

Cultural Competence Works!

**A manual to put it into
Practice**

Patrick Harris wrote this manual for

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MDAA is a non-profit peak body for people from a NESB with disability and their families and carers in NSW.

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“Culturally Competent Disability Support: Putting it into Practice: A Review of the International and Australian Literature on Cultural Competence” was also written by Patrick Harris and is available from MDAA.

Cultural competence training, further materials and information are available from MDAA.

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Background: *How the Manual Came About and How it all Works*

Welcome to the Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association's 'Cultural Competence' manual.

While I could be wrong, I am guessing that you have picked up this manual for a number of reasons. You have read the accompanying poster and want to know more. You are interested in the concepts of culture and cultural competence. You want to know ways to work better with clients and their families from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB). Or you have been asked to read it as part of a training course.

This manual is designed to help busy people who work in the disability sector with all these things.



You will **gain confidence** in your work with all consumers. Cultural competence helps you **trust in yourself** and your abilities, and **feel more comfortable** about the support you are giving.

You will develop **leadership skills**, and you can use these to **show others how** to work culturally competently.

Other benefits are:

- **Greater satisfaction** in your work.
- **Open-mindedness.**
- The ability to **make sound judgments** by considering evidence and information, alternatives and options.
- **Better and more productive relationships and communication** with people around you.

Goal and Benefits

The goal of cultural competence, and this manual, is to provide the **best possible quality** and **most effective support** for all consumers.

There are some **major benefits** of putting this manual into practice.

Cultural competence helps you become the best you can be at your job. You will **increase your skills** in working with people who are different, no matter what their background is (not just culture, race or ethnicity, but everyone).

You will **increase your knowledge** about the effect of cultures on individual clients. This knowledge will become a broad base for you to draw from throughout your career.

How the manual came about

There has been a lot of **talk about the concept** of cultural competence for some years in Australia. However, many people are now asking, *'But how do I actually do cultural competence in my own work?'*

It is **this question** that this manual and the accompanying poster aim to address. They have been written based on the work of professionals all over the

world¹ and on my research with consumers, people working in disability services and advocates in New South Wales.

The poster provides you with a visual reminder of key culturally competent practices. This manual takes each of those practices and looks at them in greater detail. *The aim is to encourage you to think creatively about your work with people and to take direct steps toward becoming 'Culturally Competent' in your work.* While the focus is on people from NESB, as will be shown, the very nature of cultural competence means that all the practices are relevant to all clients. From a more formal perspective, this manual will help you to provide support that is both accessible and equitable to all consumers.

The manual is for you to pick up when you can, or when something comes up that you want to learn more about.

Take your time, enjoy the challenges, and put the changes into practice at your own pace and as new opportunities come up.

How the manual works

This manual is about **understanding** cultural competence, **reflecting on** what this means for you, and **putting** this

¹ For those of you who want to delve even deeper, much of the work here is based on a detailed review of the international and Australian literature on cultural competence. That review is available from www.mdaa.org.au, or contact MDAA (details on inside cover)

understanding and reflection **into practice.**

It can be helpful to think of cultural competence as a **personal journey.** You start by **preparing yourself** as well as possible. You then choose **your own** route. As you move along you have **new experiences,** learn **new and better routes and pathways,** **enjoy** the scenery and company of **fellow travellers** you meet, and **gain** a sense of **satisfaction and achievement** as you **fulfil** the **goals** you **set yourself** and **reach each place you planned to get to.**



Layout

The manual is set out in **FIVE** sections. While it may be useful to work your way through these in order, they are also **stand alone documents** that target specific areas of culturally competent support. The aim is for **you to choose** where on **your journey** you feel you should focus on, not to have to go through section one then two and so on. The **first** section explains what culture and cultural competence are.

The **second** section encourages you to **become aware of your own culture and the culture of others.** It covers thinking critically, cultural awareness and sensitivity, cultural knowledge, and making changes as an individual with your new cultural competence.

The **third** section shifts the focus to your **interactions with others.** It looks at ways to improve your working relationships with people, what to watch out for in communicating with people from NESB, and how to conduct

a culturally competent consumer assessment.

The fourth section considers the importance of involving the family and broader community, and shows ways to do this effectively.

The **fifth** section looks at **the changes** involved in **cultural competence**. The first part shows you how to conduct a culturally competent self-assessment to **monitor your growth and development**; the second at a way for you to **implement change in the workplace**.

To help creative thinking

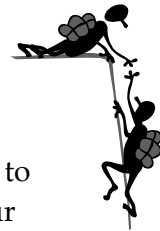
We have done a few things to **help you think creatively**. **Case studies** are included, along with **suggestions** for you to think about and **exercises** for you to work on. These all encourage you to **reflect more deeply** about what is written in the main text.

Here at MDAA we also believe it helps to **add personal experiences**. This has been done in two ways.

- **First**, I personally had quite an experience researching this manual. I came across interesting people. Interesting stories and events came up. People were different from what I expected. Mistakes happened. I have tried to learn from all these, and have included them wherever possible.
- **Second**, I have included comments made to me by consumers, workers, advocates, managers and others while I was researching the manual and tool. I think they give a great idea of what people who live or work with disability think about cultural competence.

Terminology

We recognise that people may use different terms to describe the same thing; for example, client and consumer, or NESB and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD). For the most part I have stuck to the terminology MDAA uses, which are consumer and NESB.



Working with others

The suggestions outlined are to **encourage you** to look at your work practices in new ways to **make them more effective**. While the focus is on you as an individual, we recognise that to be most effective cultural competence should **also be addressed by the organisation** you work for. This can become a useful opportunity for you! Show and communicate to others (both co-workers and those in more senior positions) the benefits that your own personal cultural competence journey has brought you and the consumers you work with. By doing this you will be in a perfect position to encourage them to take their own journey. Remember that people might be resistant to change, so **it is up to you to lead the way**, to tell them about your experiences, and to help them along. I hope the poster and manual will be food for thought to help you in your work. They have been a pleasure to research and write.

Enjoy and good luck!

Section One

What is Cultural Competence?

To answer the question '**What is cultural competence?**' and how it impacts on you and your work, **three** things need to be looked at. The **first** is **what is culture?** The **second** is **what is competence?** The **third** *puts these two together. what is cultural competence?*

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What is Culture?

There are *five* things concerning culture to remember and think about.

Culture as guide

First, culture provides all of us with a **guide** for how we **see** the world, what we **value**, what we **believe in** and how we **behave**.

Culture affects everyone

Second, we all are part of one culture or another. Some people are **part of a community**, others **part of a region**, others **part of a language or ethnic group**, and others **part of a work or organisational culture**. Our cultural guide comes in the form of **values, practices, beliefs and attitudes** that we may **learn from** and **share** with other people around us.

Culture is individual

Third, *as individuals*, we are **all influenced by culture**. We all **express** culture in the way we **behave, think** and **communicate**. But the degree to which culture is taken on and expressed is **different for every** individual, family, community, region and society.

Case study 1: Sang – The impact of culturally competent care

Sang is a 26 year old woman from Korea with an intellectual disability. Ten years after arriving, Sang now accesses a Disability Employment Support Service. Sang loves going to the service because the workers there understand that her English is not so good, and they realise that being Korean is very important to her and her family. They even invite people from the community to talk about Korean culture. When Sang first got to the service she was scared of using a telephone interpreter, but the workers encouraged her and now she uses one all the time. She has also been learning English, and enjoys practising with the workers and teaching them some words in her language, *Han-gul*. People at the service always ask her how she and her family feel about the support and activities they provide.

Case study 2: Achmed – The impact of culturally INcompetent care

Achmed is 26 and has cerebral palsy. His parents migrated from Lebanon just before he was born. He was diagnosed with cerebral palsy early in life. Achmed is Muslim. He lives independently and receives support services in his own home. Achmed feels that he has never been in control of his life and is at the mercy of insensitive services. Ten years ago he was playing some Arabic music and a worker told him to turn it off because she didn't like 'That Wog S*^t'. When he complained the manager told him that his music was offensive to some people and he should consider their feelings. Recently, he was watching the news on TV and he heard his personal carers saying that 'All those bloody tea-towel heads are criminals and terrorists'. He feels nothing has changed in 10 years but is too scared to complain because he thinks the service will be taken away.

Culture is dynamic

Fourth, culture is always changing. This is because culture *is a product of being human*, and **no human ever stays the same**. Over time as individuals we **all** have **experiences**, both small and large, meaningful and seemingly meaningless. **We learn from these experiences**. Based on these experiences **we change**. *Culture changes with this change*.

Culture creates difference

Fifth, because of each of these points, knowledge of someone's culture only gives *some* clues about them **as an individual**. **All** individuals have differences! We also have similarities (see *Box One*), but life would be incredibly boring if we were all exactly the same! So while understanding culture gives *useful clues* about an individual, family or community, **all** individuals, families and communities **are different**. We are **all**, always, **cultural beings**, though many of us are not conscious of this fact.

Box One: Responding to similarities and differences

Much of this manual is geared towards differences between people being viewed in a positive rather than a negative light. At the same time as difference, important to we often have with other people, respecting however, it is recognise that many similarities regardless of any differences. Focusing on these similarities is usually the best way to start a useful relationship with others (see *Section Three*). Finding these similarities is as important as respecting any differences.



What is Competence?

Competence happens when we **work effectively**. This means that when you work, you are doing it in a way **that is beneficial to others**. This may require developing new skills, learning from experiences, and putting these into practice in a way that is **suitable** for supporting clients, or working together with their families and carers.

Box Two: Recognising culture

It can be very difficult to recognise what our own culture is. Many of us don't. Therefore it is important not to assume everyone is at the same level of awareness about his or her culture as we may be. For example, when I talked to consumers when researching this manual, I continually received very little response when I asked them directly about their culture. When I discussed my frustrations with an experienced colleague he said to me, 'But why should they? If many Australians can't recognise their own culture, why should someone else, just because they are seen by us as being from another country'. How to avoid this is discussed later.

What is Cultural Competence?

Based on these definitions of culture and competence, cultural competence **therefore** means working effectively with individuals and their families, while **discovering, recognising, understanding** and **working with** the influence that culture may have on them and on us. This influence will *vary from person to person and over time*. For example, some cultures have the belief that disability is a gift from God (see also **Case study 3** below).

Working culturally competently recognises that this belief will provide people with guidelines on how they understand disability and seek support; that some people may believe this more than others; and that this belief may change over time. Further, it means modifying how we behave towards **respecting, accepting and working with** individuals who may or may not, or may to varying degrees, think in this way.

Case study 3: A cultural understanding of disability

In the Philippines, a woman gave birth to a baby who was unable to move his limbs. Her explanation of her son's disability was that she had worked within view of a statue of a national hero during her pregnancy. Therefore the baby must have caught 'stiffness of the limbs' from the statue. (Taken from MDAA's Ethnicity and Disability Factbook).

Box Three: Food For Thought - A Uniquely Australian Culture

For those of you who lived here in the eighties, remember the advert on TV with Paul Hogan tossing a prawn on the barbie? In the eyes of many people around the world that is what Australian culture is.

This can be particularly infuriating when Australians travel to the UK, where the ad was shown continually after the "Crocodile Dundee" films to promote tourism. Whenever they hear an Aussie accent my fellow Poms* always yell out 'Throw another shrimp on the barbie!' Irritating as this is, you can't get away from the fact that this is the perception of 'Australian culture' in the UK. Along with sun, surf, and sport!

*For those of you not in Australasia or who may not be familiar with the term, English people are referred to by Australians as 'Poms' or 'Pommies'. For a bit of cultural trivia, when Australians discuss taking a 'Pommy shower', this refers to the application of deodorant to cover body odour rather than taking a real shower! For the record, while I am English, I shower daily.