

Understanding the Diversity Jigsaw

The Diversity Jigsaw illustrates the range of characteristics that help shape each person and their identity. These diversity characteristics can provide a useful insight to someone's preferences, interests, and experiences. Important information lies within these characteristics, relating to a person's strengths, capabilities, areas where they need support and experiences of inequality and marginalisation. The Diversity Jigsaw encourages you to see diversity as a strength, look beyond visible or obvious diversity and emphasises the need to consider how the intersection of diversity characteristics can result in people experiencing unearned disadvantage. To be effective the Diversity Jigsaw needs to be embedded within the thinking and ways of working for all staff across all disciplines and program areas. If you want to deliver services that are person-centred and meaningful, staff must be attuned to the breadth of diversity characteristics and how these connect to provide important information about a person, what's important to them and their experiences.

This resource provides some information about the Diversity Characteristics. These examples do not describe every person or possible situation. It is important to remember that everyone is different, we can't make assumptions or generalisations. Clients may be reluctant to disclose information so gaining trust and explaining why and how information is used will be important. This tool has been designed to help you understand the breadth of diversity, but it should not be used by simply asking clients overt questions related to the different areas identified on the jigsaw. It is important that through your work with clients you obtain this information in a respectful and inclusive way, understanding that some topics may never be discussed. The aim of this tool is help you think broadly about the people you support, truly see them as individuals and develop ways to understand who they are, what is important to them and address inequality, exclusion, and marginalisation they may experience.

Education

A person's education may highlight areas of interest and what stimulates them. Understanding the type of education someone has had could help you develop meaningful goals and engage them in interesting activities. Their literacy and numeracy capabilities may also be revealed and show that there is extra support needed to understand information, documentation, care plans and payment processes.

Social Connections

Maintaining or developing meaningful relationships is an important aspect of a person's wellbeing. Forming friendships and being connected to communities of interest or relevance can help improve overall health and wellbeing. Therefore it is important to learn from people which communities or groups they identify with and would like to be connected with into the future.

Language and Communication Skills

The ability to communicate and be understood is important for everyone. Communicating with people in a way that is clear and appropriate for them is essential. There are different cultural practices to consider when working with people from some CALD and Aboriginal communities including eye contact and physical contact, such as shaking hands. It is important to use interpreters for people who aren't fluent in English or for anyone who requests one. This will enable you to gather the appropriate information, to help you assess, plan and deliver appropriate services. Registered interpreters need to be used as it is not appropriate or good practice to use family members.

It is important to consider how to work with and support people who may not use or have little verbal communication. Visual and other communication aids are necessary tools to assist in these situations. Allowing people to communicate in a way that is comfortable for them will allow you to find out what is important to them and ensure you gather the most appropriate information.

Geographical Location

Where someone lives could hold significant importance to them as they may have a strong connection to the local area. This could have specific value for Aboriginal people or others with a long family history. For some people it may be difficult to access services or they may be reluctant to do so because of their geographical location. There will be different needs and situations to consider for people living in rural or remote locations, but even people living in metropolitan areas could have access issues if they don't drive or if there is limited public transport.

Housing Security

A person's living arrangements can greatly impact their health, wellbeing and ability to engage with services. Their housing may be considered "insecure" if they are receiving a pension, have no access to other funds and living in a private rental. If their rent was to rise it may leave them unable to cover the costs and they could potentially become homeless. Clients living in supported residential services or boarding houses may also be considered at risk of homelessness and their living situation could impact their mental and physical wellbeing.

Skills and Talent

Learning about someone's skills and achievements can help identify activities they may be interested in, build their self-confidence and allow you to better understand who they are and what's important to them. It is important to look for the possibilities and capabilities in each person, rather than deficits, impairments or limitations.

Socio-Economic Status

A person's financial position, level of education and employment history combine to give an insight into their socio-economic status. People from a low socio-economic background may experience higher incidents of poor health and wellbeing. This may also impact on their ability or willingness to engage with services. A history of disengagement from services may also impact on the value that they place in receiving or paying for such services. Whilst this might be true for some people it would be wrong to make assumptions about a person's experiences, motivation or capabilities based on their socio-economic status.

Life Story

A person's life story will include the experiences that have impacted them throughout their entire life. These events will be unique to each person. There may be a combination of positive experiences that give a client confidence, self-esteem and value, but may also include negative experiences such as trauma, rejection, loss and grief. Understanding the life events that have had a profound impact on a client will allow you to offer the best support and ensure you are mindful of any triggers of distress or unease that a client could experience. A person's life story may also provide useful information about their resilience, motivation, and values.



Family Status

The role and dynamics of families can vary greatly. Cultural norms and backgrounds can impact these differences, so it is important to understand a person's family situation and relationships without judging from your own cultural perspectives.

Many people have broad family networks that include aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents and they need to be considered when working with clients. This includes many Aboriginal and CALD families, so it is important to understand how the family structure works for each person. Aboriginal families that have lived through the Stolen Generation, forced removals or separation may experience long lasting negative impacts. Asking questions about family therefore must always be done in a culturally appropriate and sensitive way. There are also approximately 500 000 people known as Forgotten Australians who lived in government-run institutions in the 20th Century. It is acknowledge that many of these children experienced neglect and abuse and had no connection or knowledge of their family. When working with Forgotten Australians it will be important to be aware of the long lasting impact that can result from these experiences and ensure questions or discussion about family are handled sensitively and appropriately.

People who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer (LGBTIQ) may have friends who they value and identify as their family. They may have lost connection with their biological family or experienced rejection because they are LGBTIQ. Often in these situations the family of choice replace the biological family and become just as important as a biological family could be. This cultural difference needs to be understood, respected and acknowledged.

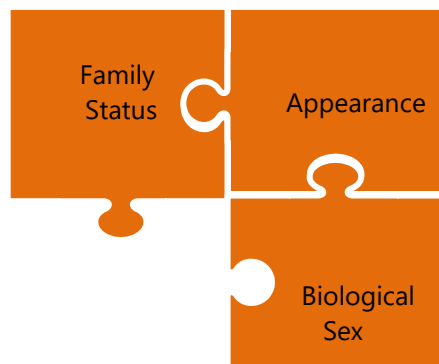
Appearance

People may be judged and treated unfairly because of their appearance. This can have long term negative impacts on their self-confidence and their health and wellbeing. This may result in people not seeking services because of fear of poor treatment or judgemental attitudes.

If you are working with someone and notice their appearance has changed dramatically (weight loss/gain, body odour, type of clothing), it could indicate that they need some support. It will be important to either discuss the situation with a manager, the client or other appropriate professionals. Appearance should not be used to assess a person's ability, skills or interest. For example, people living with a physical disability are not defined by their disability and can be integrated into almost all activities. It is important to see the person and their strengths rather than focus on what you may perceive as deficits.

Biological Sex

Sex characteristics are physical features relating to sex, including chromosomes, genitals, gonads, hormones, and other reproductive anatomy, and secondary features that emerge from puberty. Biological sex or sex characteristics are often described as being either strictly male or female, but there is diversity of sex characteristics. Intersex people have innate sex characteristics that don't fit medical and social norms for female or male bodies, and that create risks or experiences of stigma, discrimination and harm. There are many variations of intersex, it is a spectrum, not a single category. Having an intersex body should not be considered a medical condition or a problem. People who identify as Intersex may have been raised as male or female and could have undergone unnecessary medical procedures to align their bodies to "fit" what is considered "normal" for this gender. This intervention can negatively impact the person and their trust of health and other services. Whilst it can be helpful in some circumstances to understand a clients sex characteristics, conversations on this topic should be led by a client if they feel it is important. For further information on Intersex please refer to <https://ihra.org.au/>



Sexual Orientation

The combination of emotional and physical attraction, how someone self identifies and the sexual activity they participate in. It is important to treat everyone with respect and dignity regardless of their sexual orientation or relationship. It is important that we never make assumptions about anyone's sexual orientation. Assuming someone is heterosexual or in a heterosexual relationship could unintentionally make the person feel uncomfortable or unsafe. If they aren't heterosexual or are in a same-sex relationship they would need to decide if they were going to "out" themselves. This requires them to assess if it is safe to disclose this information. The fact that an assumption has been made, may be enough for that person to feel the environment isn't safe or they may be unsure if it is safe to correct you.

Some people will not disclose their sexual orientation or identify with any particular label and their choice should always be respected. Others may share this information through initial conversations or reveal it once you have gained their trust. Everything should be taken at a speed that is comfortable for the client. It is vital that you understand the potential barriers, discrimination and abuse that same-sex attracted people may have experienced. If a client has experienced negative treatment in the past, they may be reluctant to allow people into their home or engage with mainstream services. Therefore it is important to demonstrate that the organisation, staff and volunteers are welcoming, inclusive and celebrate people for who they are.

Gender Identity

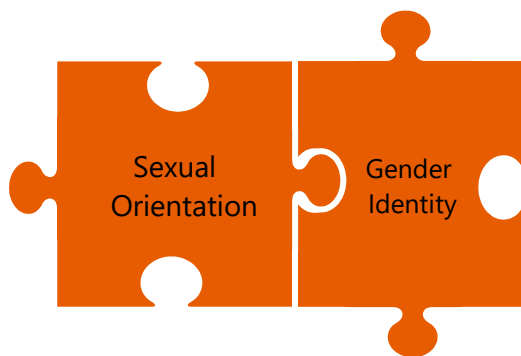
The way a person identifies or describes their gender. A person's gender identity is not fixed by their biological sex, the gender they were raised or what was written on their birth certificate. Trans or Transgender people identify with a different gender to what they were assigned at birth. E.g., their biological sex and birth certificate may have been female at birth, but they identify and live as male.

For some people their gender identity may be fluid and move between male and female. For others it may be more fixed as they identify as either male, female, non-binary, non-identifying or another way that they feel accurately represents who they are. Gender identity is deeply personal, and clients must always be treated and referred to as the gender they identify with.

Gender identity does not dictate someone's sexual orientation or who they are attracted to. People can face discrimination and exclusion from services and society because of their gender identity. It is therefore important to understand the barriers they may experience and work with them supportively, so they feel safe and secure within your service.

Women who identify as feminist may consider their gender identity to be an important aspect of who they are and what is important to them.

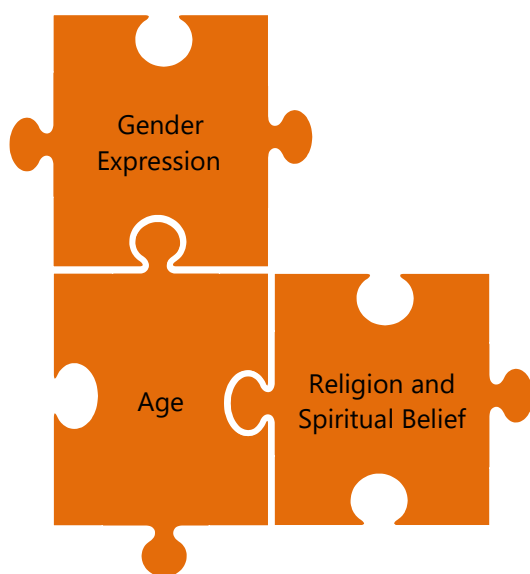
Equally some men gain a strong sense of self from identifying as male. They may link their interests, activities and how they conduct themselves with a sense of what it is to be a "man/masculine". If they can no longer be involved with these activities or their circumstances change it may conflict with their views of "what it is to be a man" and may have a negative impact on their health and wellbeing. This is important to consider as people experience financial difficulties, the breakdown of relationships, mental health issues or grow older.



Gender Expression

This describes how a person acts and expresses who they are. It may be through their body language, speech, appearance and interests which may be described as “traditionally” masculine/male, feminine/female or possibly androgynous or gender neutral. What is considered male/masculine and female/feminine is constructed by society and therefore may be different from community to community. People may have elements that are masculine, feminine and neutral in the way they express themselves.

The way someone expresses themselves can often lead people to make assumptions about other characteristics such as sexual orientation or gender identity. This is not always correct, so assumptions are not helpful. A person may identify as male, heterosexual but have some expressions or interests that are considered “traditionally feminine” or not “masculine” such as how they walk, talk, dress or the activities they are involved with. Every client should feel free to express themselves knowing that they will be welcomed and celebrated by staff and service providers. If organisations can communicate this to current and potential clients/customers it will allow people to feel more comfortable, welcomed and safe.



Religion and Spiritual Belief

People’s faith, religion or spiritual belief can form important aspects of who they are and what is important to them. There are many different religions and spiritual beliefs and they may be interpreted differently from person to person. Therefore it is not enough to know that someone has a particular faith or belief. It is necessary to understand what that faith/belief means to them and how it informs their daily life. This includes learning about diet and food preparation, dress and clothing, engaging with people of opposite sex, important times of worship and many more. This information will be different for each client, so an individual approach is necessary. Adopting this approach will help assure clients that their religion, faith, beliefs and practices are respected and understood as being important to them.

Just as there are many people with a religion or spiritual belief, there are many others who do not follow a faith or are connected with a religion. Their views and perspectives need to be considered and respected. No-one should have views or values imposed on them by staff, volunteers or an organisation. Some people may have had negative experiences with a religion or faith-based organisation in the past and therefore be reluctant to engage with these service providers. As with other characteristics, people may be fearful about sharing their religion or beliefs. This topic needs to be approached with sensitivity and with a clear message that helps the person understand that you will use this information to better support and work with them.

Age

A person’s age may help to assess how their health and wellbeing is compared to others of the same/similar age. However, people age at varying rates and in different ways, cognitively and physically. Age should not be a barrier to participation or impact the value or importance an organisation places on someone. As people age, some may lose confidence in going out in the community or fear losing their independence. For services working with these people it is important to help build their confidence and demonstrate how services can help them remain independent.

Wellbeing

A person's physical and emotional wellbeing is impacted by many aspects. Service providers need to support the overall wellbeing of their clients/customers and consider these areas. Physical wellbeing includes areas such as exercise and diet, health and medical conditions, mobility and impairments. A positive sense of emotional wellbeing enables people to function and engage with others and the wider community. It covers all aspects of positive mental health as well as mental health support that they could benefit from. Understanding their current and previous mental health issues or illness or the experiences they have gone through in their life can provide a good insight into their emotional wellbeing and what services or support may be appropriate. It is important to consider physical and emotional wellbeing jointly as they can impact the other positively and negatively. Whether a client has limited mobility, is living with dementia, depression or has a physical or intellectual disability it is important to look for their strengths, capabilities and what they can do, rather than focusing on what they can't.

Country of Birth

A person's accent, the language they speak, their cultural or ethnic group should not be used to assume where they were born. Learning about where a client was born and where they have lived can help to provide a deeper understanding of the communities they have lived with and any significant events throughout their life.

Culture

The complex range of elements which may include knowledge, beliefs, customs, traditions, language, kinship and a way of life. It may be connected to people's ethnic origin, country of birth, religion or other important aspect of their life or areas that have influenced and shaped their perspectives and what is important to them. Understanding what aspect of a person's culture is important to them will help you build meaningful relationships, develop services that are appropriate and maximise people's ability to improve their health and wellbeing. Different people who belong to the same culture will have similarities and differences in the way they live and experience that culture. Culture can be constantly evolving, people's preferences, interests and values in relation to their culture need to be known and understood, rather than identifying they belong to a cultural group and assigning stereotypical values, beliefs, traditions or customs. It is important to understand that a person's culture may inform their perspectives on a range of issues including, health, ageing, family, relationships and many others. Therefore it is important that your own cultural beliefs do not negatively impact how you work with and support others.

Ethnicity

Belonging to a social group that may have shared ancestral origins, language or national tradition. Ethnicity could be described in broad terms such as Aboriginal, Indian, Chinese and British or as narrowly as Wurundjeri, Punjabi, Han and Scottish. Ethnicity is an inherited identity that can inform a person's culture, but people of the same ethnic background may belong to different cultural groups or speak different languages. People may have faced exclusion or discrimination in the past because of their race, ethnic origin or culture. Therefore, it is important to consider these possibilities if they are reluctant to use services and to proactively promote that your service is welcoming. It is important to engage with people respectfully and learn about different ways to deliver culturally appropriate services for people from different ethnicities, cultures and communities.

