



Working with individuals and families from multicultural backgrounds

Terms

Preferred	Instead of
Multicultural	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)
Migrant, Refugee, Asylum Seeker	Foreigner, Outsider
English as Additional Language – often people speak multiple languages and dialects	English as Second Language
Cultural Background – is a more inclusive term. For refugees born in refugee camps, country of birth may not accurately reflect their cultural identity. These individuals may have limited ties to their birth countries, including language proficiency, citizenship, and exposure to the wider culture	Race, Ethnicity, Nationality
Cultural Humility: Is the lifelong commitment to learning, self-reflection, and recognising one's own cultural biases and limitations	Cultural Competency: Is the knowledge and mastery of skills needed to work with diverse cultures.

Migration

Late 1940s with large-scale migration post World War II from United Kingdom and Ireland, primarily in supporting the burgeoning coal industry in Yallourn.

1950s and 1960s witnessed a surge in arrivals from Italy, Malta, Greece, Poland, Germany, Netherlands and Yugoslavia for the Snowy River scheme of hydropower plants and growth in the farming industry.

1970s and 1980s culminated in the end of the White Australia Policy. This shift significantly diversified Australia's immigration intake.

Subsequent decades witnessed a global influx of migrants, including refugees from Bosnia, Sudan and Vietnam, as well as Filipinos, Chinese and Thailand on family visas*. (Source: GMS, "CALD Communities in Gippsland", 2011)

There has been a reduction of migration due to rural downturn, but this is slowly picking up with skilled migration.

Present days, there has been an increase of skilled migrants from South Asia (India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh) and the Philippines. Working holidaymakers from Taiwan and Indonesia and the Pacific Islanders on the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme are among the temporary visa holders in Gippsland. (Source: Department of Home Affairs, 2022 – 2023 Settlement Statistics).



Frequently asked questions

Can you be an expert in working with people from multicultural backgrounds?

No, because culture is diverse and constantly changing. For example, if you know someone from China, it doesn't mean you understand every Chinese person's culture, as there are many cultural groups, languages, and traditions. Every person's experience is unique, and cultures evolve over time.

If no one can be an expert on other cultures, what's the best approach?

Instead of trying to know everything about different cultures, practice "Cultural Humility". This means being open to learning, listening and recognising your own biases. It's about saying, "I don't know everything, but I'm willing to learn" while being respectful and understanding.

Do some cultures or religions promote violence against women?

No, this is a harmful myth. No culture or religion supports violence against women. However, some people misuse culture or religion to control women. While some cultures may be more patriarchal, cultures can change and adapt over time.

What are some practical tips for working with clients from multicultural backgrounds?

Building trust takes time. Listen actively, be mindful of body language, and avoid stereotypes. Don't judge someone's intelligence by their accent or limited English. Avoid using complicated language, and focus on practical support like food vouchers or transportation help. If you struggle saying someone's name, ask how to pronounce it instead of giving them a nickname or an English name.

Can I rely on children to help translate for their parents?

No, it's best practice to use professional interpreters. Children might not fully understand or could feel uncomfortable translating sensitive topics. Always make sure the interpreter doesn't have a personal connection to the family, and check that the interpreter speaks the right dialect or language.

What can I do if my client is always late for appointments?

Different cultures view time differently. Instead of getting frustrated, find out what's causing the delay. Offer solutions like arranging transportation, scheduling reminders, or changing the meeting location. Be flexible and focus on problem-solving.

How can I explain coercive control to someone from a multicultural background?

"Coercive Control" may not directly translate into some languages, and the concept might be unfamiliar. Be patient and use examples they can relate to. Keep in mind that culture and language evolve, and younger generations might have their own ways of understanding these ideas.

What should I know about supporting someone without permanent residency in Australia?

Immigration status concerns: People without permanent residency might be afraid to seek help because of their visa status or fear of deportation. Visa abuse can happen when someone uses another person's temporary visa status to control or manipulate them. This can occur in both family violence situations and in workplace abuse.

Limited access to services: Eligibility for government benefits and certain support services might be restricted based on visa status, including housing, healthcare, childcare, disability support, education, getting loans and financial aid.

Fear of authority: A person may have had negative experience of police or other authority figures. This may impact ability to trust and form rapport with services, particularly in environments perceived as authoritative or directive.

Social isolation: Some people may have limited social networks due to recently moving to Australia, or they may have migrated a while ago, but they were focused solely on working studying or raising children. Being in regional and remote areas can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and vulnerability.

What are the unique aspects of family violence in multicultural communities?

Migrant and refugee women may experience family violence from multiple family members, not just their partner. In some cultures, marriage is seen as a bond between two families, so divorce can impact the entire family. Migrant women and their children are also vulnerable to abuse due to their visa status, limited knowledge of rights and social isolation. (Source: ANROWS, ASPIRE Project, 2015).

What are the unique challenges young people from multicultural backgrounds face?

Young people often act as cultural translators for their families and navigate between their parents' traditions and mainstream Australian culture. This can create stress as they try to balance family expectations with fitting in with their peers.

For providing support for young people from multicultural backgrounds, refer to the Centre for Multicultural Youth <https://www.cmy.net.au/>

What challenges do older people from multicultural backgrounds face?

Older people may feel isolated after living away from their home countries for a long time. They may not return to their country of origin because it's impractical or because of culture shock. In cases of dementia, older people might lose their English and revert to their native language, which can make care more challenging but also deeply personal.

The Gippsland Multicultural Services provides comprehensive aged and disability care services that are culturally sensitive and supportive of the older person's cultural background and employ care workers from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds. For more information, refer to <http://gms.org.au>