

Volunteering in aged care: Diversity & Inclusion

Volunteers support older people from a wide range of diverse backgrounds.

This means that volunteers need to be inclusive and treat older people with dignity and respect, regardless of their background or life experiences.

This is essential for quality care and support of older people.

IMPORTANT



The Aged Care Act 2024 recognises some older people may have unique needs due to their identities or life experiences.

This may include individuals who are:

Parents and children who are separated by forced adoption or removal

Neurodivergent

Veterans or war widows

From culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Care leavers, including Forgotten Australians and former child migrants placed in out of home care



Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/transgender or intersex or other sexual orientations or are gender diverse or bodily diverse

Deaf/deafblind, vision impaired or hard of hearing

Living in rural, remote or very remote areas

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander persons, including those from stolen generations

Adult survivors of institutional child sexual abuse

Experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness

An individual with a disability or mental ill-health

Financially or social disadvantaged



While experiences of discrimination, stigma and prejudice are common among people from diverse groups, it is important to remember that every older person is unique and that no one is defined by a single characteristic or experience.



Avoiding assumptions

We all make assumptions. This can be based on many things, for example about someone's gender, age, accent, sexual orientation, ethnicity and whether they are a parent or not (and many others).

A lot of the time, these assumptions are made without us even realising.

The key is to be aware of them and try our best not to let them influence our behaviour.



Understanding communication challenges

People may feel **lonely and isolated** when they experience unfair treatment or negative attitudes.

Sometimes this happens because of **communication challenges**.

Good communication shows empathy and respectful engagement with others.

Below are some communication tips you can use to enhance your impact and support working with diverse older people.

Ask how someone would like to be addressed and follow their lead with language and terminology

Speak clearly and reduce background noise

Avoid assumptions based on appearance or behaviour

Respect privacy and consent



Check for understanding

Use respectful body language

Offer choices in how to communicate

Speak directly to the person, even if others are present

Use inclusive, gender-neutral language until you learn how someone wants to be addressed

Show genuine interest and listen actively

Ask before touching someone's belongings or entering their personal space

Additional information & support

Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN)

<https://opan.org.au/>

Aged Care Advocacy Line (1800 700 600)

Aged Care Diversity Framework Initiative

<https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/aged-care-diversity-framework-initiative>

SBS Cultural Atlas

<https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/>

Life without Barriers: Embracing diversity through inclusive language

<https://www.lwb.org.au/news/embracing-diversity-through-inclusive-language/>

Learn more about aged care volunteering

Visit www.health.gov.au/topics/aged-care/volunteers



For free and confidential information
call our Aged Care Advocacy Line:



1 800 700 600



opan.org.au

OPAN is funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing through
the National Aged Care Advocacy Program (NACAP).