

GIPPSLAND REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE CONSULTATION

Summary Report



Supported by Benetas

Centre for
Cultural Diversity
in Ageing

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Executive Summary

The Regional Roundtable Consultation explored the challenges and opportunities associated with delivering culturally appropriate care in residential aged care. Discussions highlighted challenges at consumer, employee and organisational levels, with a strong focus on person-centred care, workforce capacity and cultural inclusion.

At the **consumer level**, key challenges included language barriers, differing cultural expectations, increasing complexity of care, and supporting the cultural needs for older people living with dementia. Participants emphasised the importance of understanding older people's cultural backgrounds, maintaining connections community, and capturing cultural information earlier in the admissions process.

At the **employee level**, workforce pressures, staff shortages and limited time were identified as significant barriers to providing culturally responsive care. Participants highlighted the need for ongoing cultural diversity training and stronger workplace policies to address discrimination and support an increasingly diverse workforce.

At the **organisational level**, providers reported resource constraints, competing priorities and challenges embedding cultural diversity into everyday practice. Participants agreed that culturally appropriate care requires a whole-of-organisation approach, supported by executive leadership, governance structures and dedicated resources.

Suggested solutions included improving cultural information gathering during admissions, strengthening staff training, increasing partnerships with community and cultural organisations, connecting older people with staff and volunteers who share their language or culture, and exploring the use of technology, including AI and virtual reality.

Participants also recommended involving culturally and linguistically diverse older people, families, employees and community organisations in future discussions to ensure diverse perspectives are represented and to support ongoing sector-wide improvement in culturally inclusive aged care.

Introduction

This report is a summary from the regional roundtable consultation held on 21 May 2026 by the Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing. Participants of the consultation involved representatives from two residential aged care providers as well as representatives from the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. The discussion centred around challenges of providing culturally appropriate care in the aged care sector and supporting a culturally diverse workforce, as well as ways to overcome these challenges.

Challenges on a Consumer Level

General Challenges

Participants highlighted the complexities associated with supporting older people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Language diversity can be a barrier for providing culturally appropriate care. Differing cultural expectations can influence care preferences, particularly around end-of-life care and death and dying practices. Providers often rely on families to help understand the older person's cultural requirements and preferences.

Discussion also highlighted that challenges involved in culturally appropriate care as well as increased care complexities are experienced across the sector. There remains significant variability within organisations of maturity and understanding of person-centred, culturally appropriate care.

"Although individual organisations might be able to navigate these care complexities and cultural challenges, it's a problem across the sector - Even within organisations, there are different levels of maturity in understanding what cultural appropriate person-centred care means."

-Participant

Increased Complexity of Care

Older people are entering residential aged care later in life and with increasingly complex clinical needs. This creates challenges on both the consumer and organisation level, increasing pressure on the workforce and requiring greater coordination between services.

Providing Culturally Appropriate Food

Food was identified as an important aspect of culturally appropriate care but one that is challenging to get right. Providers often rely on the older person and their families to guide menu preferences and cultural requirements. While facilities typically offer menu choices, balancing the needs of multiple cultural groups can be difficult.

Participants noted that culturally appropriate food should not be limited to special events but should form part of everyday care.

Person-Centred Care and Connecting with Community

Participants discussed the importance of recognising intersectionality, including language, culture, religion and individual preferences. Providers are increasingly adopting person-centred approaches by taking time to learn about each older person including their spiritual beliefs. Families can assist with this process by providing information about existing community connections for the individual, such as places of worship.

Cultural calendars and culturally significant celebrations are also used to support inclusion and are incorporated into the planning of the Leisure and Lifestyle team. Providers also connect with community groups as much as they can to support this.

Working with Families in the Admissions Process

The admission process was identified as a key opportunity to gather cultural information and build relationships with families. However, participants noted that admission processes are often heavily focused on medical information and do not always capture sufficient cultural detail. It was emphasised that this work is very resource intensive.

Across all cultures, families frequently experience anxiety when a loved one enters residential care. This can be particularly pronounced in some cultural groups where family caregiving is strongly valued and can be difficult for staff to navigate. Pastoral care workers can support families and individuals during this transition, which can be beneficial for nurses who are very time poor. However, it was mentioned that it's still beneficial for nurses to further develop their knowledge and understanding of cultural diversity.

"Sometimes the family or resident might not want to be in the care because of this [negative cultural perceptions of residential aged care]. [This can be] quite tricky for providers to navigate."

-Participant

Cultural Diversity and Dementia

The intersection between dementia and cultural diversity was a significant discussion topic. Both providers highlighted the need to provide a person-centred approach when working with people with dementia in regard to promoting their decision-making in their care as well as acknowledging and learning about their cultural identity and how this might impact behaviours.

While organisations access specialist supports such as Dementia Australia and Dementia Support Australia, delays in accessing specialist services—particularly in regional areas—remain a concern. Participants also questioned whether dementia

assessments sufficiently consider cultural factors, noting that assessments often focus on clinical and trauma-related issues but not cultural identity.

Challenges on an Employee Level

General

Staff time constraints were consistently identified as a major challenge. Increasing complex medical needs of individuals often require staff to focus on clinical needs first.

Training

Participants discussed the need for stronger cultural diversity education across the workforce, highlighting a lack of understanding amongst staff of the importance of culturally appropriate care. Particular value was given to education specialised to specific cultural groups, as well as the need for providers to educate their staff about the cultural needs of individuals.

The leisure and lifestyle team was highlighted to provide an important role in cultural education for staff, particularly regarding the cultural needs of each older person, including providing resources for staff to use.

The effectiveness of culturally appropriate care was discussed to often depends on staff knowledge, attitudes, lived experience and exposure to diverse communities. Ongoing education was viewed to support staff to recognise unconscious cultural biases, but participants weren't confident of these biases being eradicated by training.

Employee Conflicts and Discrimination

The increasing cultural diversity of the workforce brings both benefits and challenges. Participants discussed various challenges involved with supporting both a culturally diverse workforce and culturally diverse older people. This includes discrimination experienced by staff from older people, as well as trying to find culturally suitable staff for the older person, which can be difficult in a thin market. Providers recognised the importance of addressing discrimination promptly and maintaining inclusive workplaces through effective policies, education and leadership.

Staff speaking in languages other than English in shared workplace settings was also discussed as a challenge in creating inclusive work environments.

"Cultural discrimination from an employee perspective is very relevant for aged care providers and it's difficult to navigate but it can have a really significant impact on the person that experiences it".

-Participant

Staff Availability

Sponsorship programs were identified as a valuable strategy for attracting and retaining culturally and linguistically diverse workers, particularly in thin markets, with sponsored staff staying for their full sponsorship or even later.

Accommodation challenges were previously an issue for sponsored staff but is not currently a challenge.

Challenges on an Organisational Level

General

Participants described the pressures faced by organisations, particularly regional organisations, including workforce shortages, limited resources, increasing demands and increased care complexities. Organisational change processes, such as mergers and system transitions were also discussed as a complex challenge which can further reduce capacity.

Providers commented that they are frequently required to balance multiple priorities while being expected to deliver increasingly complex services without additional support.

“Regional organisations are known for wearing multiple hats - which can be overwhelming and constraining. Limited resources and stretched workforce and constantly asked to do more without additional support”.

-Participant

Specialisation Verification

Discussion explored awareness and perceptions of Specialisation Verification (SV). Awareness of the program was low; however one provider was looking into SV but has put it on hold.

Participants raised concerns that specialising in a particular area could potentially unintentionally narrow their market appeal. There was also interest in understanding what incentives exist to support providers in developing culturally appropriate services.

Strategies to Overcome Challenges

Overcoming Challenges on a Consumer Level

General

Staff education and training were identified as central to improving culturally appropriate care. Participants suggested raising cultural awareness among consumers, increasing access to culturally diverse and informed support workers and creating mechanisms for ongoing individual and family feedback.

Using a residential demographic portfolio to match volunteers with older people who share similar cultural backgrounds was also identified as a useful strategy.

Improving Admissions Process

Participants discussed the need for cultural information to be collected earlier and more comprehensively in the admission process to better understand the cultural needs of individuals before they enter the residential aged care site. This would enable providers to better understand cultural preferences, religious beliefs, language needs and community connections before the older person enters care.

Suggestions included introducing more structured cultural discussions during admission and developing tools to capture meaningful cultural information.

Connecting with the Community

Stronger partnerships with local ethnic organisations and community groups were seen as important for supporting older people's cultural identities.

However, developing and maintaining these relationships requires dedicated time and resources. Participants suggested that community organisations could also play a more proactive role in connecting with aged care providers.

"There's a lot of things that can be done in regard to connecting with cultural groups in the community but it takes time to do it and do it well. Nurses don't have time to do it so it falls to other staff."

-Participant

"There has to be more available in the community, so that services can come into the aged care provider to provide services, rather than the aged care providers being relied on to provide all services themselves."

-Participant

Connecting Staff and Older People with a Shared Language/Culture

Participants highlighted the positive impact of connecting older people with staff who share their language or cultural background. Even brief conversations in an older person's preferred language can improve comfort, trust and inclusion.

This becomes particularly important for older people living with dementia who may revert to their first language. However, providers noted the ongoing challenge of matching staff and individuals' languages, particularly in smaller and regional services.

"Providers need to connect staff with residents who share a language, but unfortunately, they don't always have staff that match the residential language portfolio which creates disconnections and make it challenging."

-Participant

Volunteers

Volunteers were recognised as an important resource for supporting culturally diverse older people. Both formal volunteer programs such as the Aged Care Volunteers Visitors Scheme and informal community support, such as family members of the residential community, contribute to reducing social isolation and strengthening cultural connections. In smaller communities, communities are often familiar with each other.

AI and Technology

Participants discussed the potential for technology to support culturally responsive care. AI was viewed as a useful tool for information gathering, problem-solving and improving efficiency, but participants emphasised that it cannot replace human judgement and is not culturally neutral.

Virtual reality (VR) technology was identified as another tool that could be explored more in working with older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, such as virtual visits to older people's countries of origin and reminiscence activities. However, implementation barriers, organisational readiness and resource constraints continue to limit uptake.

Overcoming Challenges on an Employee Level

General

Strategies discussed included implementing strong anti-discrimination policies, creating inclusive workplace cultures and using team meetings and handovers to address issues promptly.

Participants also emphasised the importance of understanding local demographic data to better align workforce planning and service delivery with community needs, which can be challenging to obtain.

Staff Availability

Recruitment remains highly competitive across the aged care sector. Attracting and retaining workers continues to be a significant challenge, particularly given the highly casualised nature of the workforce.

Training

Training was consistently identified as one of the most important solutions. Providers reported positive outcomes from cultural diversity training, including improved respect and understanding among staff.

Overcoming Challenges on an Organisational Level

General

Participants emphasised that cultural diversity must be an ongoing organisational priority rather than a one-off initiative. Delivering culturally appropriate care requires a sustained commitment of time, resources and attention across the organisation. Effective strategies identified included improving admission processes to capture cultural information earlier, providing regular staff training, strengthening links with community organisations and services, and adopting innovative approaches to delivering culturally responsive care.

A particular focus was placed on improving the collection of cultural information of the older person before they enter care. Participants highlighted the importance of ensuring admission processes include meaningful conversations with older people and families so that cultural preferences, beliefs, values and support needs can be identified and incorporated into care planning from the outset.

“Providers need to prioritise cultural diversity to be able to do it and do it well. You don’t just focus on it as a once off. You have to do the work on a regular basis.”

-Participant

Resources

A resources suggestion that could improve cultural appropriate care was a tool that assists in obtaining pre-admission cultural information about the older person.

Executive Buy-In, Senior Staff Engagement and Governance

Strong leadership and governance were identified as essential to success. Participants stressed that responsibility for cultural diversity cannot sit with a single individual or

department and must instead be embedded across the organisation. Executive buy-in, senior staff engagement and organisational ownership were viewed as critical to ensuring culturally appropriate care remains a strategic priority.

Examples included establishing diversity committees involving representatives from multiple departments.

"This work is resource intensive and one person or department cannot deliver this full work, it has to be a whole organisation approach."

-Participant

Future consultations/engagements

→ Who to get in the room next time?

Consumers and Employees

Participants strongly supported involving culturally and linguistically diverse older people, families and frontline staff in future discussions. Including consumers would provide valuable insight into lived experiences and identify opportunities for improvement.

Community Organisations

Suggestions included involving community organisations that are assisting providers, such as migrant resource centres, care finders, social clubs and multicultural community groups. This would also provide an opportunity for networking and collaboration.

Meeting Format

Participants agreed that the format should be determined by the objectives of each discussion. While broad stakeholder meetings can generate diverse perspectives, separate consultation sessions may be more appropriate for sensitive topics.

There was a strong preference for face-to-face meetings, supported by effective facilitation, and clear expectations and objectives.

What Do You Want Us to Say and to Whom?

Participants suggested sharing the challenges identified through the roundtable with organisations that support aged care providers. Raising awareness of these issues may contribute to improved collaboration and problem solving of issues.

Beneficial resources and materials

→What other resources and materials do you need from us?

Participants identified a need for:

- More training and education opportunities.
- Practical resources to have on site for staff to use when needed.
- Region-specific culturally and linguistically diverse information and materials.

The discussion concluded with an overview of available resources from the Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing and other organisations.