



## Steering Committee Biographies



**Co-Chair**  
**Tim Heffernan**  
*He/him*  
**Biography**

Tim Heffernan is a Deputy Commissioner with the Mental Health Commission of NSW and an experienced consumer peer worker.

Tim is a past chair of Being (NSW Consumer Advisory Group) and the NSW Public Mental Health Consumer Workers Committee. He was the Deputy co-chair for the National Mental Health Commission's Peer Workforce Development Guidelines Steering Committee. Tim has been a member of the NSW Consumer Led Research Network since its inception in 2015.

Tim is an executive member of the Illawarra Shoalhaven Suicide Prevention Collaborative. In 2013 he was awarded a scholarship to attend Boston University's Global Leadership Institute to develop a co-designed project, Safety for All, which involved peer workers training mental health nurses working on acute mental health wards to reduce seclusion and restraint.

Tim explores this complex world through poetry.

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**Professor the Hon. Kevin Bell AM KC**

*He/him*

**Biography**

Kevin Bell is a Professor and the former Director of the Castan Center for Human Rights Law in the Faculty of Law at Monash University.

He was a justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria for fifteen years during which he delivered many foundational judgments on human rights under the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic), including several concerning people with lived experience of mental illness and the impact of inequality, discrimination and stigma on generally.

He is a past-President of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal and the Victorian Forensic Leave Panel. He is a member of the Yoo-rrook Justice Commission, a Royal Commission recently established to undertake a truth-telling and transitional justice process in relation to the First Peoples of Victoria. Prior to becoming a judge, he was a barrister and Queens Counsel for twenty years practicing in several areas, including human rights, industrial and employment law.

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**Tanya Blazewicz**

*She/her*

**Biography**

Reformed Medical Scientist turned Peer Project Worker. Passionate about delivering trauma-informed, compassionate care!

Advocate for mental health services to be more person-driven and relationship focused. Frame of reference is trauma based, asking “What happened to you?” rather than “What’s wrong with you?” Particular interests include, LGBTQIA+ and youth mental health, suicide prevention, lived experience engagement at all levels, advocacy and policy change.

Looking forward to a future where we ‘dig deeper’ around mental health and see past the DSM to the social determinants – like poverty, racism, intergenerational trauma, homophobia and transphobia. Discrimination should not exist within mental health services, people should feel safe where they go for help.

The people I work with help me more than I could ever help them. #mutualityandreciprocity

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**Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine**

*She/her*

**Biography**

Tessa is the founding CEO of Health Justice Australia, established in 2016 as the national centre of excellence for health justice partnership.

Originally a criminologist, she has worked in health, criminal justice and human rights organisations in Australia and internationally. She was previously Deputy CEO of the Australian Council of Social Service and was the inaugural Fulbright Professional Scholar in Nonprofit Leadership, the report of which was published [Lead or be left behind: Sustaining trust and confidence in Australia's charities](#).

Tessa's PhD on the detention and release of mentally disordered offenders was published as a book, [Protecting the Public? Detention and Release of Mentally Disordered Offenders](#) by Routledge in 2010. She is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors; on the Advisory Committee of the Sydney Institute of Criminology; the Board of Gondwana Choirs, the leader in Australian choral performance; and plays ultimate Frisbee.

Tessa's [TEDx on health justice partnerships](#) explains why seeing a lawyer might be good for your health and her [TEDx on philanthropy through partnership](#) argues against 'bizsplaining' and builds on her work as the inaugural Fulbright Professional Scholar in Nonprofit Leadership.

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**John Canning**

*He/him*

**Biography**

Diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder in 2008, John Canning, through self-realisation and education, now leads a fulfilling life with support from doctors, family, friends and his workplace.

As a member of the KWM leadership team he helped implement the Tristan Jepson Memorial Foundation (now Minds Count -<https://mindscount.org/what-we-do/>) Guidelines. Having experienced the pain of suicide, John and his family stood up against mental health stigmas and are advocates of improving awareness through education.

John believes all sufferers, carers and anyone touched by mental illness must be able to talk openly and be treated without fear or prejudice. John has a “talk anytime, anywhere” approach to any mental health discussions and he frequently presents to, and swaps ideas with, clients, other law firms and industry bodies. He also pursues and discusses mental health initiatives with schools and organisations such as SANE Beyond Blue and Black Dog Institute. As a presenter for the Black Dog Institute Community Education Programs he developed a unique understanding of his illness.

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**Dr Sarah Chalmers  
Biography**

Dr Sarah Chalmers is a Rural Generalist and Senior Lecturer at JCU in North Queensland. She is also the President of the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine.

Sarah worked in East Arnhem Land in the NT for 15 years, before moving to North Queensland in 2019. She has worked in private general practice, hospitals and remote Aboriginal communities and homelands in the Northern Territory and is now in FIFO role to Western Queensland.

She has always been interested in medical education for both medical students and GP and RG registrars. Her clinical interests include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health, remote practice and occupational medicine.

She also volunteers at rugby union tournaments whenever she gets the chance.

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**Kelly Clark**

*She/her*

**Biography**

Kelly has a strong dislike of writing biographies, as she believes they are unable to capture the rationality required for important work and demanded by the nature of the human person.

Philosophically, Kelly is a phenomenological personalist; economically, a guild socialist (or Distributivist); ethnically, a Worimi, wipella (whitefulla), and Cuban; culturally, an Anglocatholic; professionally, an asker of questions and suggester of reforms.

Kelly currently receives money as the Lived Experience Lead, a Research Officer, at the Centre for Social Impact, UWA. She is a member of the WA Mental Health network, including sitting on the steering committees for the Personality Disorder- and the Neuropsychiatry & Developmental Disability Subnetworks; a SANE Peer Ambassador; and a member of the Indigenous Lived Experience Centre.

Kelly attempts to live a Via Pulchritudinis, believing that Beauty shows forth in Goodness, and leads to the Truth.

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**Professor Allan Fels AO  
Biography**

Professor Allan Fels, former Chair of the National Mental Health Commission and former Commissioner of the Victorian Royal Commission into Mental Health is best known in Australia as former high profile Chair of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC).

He Chairs the Haven Foundation which provides accommodation, care and support for persons with severe and persistent mental illness and is a board member of Mind Australia.

He was awarded the Australia National Mental Health Prize in 2017



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**Maria Katsonis**

*She/her*

**Biography**

Maria is a Public Policy Fellow at the University of Melbourne where she teaches public policy and management at a post graduate level. She previously worked as a senior executive in the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet for 20 years in the areas of social policy and governance.

While Maria lives with a chronic mental illness, she leads an active and purposeful life. She regularly speaks about her lived experience to corporate, community and school audiences. Maria is a Beyond Blue Ambassador and was a member of Mental Health Australia's National Consumers and Carers Forum. She has also written about her mental illness and recovery for The Age and Guardian newspapers.

Maria has a Master of Public Administration from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and is a Fellow of Leadership Victoria. She was named an Australian Financial Review Woman of Influence for her leadership in diversity and inclusion.

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**Mark Orr AM**

*He/him*

**Biography**

Mark is the Chief Executive of Flourish Australia, a leading Community Managed Organisation providing community-based support and employment for people living with a complex mental health issue in NSW, Victoria, the ACT and South-East Queensland, with a growing service footprint in the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

He is a registered psychologist with postgraduate qualifications in health service management, health informatics, corporate governance, and special education.

Mark has a strong commitment to good governance and capacity building in Community Managed Organisations. He is a board member of the Mental Health Coordinating Council Limited (NSW) and Mental Health Australia Limited.

Mark has a specific interest in service redesign, innovation, and evaluation, and, in particular, the use of technology to deliver information and supports to people with lived experience, their families and carers. He is currently undertaking a Doctorate in Public Health in that area at the University of New South Wales

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**Dave Peters**

*He/him*

**Biography**

Dave has lived with mental health issues for most of his life, but it has only been since accessing supports in his late 20's that he shifted focus to concentrate on having input into service design, evaluation, research and continuous improvement.

Dave has also been involved in the Equally Well program since 2018 and is deeply and personally invested in improving the physical health outcomes for people living with mental illness/distress

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**Professor Nicholas Procter**

*He/him*

**Biography**

Professor Nicholas Procter is Chair: Mental Health Nursing and director of the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Research and Education Group at the University of South Australia.

He is a Registered Nurse with longstanding interest in trauma informed practice and compassion focused mental health and suicide prevention, and has published widely on these topics.

His most recent book *Mental Health: A Person-centred Approach* (Cambridge University Press) will be published in 2022. Professor Procter is currently Australia's national representative to the International Association for Suicide Prevention (until 2023).

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**Navin (Sam) Regi**

*He/him*

**Biography**

Navin Sam Regi is multimedia journalist, and academic pursuing embedded stories through process driven journalism.

Sam currently works as an academic at the University of Queensland (UQ) and as an independent producer. Sam is part of the ARC Project – Amplifying voices of the aged care commission as an MPhil scholarship student at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), researching the role of participatory media and process driven journalism in storytelling with resilient communities. An independent producer, Sam is working on an ABC-UQ collaboration, to produce a series of panel discussions for the Think Twice television program and his own long-term journalism project on grief and death.

Sam has won few accolades, most notable a grant by the Alan Whicker's Foundation in London to document the audio stories for his project. He was also part of a team that won the 2016 Queensland multicultural reporting award of the year