# Co-developing the Lived Experience Advocacy Program (LEAP): Training for survivors of intimate partner violence interested in research engagement

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## Background

- Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to abusive behavior that occurs within a current or former intimate partner relationship[1]
- IPV can result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling or manipulative behaviours[1]
- Survivors of IPV bring essential perspectives to research, but effective involvement often requires training to help them understand research processes, their roles, and the value of their contributions[2,3]
- Existing training programs vary in content, depth, and alignment with equity and power-sharing principles, which can affect how meaningfully survivors are able to participate
- These barriers highlight the need for adaptable training and experiential learning to support more equitable and sustainable engagement[4]

## Objectives

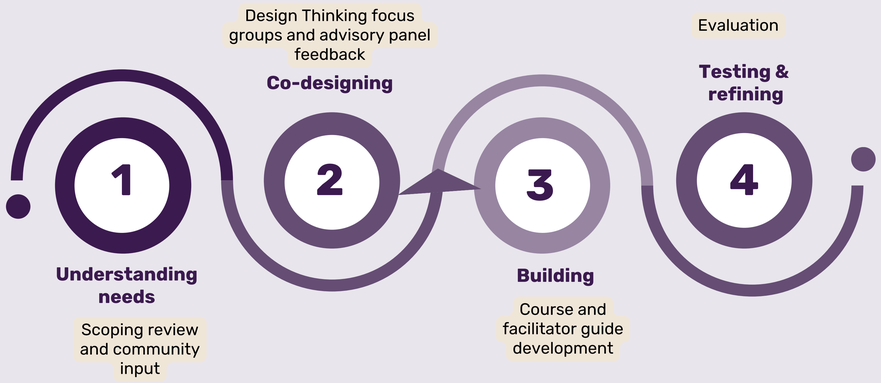
1. To **map and synthesize existing training programs** that prepare people with lived experience (PWLE) to engage in health and social research, including program content, outcomes, gaps, and recommendations.
2. To **co-develop the Lived Experience Advocacy Program (LEAP)**, a survivor-informed research training initiative (both synchronous and asynchronous) that specifically equips IPV survivors to meaningfully engage in research.

## Methodology

**Research Question 1**
What training programs have been developed to equip PWLE with foundational research skills and knowledge to engage in health and social research?

**Research Question 2**
What should a research training course for PWLE of IPV include, and how should it be structured and delivered?

**Research Question 3**
How effective, relevant, and practical is the newly developed course in preparing PWLE for meaningful research engagement?




**Advisory Panel Members**

- 14 advisors provided written responses to the Focus Group questions
- Advisors included researchers, mental health experts, community members, service providers, and people with lived experience of IPV
- Most advisors identified as white women in their 40s

**Focus Group Participants**

- Two-stage focus groups with survivors: Discovery (n=9) and Validation (n=8)
- 6 participants provided additional written feedback, including one participant unable to attend the live sessions.
- Participants were survivors of IPV
- All participants identified as women and represented diverse ages and ethnicities

## Results

- Findings of the **scoping review (n=35)** indicated that most programs prioritized foundational research skills. Gaps included the tokenistic involvement of PWLE and the need for standardized methods of training evaluation.

| Gaps | Recommendations |
|---|---|
| Program evaluation and knowledge translation | Strengthening evaluation through standardized and longitudinal approaches |
| Tokenistic engagement, unclear roles, power imbalance, limited preparedness | Shared ownership, early role clarification, integration of PWLE as co-researchers |
| Access and resource constraints | Financial support, compensation, multilingual and flexible delivery, improved technological and logistical accessibility |
| Content coverage and structure related to curriculum | Flexible, applied, and interactive training approaches |

- **Focus groups and advisory panel feedback (n=26)** highlighted the importance of plain language, centering lived experience, embedding ethics throughout the program, ensuring cultural safety and meaningful representation, and incorporating hands-on, practice-based experimental learning through art-based activities.




**Figure:** What a successful LEAP experience looks like for participants

**Based on these findings, the LEAP program sessions are organized as:**

| |
|---|
| Session 0: Self-Paced Orientation |
| Session 1: Foundations of Lived Experience Co-research |
| Session 2: Lived Experience, Communication, and Self-Reflection |
| Session 3: Ethics, Equity, and Cultural Safety |
| Session 4: Understanding Research Methods |
| Session 5: Engagement, Leadership, and Future Pathways |
| Session 6: Applying Research Skills in Practice: Reflection and Community Priorities |

## Conclusion

LEAP offers a co-developed approach to support meaningful engagement by IPV survivors in research.

It centres lived experience, safety, autonomy, accessibility, and ethical, trauma- and violence-informed research.

## Next Steps

The next step is to beta test the newly developed course with IPV survivors and refine it based on their feedback. A final version of the course is expected to be available in March 2027.

**Scan the QR code to learn more**

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4. Dembele, L., Nathan, S., Carter, A., Costello, J., Hodgins, M., Singh, R., Martin, B., & Cullen, P. (2024). Researching with lived experience: A shared critical reflection between co-researchers. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 23. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069241257945

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