

Community and Citizen Insights



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Community and Citizen Insights

This document contains a summary of the insights that were gathered as part of the codesign of the Fairer Health for All Leadership approach. These insights were gathered through one to one conversations, group discussions and through wider pieces of work and discussions that could meaningfully inform this work.



Lived Experience as Leadership

“The challenges we’ve lived through don’t disqualify us they prepare us to lead with empathy, insight, and strength.”

Key insights:

- Leadership often emerges from personal experiences with adversity such as mental health challenges, addiction recovery, immigration, discrimination, and parenting.
- These experiences foster empathy, resilience, and a deep understanding of community needs.
- People with lived experience often become trusted connectors and advocates within their communities

Leadership Without Titles

“Leadership isn’t about titles, it’s about showing up, making change, and doing what’s right for your community.”

Key insights:

- Leadership is frequently informal and not always recognised by traditional systems.
- Many individuals lead through everyday actions, supporting others, creating safe spaces, and responding to unmet needs.
- The term “leadership” may not resonate with everyone, but the impact is clear and meaningful.



Enablers of Leadership

“When we build trust, share power, and create space for others, leadership flourishes in every corner of the community.”

Key insights:

- Collaboration: Co-designing with communities and sharing power fosters trust and relevance.
- Trust & Relationships: Built through consistent, respectful engagement and outreach. Trust must be mutual.
- Spaces to Connect: There is a need for both formal and informal spaces where communities and public services can meet and collaborate.
- Fair Exchange: Contributions from communities should be valued and reciprocated not extracted without recognition.
- Support Systems: Peer support, volunteering, and holistic wellbeing initiatives are vital for sustainable change.
- Community Ownership: Leadership development should be community-led, not imposed through pre-designed programmes.

Design Principles for Leadership Development

“Design with people, not for them. Keep it simple, flexible, and rooted in real life.”

Key insights:

- Keep support real, relevant, and bite-sized, accessible and flexible for different groups.
- Avoid one-size-fits-all approaches; tailor support to individual and community needs.
- Focus on early help, especially for families, women, and those with lived experience of trauma.
- Recognise and support non-traditional forms of leadership, especially those rooted in care, creativity, and community action.
- Design with emotion, humanity, and lived experience at the centre.
- Encourage testing and exploration, allowing people to try things out without fear of failure.

Language & Framing

“Words shape what’s possible, let’s speak in ways that include, empower, and reflect the realities of those we serve.”

Key insights:

- Language shapes understanding. Many community leaders do not identify with formal terms like “leadership.”
- Avoid categorising people, see them as whole individuals with complex identities.
- Build shared language while respecting different ways of expressing ideas.
- Use storytelling and creative expression to make inequality and lived experience visible and relatable.

Power & Equity

“True leadership shifts power, not just positions. It starts by listening and ends by sharing the decisions.”

Key insights

- Leadership must address inequality and power dynamics.
- Communities want to be involved from the beginning, not invited in after decisions are made.
- Shared decision-making and reverse mentoring can help bridge gaps between systems and communities.
- Recognise and support the power already present in communities.



Barriers to Community Leadership

“There’s no shortage of ideas just a shortage of access, support, and belief in those who carry them.”

Key insights:

- **Funding:** Accessing grants is difficult due to bureaucracy, restrictive criteria, and lack of support for small or emerging groups.
- **Confidence & Skills:** Many community members lack bid-writing skills, public speaking confidence, and understanding of funding structures.
- **Gatekeeping:** Larger organisations often dominate relationships with public services, limiting visibility and access for smaller groups.
- **Red Tape:** Bureaucratic requirements (e.g., insurance, formal structures) can hinder grassroots efforts.
- **Representation:** There is a lack of diversity in leadership and decision-making spaces, which can lead to exclusion and mistrust.
- **Navigation:** Finding support is challenging, especially for unconstituted groups or those unfamiliar with formal systems.

Emerging Needs and Opportunities

“If we want lasting change, we must invest in what matters most, families, wellbeing, creativity, and community-led solutions.”

Key insights:

- Greater support is needed for women’s health, early years, and family wellbeing, especially around birth trauma, mental health, and attachment.
- Volunteering and peer support are key pathways to leadership and employment.
- Long-term investment is needed, not short-term programmes.
- Creative arts are powerful tools for healing, connection, and leadership development.



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