

Appendix D – Supporting people who are culturally, linguistically, and religiously diverse



“Ahmet arrived in Australia a few years ago but is still finding it hard to speak English. He received some assistance to settle when he first arrived but when his landlord sold the property he was staying in and none of his friends had space for him, he didn’t know where to turn and ended up sleeping on the street. When Ahmet comes into contact with services, they do not speak his language so he is not able to communicate what he needs. Ahmet feels stuck and very alone.”

Each person has their own unique experience and needs. It is important to understand the intersectionality between a person’s gender, race, sexual identity, culture, experiences and circumstances. Workers may refer to multiple appendices to assist their understanding, engagement and support for each person they engage.

Overview

Australia is a multicultural country. This diversity drives creativity and innovation and enriches society as a whole. However, people from culturally, linguistically, and/or religiously diverse backgrounds are at an increased risk of homelessness. This can be due to discrimination, speaking a preferred language other than English, limited provision of interpreters and/or translated documents, a lack of culturally appropriate and accessible support services and stigma related to conditions, circumstances, or asking for assistance.

A person’s risk of homelessness may also be increased due to dependence on family or community, insufficient access to community connections or their willingness to engage support services. A person may experience barriers to obtaining employment or income as well, all of which may impact access to accommodation options or a person’s ability to address their basic needs.

Each culture may have their own cultural norms which prescribe how a person may dress, act, and engage with other people. This may impact a person’s willingness to share information or engage with a worker for assistance.

A person may have a complex relationship with their own culture due to their experience or current circumstance. A worker’s ability to understand this will help build trust and improve communication throughout an interaction.

Effective communication is critical to any interaction but may be difficult when a person speaks a language that is different to the worker. In 2021, eight per cent of people experiencing homelessness in Australia did not speak English well or at all. Workers should identify a person’s preferred language and engage an interpreter as required. Multicultural NSW’s [NSW Language Services Guidelines](#) can assist workers to engage interpreters and translators. Workers should be familiar with their agency/organisation’s procedures to procure and/or access translation services.

People from culturally, linguistically and/or religiously diverse backgrounds who are experiencing domestic and family violence may be at increased risk of homelessness. For information on supporting people who experienced domestic and family violence, refer to **Appendix L**.

People from culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse backgrounds who are on temporary visas experience additional barriers and disadvantage. For more information on supporting people on temporary visas refer to **Appendix E**.

It is important that the worker considers the person's cultural safety before, during, and after any approach or interaction. Workers should remain non-judgemental throughout all interactions and respect a person's appearance, behaviour or practices.

A worker is encouraged to participate in cultural competency training and demonstrate understanding through their approach and interactions. Muslim Women Australia provides an engagement guide for faith and culturally appropriate support. The guide can be found at <https://mwa.org.au/submissions-and-reports/saving-face-faith-sector-guide>

Any information, resources, or support provided must be culturally appropriate and considerate. Workers should ask and, where possible, assist people to engage a culturally appropriate support worker if preferred, to improve the experience and outcomes for people who are culturally, linguistically or religiously diverse.

Engagement strategy

Things to consider before engaging:ⁱⁱⁱ

- The worker should consider a person's culture, history, faith or spirituality, and current circumstances, as well as the impact that these may have on any interaction.
- A person's cultural norms or beliefs may also impact their willingness to access support services.
- Understand cultural gender roles and their impact when engaging. Workers should consider the number and gender of workers that approach a person to ensure cultural safety and respectful interactions.
- Workers should access language services, as required, that are certified by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) to assist with any interaction. Note while NAATI Certified Practitioners are preferred, in some cases, only NAATI Recognised Practising Practitioners may be available especially for newly emerging languages where higher certification testing may not be available. The [NSW Language Services Guidelines](#) can assist workers to engage language services when supporting a person who speaks a language other than English.

- It is important that workers do not rely exclusively on a person's family members or friends to facilitate communication. This is to avoid any misinterpretation, bias, vicarious trauma and potential abuse.
- In some small cultural groups and communities, accessing interpreters or bilingual workers can void their anonymity and restrict engagement.
- Where possible, the worker should know where to access materials that are translated into languages that a person can understand. Some people may be illiterate in their preferred language in which other forms of communication (e.g. visual, audio, audio-visual) may assist.

Strategies for engagement:

- Introduce yourself in a friendly manner, stating your name and the agency/organisation you work for.
- Ask the person their preferred language and engage an interpreter as needed, including when obtaining consent for referrals.
- Confirm that the person has no familiarity with the bilingual worker or interpreter engaged to support the interaction.
- Be aware of non-verbal behaviours that may be interpreted negatively by various cultures (i.e. eye contact, distance between you and the person, or hand gestures that have different meanings).
- Use plain language and keep statements clear and simple, avoiding the use of jargon or acronyms.
- If needed, use visual aids or write information down to assist with understanding.
- Direct the person to an appropriate service that can provide assistance if needed or requested.



RESOURCES

CRISIS SUPPORT		
Name	Service	Contact Details
Ask Izzy	A website directory that connects people who are in need with nearby services such as housing, food, health care and legal services in their local area.	Website: https://askizzy.org.au
Link2Home	A statewide telephone service providing information, assessment and referral to specialist homelessness services, temporary accommodation and other appropriate services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week every day of the year.	Phone: 1800 152 152 Website: https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/help/ways/are-you-homeless
OTHER SUPPORT		
Name	Service	Contact Details
AMES Australia	Supports culturally and linguistically diverse communities by providing end-to-end settlement services including English language and vocational training and employment and accommodation services.	Phone: 13 AMES (13 2637) Website: https://www.ames.net.au
Settlement Services International (SSI)	Provides a range of programs to support refugees, asylum seekers and people who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Programs include disability support, education, medical care and employment.	Phone: 02 8799 6700 Email: info@ssi.org.au Website: https://ssi.org.au
Transcultural Mental Health Centre	Works with health practitioners and communities to support positive mental health for people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.	Phone: 1800 648 911 Website: https://www.dhi.health.nsw.gov.au/transcultural-mental-health-centre



- i University of Western Australia (UWA), *Homelessness in culturally and linguistically diverse populations in Western Australia*, report to the Western Australia Government Department of Communities, UWA, 2019.
- ii Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Estimating Homelessness: Census*, ABS website, 2023.
- iii NSW Government Small Business Commissioner, *Advice for councils: Engaging with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) businesses and communities*, Small Business Commissioner website, 2022.