



**An aged care
workforce for the future:**
Recruiting and maintaining a
culturally diverse workforce in
aged care services

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This resource aims to help aged care service providers to identify possible barriers or challenges to recruiting and maintaining a diverse workforce – specifically workers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD).

People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds identify with a culture or religion that is not predominantly represented in Australian society or they speak a language other than English at home.

Workers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds face various challenges in not only gaining work in aged care services, but also movement into leadership roles within the sector. This resource documents some of these challenges and provides strategies organisations can use to address those barriers.

Why is this important?

As we know, Australia is a multicultural country. In the 2021 census 51% of the population stated that they were either born overseas or had at least one parent who had been born overseas. With this in mind, we know that services in all sectors need to be aware of diversity and ensure that the services are accessible to all people.

The [Aged Act 1997](#), the [Aged Care Quality Standards](#), and the [Charter of Rights](#) all require providers to address the specific needs of groups including our older population from CALD backgrounds.

At the centre of the Aged Care Quality Standards are two requirements:

1. consumers receive quality care
2. workers are kind, caring, and respectful of each consumer's identity, culture, and diversity.

The draft of the [strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards](#) also stresses:

1. the importance of delivering care that is culturally safe, and trauma-aware, and
2. that the older person's individual background, culture, diversity, beliefs, and life experiences are part of assessment and planning, and are used by services to direct the way their care and services are delivered.

Cultural and linguistic diversity in the aged care workforce

We know that a high proportion of aged care workforce who are identified as being from a culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds work in direct service provision. The highest proportion are working as personal care workers followed by nursing and allied health workforce.

Based on the expected growth in the aged care sector and on the high current vacancy rates in direct care roles (22,000), we can predict that the recruitment of workers from culturally and linguistically diverse communities will continue to also grow.

Home care

21%

of the total direct care workforce – personal carers, nurses, and allied health roles, identified as being from a culturally and linguistically diverse background.

Of that 21%,

91%

are personal care workers.

95%

of personal care workers work part-time.

Residential care

35%

direct care workers identify as being from a culturally and linguistically diverse background

Of that 35%,

72%

are personal care workers, 24% nurses and 4% allied health professionals.

96%

of personal care workers work part-time.

Source: Dep of Health, aged care workforce census 2020

What we see from these statistics is that workers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds play a critical role delivering direct care however are not represented in management or leadership roles relative to their representation in the community. For organisations to be truly diverse and inclusive, diversity needs to be reflected throughout the organisation.

Benefits of a culturally diverse and inclusive workforce

Workers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds bring many benefits to the aged care sector including:

- Language skills
- Cultural knowledge
- Diverse perspective leading to new initiatives in service design and delivery
- Community links that will help with recruitment and promotion of aged care services
- Willingness to work in the sector that currently has difficulty recruiting sufficient workforce
- Values alignment supporting quality care.

For services, there is also an increased opportunity to meet the criteria of the [CALD Specialisation Verification Framework](#).

These benefits of a culturally diverse workforce are unlocked and amplified when an organisation actively builds inclusion to ensure workers feel respected and connected and can contribute to and progress their career within the organisation. While many aged care providers have consumer focused policies and procedures in place to address inclusive services, the same is not as common when it comes to an inclusive workplace.

According to Diversity Council of Australia, workplaces are happier and more effective when diversity is embraced and the organisation and employees actively build inclusion.

Workers in inclusive teams are:

11^x

more likely to work effectively together with their teams

9.5^x

more likely to be innovative

4^x

more likely to provide excellent service

2.5^x

more likely to work extra hard

10^x

more likely to be very satisfied in their job

3^x

less likely to leave their organisation

4^x

more likely to feel that work has a positive impact on their mental health

2.5^x

more likely to have been given feedback they found useful

5^x

less likely to experience discrimination and/or harassment.

Source: Diversity Council Australia (D'Almada-Remedios, R.) DCA Inclusion@Work Index 2023-2024: Mapping the State of Inclusion in the Australian Workforce, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2024.

Motivations, challenges and retention factors for workers

Reasons for working in the aged care sector.

- Alignment with value of compassion
- Cultural values in relation to respect of older people
- Experience of having looked after parents/grandparents
- Short training or formal qualifications not needed
- Availability of work
- Opportunity to work in a similar profession when overseas qualifications not recognised e.g. personal care worker for a nurse
- 'Stepping stone' until qualifications are recognised

Source: Migrant Care Workers' Perceptions of Their Working Conditions in Australian Residential Aged Care Facilities [2023](#)

Challenges for working in aged care sector.

- Understanding complexity of work requirements with insufficient induction
- Communication - understanding terminology, colloquialisms and slang
- Professional development to respond inclusively of diversity in the workplace and with consumers
- Racist comments/behaviour from consumers
- Experiencing discrimination and racist behaviour from colleagues
- Inadequate response from organisation/leaders when they experience racism
- Lack of familiarity with workplace routines
- Cultural differences
- Lack of career options

Source: Migrant Care Workers' Perceptions of Their Working Conditions in Australian Residential Aged Care Facilities [2023](#)

Factors that keep workers in their jobs.

- Personal satisfaction and positive feelings of identity with their work roles
- Support for their emotional and mental health
- Systems to prevent work-related injuries
- Validation, support, and positive feedback from managers and aged care organisations
- Presence of peers from a similar cultural background
- Positive relationships between care workers and peers, supervisors, management, older people, and their families
- Socially supportive colleagues
- Access to responsive leadership with low management turnover
- Genuine affection and concern for consumers

Source: Factors Impacting Retention of Aged Care Workers: A systematic review [2023](#)



Commitment to diversity and inclusion – strategies and tips

The approach to working towards one goal and vision of diversity and inclusion happens at a number of different levels within an organisation.





While the main obligation of an organisation in aged care is to ensure that workers have the right skills to carry out their work, it is also the organisation's responsibility to ensure that the workplace is welcoming, safe, and free from discrimination in relation to its employees.

Good practice example:

✔ Australian Multicultural Community Services (AMCS) ensures that their website lets potential employees know that the organisation embraces diversity and welcomes staff from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds:

- Our organisation embraces diversity. Our multicultural team provides a range of home-based care and social support services to the seniors in our community, always with an emphasis on cultural competence and connection.
- Most of our staff are bi or multi-lingual and have arrived in Australia as adults or are children of migrants. This is the real strength of our organisation, adding a real value and cultural understanding to our services.

Recruitment

Organisations that are truly reflective of their local community thrive in terms of attracting consumers, workers and volunteers and they also tend to be more inclusive at all levels of the organisation.

Traditional recruitment processes can be the first hurdle to attracting applicants and hiring. These can include:

- Bias: implicit and explicit assumptions about people based on their cultural background, their language, and/or their religion. It may be assumed that the candidate wouldn't be a cultural fit for the organisation.
- Insensitivity: some Australian cultural norms can make people from specific cultures and religions uncomfortable, such as shaking hands or asking personal questions.
- Language: jargon, colloquialisms, and slang are a barrier to many people who speak English as a second language.
- Perception of lack of qualifications and experience: many people settle in Australia with qualifications and experience from their home country. These can be overlooked, not recognised, or simply ignored.
- Inflexibility: not considering family and cultural needs of the applicant, such as family care responsibilities or days of religious or cultural significance.
- Tools such as psychometric testing that do not account for cultural and linguistic diversity.

Addressing the barriers:

- Broaden the distribution of advertising and of job descriptions.
- Talk and listen to employees from diverse backgrounds about their experiences with the recruitment process and make meaningful change to create greater access.
- Encourage current staff to promote the vacancies in their local communities.
- Adjust the essential and desirable criteria for positions so they are more accessible.
- Ensure the process for applying is clear and simple.
- The interview panel should be diverse.
- Provide feedback to unsuccessful applicants, explaining why they were unsuccessful and how they could improve in the process.
- Having leadership that reflects diversity will attract more diverse applicants.
- Conduct ongoing reviews of the application processes.
- Consider blind recruitment – removing names so that an initial bias is eliminated at the start.

Good practice example:

✔ Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra Ltd (MCCI)

The organisation has a succinct and clear message for potential workers and on its website encourages applications from people who:

share a passion for working with culturally and linguistically diverse communities and

are committed to an inclusive society that embraces, celebrates and values diversity

MCCI has a staff referral program and encourages current staff to refer a friend for employment. Upon successful recruitment, the staff member who made the referral is rewarded (payment or gift voucher) and then again after a designated period if the person recruited remains with the organisation.

All new staff members receive a welcome email from the CEO in addition to regular check-ins from the Human Resources team.

Good practice example:

✔ SydWest Multicultural Services recruited 18 staff through participation in one community event. It is an organisation that states on its website that it adheres to the principles and practices of Equal Employment Opportunity, Workplace Health and Safety providing employees with the opportunity to work within a dynamic multicultural environment.



Retaining staff

Staff are much more likely to stay in a workplace where they feel that they are included and valued.

Retention of staff can be helped by:

1. Building staff capabilities and confidence to be culturally responsive at all levels of the organisation.
2. Creating a workplace culture that celebrates diversity through internal and external events.
3. Development of mentoring programs.
4. Open communication so staff feel that their opinions are valued and that they will be listened and responded to.
5. Visibility of diversity and inclusion policies.
6. Facilities that accommodate cultural and religious needs such as a prayer room.
7. Addressing racism and bullying.
8. Diverse workforce on all levels of the organisation.
9. Understanding cultural safety and ensuring it is a part of the workplace culture.

Good practice example:

✔ **Advance Diversity Services has a robust Peer Support program.**

The organisation has identified challenges faced by this cohort of workers:

- Home care support work is very isolating
- People recruited may have little to no training as they enter the aged care workforce
- Many may not have previous work experience in aged care in Australia

Key features of Peer support program include:

- If appropriate, language match is created to facilitate greater ease in communication
- New worker and Peer support worker work together for a period of time
- New worker is introduced to the service recipient so that they are not surprised by a 'stranger' arriving to their home
- Regular and ongoing support and checking how the new worker is settling into their work is provided by the Case Manager
- Monthly team meetings provide work updates, training and peer support for the team

Diversity in Leadership

As we know the majority of culturally and linguistically diverse workers in aged care are personal care workers and as there is little data for leadership roles we can assume that, like many industries, there is underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse workers in leadership roles.

Barriers to progression:

- Workplace cultural differences can lead to people feeling excluded as they struggle to understand the culture and ways of achieving progression
- 'Not all experience is equal' such as overseas qualifications may not be recognised but regardless of qualifications many applicants from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds find overseas experience often isn't valued
- Experience of microaggressions and discrimination in the workplace
- Experiences of bias that can come from individuals or structural bias

Strategies:

- Leadership diversity audit
- Clear pathways into leadership roles
- Building support structures to address structural bias
- Explicit diversity and inclusion policies that are implemented
- Formal mentoring programs that encourage cross cultural matches
- Provide opportunity for 'acting' in leadership roles
- Professional leadership development

Identifying the diversity profile of your organisation.

To be committed to a diverse and inclusive workplace the capacity of the workforce needs to be developed through mentoring, feedback, and continuous reflection.

The first step is usually to know the diversity within your organisation. Understanding the diversity of the organisation gives you three main benefits:

1. Knowing the organisation's diversity can show you the unique knowledge and skills of staff that may not be being utilised
2. Identifies support and needs of staff that are yet to be provided
3. Shows you whether or not the diversity of staff reflects the diversity of the community, of consumers, and of other stakeholders

The information gathered would include:

- Cultural heritage or background
- Language spoken at home
- Experience working with customers and colleagues from diverse backgrounds
- Cross-cultural communication
- Formal training and studies

If you would like to assess your organisation's ability to recruit, retain and progress staff from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds please download our **Culturally Inclusive Workplace: Self Assessment Tool**.

References

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[Aged Act 1997](#)

[Aged Care Quality Standards](#)

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[Charter of Aged Care Rights](#)

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Resources:

Tools and resources for multicultural planning

<https://multicultural.nsw.gov.au/resources/tools-and-resources-for-multicultural-planning/>

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