

## Empowering and Supporting a Culturally Diverse Workforce

### Purpose of this guide

This guide is intended to provide an overview of the challenges faced by our culturally diverse aged care workforce and how people leaders can be more intentional in leading, supporting and empowering their people to feel safe and included as they deliver aged care services.

### Who this guide applies to

This guide applies to all aged care people leaders whose role is to supervise, support, educate and coach their culturally diverse workforce. It extends to coordinators, clinicians and people in management or administrative roles.

### Background

The Australian aged care workforce is increasingly culturally diverse. The federal government's 2020 Aged Care Workforce Census Report showed 35 per cent of direct care workers in residential aged care identified as culturally and/or linguistically diverse, which is up 26 per cent from 2016.<sup>1</sup> The majority of culturally and linguistically diverse staff in Residential care are Personal Care Workers (PCW) (72 per cent). In relation to Home Care Workers, the number of direct care workers who identify as being from a culturally and linguistically diverse background in 2020 was 13,192, representing 21 per cent of the total direct care workforce. PCWs account for 91 per cent of all culturally and linguistically diverse direct care workers with 65 per cent of these, working for providers with a higher proportion of culturally and linguistically diverse clients. In addition, the Australian Aged Care workforce is female dominated with majority of PCW being female<sup>2</sup>.

In terms of the cultural backgrounds of these workers, the majority of workers come from Asian, Middle Eastern and African countries like India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Iraq, and Sudan.<sup>3</sup> One strategy to adopt in providing culturally appropriate care is matching culturally and linguistically diverse clients with workers of the same background. This has been seen as favorable as workers may better understand the client's cultural norms and language, especially given that with conditions such as dementia, people can often revert to their first language. However, there is a mismatch between culturally and linguistically diverse clients and the current migrant workforce. This requires the sector to take a closer look at how it provides culturally appropriate care and manages, supports and empowers its workforce.<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that culturally and

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<sup>1</sup> [The 'elephant in the room' of racism in Australia's aged care homes - ABC News](#)

<sup>2</sup> [2020-aged-care-workforce-census.pdf](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Managing a culturally diverse workforce - Australian Ageing Agenda](#)

<sup>4</sup> [4. Managing a culturally diverse workforce - Australian Ageing Agenda](#)

linguistically diverse workers don't just benefit culturally and linguistically diverse clients, as clients of Anglo-Saxon backgrounds also benefit from cross-cultural exchange. It is also important to become increasingly aware that culturally and linguistically diverse workers are not a homogenous group and developing better skills to lead and manage a multicultural workforce is essential in providing culturally appropriate care.

Key themes in research in the field of managing and supporting a culturally diverse workforce include cross-cultural interactions between culturally and linguistically diverse staff and people with dementia, cross cultural interactions between staff, cultural competence in the workplace, and developing policy, guidelines, and practices to support cultural diversity and effective communication.<sup>5</sup>

Other themes include recognising the various cultural awareness, lived experience and cultural skills in the multicultural team, managers and team members having limited cultural knowledge about members in the multicultural team, and the desire amongst culturally diverse staff to enhance inclusion, teamwork and belonging.<sup>6</sup>

Issues related to racism within aged care organisations has also been an ongoing issue within the sector and a key theme in recent research particularly toward staff from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

## Key themes in Aged Care Policy

Another issue relevant to a culturally diverse workforce is the larger scale workforce shortages and the way in which the Australian government has tried to address this issue. In 2023, the government introduced the [Aged Care Industry Labour Agreement \(ILA\)](#). This agreement aims to make it easier for aged care providers to recruit workers from overseas. Aged Care ILA enables sponsorship of roles which would normally fall below the skill and salary levels that qualify for standard skilled migration programs.

Aged care providers can sponsor overseas workers for the Temporary Skill Shortage (subclass 482) visa in direct care occupations:

- Nursing Support Worker
- Personal Care Worker
- Aged or Disabled Carer

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<sup>5</sup> [Challenges and opportunities for the multicultural aged care workforce: A systematic review and meta-synthesis](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Understanding and improving communication processes in an increasingly multicultural aged care workforce](#)

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They can also sponsor overseas workers for permanent residence under the Employer Nomination Scheme (subclass 186) visa program.

In the Australian aged care policy space, the 2019 Department of Health and Aged Care resource entitled “Actions to support older Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people - A guide for aged care providers”, aims to provide assistance to aged care organisations to support the need to manage a culturally diverse workforce effectively.

This guide suggests employing bilingual and bicultural staff that reflect the cultural and language demographic of clients at the service and provide additional incentives to attract and retain bilingual, bicultural staff that meet the needs of consumers. For example, opportunities for training, sponsorship of English or other language tuition and support for advancement and permanency.

The guide mentions strategies such as recognising and rewarding bilingual and bicultural staff who work in the organisation including salary, and professional development that acknowledges their skillset as well as adopting workforce recruitment, retention and development approaches that ensures a skilled and culturally competent workforce that is responsive to local needs.<sup>7</sup>



## Key Considerations

### Knowing the Diversity of your workforce

To support a culturally diverse workforce it is important to know and collect data on the cultural and linguistic diversity of your team. Ignoring cultural diversity can lead to an exclusionary environment where employees feel unable or unwilling to talk freely about their views and opinions and a missed opportunity to demonstrate inclusive practice. Knowing the cultural diversity of your workforce can be obtained both formally within your HR systems and informally through staff surveys, or through regular conversations and discussions. To know more about inclusive data collection, visit The Centre’s [Data and Demographics Practice Guide](#).

You may wish to collect data either upon intake and staff onboarding or through a staff survey such as:

- Self-described ethnic/cultural and linguistic identity
- Languages spoken other than English
- Age
- Gender

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<sup>7</sup> [Actions to support older Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people: A guide for aged care providers](#)

- Country of birth
- Religious practice or spiritual practice
- Length of time in Australia
- Migration Journey
- Training opportunities received or sought
- Employees' desire to learn about cultural groups and your organisation's diversity
- Experiences and types of discrimination and exclusion
- Job satisfaction – most and least favourite aspects of your organisation, their role, etc.
- Satisfaction with career progression and professional development opportunities
- Opinions on the inclusiveness of your workplace culture and whether employees feel comfortable with cultural diversity and how it's reflected in the organisation.<sup>8</sup>

It is important when collecting data to take into consideration privacy and sensitivity such as being mindful that some questions may trigger trauma related experiences or memories or shame or stigma. Ensuring cultural safety is critical, therefore the communication on the collection of sensitive information needs to cover aspects of privacy, why collecting this data is important, who will access this data, how it will be used, and if it is self-reporting data and remains confidential and communicating that cultural diversity is valued in your organisation.

## Responding to and Recognising Cultural Diversity

After collecting data on your workforce, it is important to appropriately respond to the needs of your culturally diverse staff. Some workers may have specific cultural needs or requirements that are important to acknowledge so they feel safe, well supported, included and respected in their working environment. These include:

- Clothing and dress: How does your uniform or dress code policy support your culturally and religious diverse staff? E.g., do you include long sleeve shirts to ensure your Muslim women staff feel included? And, does your dress policy preclude the wearing of facial piercings?
- Religious practices: how do you support your staff to participate in days of cultural and religious significance such as Diwali and Ramadan?
- Social values – perspectives on issues in society such as politics, sexual behaviour and orientation, work ethics, wealth and career ambitions vary between cultures.
- Customs – some cultures can or can't have specific foods and drinks or may have rules about how food is prepared.
- Family obligations – some cultures prioritise family commitments that may, at times, conflict with work commitments such as caring and cultural responsibilities overseas. Cultural or Carers Leave requirements may support

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<sup>8</sup> [FECCA Factsheet 3: What is Diversity in the Workplace](#)

these obligations as well as job design, flexible work arrangements and having a policy on leave during times of significant cultural and religious festivals

- Visa status – some workers may not be on permanent visas or have Australian citizenship. They may be on temporary humanitarian students or skilled migrant visas. Understanding how their visa status affects their experience in the workplace is important in supporting a culturally diverse workforce and their future career goals.
- Non-verbal behaviour – use of eye contact, facial expressions, and hand gestures and how people interpret them vary between cultures.
- Understanding the Australian aged care and health context – this can be a daunting experience for new arrivals, so it's important to ensure you support your staff to understand the environment and how government reforms play a significant role in how services need to be delivered by our aged care
- Training opportunities and career goals
- Opportunities for social connections and inclusion
- Policies, practices and education on how to respond to discrimination and racism, including support to speak up when people see racism and know who they need to talk to.

Acknowledging how these factors shape the nature of your workforce is vital in building an inclusive work environment.<sup>9</sup>

## Supporting Cross-cultural communication

It is important to ensure all workers are trained to work in cross-cultural environments, recognising that both clients and colleagues may come from a different background than themselves. There are many organisations that deliver training in culturally responsive practice which include building skills on: Cultural intelligence; cultural competency; and cross-cultural and interfaith communication. For more details visit The [Centre's training programs from across the sector page](#) as well as The Centre's [Communication Practice Guide](#).

## Creating Inclusive workplaces

Successfully empowering and supporting culturally diverse workforce so they can thrive and fully contribute requires ongoing commitment and acting with intent. This shouldn't be limited to cultural competency training. A more comprehensive strategy should be developed to encourage the inclusion of a cultural diversity lens embedded in all areas and functions of your organisation. This could include:

- Internal policies, programs and systems that acknowledge and refer to cultural diversity
- Policies and structures dealing with workplace discrimination and racism
- Staff training, including cultural competency training that is delivered on an

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<sup>9</sup> [Aged Care Workforce Strategy \(fecca.org.au\)](https://www.fecca.org.au)



ongoing basis

- Communications, such as newsletters and staff updates, reporting on cultural diversity in your organisation's events, celebrations, activities, staff development exercises and initiatives that acknowledge and celebrate cultural diversity.

A diversity and inclusion strategy based on the above areas will help you to effectively manage a culturally diverse workforce<sup>10</sup>.

## Trauma awareness in the workplace

Trauma within a number of culturally and religiously diverse communities is common. We know that people from diverse communities, including people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, are at higher risk of trauma over their lifetime. This concerns both the clients and the culturally diverse workforce. An all of organisation approach to trauma informed practice and education is recommended and a starting point to deliver and recognise trauma informed care. See [Introducing Trauma Informed Care Concepts for Residential Care and for Home Care. Care and Support Mental Health Resources - Human Services Skills Organisation: Human Services Skills Organisation - Growing the human services workforce \(hssso.org.au\)](#)

## Recognition of lived and living experience, multilingual skills and cross-cultural competencies

A strategy which considers the skills and recognition of aged care experience, international qualifications and skills will be a positive step for attracting and retaining a workforce that is rewarded appropriately for the work which they perform.

The benefits of employing bilingual and bicultural staff should be celebrated and supported. Diversity representation of your workforce compared with your clients and those in the community you work in is a key indicator for inclusive practice. Amongst the benefits of employing bilingual and bicultural staff are enhanced cross cultural understandings, language skills, and links to the community where added benefits for communication and support can be derived. This will lead to an improved quality of life for aged care consumers. It is imperative that there is a strategy which includes processes to develop a formalised recognition of the skills and attributes of bilingual and bicultural staff.<sup>11</sup>

You may wish to create a role for a person within the organisation such as a multicultural liaison role responsible for coordinating, overseeing, and supporting the bilingual staff who have agreed to be part of a bilingual staff register. This person can be a contact person and assist with monitoring languages used, level of demand, patterns of use, identifying issues of concern and possible areas for improvement. It is important to acknowledge that bilingual staff can be called away from other duties to assist others with their communication needs.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> [FECCA Factsheet 3: What is Diversity in the Workplace](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Aged Care Workforce Strategy \(fecca.org.au\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.culturaldiversity.com.au/resources/practice-guides>

## Addressing racism in and amongst aged care workforce

Research has revealed that aged care workers have experienced racism in their workplaces. It is important to have policies and procedures in your workplace to address the racism workers face on the job.

The National Ageing Research Institute (NARI) conducted interviews with several aged care workers who have experienced racism at work. One incident involved a female Nigerian personal care assistant who faced difficulties when trying to communicate with a resident. Despite her attempts to speak louder, the resident responded with an unpleasant attitude. Another staff member intervened, but the resident made a derogatory comment, saying, "Because of her bloody accent, I could not hear what she was saying."

This incident is sadly not uncommon, and migrant aged care workers frequently endure abuse based on their skin colour or accent. Some residents and families even refuse assistance from these workers for essential care tasks, such as treatment, feeding, and bedding. Certain communities, such as African aged care workers, are particularly vulnerable to frequent racism.

Unfortunately, such incidents often go unreported, as many migrant workers believe no action will be taken. They endure the abuse until they can no longer bear it and eventually leave their roles and the organisations they work for. The National Ageing Research Institute contributes to information sessions for aged care workers and conducts professional development workshops, providing information and management tools to support providers.<sup>13</sup>

Workplaces have a duty of care to support their workforce and ensure it is free from racial discrimination, which is unlawful. It's important to have pathways that support managers and employees to take action. The below image highlights the organisation's responsibility to educate, support and follow up with incidents of racism and have clear pathways to both support the workforce and managers, but also to educate and set expectation with clients and residents about acceptable, and unacceptable conduct.

Some initiatives you may wish to consider include:

- Signing up to the Australian Human Rights Commission Campaign Racism. Stops with Me! and placing their stickers at reception and including this information within the intake forms.
- Visually displaying the images of your culturally and racially diverse staff in your advertising and any communications to clients and their families
- Include commentary in newsletters of the value of having a CALD workforce and how proud your organisation is for their contributions to the service
- Develop a Speak Up policy aimed at empowering workers to speak up when they witness racism within the workplace
- Include a statement on zero tolerance for racism at your service within the rights and responsibilities of staff, clients, their families and anyone who is engaged

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<sup>13</sup> [The 'elephant in the room' of racism in Australia's aged care homes - ABC News](#)

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within service

- Raise awareness of racism through [International day of the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#) (Harmony Day) on 21 March of each year and educate your staff on why this day is important.

The following diagram provides a map of the steps to take to respond to an incident of racism.



There is also information and resources available on the [Racism No Way website](#) and [Racism. It Stops with me](#) website.



## Good Practice Stories

### **The Australian Human Rights Commission has a free online Workforce Cultural Diversity Tool**

The Australian Human Rights Commission has a free online Workforce Cultural Diversity tool to help organisations enhance productivity through a culturally diverse workplace. Based on international best practice, the tool:

- Offers practical steps to effectively manage a culturally diverse workforce.
- Gives organisations the opportunity to assess themselves against 30 measures of competence.
- Provides a starting point for those considering a focus on cultural diversity.
- Helps those committed to cultural diversity move towards best practice.
- Can offer a confidential report tailored to your workplace.<sup>14</sup>

The Tool has the following ten areas to consider:

1. Acknowledging the unique position of First Nations peoples and the contributions they bring to a workplace
2. Organisational Learning: Understanding the need
3. Leadership and commitment
4. Strategy
5. Equitable hiring: Deploying an equity framework to find and select the best staff
6. Equitable retention: Deploying an equity framework to keep the best staff
7. Developing a strong culture
8. Embedding anti-racism in everyday practice
9. How the organisation responds to incidents of racism
10. Evaluation and monitoring: Ensuring that your strategies work

### **Latrobe Research: Recruitment and Retention of Multicultural Female Caregivers in Australia's Aged Care Workforce Industry: Exploration of Social Resilience**

This project explores the recruitment and retention of the female culturally diverse aged care workforce. Through the experiences of culturally diverse female aged care workers, this project aims to inform the development of a culturally responsive aged care workforce and create a sustainable caregiving industry.

The female culturally diverse workforce plays a critical role in caring for consumers of aged care services. Studies have shown that migrant workers, especially women, have a desire to remain in aged care due to the value they place in caring for older people. Additionally, flexible shift work

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<sup>14</sup> [Workplace Cultural Diversity Tool | Australian Human Rights Commission](#)

allows them to balance their responsibilities to children and families.

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Chief Investigators: Irene Blackberry, Monika Winarnita, Tom Klassen, Marita Chisholm, Masa Higo<sup>15</sup>

## Uniting NSW.ACT Manager's Guide, Seniors Services Preparing for and managing leave during cultural and religious holidays

Uniting developed a manager's guide to support leaders to implement practical ways to promote/increase employee retention and engagement, through the provision of flexible and adaptive practices that support our people to thrive, which has become even more important with our emerging workforce crisis.

The guide covers tips on how to prepare for lots of staff wanting to take leave/have time off work at the same time to participate in their cultural and religious festivals that are significant to them. Importantly, the organisation wants their staff to feel safe, welcome and that they belong and have opportunities to participate in festivals that are important to them. At the same time, managers have a responsibility for ensuring operational requirements are in place for effective delivery of services.

Proactively managing taking of leave and roster flexibility to enable our people to celebrate cultural and religious holidays of significance is considered critical to maintain required staff rations.

In preparing for significant employee leave events, this guide also covers some areas for services to consider whilst balancing this with creating a safe space for their staff to feel they belong and that they can bring their whole selves to work.

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<sup>15</sup><https://youtu.be/nuyUKbC48ec?feature=shared>

## Useful Resources and Further Reading

### [Aged Care Diversity Framework](#)

Australian Department of Health and Aged Care

### [Working with Bilingual Workers](#)

The Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing

### [Inclusive Service Standards](#)

The Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing

### [Data and Demographics](#)

The Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing

### [Communication](#)

The Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing

### [Actions to support older culturally and linguistically diverse people: A guide for aged care providers](#)

Department of Health and Aged Care

### [Workplace Cultural Diversity Tool](#)

Australian Human Rights Commission

### [Actions to support older culturally and linguistically diverse people: A guide for aged care providers](#)

Australian Department of Health and Aged Care

### [Challenges and opportunities for the multicultural aged care workforce: A systematic review and meta-synthesis](#)

National Library of Medicine

### [La Trobe University | Aged Care Video](#)

Latrobe University

### [The 'elephant in the room' of racism in Australia's aged care homes](#)

ABC News

### [Aged Care Workforce Strategy](#)

Federation of the Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia

### [FECCA Factsheet 3: What is Diversity in the Workplace](#) (hard copy only)

Federation of the Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia

### [Racism. No Way: Anti-racism education for Australian schools](#) ([racismnoway.com.au](http://racismnoway.com.au))

NSW Department of Education

### [Racism. It Stops with me! Campaign](#)

Australian Human Rights Commission

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