

How can services be more inclusive?

Recruit a diverse workforce

Health care services can provide better care when it is delivered by workers who reflect the diversity of consumers. An inclusive organisation will have medical and administrative staff with a variety of experiences, skills, and identities (age, ethnicity, faith, gender, language, sexual orientation and more). A diverse workforce has the knowledge and life experience to help identify issues, improve services, and recognise the needs of more people.

Provide staff with regular training

All staff should have regular training on community values, culture, languages, and communication styles. Staff who do not come from marginalised backgrounds need to be supported to better understand consumers and colleagues who do. Consumers and staff from marginalised communities should not have to repeatedly explain their experiences and needs. Training all staff can help share the emotional load.

Partner with consumer and local organisations

Partnering with Consumers is Standard 2 of the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards. Consumers and their carers have a right to participate in the **creation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation** of the health care services they use. It is beneficial to include consumers in the decision-making process from the beginning, as their lived experience within services means consumers know what would make these services more relevant, effective, and respectful. There should be opportunities for consumers to be included in **research, development, improvement, implementation, feedback and evaluation of services, facilities, programs, and policies**. In other words, consumer knowledge should appear in all stages and at all levels of health care services.

Value those who are teaching you about diversity

It is important to value the time of those teaching you about communities needs and experiences. Telling your story to strangers can be exhausting or even traumatising. Reimburse consumers who are sharing their knowledge to inform the development of services, programs, facilities, and policies. Make sure you have questions or potential discussion topics prepared when you seek feedback from community groups and organisations. Find out if they have already shared the information you are looking for.

Inclusive physical environment

Physical signs of inclusivity include building design, accessibility, or visual clues.

Building design – Is it easy for consumers to know where they need to go? Wayfinding such as maps, consistent signage, marked pathways, and landmarks at decision points can make it easier for consumers to navigate.

Accessibility – Is the space accessible for all consumers? When designing buildings, think about who will be using the services and make spaces accessible for all consumers through gender neutral bathrooms, wheelchair access, family rooms, translated signs, and sensory friendly environments.

Visual Clues – When consumers first enter your site can they see signs of inclusion? Consider using flags, posters, stickers, or artwork to indicate that it is a safe and accepting place.

Protect consumers' privacy

Protecting consumers' privacy is critical for providing safe and respectful care. Confidentiality must be taken seriously in all part of a service. Privacy requires thinking about the context and communities our consumers live in, being flexible and respecting consumers' choices. Consumers may or may not want information shared with their carers. They may prefer a family member to interpret or require an interpreter they do not know. Some conversations may not be appropriate for the main reception area if they put consumers in difficult or dangerous positions.

Have a diversity officer, team, and policy

A Diversity Officer or team can help services and policies to engage with the community. They can help services to better understand and empathise with consumers, help staff and consumers to feel safe and promote consumer voices. Diversity and Inclusion-focused policies, training, and specialised roles and teams can also promote quicker problem solving and build a strong reputation in the community.

Be accountable

Accountability should be both internal (governance structures and staff feedback). It can also be external (consumer consultation and feedback). Consumers have a right to see how feedback is handled and how providers respond to problems. They also need to see how service providers will take responsibility for past and future actions.