

GUIDE: Culturally appropriate service delivery

An organisation must provide the most culturally appropriate forms of service delivery it can. Take a moment to think about how people might see your organisation at the first contact.

Does the organisation:

- have reception or frontline staff who are approachable and show good cross-cultural communication skills?
- use promotional materials including pictures of people from diverse cultural backgrounds?
- engage staff from the cultural backgrounds of clients?
- have the capacity to use people's names correctly and respectfully?

These are just a few of the areas of service delivery where cultural capability can make a difference.

In diverse cultural communities, people from different cultures may have different expectations and norms regarding:

- appropriate greetings and body language
- hospitality and what are 'good manners'
- physical contact and gender norms
- taboos and inappropriate behaviour.

At an individual level, it is not always possible or practical to adapt behaviour to everyone's culture. But understanding different norms can be very helpful, and in many circumstances, it is possible to be adaptable and more inclusive of difference. Minor modifications in behaviour can show respect and build rapport.

At an organisational level, this guide focuses on what is needed to ensure culturally appropriate service delivery.

Accessing and leveraging the skills of diverse staff

For an organisation to understand and respond to community needs, it should reflect the community it serves. Understand the cultural capabilities of all staff and address hiring practices to ensure diversity among your employees.

Hiring or promoting staff is central to bias claims. Unconscious bias or learned stereotypes that are automatic, unintentional and deeply engrained can lead to a tendency to hiring similarities. The unconscious is 'the part of the mind that a person is not aware of but that is often a powerful force in controlling behaviour'.

Managing talent pipeline to reflect diversity and inclusion

The best way to minimise the potential or impact of unconscious bias is to focus on performance and capability. Flexible and informal hiring practices are high risk. In one of the most famous unconscious bias case studies, the Boston Symphony Orchestra instituted blind auditions to assess potential musicians. Under blind audition conditions, the likelihood of a female musician advancing from the preliminary rounds of an audition increased by 50 per cent. Other studies of labour market discrimination found that call-backs after review of identical resumes can be up to 70 per cent higher for applicants with non 'foreign-sounding' names.

The tools which follow this guide provide practical guidance on how to minimise bias in the hiring and promotion process.