inclusive communication in action

ABOUT THIS SECTION

This section describes inclusive communication in action. It provides information on the key communication approaches, the factors to consider when communicating with people face to face or over the phone and particular considerations for people from diverse communities.

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HaViNG MeaNiNGFuL CoNVerSaTioNS

What we say, and how we say it, is equally important. The following communication approaches are necessary when operating in an inclusive and person centred way.

Communication Approach	Description
Active Listening	• Active listening is communicating empathetically through reflective listening. It describes the act of being present and attentive to what someone else is saying. It involves viewing the world through the eyes of the person you are communicating with and demonstrating that you understand their feelings and views by repeating back to them what you have heard in your own words[15] • The approach demonstrates an appreciation and understanding for the perspective of a person without judging, criticising or blaming • It builds on trust and minimises resistance and promotes self-confidence • It clarifies, rather than assumes you know what is meant • It allows or invites opportunity for feedback Active listening involves some key steps to demonstrate you're paying attention, engaged and listening: • Use verbal and non-verbal communication (maintain eye contact, use open body language, mirror) • Provide feedback by responding in an active way (nod, smile, say yes) • Defer judgement and avoid interrupting • Respond appropriately by summarising what the person has just said and ask them to confirm if you've heard it correctly e.g. It sounds like you are concerned that you don't get out of the house as often as you used to? Would this be correct? What would you like to be doing, or where would you like to be going? Useful videos: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWe_ogA5YCU https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_-rNd7h6z8

15. https://www.mindtools.com/CommSkll/ActiveListening.htm

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Communication Approach	Description
Using appropriate questioning techniques	• Good questioning techniques encourage people to share their own story in their own words, describe what's important to them, their strengths, resources, motivation and interests • Appropriate questioning empowers the person to make suggestions and contribute their ideas about the support they would like You can do this by: • Framing questions in a positive way e.g. I understand that you are finding some tasks more difficult • Asking open ended questions that require more than a yes or no answer e.g. What has brought you here today? or What's makes you think it might be time to get some help around the house?
Using affirming language	• Affirming language shows that you genuinely and respectfully affirm someone's personal qualities, strengths, efforts, successes and intentions • This approach supports independence, improves confidence, and demonstrates a recognition that people are experts in their own lives. e.g. It sounds like you are very creative You can do this by: • Listening and reflecting back what has been said in a positive way • Acknowledging people's strengths, successes and efforts to change e.g. It's clear that you are really trying to change[16]

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conversations with diverse communities

There are additional communication considerations when interacting with people from diverse communities. The following are some of the recognised areas to consider when working with different communities. However, these are just a guide and it must be acknowledged that not all people from the same cultural or social group have the same beliefs, values, customs, experiences or expectations.

Not all of the diversity characteristics have been detailed in this guide. For further consideration refer to the diversity jigsaw, understanding the diversity jigsaw and the recommended resources after each section.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

There are specific cultural and social practices that are important to understand when communicating with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a history of sharing their traditions and passing on information orally through stories. Story telling is an important part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island culture, so taking the time to share things about ourselves and to learn about the person we are meeting will help to build trust and rapport in a cultural appropriate way.[17] Having an informal conversation can help us to learn where a client is from, where their traditional country is and what else is important to them.

Whilst it is a sign of respect to refer to an Aboriginal person by their language or country, it is important to remember that due to past displacements and the Stolen Generations some people may not know their language or which country Aboriginal people are from. It is important to understand the role and value of family and community. The definition and makeup of family may be broader or different to a Western/Anglo family context.

For some people making eye contact can be considered inappropriate or a sign of disrespect. We need to be aware of this and adapt our own eye contact and body language as appropriate. Personal space and touching people of the opposite sex may also be culturally inappropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Extended periods of silence during conversations can be normal for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Silent pauses may be used to demonstrate respect or consensus.[18] Before we start speaking, we should observe the silence and body language of those present and assess when it is appropriate to speak.

It may not be appropriate to assume someone is an elder and we should ask if they want to be called Aunty or Uncle. Similarly, if we are unsure what words or references are appropriate ask the person what they prefer, Aboriginal, Indigenous, Wurundjeri elder/man/woman.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may use indirect language when communicating.[19] This is considered a polite way to communicate, but it requires others to identify indirect language and respond appropriately to ensure the needs and preferences of the person are understood.[20]

Indirect question example	Direct question example	Indirect Response
'Wow, isn't it cold in here'	'Can you close the window please?'	'Would you like me to close the window/put the heating on?'
'Is it normal that your feet hurt when you walk?'	'When I walk my feet hurt, is that normal?'	'That doesn't seem right, does it hurt when you walk?'

17. https://www.health.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0021/151923/communicating.pdf

18. https://www.health.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0021/151923/communicating.pdf

19. http://www.vaccho.org.au/assets/01-RESOURCES/TOPIC-AREA/CULTURAL/Koorified-Aboriginal-Communication-and-Well-Being.pdf

20. Reference Silvia, A. Politeness in social interaction and indirect speech acts. Undated. https://www.academia.edu/2344547/Politeness_and_Indirect_Speech_Act

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Recommended resources

- Alzheimer's Australia https://www.fightdementia.org.au/about-dementia/resources/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander
- Queensland Health https://www.health.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0021/151923/communicating.pdf
- VACCHO
  http://www.vaccho.org.au/assets/01-RESOURCES/TOPIC-AREA/CULTURAL/Koorified-Aboriginal-Communication-and-Well-Being.pdf
- Alliance for Forgotten Australians
  http://www.forgottenaustralians.org.au/assets/docs/Booklet/AFA_Booklet.pdf
  http://www.forgottenaustralians.org.au/
- Australian Department of Health
  https://agedcare.health.gov.au/support-services/people-from-diverse-backgrounds/care-leavers-resources
- Australian Human Rights Commission https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/bringing-them-home-report-1997
- Australians Together http://www.australianstogether.org.au/stories/detail/the-stolen-generations
- Child Migrants Trust https://www.childmigrantstrust.com/
- Open Place http://www.openplace.org.au/AboutForgottenAustralians
- Parliament of Australia
  http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/Completed_inquiries/1999-02/child_migrat/report/index
  http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/Completed_inquiries/2004-07/inst_care/report/index
- VACCHO http://www.vaccho.org.au/about-us/ah/tsg/
- VANISH https://vanish.org.au/

People from Cultural and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities

CALD communities are diverse and whilst there may be similarities between some, there are also significant differences. Respect is central to having inclusive face-to-face communication and building trust.

It is vital that we are aware of our own cultural practices and perspectives and do not try to impose these on others or judge people's beliefs, traditions or experiences that are different to ours.[21] We should avoid undue emphasis on differences between CALD communities and western cultures.[22] We need to consider the language we use and avoid terms such as foreigner, migrant and immigrant as they have been used with negative connotations and can alienate or isolate people on the basis of their country of birth, identity or culture.

People who have come from countries experiencing war or oppression may be reluctant to trust government, health and community sector systems. Therefore, service providers and their staff become the bridge, linking individuals and the Australian healthcare system.

Developing relationships with community groups and learning about specific cultural norms, beliefs and practices can help staff build relationships with CALD clients.[23] Formal and informal education about specific CALD communities or faith groups will help to build the capacity of the workforce to develop and deliver services in an inclusive way.

The role and dynamics of families can vary greatly across and within different cultural groups. It is important that we understand a person's family situation and relationships without judging from our own cultural perspectives. Many people have broad family networks that include aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents and we need to consider them when working with clients.

Shaking hands or other touching between people of the opposite sex will be considered culturally inappropriate for some people and could make the person feel uncomfortable if they need to point this out.

Some people from CALD communities will only access practitioners or interpreters of the same gender, but this will not be the case with all people; it is important to ask and not assume.[24] It is vital that professionally qualified interpreters are used for:
• people who ask
• people not fluent in English
• people who cannot grasp or respond to questions in English

Interpreters should be used for assessments, explaining health information and delivering allied health services.[25] Family members, friends and bi-lingual volunteers should not be used as interpreters in a formal setting. Clients may be unaware that they are entitled to an interpreter, so it is important we recognise when an interpreter is required.

The use of bi/multi-lingual volunteers in social support settings can help to integrate clients and build a welcoming and inclusive environment and should be actively resourced and promoted.

Recommended resources
• Alzheimer's Australia https://www.fightdementia.org.au/resources/culturally-and-linguistically-diverse
• Banyule City Council https://www.banyule.vic.gov.au/Services/Diverse-Communities-and-Social-Inclusion
• Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing http://www.culturaldiversity.com.au/resources
• Centre for Culture Ethnicity and Health
  http://www.ceh.org.au/health-literacy-hub/
  http://www.ceh.org.au/6-steps-effective-translation/
• Dental Health Services Victoria https://www.dhsv.org.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/3226/cald-kit.pdf
• ECALD http://www.ecald.com/Portals/49/Docs/Toolkits/cald-older-people.pdf
• Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria
  http://www.eccv.org.au/library/An_Investment_Not_an_Expense_ECCV_Health_Literacy_Paper_FINAL.pdf
• EMR Alliance
  http://www.emralliance.org/connecting-the-pieces.html
  http://www.emralliance.org/building-culturally-inclusive-social-support-groups.html
• Migrant Information Center http://miceastmelb.com.au/resources/

21. https://www.dhsv.org.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/3226/cald-kit.pdf

22. http://www.emralliance.org/building-culturally-inclusive-social-support-groups.html

23. http://www.ecald.com/Portals/49/Docs/Toolkits/cald-older-people.pdf

24. https://www.dhsv.org.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/3226/cald-kit.pdf

25. http://www.ceh.org.au/assessing-the-an-interpreter/

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People living with Dementia

People living with dementia have varying abilities, skills and needs. It is important we understand these so that we can communicate appropriately and adjust our style and approach.

The physical environment is also very important. We should create a quiet space with minimal distractions and use large font signs on doors to indicate which room is behind each door. Distinct walkways will also help people to navigate the building.

Losing the ability to communicate can be frustrating for the person, carers and families. As the disease progresses the person with dementia will find it more difficult to express themselves.[26] We need to be mindful of how we ask questions and provide information. Complex information and multiple questions can be overwhelming and confusing. Introduce one question at a time and check if the message has been understood.[27] Wear name tags with a large font and use people's names during conversations to assist people to follow the conversation.

There are a range of alternative communication approaches[28] and strategies that can also be useful to support people who are living with dementia. These include:
• Validation Therapy
• Music Therapy
• Reminiscence
• Creating a 'This is your Life' book

It may be necessary to have separate meetings with the person's support network to find out any additional information, listen to their experiences and assist them to access appropriate support. Working with a person's support network is important, but the client must still be involved, listened to and respected.

Things to remember
• Losing the ability to communicate can be frustrating and difficult for people with dementia, their families and carers
• Positive communication can help a person with dementia maintain their dignity and self-esteem
• A caring attitude, use of appropriate body language and maintaining the right environment are all important aspects of communication
• Try alternative communication approaches

Recommended resources
• Alzheimer's Australia
  http://livingwellwithdementia.org.au/
  https://www.fightdementia.org.au/files/NATIONAL/documents/language-guidelines-full.pdf
  https://vic.fightdementia.org.au/about-dementia/resources/help-sheets#About-dementia
  https://vic.fightdementia.org.au/vic/about-dementia-and-memory-loss/resources-to-download
  https://vic.fightdementia.org.au/files/helpsheets/Helpsheet-CaringForSomeone01-Communication_english.pdf
  https://vic.fightdementia.org.au/files/helpsheets/Helpsheet-CaringForSomeone02-TherapiesAndCommunicationApproaches_english.pdf
  https://www.fightdementia.org.au/sites/default/files/20090901-NATSIDAG-FacilitatorsGuide_Sec-11_Ways_of_Communicating.pdf
• Uniting Age Well Dementia Friendly Checklist
  http://www.unitingagewell.org/Pages/News/2015-Dementia-friendly-checklist.aspx
• Journal of Dementia Care
  http://journalofdementiacare.com/the-power-of-language/

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26. https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/dementia-communication#lp-h-1

27. https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/dementia-communication#lp-h-1

28. https://vic.fightdementia.org.au/files/helpsheets/Helpsheet-CaringForSomeone02-TherapiesAndCommunicationApproaches_english.pdf

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People who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ)

LGBTIQ people have a history of exclusion, discrimination and invisibility within health and community services. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer groups have their own distinct histories and experiences.[29] It is important to understand that some issues around inclusive communication practices will be similar across the LGBTIQ groups, but there are also specific and unique histories, issues and preferences that need to be understood. We need to invest in understanding the entire LGBTIQ group including transgender, bisexuality or intersex issues.

There is often an automatic assumption that everyone is heterosexual.[30] For example, people are often asked about their marital status at intake and assessment. We may automatically ask a male client about their wife or a female client about their husband. These assumptions suggest the service is not inclusive and places same-sex attracted people in a difficult position where they must decide if they correct the staff and out themselves. The term partner is inclusive and does not suggest gender. If someone mentions a partner, don't use gendered pronouns (he/she) unless they have. Incorrectly assuming the gender of a partner forces people to either correct you or ignore it, both of which can be difficult and exclusionary.

Misgendering happens when someone refers to a person as one gender (male/female) but they identify as another gender (female/male/non-binary, neither male nor female).[31] It can be deeply upsetting and make people feel alienated and doubt the appropriateness of the service. Refer to the person as the gender they identify with and avoid making assumptions about a person's gender identity based on their appearance or voice. Service intake forms are often 'gendered' and require people to select male or female. This is not inclusive and can place the person in an awkward, upsetting or frustrating position. If a person introduces themselves as Mary and uses she/her pronouns, we would echo Mary's choice of pronouns and refer to her as Mary/she/her.

Working with LGBTIQ people in an inclusive way requires us to consider our systems, processes and communication styles from the perspective of a LGBTIQ person.[32] We need to learn about the history of older LGBTIQ people in order to understand the potential barriers they have in accessing services.

Recommended resources
- Baptcare- 'Safe, inclusive and person centred care for LGBTI seniors' http://www.baptcare.org.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0023/3983/BC368-LGBTI-AgedCare-SocialPolicy-A4-24pp-WEB.pdf
- Bisexual Alliance http://www.bi-alliance.org/
- Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria http://www.glhv.org.au/
- National LGBTI Health Alliance http://www.lgbtihealth.org.au/sites/default/files/Cultural%20Competancy%20Framework.pdf http://lgbtihealth.org.au/
- Organisation International Intersex Australia https://oii.org.au/
- Rainbow Health Ontario https://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce_uploads/2014/08/lgbt_toolkit_2008.pdf
- Transgender Victoria http://www.vic.gov.au/equality/inclusive-language-guide.html
- Val's Café http://www.valslgbti.org.au/index.php/resources/resource-articles/item/134-trans http://www.valslgbti.org.au/index.php/resources/resource-articles/item/114-no-need-to-straighten-up-discrimination-depression-anxiety-and-older-lgbti-australians http://www.valslgbti.org.au/index.php/resources/resource-articles/item/111-social-connection-relationships-and-older-lesbian-and-gay-people-social-connection-relationships-and-older-lesbian-and-gay-people http://www.valslgbti.org.au/index.php/resources/resource-articles/item/106-hacc-pack http://valscafe.org.au/index.php/resources/resource-articles/inclusive/item/136-lgbti-inclusive-aged-care-assessment-guidesheets
- Victorian Government http://www.vic.gov.au/equality/inclusive-language-guide.html

29. https://agedcare.health.gov.au/older-people-their-families-and-carers/people-from-diverse-backgrounds/national-lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-and-intersex-lgbti-ageing-and-aged-care-strategy

30. http://www.lgbtihealth.org.au/sites/default/files/Cultural%20Competancy%20Framework.pdf

31. http://www.vic.gov.au/equality/inclusive-language-guide.html

32. http://www.lgbtihealth.org.au/sites/default/files/Cultural%20Competancy%20Framework.pdf

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People with a Disability

The ability to communicate and have our views, experiences and questions understood is a fundamental right.[33] As service providers we need to have practices in place that support people with a disability so they can engage with staff, understand the services that are available and ensure all the necessary information is shared with them. People with a disability come from diverse backgrounds and experiences. We need to take an individualised and person centred approach when working with people with a disability in order to avoid prejudicial and stereotyped behaviour.

Some general tips when communicating with people with a disability include:
- Speak to the person with respect and use plain language
- Use an age appropriate tone and treat adults as adults
- Direct your questions to the person with a disability, regardless of whether they have a carer, family member, interpreter or other support person present
- Put the person first, not their disability. For example, use the term 'a person with a disability' rather than 'a disabled person'
- Focus on the person's abilities and what they can do. People with a disability regularly adapt how things are done so they can participate and we shouldn't underestimate what someone can do based on our own expectations[34]

There is also specific good practice advice when working with people with different impairments. The following information has been sourced from the City of Casey Inclusive Communication resource.

Acquired Brain Injury
- Have a conversation in a quiet place
- Discuss one topic at a time
- Repeat information
- Don't assume the person has understood what you have said
- Don't assume you have understood the meaning behind what the person has said

Hearing Impairment
- Face the person you are speaking with and speak in a normal manner – do not shout
- Make sure you are in a well-lit area with low background noise
- Use clear, short sentences and questions
- Communicate by writing if speech is not working

Intellectual Disability
- Be patient
- Allow the person time to express their ideas and participate
- Don't rush people or finish their sentences
- Consider using picture or gestures to help include people in the conversation
- Offer to write instructions down

Mental Illness
- See the person not the symptom
- Create a relaxed, non-threating environment
- Show understanding and compassion, empathise without necessarily agreeing
- If the person is disorientated or responding in an inappropriate manner, allow the person space and initially avoid eye contact, touch or confrontation

Physical Impairment
- Communicate with people at their eye level
- Remember that a wheelchair is an extension of that person, never touch or push the chair unless asked
- Make sure corridors, pathways and aisles are clear

Speech Impairment
- Be in a quiet space, be patient and give the person plenty of time
- Ask if the person has an another method of communication
- If you haven't understood something, ask the person to repeat it
- Consider using pen and paper to communicate

Visual Impairment
- When meeting someone introduce yourself in normal voice and tone
- If you are asked to guide a person, offer your arm and allow them to be in control of any movement
- Be specific when giving directions
- If you leave a room, say something that indicates you are leaving
- If a person has a guide dog, do not pat or distract the dog
- Always address the person and not the dog

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33. http://www.scopeaust.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Toolkit-Part-1.pdf

34. http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-business-and-community/community-involvement/people-with-a-disability-in-the-community/communicate-and-consult-with-people-with-a-disability/communication-with-people-with-disabilities

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Recommended resources
- City of Casey http://www.casey.vic.gov.au/files/a04b6288-00bc.../Inclusive-Communication-Guide.pdf
- Scope
  http://www.scopeaust.org.au/service/communication-access/
  http://www.scopeaust.org.au/information-resources-hub/resources-download/
  http://www.scopeaust.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Toolkit-Part-1.pdf
  http://www.scopeaust.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Toolkit-Part-2.pdf
  https://www.youtube.com/user/scopevictoria
- People With A Disability http://www.pwd.org.au/
- Victorian Department of Health and Human Services
  http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-business-and-community/community-involvement/people-with-a-disability-in-the-community/communicate-and-consult-with-people-with-a-disability/communication-with-people-with-disabilities
- Accessibility Resource Kit- Marketing and Communications Checklist, Accessible Arts, 2012
  https://www.google.com.au/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=Accessibility+Resource+Kit-+Marketing+and+Communications+Checklist,+Accessible+Arts,+2012&*
  http://archive.creative.vic.gov.au/Research_Resources/Resources/ADAPT_-_The_Arts_Disability_Action_Plan_Training_Project/Top_Tips_and_Practical_Resources/Accessible_Marketing_and_Audience_Development

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