

It's about the individual person – your client

Understanding and responding to the diversity of clients

Victoria benefits from being a diverse state made up of people from different communities, with different identities, experiences and skills. The diversity that exists across the state is also represented in our staff, volunteers and those who use Support at Home services.

The diversity jigsaw

Our clients:

- > come from a range of cultures
- > cover a wide age range
- > speak different languages
- > are married, widowed, divorced and single
- > are heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and have intersex variations
- > have experienced and survived war, trauma, violence and elder abuse
- > have various family dynamics and situations
- > live with or care for people with dementia
- > come from varied social and economic backgrounds
- > have a range of interests, strengths, abilities and life experiences.

The diversity jigsaw shows that we all have a wide range of diversity characteristics. These shape our identity and what's important to us. Services are focused on the individual person and supporting them to maintain health, independence and be in control of their life. Support that is focused on understanding who each person is, their strengths and what is important to them is welcoming, inclusive and respectful. To see the whole person, we need to look at all the jigsaw pieces.

How do we make sure our support responds to the diversity of our clients?

The Support at Home program has made many improvements to make sure the support provided is designed around the person and what they want and what they need; rather than trying to 'fit a person' into a service. Everyone's individual preferences, circumstances and special requirements are discussed with them when developing a plan about how we will work together.

Taking a person-centred approach means that you understand who the individual is and can respond to their preferences and needs. Some individual requirements that could be in a plan include:

- > food preparation to meet the person's religious practices
- > how best to communicate with a person if they do not communicate in English
- > how to respect any household rules, for example, not wearing shoes inside.

A person's plan can include support provided through a range of people and services. Family, friends, local community groups, doctors, and other health professionals may all work in partnership to provide the best possible support. Volunteers are an important part of this partnership. Clients all have different plans, because each client is an individual. Clients have different drivers, interests and needs.

How can I best support and work with all the people I meet as a volunteer?

To be able to volunteer effectively with all clients, it is important that you:

- > have an open and welcoming approach to all
- > understand that individual beliefs and practices may differ from your own – or they may be the same – regardless this won't affect the services clients receive
- > see your client as an individual and do not make assumptions about them based on stereotypes
- > see people's 'difference' to you as an opportunity to learn about new ways and new people
- > get to know your clients, learn about who they are and their experiences
- > provide timely feedback about client's changing needs
- > take up any training opportunities that will assist you in your role.

Key messages

- > Everyone is different – that is what is so interesting about working with people.
- > Plans take into account and are centred around people's preferences, interests, special needs and circumstances.
- > Respect each client for who they are, and how they live.
- > Respect what is important to the person and what they want to achieve.
- > Respect that each person is an individual with their own unique life story.