



MENTAL HEALTH FACTSHEET:

Culturally and linguistically diverse people

With almost half of all Australians either born overseas or having a parent who was born overseas, an effective mental health system must be able provide care to people that is appropriate to their cultural background and the language that they speak.

The Productivity Commission's Mental Health Inquiry presents a long-term plan to improve Australia's mental health system, and make sure that it can meet the needs of people from a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

For this to happen, the cultural responsiveness and inclusiveness of services need to be prioritised — there is substantial room for improvement. We have provided the Australian Government with a number of recommendations to develop mental health services that meet people's needs, regardless of their cultural background.

- People needing mental health support, and their families and carers, need to be able to access information that is culturally relevant and presented in their own language. The recommended national digital mental health platform includes a tool for mental health assessment and referral (action 10.4). This platform should be designed with input from people who use mental health services and should be tailored to make it an effective gateway into mental healthcare for people from different cultural backgrounds.
- It is also recommended that the Carer Gateway be evaluated to make sure that it works for carers from different cultural backgrounds (action 18.2).

- The national digital mental health platform should be used to provide supported online treatment (action 11.1). This would benefit people in regional and remote Australia, as well as people in urban areas who have difficulty accessing culturally capable care, and those who may prefer to seek care anonymously. Online supported treatments should be adapted to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of consumers.
- Recommended expanded access to treatments via phone or video will allow people to link up with a psychologist or care provider located anywhere in Australia who suits their needs, increasing the care options available (action 12.2).



- Significant changes are recommended to the planning, funding and delivery of community mental health services. Community organisations are crucial to the social participation and inclusion of migrants. Better service planning would lead to more culturally-relevant psychosocial services, and longer contract lengths would enable providers to develop and maintain stable, trusting and therapeutic relationships with consumers (actions 17.1 and 17.3).



- The cultural capability of mental health professionals is a key element needed to address cultural and health literacy barriers. Recommended reforms to workforce planning would better align the cultural capabilities of mental health practitioners with the
- needs of consumers (action 16.1). Greater use of bilingual and bicultural peer workers can also help overcome these barriers, and the Productivity Commission makes recommendations intended to support peer workers as a growing part of the mental health workforce (action 16.5).
- All mental health service providers should be aware of people's cultural context and needs. There are data gaps related to mental health services and outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse people. More effective collection and use of data as well as co-design practices by policymakers would encourage more person-centred care (actions 22.4 and 24.3).
- For some people who face barriers to accessing early support, their first contact with services is with police. The recommended additional supports for police responding to mental-health incidents should be tailored to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse people (action 21.2).
- To reduce psychological distress among international students, tertiary education providers should make arrangements with insurers providing Overseas Student Health Cover to their international students to ensure there is adequate coverage for any required mental health treatment. Universities should also ensure their counselling services are able to meet the language and cultural diversity needs of their international students (action 6.2).

Consistent with a person-centred approach, we want a mental healthcare system that allows people to choose and access care options that are right for them, given their needs and circumstances. This means that there needs to be a range of different ways that services are delivered, to be accessible as and when people need them, that are not just clinically effective and culturally relevant, but impose minimum burden on the individual seeking care. People are more likely to choose, persist with, and benefit from, treatment that matches their needs (volume 1, p. 29)