

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse People

Factsheet



Engaging with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) people presents additional factors that organisations need to be aware of and sensitive to. CALD people currently comprise 31% of the Australian population and may have different expectations, experiences and perspectives that need to be considered.

Considerations when Engaging with CALD People

- It is important not to make assumptions about individuals on the basis of their culture. Flexibility and offering options should be key at all times.
- CALD people are not homogenous. CALD groups are diverse and encompass a range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Individuals may also identify as multicultural.
- Communication is a major consideration. Recognising that communication is not only verbal but also includes body language, tone, sentence structure and the use of slang terms.
- CALD clients may have experienced discrimination, marginalisation and racism which could impact their engagement with organisations and services. They may not feel comfortable providing feedback or engaging.
- Community organisations and leaders are a crucial resource when engaging with CALD communities.
- Knowledge of the migration experience is essential. There are many differences in the experience and it is important to be aware of the decisions, stressors and potential trauma involved, particularly when working with refugees.

Barriers to Engagement for CALD People

1. Cultural

- a. Language - Ensuring people feel they will be understood is extremely important. This can involve use of a translator, translation of literature into appropriate languages or audio files and avoiding acronyms, terminology or slang. Literacy should also be considered as not all languages have a written component and people may lack literacy skills.

The easiest way to ensure communication is appropriate is to ask the individual their preference and offer options.

- b. Cultural norms – Some cultures are collectivist and emphasise family obligations over individual needs. People may not feel comfortable reaching outside of their family for assistance. Certain body language and gestures also differ between cultures and can often be misinterpreted.

Cultural bias refers to the tendency for people to judge others based on the standards of their own culture. It is important to be sensitive to this and not make assumptions

- b. Traditional gender roles – Some CALD communities and people may have gender preferences and certain views regarding the roles of men and women. Combined with cultural norms, this may make it difficult for certain sub-groups to engage or be engaged effectively
- c. Fear of authorities – Previous negative experiences with authority figures may prevent CALD people from trusting organisations or services. They may be unwilling to engage for fear their privacy and confidentiality may be breached. Clearly defining boundaries regarding privacy and engaging community organisations and leaders can help build trust and improve relationships.

2. Structural

- a. Practical – Factors such as location (remote and rural communities), access to and cost of public transport and timing are all important considerations when engaging CALD people.
- b. Lack of knowledge – People from CALD communities may be unaware of opportunities, organisation and services and the benefits of engaging with them. Culturally and linguistically appropriate communication is essential.

3. Service

- a. Culturally inappropriate models – CALD people may be reluctant to engage with services or organisations that do not cater to their cultural needs. Services and organisations that do not offer diverse and culturally appropriate options may be perceived as forcing CALD people to conform to a mainstream view.

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- b. Lack of diversity in the workforce – Some CALD people may perceive a lack of diversity in the workforce of an organisation or service as a lack of experience or knowledge of cultural and linguistic diversity. It is also important that all staff are trained in cultural competency, regardless of their background.
- c. Stereotyping - CALD people may be reluctant to engage due to concerns they will be stereotyped, misunderstood or not treated as an individual. As with all aspects of engaging CALD people, respect for individual preferences and providing the same information to everyone is essential.

Tips for Engaging with CALD People

- *Individuality/Intersectionality.* Although someone may identify as CALD, this does not define their entire identity. Individuals may identify with other groups e.g. people with a disability, LGBTQI+. Considering each person as an individual and respecting their experiences and preferences is key to engaging effectively.
- *Sensitivity to certain topics.* Topics such as mental health, domestic violence, death and sexual health may not be openly discussed in some communities. The stigma associated with these topics requires sensitivity and targeted strategies e.g. A female may not feel comfortable discussing their sexual health queries in front of a group of men. Offering a range of educational options and opportunities for involvement is helpful.
- *Refugees.* People from refugee backgrounds have an increased risk of having experienced significant trauma. Certain behaviours may trigger stress and anxiety and every effort should be taken to ensure their comfort and understanding. They may require additional assistance in the form of a support person.
- *Building relationships.* One of the most important factors for engaging with CALD communities is building relationships. Communities are more likely to respond to and be willing to engage with organisations, services or staff they interact with regularly and feel comfortable with.

Additional Resources

Here are some additional resources available to help engage with and learn more about Culturally and Linguistically Diverse People:

[**Australian Institute of Family Studies - Enhancing family and relationship service accessibility and delivery to culturally and linguistically diverse families in Australia**](#)

[**Health Services Victoria - Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities**](#)

[**QCOSS Community Door eTraining Course – Work with diverse people**](#)

For a list of relevant community organisations in Queensland that may be able to assist with engagement, please refer to the following list:

[**Queensland Multicultural Resource Directory**](#)