

Compensation practices for lived expertise in mental health and substance use system decision-making



Compensation practices for engaging people with lived expertise (PWLE) varies widely across organizations and sectors. The *Supporting Transformation through Research, Evidence, and Action in Mental health (STREAM) Lab* at the *Waypoint Centre for Mental Healthcare* conducted a survey to understand current compensation practices for engaging PWLE in mental health and substance use (MHSU) organizational and system-level decision-making across large organizations in Ontario and Canada. Based on survey responses, we highlight key findings and considerations that may be relevant to decision-makers supporting MHSU systems planning in Ontario.

Of the 26 organizations we contacted, 11 submitted a complete response:

- eight from Ontario (including two specific to Central Ontario and one specific to Toronto), one from British Columbia, and two pan-Canadian organizations
- two were PWLE-led, three focused on children and youth, and two were MHSU-specific hospitals

PWLE roles and engagement activities

Respondants listed a number of ways PWLE were engaged in organizational and system-level decision-making:

Role	Examples of activities
Project or research participant	Participating in research interviews, quality improvement feedback surveys
Consultant	Attending townhalls, reviewing project materials, providing guidance on advisory boards
Co-developer	Partnering on research, quality improvement initiatives, and/or staff training initiatives
Full-time staff	Completing tasks as outlined by job descriptions

Time commitments involved in these activities may also vary from one-off engagement sessions, to longer-term project-based work, to weekly or monthly commitments.

Monetary compensation

It is difficult to identify a typical rate of compensation, due to a wide variety in compensation practices. Most frequently, organizations compensate PWLE at a rate of **\$20-40/h** across activities. Organizations may also pay per day, year, or activity, or use a combination of compensation structures, while full-time staff may be salaried.

Most organizations offer monetary compensation via cheque, e-transfer, or direct bank deposits. If preferred by patients, some organizations also offer gift cards or cash.



Non-monetary supports

Organizations also offer several non-monetary supports, sometimes on a case-by-case basis, and often depending on funding availability. Examples include:

- Reimbursement for events and meetings (e.g., travel, accommodations, meals)
- Access to organizational supports (e.g., work laptop, office space, professional development training, leadership opportunities, networking support)
- Gifts, including nominal items of cultural significance, and prizes

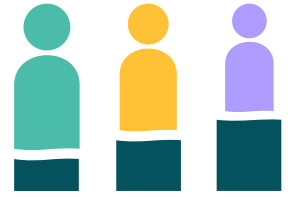
Additionally, PWLE are acknowledged for their contributions through award nominations, co-authorship opportunities, and/or volunteer hours for youth participants.

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Equity in compensation practices

Most organizations also described adopting the following strategies to promote equity:

- delivering payments in formats based on PWLE's preferences
- covering certain costs up front, rather than providing reimbursements later
- offering alternatives when compensation may negatively impact PWLE income supports



There are several limitations to the evidence presented:

- Findings provide a snapshot of current practices, and do not necessarily represent best practices
- Variation in compensation structures limited comparisons across organizations
- Perspectives of PWLE were not directly captured in this report, as data collection focused on organizational policies and practices
- Given the small sample size and low response rate, findings are solely illustrative rather than fully representative



Considerations for decision-makers:

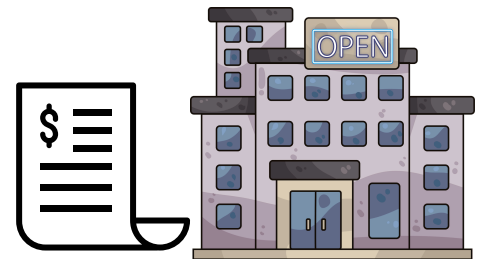
Co-designing compensation practices with PWLE.

Engage PWLE in identifying preferred payment formats, types of recognition (including monetary and non-monetary), and approaches that take into account PWLE preferences, needs, and access barriers (e.g., need for additional preparation time).



Aligning with current compensation practices used across the MHSU sector.

Existing compensation practices used by other, similar organizations can serve as a foundation for co-developing consistent, yet flexible, approaches.



Developing compensation policies that are responsive, relevant, and aligned with evolving standards in PWLE engagement.

Regularly review and update compensation practices to account for context changes, such as inflation and emerging national and provincial guidance.



About STREAM Lab

Supporting Transformation through Research, Evidence, and Action in Mental Health (STREAM) Lab is dedicated to meeting the evidence needs of mental health and addictions decision-makers in Ontario and beyond. *STREAM* products focus on evidence related to health systems, delivering actionable insights that can inform planning and decision-making. *STREAM* is based at the *Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care*. The findings in this product should not be taken to represent the views of *Waypoint* or our funders.