

Creating Culturally Safe Environments



There are significant inequities in access to health services for migrant and refugee populations including international students, tourists and visitors.

Barriers can include: access to interpreters; social marginalisation; cost of services; a complex Australian health system; lack of culturally trained health professionals; stigma and discrimination; visa status and healthcare eligibility; and poor access to healthcare prior to arrival in Australia.¹

Following are some strategies for creating culturally safer environments.

Awareness and cultural humility

Recognise the effects of racism and discrimination on health and wellbeing.

Find out about the health needs of communities in your area.

Don't assume identity equals certain values or behaviours. Whilst it is valuable to have an awareness of the demographics you are working with, not all people from one cultural group will have the same experiences or views as each other.

Develop cultural humility, which is the ability to maintain an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented (or open to the other) in relation to aspects of cultural identity that are important to them.² Aim to be aware of your own (often unconscious) bias and be aware that there are multiple ways of understanding the world and health.

Take each individual's preferences into account and implement culturally appropriate person-centred approaches that consider broader social determinants that impact on health (e.g. housing, employment, education, gender, sexuality).

Be mindful of well-intentioned questions: for example, many Australians who are not white and may be born in Australia are asked where they are from, which can make people feel like they do not belong. Asking people why they came to Australia and what visa they have can be a sensitive topic – if it is a necessary question it can be helpful to explain the reason for it.

Create opportunities for all staff to receive ongoing cultural diversity/anti-discrimination professional development. Share information that raises awareness of migrant and refugee issues and needs.

A culturally safe environment is where people feel safe, included, and valued and where identity is considered a source of strength.

Resources

Ensure resources are interpreted and translated – as well as written by people in community so cultural frameworks are used (e.g. by an advisory committee). Check translations are accurate and do not contain content that may be offensive.

Use multi-language welcome signs.

Use already translated health information

www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au

Develop resources that can be accessed in a variety of ways (e.g. written, visual, audio).

Working with Interpreters and Translators

An interpreter translates spoken language orally, a translator translates written text. At times both translation and interpreting may be used e.g. consent forms.

Ensure all staff know when and how to book.

Certified interpreters should be booked for health appointments. Engaging a family member or bilingual colleague could be a breach of duty of care.

Book ahead of time, ensure the correct language/dialect is booked (e.g. Arabic is different from Sudanese Arabic), pre-brief the interpreter, and allow at least twice the amount of time for the meeting.

When deciding if an interpreter is needed consider: crisis, complexity, obtaining consent, decrease in the person's competence (for example, when someone is unwell one language may become less fluent and an interpreter may be required where previously they were not).³

The gender of the interpreter may be important, particularly for some issues and in face-to-face appointments (ask the person).

Reaffirm the importance of privacy and confidentiality. Interpreters and translators from other regions may be preferred.

Recognise that some English terms may not have the same concept in another language. Check with the interpreter that they understand and can interpret specific health concepts. For example, some languages there is no direct translation for "counselling" or "mental health".

Print an appointment reminder in another language:

[Appointment Reminder Translation Tool](#)⁴

Environments free from discrimination

Be proactive. Implement policies, procedures, and strategic plans on anti-discrimination and the valuing of diversity (e.g. Multicultural Queensland Charter) and ensure staff are aware of them.⁵

Actively address discrimination.

Representation

Develop and use images, brochures, posters, websites, and promotional material that promote positive and meaningful images of cultural diversity.

Forms and databases that capture gender, language and culture (sensitivity is needed: for some people with refugee experiences, discussing ethnicity can be difficult as this may be the reason they were forced to leave their country).

Support the leadership of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Empower role models and cultural ambassadors.

Meaningfully consult the communities you work with to ensure that they are represented in decision-making processes which affect their community.

At conferences and in educational spaces, highlight and promote the voices of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Use affirmative approaches to human resource management such as de-identified recruitment⁶ to address unconscious bias and achieve inclusive and equitable workplaces. Increase opportunities to attract culturally diverse staff, including staff that represent your local community.

Referrals and partnerships

Inform staff of relevant referral pathways to link people with local community groups and support services.

Organise joint events with cultural community groups and multicultural organisations.

Resource, assist, and create cultural and multicultural support groups (family support groups, peer support groups, online, etc.)

Endnotes

- 1 Queensland Health (2016) *Queensland Sexual Health Strategy 2016-2021*, State of Queensland
- 2 Hook (2013). *Cultural Humility: Measuring openness to culturally diverse clients*. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*.
- 3 Phillips cited in Foundation House (2012) Exploring Barriers and Facilitators to the Use of Qualified Interpreters in Health, Discussion Paper
- 4 NSW Government Health Appointment Reminder Translation Tool www.swsldh.health.nsw.gov.au/refugee/appointment
- 5 Queensland Government (2017) *Multicultural Queensland Charter* www.dlgrma.qld.gov.au/multicultural-affairs/policy-and-governance/multicultural-queensland-charter.html
- 6 Markers such as name, ethnicity, gender, age



For more info on **Culturally Responsive Health**, please visit:
true.org.au