Using Culturally Inclusive Language

The way we use language strongly influences a culture of inclusion. Language can either be inclusive and promote a sense of belonging or it can also be exclusive and promote a feeling of being "othered". Creating and maintaining an inclusive culture is everybody's responsibility, and language is a way in which we can make aged care services an inclusive place for all staff, and consumers and their families and carers.

Inclusive language intentionally uses language and communication in a way which acknowledges the audience we are communicating with who may come from diverse cultural, linguistic and faith diverse backgrounds, and varying levels of literacy and communication styles. Language can be written and verbal as well as non-verbal such as how we communicate visually, digitally, and through our body language, for example, sign language.

Inclusive language can therefore be a powerful tool in creating cultures where people can feel free to be their authentic selves which acknowledges the unique values, identities, faith, language, and culture.

This guide has been designed for staff working in aged care settings and will focus on culturally inclusive language that is language that supports inclusion for culturally and linguistically diverse consumers. However, there are other key considerations in using inclusive language as it relates to other aspects of diversity such as people living with a disability, LGBTIQA+ people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and those outlined in the Department of Health and Aged Care's Aged Care Diversity Framework. To find out more about how to apply inclusive language for a range of diversity groups it is encouraged to do further research for those particular areas or visit more broader inclusive language guides such as the Australian government's Inclusive language | Style Manual.

Key Considerations

Promoting a Multilingual Organisational Culture

Try creating a multilingual organisational culture by reflecting the languages of your local community, consumers, and staff within your organisational environment. This can include engaging with interpreters when needed and the production and availability of high-quality translated materials which can range from information about services, aged care and health related information and internal communications such as service agreements, consumer rights, and consent or feedback forms. In 2022, the Australian government Department of Health and Aged Care launched its project entitled Different Languages, Same Aged Care which offers free translations for Australian Government funded aged care providers. These services can be used to communicate with older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; First Nations Elders; and Deaf, blind, deafblind, or hard of hearing older Australians.

The Centre has a range of practice guides to support a multilingual organisational culture such as Accessing Interpreting Services , Communication, and Working with Bilingual Workers.

In addition, you may wish to promote multilingualism by encouraging people to express themselves in their preferred language and learning new words in new languages other than English. You may also wish to acknowledge International Mother Language Day which is a worldwide annual observance held on 21 February each year to promote awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and to promote multilingualism.

Using Appropriate Definitions

The term 'culturally and linguistically diverse' (CALD) is a useful inclusive description for communities with diverse languages, ethnic backgrounds, nationality, dress, traditions, food, societal structures, art and religion. CALD is the preferred term for many government and community agencies as a contemporary description of ethnic communities[1]. The CALD concept has been recently debated as being too *narrow* in that it writes the contributions of English-speaking, Anglo-Celtic Australians out of our country's diversity story. In doing so, it presupposes that this Anglo-Celtic 'majority' is the 'default' culture from which all others deviate[2].

While this terminology is quite established from a governmental or organisational perspective, it's important to remember that this terminology may not resonate with all – it's best to avoid using the acronym CALD unless you're speaking to a specialist audience[3].

Because there is such diversity of migration experience, definitions for culturally diverse communities have evolved in the aged and community care context in Australia. More formal definitions, such as 'refugee', asylum-seeker', and 'permanent humanitarian visa holder', tend to arise from immigration visa categories. These terms may be necessary to determine eligibility criteria for a program or research project. In saying this, it is important to consider whether the terms exclude or "other" people.

Pronouncing Name's Correctly

People's names form part of people's personal, cultural, and spiritual identity. Correctly pronouncing a person's name is important to a sense of inclusion. This applies to staff, volunteers, consumers and their families and carers. Some naming systems differ from those used in English-speaking countries. For example, Chinese naming conventions arrange names as follows: [FAMILY NAME] [given name]. For example, *ZHANG Chen* and there are no spaces between a person's family name and given name when written in Chinese characters, e.g., 张晨(ZHANG Chen)4.

Another example is in Indonesian naming conventions where all components of a name is considered part of a single given name with no middle name or surname.

For people to better 'fit into' the dominant culture and increase their job prospects, people often change their names. While this might make it easier for people to pronounce their name, it puts the onus on the person

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[1] What is CALD? A Comprehensive Guide to CALD Communities, Ethnolink.com.au

[2] Moving Past CALD, Inclusiveaustralia.com.au

[3] Beyond CALD: what lies behind the labels | Diversity Atlas

[4] Chinese Culture - Naming — Cultural Atlas (sbs.com.au)

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with the non-Anglo or non-Eurocentric sounding name rather than people in the dominant culture to adapt and try to pronounce the name correctly including both written, spoken and phonetically. Anglicising names or converting culturally and linguistically diverse names into English can be disrespectful to people's personal, cultural, and spiritual identity.

Making an effort to pronounce someone's name correctly demonstrates that you are culturally sensitive and care about ensuring people feel comfortable and welcome and helps to build trust and rapport.

The Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing has a Practice Guide entitled [Pronouncing Names Correctly](#) for further reading. The SBS's [Cultural Atlas](#) can also provide detailed information of naming conventions from cultures around the world.

Valuing the Uniqueness of the Person and Avoiding Stereotyping

Making references to an individual's cultural or linguistic background and/or faith is generally not necessary when it is not relevant to the context. For example, describing a consumer as a 'Chinese-Australian resident' when not relevant to the context could have the impact of othering them, reinforcing stereotypes and reducing an individual to one aspect of their identity and experience.

However, where it is appropriate or necessary to speak about a person's cultural background, try to be as specific as possible. Referring to an individual as 'Asian' or 'African' overlooks their unique identity. Remember to ask the person how they describe their own cultural or linguistic background, and do not make assumptions about their faith, beliefs or attitudes based on where they or their family members were born.

In written communication it is important to use person-centered language such as a *person* from a culturally and linguistically diverse background rather than CALD *person*.

Inclusive Communication in Written and Promotional Materials

It is important that the diversity of your staff and consumer population is reflected in marketing and promotional collateral. This include images of diverse groups and individuals which build a more responsive picture of the wider community and can help staff and consumers feel welcomed and more visible in their environment. At the same time, images can also reinforce stereotypes or can be "tokenistic" if not considered carefully.

Consider Varying Levels of Literacy including Digital Literacy

It is important to take into consideration the literacy levels of the audience. The use of plain English is important in both verbal and written communications. Using complex terminology and jargon can make it very difficult for people to understand. There are a number of resources which can assist you in developing strategies for using plain English in all your communications, including preparation of text for translations such as resources from the [Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health.](#)

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It is also important to consider digital literacy. If you are creating digital content in your organisation, it is important to apply digital accessibility principles such as standards for ensuring that digital content can be accessed using assistive technology (such as screen readers), and that visual content can be perceived and understood by consumers (via captions on images, subtitles, and transcripts for videos, and available in multiple languages). For more information visit the Centre's Digital Inclusion Practice Guide.

Useful Resources and Further Reading

Cultural Atlas
SBS

Capturing Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Australia
AAG

Embracing diversity through inclusive language
Life Without Barriers

Why Inclusive Language Matters
APA

Aged Care Diversity Framework
Department of Health and Aged Care

Inclusive language | Style Manual
Australian Government

Different Languages, Same Aged Care
Department of Health and Aged Care

Working with Bilingual Workers
Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing

Pronouncing Names Correctly
Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing

Communication Practice Guide
Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing

Digital Inclusion Practice Guide
Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing

What is CALD? A Comprehensive Guide to CALD Communities
Ethnolink

Plain language: is your focus on readability dating your practice in the 1970s?
Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health

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