Factsheet - How to Develop Cultural Competence

What is cultural competency?

There are many definitions for cultural competence. Probably the most comprehensive definition is:

> *"The ability of individuals and systems to respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and faiths or religion in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, tribes, and communities, and protects and preserves the dignity of each"* *(Cross et al. 1989).[i]*

Other definitions of cultural competence include:

*For an **agency**, cultural competence is considered, "a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes and policies that come together in an agency, enabling that agency to work effectively in cross-cultural situations" (ibid)[ii].*

As it relates to **disability**, cultural competence, "*implies the ability to adequately understand and respond to the needs and concerns of individuals with disability and their families from ethnic and minority communities, with responses based on an accurate understanding of their specific cultural practices*" (Stone, 2005)[iii].

> *"Cultural competence is a developmental process and evolves over an extended period. Both agencies and individuals are at various levels of awareness, knowledge and skill acquisition along the cultural competence continuum."*
> *(Betancourt, Green, & Carrillo, 2002.).[iv]*

Reasons for developing Cultural Competence

Australia has a rich cultural diversity and according to the 2016 Census, Australians were born in almost 200 different countries and speak more than 300 languages. However this diversity is not reflected in rates of service use. These rates are far lower than the national rate. AMPARO has observed that when services do not have a culturally inclusive practices people from CALD backgrounds with disability:

- May not know of what supports and services are available

- Miss out on essential services or receive inappropriate or inadequate levels of support

- Suffer long term impacts on their health and well-being, and ability to participate in community

Australia has witnessed lower and decreasing economic participation by people with disability and their carers generally. "Rates of service use for people from a NESB with disability are only 11.7%, less than half of that of the national rate of 34.9%. These inequalities are even more acutely experienced by people with disability who are Indigenous or who were born in non-English speaking countries."[v]

Australia's Multicultural Access and Equity Policy

The Federal Government's Multicultural Access and Equity Policy promotes the right of all Australians to effectively communicate and engage with the Australian government and funded agencies, irrespective of their cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds.

What does Cultural Competence mean for staff?

A staff member who is culturally competent is able to identify and challenge their own cultural assumptions, values and beliefs. When working with people from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background and their families, culturally competent workers aim to:

- Develop empathy
- Appreciate the existence of different ways of seeing the world, as this is influenced by culture
- Understand how their own cultural norms impact on their view of themselves and the families they work with
- Be less judgmental and more flexible, responsive, inclusive and respectful.

What does Cultural Competence mean for an agency?

When human services develop policies, programs and practices which are person centred and culturally competent they are better able to be inclusive and responsive to the needs of people from CALD backgrounds with disability.

Culturally competent agencies:

- Broaden their knowledge and understanding of the cultural and linguistic needs of individuals and communities they assist

- Learn about, and integrate, unique cultural abilities and perspectives into daily operations

- Identify and address the issues facing organisations and staff that have cultural implications

- Are able to bring this knowledge into the routine functioning and operations of the agency.

What does Cultural Competence offer?

Cultural competence offers a framework through which to improve service delivery to people from a CALD background. This framework enables you to assess and make improvements to every aspect of your organisation, from management and governance structures to service delivery and staff development. It will help ensure that all clients receive high quality and culturally appropriate service.

What are the essential components of Cultural Competence?

Cultural competence requires that organisations and their personnel are active in:

(1) Valuing cultural diversity
(2) Conducting cultural self-assessment,
(3) Managing the dynamics of difference,
(4) Acquiring cultural knowledge and incorporating it into core practices
(5) Adapting to the diversity and cultural contexts of the individuals and communities served [vi].

Core focus areas for developing Cultural Competence

1. Agency knowledge and understanding

- Expand the agency's knowledge of culture, cultural competence and the dimensions of culture.
- Develop an understanding of the various cultural groups within communities serviced by your agency.
- Increase the organisational and individual understanding of how the various dimensions of culture impact the families the agency serves and the staff that work with them. Dimensions of difference between cultures are for example; different ways of understanding time, hierarchy, health, collectivism and individualism.

2. Policy and program design and development

- Need to be inclusive, responsive and flexible to the needs of people from a CALD background and their families.

- Include culture and cultural competence principles in the strategic planning, policy development, program design, and service delivery process. For example, develop and implement a Language Service Policy and ensure all staff are able to use it.
- Review all agency policies to ensure that they take into account the needs of people from CALD backgrounds that are being serviced by the agency, and that the policies are inclusive and responsive to the cultural values of all communities being serviced.
- Actively promote programs to people from CALD backgrounds with disability and their families and communities.
- Translate materials as required, ensuring increased knowledge of, and access to, services.
- Collect relevant data to measure the level of access to the agency and the quality of service delivery.

3. Staff training and ongoing cultural competency practices

- Recruit staff that reflect the diversity people agency is working with.
- Provide training to all staff to increase their cultural competence, including knowing how to access and work effectively with interpreters.
- Create a safe, secure, and supportive environment where staff can explore and develop an understanding for all cultures.
- Provide opportunities for staff to reflect on their work practice, and explore their unconscious biases, assumptions and stereotypes.
- Develop connections with CALD organisations to ensure clear referral pathways and assist staff with training where relevant.

- Be committed to promoting cultural competence, through staff development, hiring, retention, career advancement, performance evaluations, and employee policies that support culturally competent and linguistically appropriate practice.
- Support employees to develop an understanding and respect for the richness, strength, and additional capacity culture and diversity bring to the workplace.
- Provide access to secondary consultations with bicultural consultants and bilingual workers if/when required.
- Ensure staff have enough flexibility to modify their work practices so their interactions, approaches and ways of working with CALD are appropriate and inclusive
- Ensure budget allocations are sufficient to ensure programs are culturally inclusive, for example include increased staff time, bicultural workers or translations.

4. Engaging with the community

- Promote your services through culturally appropriate outreach to CALD communities
- Create formal partnerships with other agencies working with CALD communities
- Be active in local communities. Engage communities by recruiting local citizens for the Board of Directors, in voting positions, and on advisory teams and task forces. Encourage and support staff to become involved in community boards and cultural activities.
- Advocate for the development of cultural competence principles in other groups to which your agency belongs. Include criteria in contracts that place emphasis on the ability of the applicant, contractor, or consultant to demonstrate the capacity and ability to achieve positive results that are culturally competent and linguistically appropriate, and applicable to the needs of people from a CALD background and their families.

5. Equal opportunities

- Be an example to communities and families that work with your agency by ensuring hiring processes are culturally appropriate and decisions that are reflective of the diversity of those populations.
- If your agency provides educational and/or recreational opportunities for the community and families served, make sure that they include experiences that are reflective of all cultural groups.
- Equal employment opportunities for workers from a CALD background and provision of staff training and supervision to assist their professional development.

[i] Cross, T., Bazron, B., Dennis, K. & Isaacs, M. (1989) Towards a culturally competent system of care: A monograph on effective services for minority children who are severely emotionally disturbed: Volume I. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Child Development Center.
[ii] ibid
[iii] Stone, J.H. (2004) Culture and Disability: Providing Culturally Competent Services, Sage Publications.
[iv] Betancourt, J., Green, A. & Carrillo, E. (2002). Cultural competence in health care: Emerging frameworks and practical approaches. The Commonwealth Fund.
[v] Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2012) National Disability Strategy 2010 – 2020 Report to the Council of Australian Government

[vi] National Centre of Cultural Competency- Conceptual Framework, adapted from the work of Cross et al., 1989. Retrieved from
https://nccc.georgetown.edu/foundations/framework.php

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