making power, and does not represent lived experience on behalf of the coalition. Instead, the Secretariat ensures that the coalition has the structure, tools, and systems it needs to function smoothly, while decision-making and advocacy remain led by members with lived and living experience.

Scope of Work

Administrative Support: Organize coalition meetings, manage scheduling, and maintain records (e.g., attendance, agendas, minutes, membership renewals).

Communication Support: Maintain email lists, digital platforms, and communication channels to keep members connected.

Documentation: Ensure transparent documentation of decisions, meeting notes, and policies, making them accessible to all members.

Membership Processes: Support application intake, renewal check-ins, and feedback mechanisms.

Logistical Support: Assist with honorariums (if applicable), budget tracking for coalition activities, and ensuring accessibility needs are supported.

Information Hub: Serve as a central contact point for questions about coalition processes (not advocacy positions).

Boundaries of Role

- The Secretariat does not vote, influence, or participate in decision-making on coalition priorities, advocacy, or positions.
- Staff serving as representatives of the Secretariat are not considered member/s of the coalition by default.
- If staff wish to participate as members, they may apply separately through the membership process, ensuring a clear distinction between their Secretariat and member roles.

Limitations

- At this stage, the Secretariat role is being resourced through the host organization's existing funding.
- Coalition activities will use the host organization's website and communication platforms until dedicated funding is secured.
- These arrangements are intended as temporary support and will remain in place until independent funding is established, at which point the coalition may revisit and restructure the Secretariat function to support greater independence.

Values

The Secretariat operates from a lens of **respect, harm reduction, accessibility, and peer support**, ensuring that coalition members with lived experience remain at the center of decision-making and advocacy.