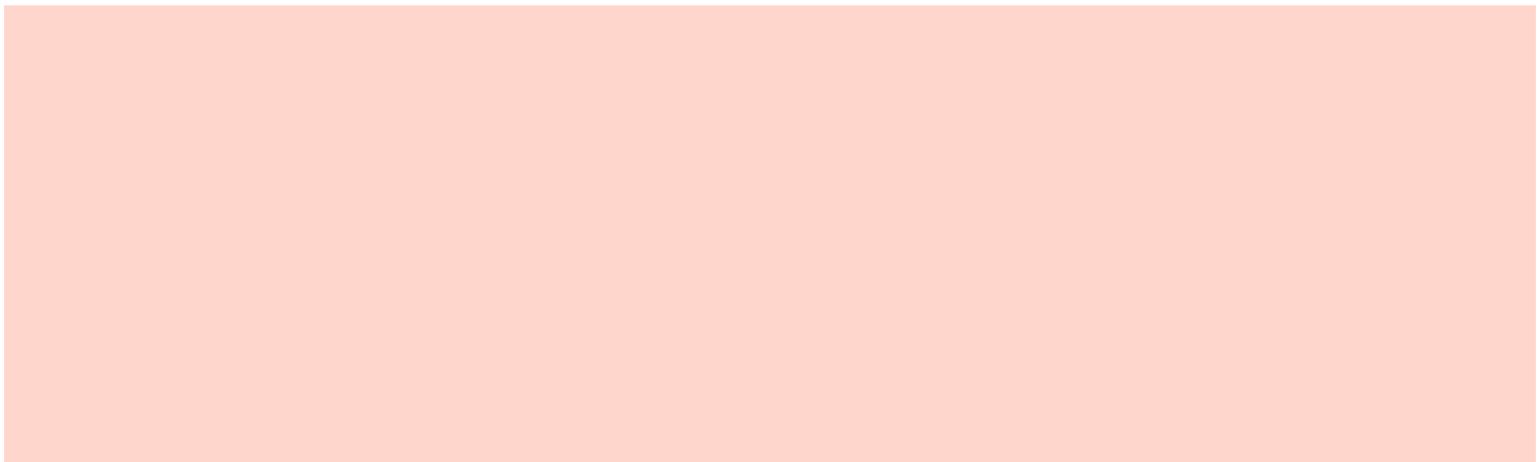




Engaging new and emerging communities

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What will this resource cover?

The resource will support you with knowledge of some practical methods that could be implemented within your own role and organisation. This resource will explain the definition of new and emerging communities in Australia. Some strategies to engage with these communities will be explored, ending with a case study and questions that connect with the information.

This tool focuses on engaging with communities, not necessarily interpersonal strategies when working with a client one on one or with their family. However, understanding a person's individual needs does relate to wider community engagement.

Essential information

New and emerging communities are defined as communities that have increased in number and who have recently arrived in Australia. These communities may have arrived in Australia due to changes in migration and settlement patterns and could be humanitarian entrants, asylum seekers, skilled migrants or part of the family stream of entrants.¹

When working with people with disability from a new and emerging community, it is important to consider some key points that may influence your communication and engagement with the particular community that you may be engaging with. It may seem daunting to engage with communities that are difficult to penetrate, or are not as visible in the wider community. New and emerging communities tend not to have the established infrastructure of organisational support that other more established communities have built up over the years (such as post World War II European migrants). Individuals within communities may also have barriers that make it difficult to access a range of services, including disability services. Please note that every individual and community is different, and some of these issues may not apply in every situation, however some potential barriers to be aware of are listed below.

¹ Federation of Ethnic Communities Council Fact Sheet http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/factsheet1_introduction-to-new-and-emerging-communities.pdf

- Settlement concerns can add an extra layer of frustration and disadvantage for these communities. Related issues that stem from recent settlement include:
 - Feelings of dislocation and isolation
 - Rearrangement of family structures, where some family members remain living in the country of origin
 - Housing issues
 - Education concerns
 - Experiences of past trauma and torture
 - Low English proficiency
 - Employment concerns, including potential exploitation in the workplace, difficulty obtaining a job due to low English proficiency or visa status
 - Health concerns
 - Lack of trust of authority or government structures

Essential day to day concerns can often have priority over other considerations such as understanding disability and accessing disability services.

It is also worth mentioning that as some of these communities have recently arrived in Australia, people with disability living within these communities may not have been identified as having a disability in their country of origin. Often the schooling system in Australia can identify children with disabilities at a young age and the process of linking them to services can begin from there. This may not have been the case for people within new and emerging communities. Therefore, a person may access your service in adulthood with no prior experience of support or service provision.

Essential good practice tips

You may recognise that engaging with less visible communities might be a challenge within your organisation, yet you are unsure of the next steps to take.

Some strategies that may start the process of engagement include:

- Building an understanding of the ‘go-to’ people within the community (these may not necessarily be ‘community leaders’)
- Communities may not visit specific organisations or structures, but opportunities to engage with more hidden communities could be in:
 - Local shops
 - Cultural events – e.g. Persian New Year festivities
 - Religious structures
 - Sporting events
 - At a key person or family’s home

This is where it would help to have staff members within your organisation who have existing links in the community, and know the places that people within these communities’ visit.

In terms of communicating with this cohort, it is important to think about your engagement approach. Any resources developed should be done in a bilingual form, possibly using pictures or graphics (this would also be relevant for CALD people with disability who may have intellectual impairments or who may be illiterate in both English and their original language due to lack of education access). Using community radio to engage with communities is a productive approach, and using story telling or electronic media could also be appropriate.

It is worth researching the background of various communities to further understand the history, and cultural/religious celebrations that are important to that community. Country profiles can be found at on the Department of Social Services website, and are a good starting point: <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-services/community-profiles>

Another resource is the SBS Cultural Atlas which focusses on those communities who have settled in Australia. The Cultural Atlas is available at <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/intro>

Case Study

Abdi is a 35 year old male living with severe intellectual and physical disabilities. He has arrived in Australia with his family in the last six months. His parents (both 55), currently care for him, however he does not leave the home during the day, and he has never received any disability support in his country of origin. The family have been living in transitional housing and have been finding it difficult to find a permanent home. They also have a few friends living in the area, yet they have also recently arrived and are struggling to make ends meet financially. Abdi and his family are referred to a disability support service, and meet with case worker Ben in order to complete an initial assessment.

Key questions

What other elements should Ben be looking out for when making an assessment of the needs and wishes of Abdi and his family?

Should Ben refer Abdi to any additional support services that may complement the support from the disability organisation?

Is it a good idea for Abdi to speak with his manager about a wider project on understanding the community that Abdi is a part of, and what are the first steps that Ben should undertake to do this?