



ETHNIC DISABILITY ADVOCACY CENTRE  
[www.edac.org.au](http://www.edac.org.au)

Implementing Cultural Competence  
By Amy Berson and Zeliha Iscel

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The Ethnic Disability Advocacy Centre (EDAC) is a community based agency in Western Australia, which advocates for people with a disability who are from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) backgrounds and their families. EDAC utilizes a holistic approach to the implementation of cultural competence through various initiatives, projects and strategies in order to reach different target groups throughout the community. Cultural competence is defined as providing a practical sensitivity and capacity to ensure people of different cultures receive access and services appropriate to their cultures. That is, that their cultural ways are recognized, supported and are included centrally within the multicultural Australian context. The diagram below demonstrates the culturally inclusive holistic approaches utilized by EDAC.

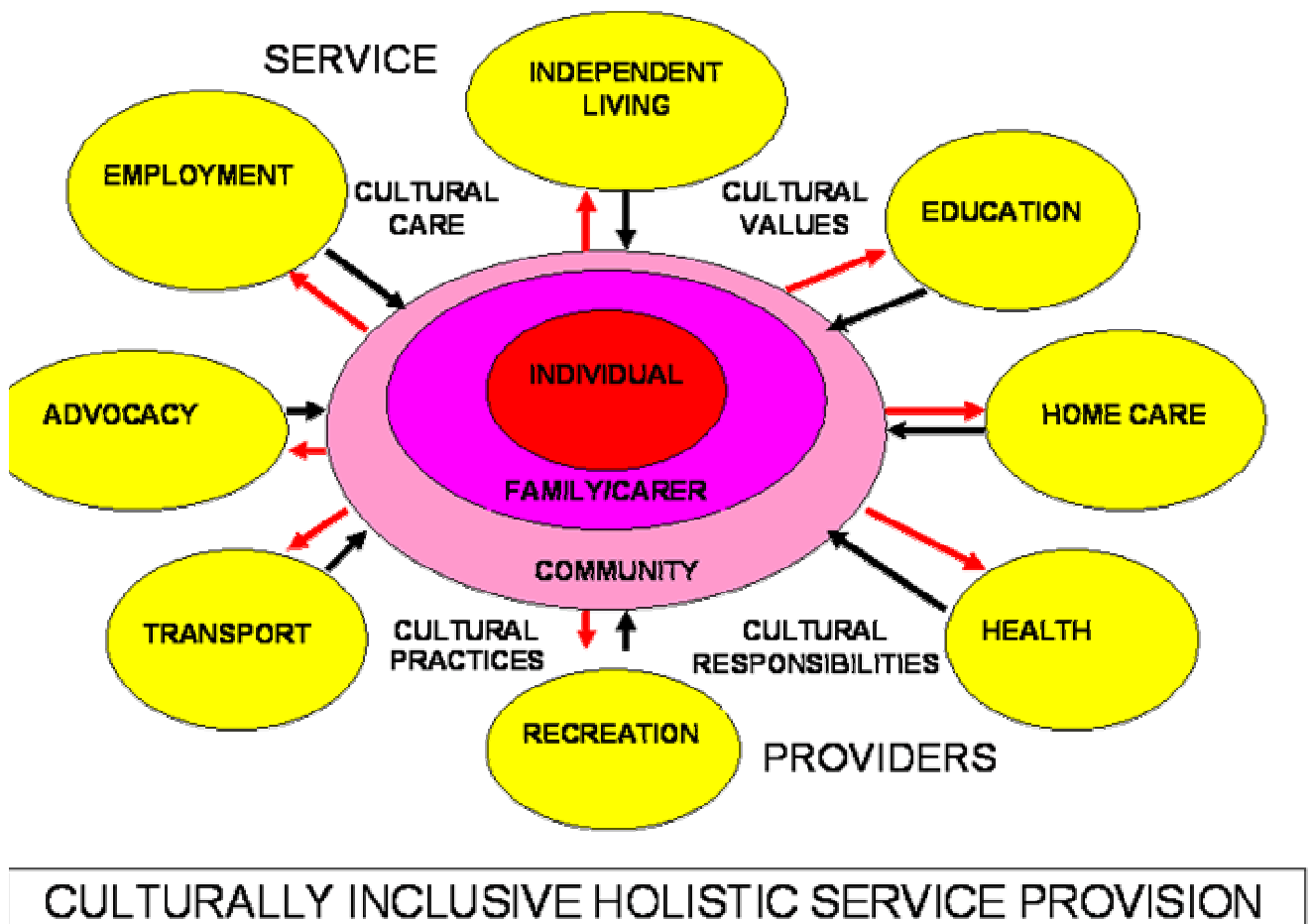


Figure 1.

Implementing cultural competence involves constantly working towards substantive equality with both service providers and the consumers. Importantly, these cultural competencies are defined through the consumers' interpretations and then conveyed to service providers. The 'Policy Framework for Substantive Equality' was introduced in Western Australia as part of the current Government's election commitment to reduce racism in the community. Substantive equality "involves achieving equitable outcomes as well as equal opportunity" (Policy Framework for Substantive Equality, 2004 p6). This is particularly pertinent for EDAC's work, given the diverse population we work with and within. This diversity includes people with varied disabilities as well as people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It is the goal of EDAC to assist our consumers and their carers to achieve substantive equality through the participation in the variety of culturally responsive services provided and projects undertaken. EDAC also assists other service providers through training and consultancy to apply best practice in substantive equality through the implementation of cultural competence.

In addition, cultural competence must be implemented at a legislative and policy level and within the general community. Systemic advocacy has proved to be a key process and enables issues such as access inequity to be addressed and for cultural awareness to occur. Key systemic issues are identified through a variety of different sources. These include projects targeting carers, consumers, service providers, ethnic communities and the general community. In addition, issues arising from EDAC's individual advocacy informs systemic advocacy. Submissions are made to relevant legislative review processes (e.g., the recent Equal Opportunity Act review), with key recommendations concerning people with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. EDAC is also a member of the Disability Coalition, a group of disability agencies who provide advocacy services, that identify and address systemic issues within the disability industry. EDAC provides an important voice for people from CaLD backgrounds in this Coalition and ensures that cultural competence is considered. EDAC's contribution in such initiatives has proved to be important and the value of CaLD input has been recognized by different government agencies and non government organisations. For example, the Executive Officer of EDAC, Jenny Au Yeong, has recently been invited to sit on the Disability Sector Review and EDAC has also provided input into the National Disability Advocacy Review.

Support is provided to individuals through the provision of individual advocacy. People with a wide range of disabilities and from various and varying ethnicities access EDAC's individual advocacy service. These people present with different issues but some common threads are identified and contribute to the focus areas of EDAC's systemic advocacy. These issues are varied and reflect the holistic nature of our service, as demonstrated in the graph on the following page.

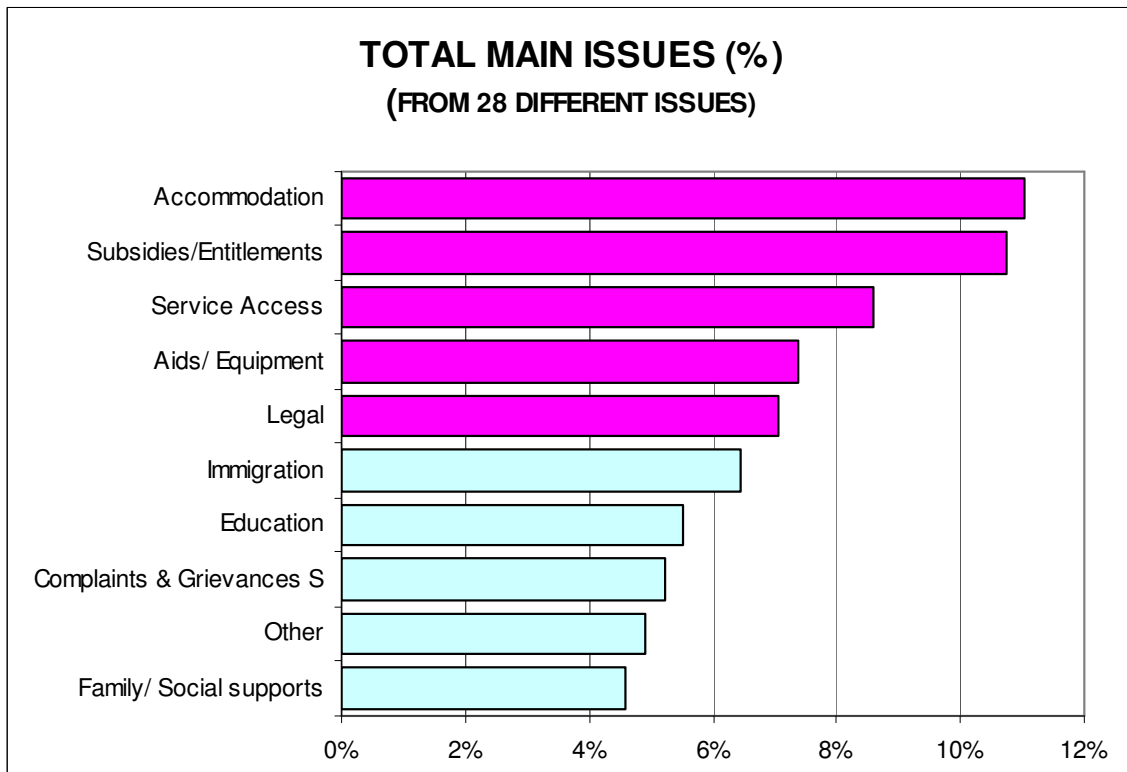


Figure 2. 2005-2006 Individual Advocacy Clients

In addition to ensuring the cultural appropriateness of individual advocacy, the individual advocates also prioritise self advocacy as part of their case work. This is a key component of cultural competence as it enables individuals to become empowered and to speak up for their rights. A self advocacy manual for people with disabilities from CaLD backgrounds entitled 'Let Me Speak' has been developed. This manual utilizes a case study approach with modules on understanding self-advocacy, rights and responsibilities, planning for and conducting self-advocacy, plus activities designed to enhance the person's self esteem, communication, assertiveness, stress management and negotiation skills.

Empowerment of consumers and their carers have proved to be critical components of implementing cultural competence. This empowerment also includes gaining and responding to feedback from carers and consumers, the use of focus groups, upskilling in requested areas and providing opportunities for consumer or carer led projects. The contribution of consumers and carers increases the effectiveness of EDAC's activities as they are largely driven from the consumers and carers. Initiatives in this area include EDAC's Carer and Consumers Reference Groups. These groups meet regularly and are provided with important and up to date information and are supported to discuss and

contribute to relevant matters. As well as providing a valuable means of peer support, they also provide valuable input into EDAC's projects and operations. Other groups have been developed as the need has been identified. For example the Vietnamese and Muslim Carers Groups have been established to identify needs and specific issues and to provide training and a support base, particularly for Muslim women in a carers role.

Service providers in the disability industry have been targeted through the provision of cultural competence training. This training differs from traditional cultural awareness training in that the emphasis is on sensitization to the different cultural perspectives concerning disability and culturally responsive implementation by service providers within the multicultural Australian context. An example of a project in this area is the development of the CaLD perspectives on the Disability Service Standards, now available as a manual and training program. The manual was developed through input from EDAC's Consumer Reference Group who were asked to interpret in their own words what each standard meant to them plus provide guidelines for best practice on each standard. The manual enables service providers to make agency self assessments and identify any gaps or needs for improvement. EDAC will be providing training and implementation support to service providers in this process.

Working with ethnic communities in Western Australia has also been an important component of cultural competence implementation. Workshops on culture and disability have been conducted and these have proved to be useful ways of not only providing information about relevant disability services available but also as a means of gaining feedback and input from the different communities. A further initiative has included the Disability Support Workers Project which involved facilitating the training of bi-lingual and bi-cultural people to undertake Certificate III in Community Services specializing in Disability. 28 people graduated in this course and were and are supported to find employment in the disability field. The aim of this project was to provide an opportunity to increase the number of people from CaLD backgrounds working in the disability industry so that greater cultural responsiveness can be achieved. EDAC is currently running a small project to follow up on the progress of these individuals and provide additional training to these individuals in areas they have identified as being barriers to finding employment in the disability field.

Innovative projects such as the Vicinity Film project and the EthnicAbility radio program are exciting methods of implementing cultural competence and promoting inclusion in the broader community. Inclusion is a key component of the Western Australian Citizenship Strategy and together with the WA Charter of Multiculturalism provides important policy context for EDAC's overall approach. There are two components to the Vicinity project, the first being a filmmakers course for people with disabilities. Filmmaking is used as a means of self expression and reflection. The course also focuses on the promotion of people

with disabilities from CaLD and non-CaLD backgrounds working together creatively. The participants in the course have a wide range of disabilities, including physical, intellectual, sensory and psychiatric. The diversity of the participants has resulted in the production of a diverse range of short films. The capacity building nature of the project has had far reaching effects. In addition to the enhancement of film making skills, the participants have demonstrated improved self confidence and the ability to use film as a means of communicating messages about disability. The second component is the Vicinity Film Club. This is an inclusive recreation option for people with and without disabilities, that aims to build and strengthen social connections through a shared interest in film.

The EthnicAbility radio program is broadcast weekly on 95.3 6EBA FM, Western Australia's multicultural radio station. It explores issues affecting people with a disability who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, their families, friends, communities and their service providers. EthnicAbility also provides information about EDAC's services and those of other agencies. Importantly, the radio program also provides a voice for people with a disability and their carers through participation in interviews and opportunities to contribute to the content of the program. Recent topics have included information about Disability First Stop, guardianship for people with decision making disabilities, individual advocacy and upcoming events. Feedback from this radio program has been extremely positive.

As outlined above, the strategic approach utilized by EDAC of implementing cultural competence through varied initiatives has resulted in many positive outcomes at individual, industry and community levels. The involvement of people with disabilities from CaLD backgrounds and their carers at all levels of strategic management is a vital component for the implementation of cultural competence. Consumers and carers are well represented at board level, staff level and through positions on steering committees. There is, however, still an immense need for further initiatives to facilitate cultural competence, particularly in reference to disability, within the Western Australian community. By building on the lessons learnt from past and current projects, EDAC is continuing to identify gaps and to develop appropriate responses and actions to these. EDAC is enthusiastically engaged in contributing to the important transition in the nature of best practice in service provision – as part of an overall ethos of positive engagement that prioritises the inclusion of consumers with disabilities and values multicultural contribution to a diverse and vibrant Australian society.

## **Where you can go for more information**

Ethnic Disability Advocacy Centre                      [www.edac.org.au](http://www.edac.org.au)  
Let Me Speak  
CaLD Perspectives on Disability Services Standards  
Annual Reports  
Vicinity Project  
EthnicAbility Radio Program  
Other manuals and publications

Equal Opportunity Commission  
[www.equalopportunity.wa.gov.au/seu.html](http://www.equalopportunity.wa.gov.au/seu.html)  
Policy Framework for Substantive Equality, 2004

Office of Multicultural Interests                      [www.omi.wa.gov.au](http://www.omi.wa.gov.au)  
WA Multiculturalism Charter

Citizenship and Civics Unit of the Department of Premiere and Cabinet  
WA Citizenship Strategy                      [www.citizenscape.wa.gov.au](http://www.citizenscape.wa.gov.au)