

Essential Tools for Workforce Development

What is CALD?

This resource is part of a series of resources in the online Diversity in Disability Toolkit.

For further information, see:

diversityindisability.org

CALD

CALD is an abbreviation for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse. This phrase is used to describe people who have a diverse cultural background or whose first language is not English.**

Australia can be described as having a culturally and linguistically diverse population.

Many residents are born overseas or originate from non-English speaking countries. Except for Australia's first people, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, we are a country of migrants. Each different cultural group has its own history, beliefs, local customs, languages, dialects, style of dress and social rules.

Approximately one in every four Australians was born overseas.

Migrant communities

Even in the most represented countries of origin that make up our population, the range of cultural values, beliefs and perspectives is vast. Consider the level of diversity if you included all the other countries and cultures represented in Australia.

Language diversity

Linguistic diversity is also significant. Nearly one in five Australians speak a language other than English (LOTE).

Common languages spoken in the home, other than English are: Arabic, Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Greek.

Language is a defining characteristic of different cultures, allowing communication of traditions, beliefs and values. We work in a culturally diverse context. It's important we consider how we need to adapt and adjust our services. Working well in a diverse cultural context requires awareness, knowledge and skills. To access, understand and service the community, we need to reflect community diversity and leverage the great talents of our people.

To meet the National Disability Standards, it's critical organisations take a person-centred approach and enable participation and inclusion. Understanding, responding to and servicing the needs of our community also results in better business outcomes.

It's a basic business principle that to engage with and service a market, it is necessary to understand the underlying needs of the people in that consumer segment.

So, what is culture and why does it matter?

Culture is often likened to an iceberg. Part of it is visible, above the water, but the majority sits below the waterline, unseen.

Cultural behaviours are visible and observable: what people do, what they wear, how they speak. People often adjust and adapt their behaviour in different cultural contexts.

Cultural values and beliefs are not immediately visible or obvious: what people think or feel, what they value. Cultural values and beliefs impact behaviours.

For example, in many Asian cultures people are taught it is important to demonstrate humility. This is a value or belief and not externally visible. However the belief has an effect on behaviour. In an interview an Asian colleague may consider it inappropriate to 'blow their own trumpet' or 'sell themselves'. This can lead to a lack of recognition of skills among Asian staff in Australian organisations.

Cultural values and beliefs can take a long time to change. Everyone has a culture and a 'way of doing things', which is their 'normal'. It's helpful to be aware of some of your own cultural values and practices and those of the people in your workplace or community. It's important to recognise significant diversity also exists within cultural groups, due to age, generation and lived experience. A recognition and respect for diversity ensures effective service delivery.

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