Respecting culture and cultural difference

FACT SHEET

Loddon's Commitment to Supporting Families
Our shared core competencies

This competency refers to practice that recognises and respects the cultural diversity in our community and is informed by an understanding of cultural history, difference, strengths and safety. This competency involves being able to build a culturally safe workplace.

What does this competency mean?

Respecting culture and cultural difference means:

- Understanding and respecting difference in personal, cultural, linguistic and historical background
- Developing positive attitudes towards cultural differences and different world views
- Making our services culturally welcoming for all people
- Being able to build culturally safe services
- Being able to reflect on our own cultural background and be aware of our unconscious assumptions and bias.

What does the research say?

'Cultural awareness training' has been a popular method by which organisations seek to improve the cultural appropriateness of their service delivery. Developing cultural awareness, including self-awareness about one's own culture, values and assumptions, is often described as the first step towards cultural competence.[1] It requires 'the ability to critically reflect on one's own culture and professional paradigms in order to understand its cultural limitations and effect positive change'.[2]

However, more recent terminology has shifted in favour of 'cultural competence' as it recognises the importance of not only knowledge, but accompanying skills, attitudes and behaviour. Cultural competence includes the concept of cultural safety, which is about creating an environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening.[3]

The Victorian Department of Human Services' Cultural Respect Framework (2016-2026) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders also includes self-reflection as a step in developing a culturally responsive workforce.[4] In relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, to create a culturally safe environment an organisation and its staff needs to:

- Build strong and mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal people and organisations
- Discuss with local Aboriginal organisations how to improve the cultural safety of your organisation
- Find out who the Traditional Owner groups or Registered Aboriginal Party is in the area
- Recognise the impact of the past on Aboriginal families, individuals and communities today
- Respect and embrace culture in every aspect of the organisation.[5]

1 Lynch, E. & Hanson, M. (Eds), 2004. *Developing cross-cultural competence: A guide for working with children and their families*, Third Edition, Paul H. Brookes Publishing, Baltimore.
2 Universities Australia, 2011. Guiding Principles for Developing Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities.
3 Williams, R. 2008. 'Cultural safety; What does it mean for our work practice?', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 23(2), pp. 213-214.
4 Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council, 2015. 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework' 2014 Report, AHMAC, Canberra.
5 Commission for Children and Young People (n.d.) Cultural safety for Aboriginal children. Tip Sheet: Child Safe Organisations.
6 Stith-Williams, V. & Haynes, P. 2007. 'For Cultural Competence: Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions Needed to Embrace Diversity', Virginia Department of Education.

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What are the implications for practice?

Pedersen's Conceptual Framework for cultural competency presents three layers of strategies to improve an organisation's cultural competency:

- **Raising awareness:** examples include reflective exercises, case studies, critical incident debriefing and group discussions

- **Promoting knowledge:** examples include workshops and training sessions, self-guided learning, reading materials, films and video clips

- **Strengthening skills:** examples include role modelling, reflection on practice, supervision and structured opportunities to practice specific skills.[6]

The Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health (CEH) presents strategies an agency might employ to positively engage with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background communities, including:

- Having CALD background community members on boards of management

- Holding community member planning days

- Involving community members in project/reference groups

- Establishing advisory groups

- Holding focus groups and informal information sessions

- Distributing information and resources to CALD community members.

Other information and resources

Dja Dja Warrung Clans
www.djadjawurrung.com.au

Taungurung Clans:
www.taungurung.com.au

Wurundjeri Council:
www.wurundjeri.com.au

Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation:
www.yynac.com.au

Victorian Multicultural Commission
www.multicultural.vic.gov.au

Understanding cultural competence
Early Childhood Australia
www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2013-2018 www.vic.gov.au/aboriginalvictoria

Imagine a culturally competent Australia
Centre for Cultural Competence Australia
www.essa.org.au

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