

2024



AmbulanceVictoria

Inclusive Language Guide



Ambulance Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands in Victoria. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to Elders past and present and recognise Aboriginal self-determination is a human right. We commit to working with our Aboriginal communities to improve our care and services in the spirit of partnership.

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INTRODUCTION

01

Inclusive language is a way of acknowledging and respecting the diversity of people and their identities.

Knowing how to use language helps everyone feel included, valued and respected.

Language is a powerful tool and should always be:



Respectful

Inclusive language involves knowing about and showing respect for everyone. At AV, this means our colleagues, patients and community.



Accurate

Inclusive language helps us avoid making assumptions about people based on their age, cultural background, disability, gender, Indigenous background, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identity and other personal attributes.



Relevant

Inclusive language reflects Australia's diversity, is meaningful to a wide audience, and enables everyone to feel that they are being reflected in what is being said. To feel included, we need to 'see' and 'hear' ourselves reflected in the language used.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

02

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide will help you understand:

- » why inclusive language matters
- » the four key steps to being inclusive in language
- » the context behind certain identity groups
- » examples of inclusive phrases to use and non-inclusive terms to rethink
- » where to find more information or seek advice

Ambulance Victoria (AV) recognises that language can change and be used in different ways by diverse groups and individuals. This guide has been developed based on emerging best practice at the time of writing and will be reviewed regularly.

AV recognises that not all our systems and process currently reflect inclusive language. It is everyone's responsibility to continuously learn and improve our processes and procedures in an inclusive and accessible way. This guide is part of other resources which can be found on the [Diversity and Inclusion Workplace Knowledge Library](#).

If you have feedback, questions or suggested changes, please email: diversityandinclusion@ambulance.vic.gov.au.

2.1

WHY DOES INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE MATTER?

How we speak to and about each other influences how we treat each other.

For our people and patients, inclusive language is one way AV can “foster a culture in which everyone feels safe and that they belong, no matter their cultural identity, sexual orientation, disability or any personal characteristic.”

FOUR STEPS TO INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

01

KEEP AN OPEN MIND, BE OPEN TO LEARNING AND CHANGING

Language is always changing. As we learn more, we can identify and address the harmful trends in language used today and find new and simple ways to encourage everyone to feel included.

- Be open to learning about new ways to use language — in written and verbal communications.
- Put yourself in someone else's shoes for a different perspective.
- No one is expected to have all the answers.

02

FOCUS ON THE PERSON

- Avoid stereotyping people from particular groups as this oversimplifies a person's characteristics.
- Refer to personal attributes or characteristics only when it is relevant to the context or conversation.
- Consider a strength-based approach. For example, focus on abilities, knowledge, and capabilities.

03

IF IN DOUBT, ASK

- If you're not sure what terms someone uses, ask them, do not question or make assumptions.
- When using language about a group of people, it is best practice to ask people with lived experience.
- Provide opportunities for people with lived experience to speak for themselves.
- Contact diversityandinclusion@ambulance.vic.gov.au for advice.

04

KEEP CALM AND RESPOND

- Unconscious bias and habits mean we may all use words that exclude people without intent. If you are called out, it's important to not react by defending your words or justifying your actions. For example, responding with 'it was just a joke' or 'don't take it so seriously' is not helpful and could be harmful.
- Take the time to listen, understand the impact upon the other party and reflect on what could have been done differently and/or better.

2.3

OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE LAW

Under the [Equal Opportunity Act 2010 \(Vic\)](#), AV has a positive duty to proactively prevent discrimination as far as possible. This means we all must take positive action to create an environment where discrimination is unlikely to happen in the first place. Language is one way that people experience discrimination. It is unlawful to discriminate against a person because of a protected personal attribute.

Examples include:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| » race | » physical or mental disability |
| » physical features | » parent or carer status |
| » religious belief or activity | » sexual orientation |
| » sex or sex characteristics | » breastfeeding |
| » pregnancy | » gender identity |
| » age | » expunged homosexual conviction |

It is important to note that this guide does not exhaustively reflect all protected attributes.

KEY TERMS

Accessibility

Accessibility refers to ensuring equitable access for all to the built environment, information and communications. For example how buildings are designed using Universal Design principles and how websites and communications meet accessibility standards.

Tips for plain language, useability and accessibility can be found in [Section 10.6 Key resources](#).

Cultural safety

Cultural safety means reflecting on your knowledge, skills and attitudes and practicing behaviours to deliver safe, accessible and responsive healthcare free of discrimination. Cultural safety in Australia is particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as they bear the burden of gross social and health inequity. Cultural safety is also important to different races, ethnicity, faith, ability, sexuality, gender, age and social-economic class.

Culturally safe practice

Culturally safe practice includes:

- a. understanding that only the patient and/or their family can determine cultural safety
- b. respecting diverse cultures, beliefs, gender identities, sexualities and experiences of all people, including colleagues
- c. acknowledging that social, economic, cultural, historic and behavioural factors can influence health and wellbeing at the individual, community and population levels

- d. recognising and avoiding bias, discrimination and racism based upon assumptions (for example, assumptions based on gender, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, age or political beliefs)
- e. recognising the right to self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through partnerships and collaboration in healthcare
- f. creating an inclusive, positive and work environment by role modelling behaviours that uphold the rights and autonomy of patients and colleagues

[Ahpra Shared Code of conduct](#)

Intersectionality

Intersectionality describes how different social factors or circumstances such as race, class, ability, age, sexuality, gender can overlap and combine to shape a person's life experience. Intersectionality may influence levels of discrimination and disadvantage. Everyone's story and experiences are different. It is important to be aware that the identity groups in this guide can change and people's characteristics do not exist in isolation.

You can apply an intersectional lens to your language by thinking about your experiences and the experiences of colleagues and people in the community, and consider how discrimination or disadvantage is further compounded by multiple aspects of identity.

Listen to Colleen Furlanetto (Chair of the Community Advisory Committee) [talk about intersectionality](#) with the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector.

Lived experience

Lived experience refers to a person with "direct" or "first-hand" experience. For example, a person with disability or a person who identifies as LGBTIQ+ has lived experience with disability or identifying as LGBTIQ+. Sometimes this is referred to as "direct experience". It is recommended to use the term "lived experience".

Personal experience

Personal experience refers to “indirect experience”. For example, when providing informal support for a family member, friend or colleague or formal support through being a support worker. Sometimes this is referred to as “indirect experience”. It is recommended to use the term “personal experience”.

Both lived and personal experience create a valued perspective and knowledge.

Plain language

Plain language means using everyday words and phrases to help people understand content. Using plain language makes information more accessible for everyone, helps express complex ideas simply and reaches people with low literacy levels.

Usability

Usability refers to how easy it is to navigate and interact with content. For example, how a page is structured and presented improves readability through assistive technology (screen readers). Consider using web and desktop tools such as the [Hemingway app](#) to correct grammar, fluency, sentence structure and assess reading level.

Vulnerable

Vulnerable should be used with care. It comes from the Latin word for ‘wound’ and can suggest that people are frail and in need of protection. Be mindful of the context when using this term.

INTERSECTIONALITY IN ACTION

Jamie is a recently qualified paramedic. They have a university degree and are a person of colour. Jamie is responding to a job for a patient who is presenting with abdominal pain. The patient, Ahn, is an older person with cognitive disability and English is their second language. Their carer is not present and their neighbour has called an ambulance on their behalf as they are not trusting of medical professionals due to experiences of medical abuse in the past.

There are many ways that patients may experience barriers to care. Jamie and Ahn may find difficulty in communicating and building trust due to the differences in their life experiences, Ahn's disability and/or Jamie's education level. The barrier to care is not due to other singular factor — each intersecting factor can compound to create unique challenges to receiving support.

Understanding inclusive language and how it can assist in helping both our people and patients feel included, seen and respected is just one of the ways we can create a safe, fair and inclusive environment in which to give and receive care.

**ABORIGINAL AND
TORRES STRAIT
ISLANDER PEOPLES
INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE**

03

Using inclusive and respectful language for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is not only essential to creating an inclusive workplace, it is also a core element of Reconciliation.

When seeking guidance on how to speak or write to or about Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples, it is always best to consult the local Traditional Owner corporation. A Traditional Owner corporation is the formally recognised body that represent a specific Traditional Owner group. For example, the Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation.

There is no such thing as one Aboriginal language. The Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VACL) identifies 38 languages and 11 language families in Victoria today.

3.1

TERMINOLOGY

When speaking collectively, AV has chosen to use the best-practice term **“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples”**. Using ‘peoples’, rather than ‘people’, refers to the many Aboriginal groups and Torres Strait Islander groups within Australia. However, there are many other terms that are considered acceptable to use, described in Section 3.2 Common terms below.

When working with a specific Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander individual or group, it is best to ask which terminology they prefer and reflect that in your language. It is important to remember that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples come from numerous and distinct cultures, rather than one homogenous culture.

COMMON TERMS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is extensively used and widely accepted throughout Australia when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples, and related topics. Using the plural – peoples, rather than people - can also be applied to other terms, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. In referencing ‘cultures’, you acknowledge the numerous and distinct cultures, rather than implying one shared ‘culture’.

Indigenous

Indigenous is defined as the people inhabiting or existing in a land from the earliest times or from before the arrival of colonists. In Australia, this is a term extensively used when referring to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia.

Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples feel the term Indigenous can detract from the preferred identity of the individual, or group of people and does not adequately describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The term can be viewed as merely used for convenience, to avoid repeating ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’.

Indigenous Australians

Indigenous Australians is another term used to describe the Indigenous peoples of Australia. This is a more appropriate term to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as it refers specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, whereas Indigenous is a much broader term that can refer to other Indigenous people, in other parts of the world.

Aboriginal

Aboriginal is a term extensively used and widely accepted throughout Australia when referring to Aboriginal peoples and topics. Aboriginal peoples are the first peoples of mainland Australia.

Torres Strait Islander

Torres Strait Islander is the term extensively used throughout Australia when referring to Torres Strait Islander peoples and topics. Torres Strait Islander peoples are of Melanesian origin, and are the Indigenous peoples of the Torres Strait Islands, located between Australia and Papua New Guinea. There are five traditional island clusters in the Torres Strait. More than half of the Torres Strait Islander peoples live on the mainland, with large populations residing in towns such as Cairns.

First Nations or First Peoples

First Nations or First Peoples can refer to the peoples or nations of people who were there from the beginning, prior to the settlement of other peoples or nations. These terms have some general acceptance but can also be perceived as generic or not adequately describing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia.

Non-Indigenous

Non-Indigenous is a term used in Australia when providing two perspectives — those of the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the rest of the Australian population. There is some dissatisfaction with the usage of the terms 'Indigenous', and 'non-Indigenous' as they can be viewed as over-simplifying complexities.

First Australians, Australia's First Peoples and First Nations Australians are terms that may be seen as growing in acceptance.

Be consistent in your communications — try to use the same language throughout.

3.3

ACRONYMS OR ABBREVIATIONS

Using an acronym or abbreviation — such as ‘ATSI’ for ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’ — to describe a race of people can be offensive and inappropriate.

It is only acceptable to use abbreviations in your communications when they form part of an acronym, a web address or an organisation, such as AIATSIS, NAIDOC, www.atsi.org.au.

Using abbreviations such as ‘ATSI’, ‘Abl’ or ‘TSI’ in communications such as tables, charts or surveys because you have limited space to insert ‘Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander’ or ‘Indigenous’ is not advisable. Consider reformatting to ensure abbreviations or acronyms are not used.

3.4

TRADITIONAL OWNERS/CUSTODIANS

The term ‘Traditional Custodians’ reflects the ongoing obligation to look after Country, and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do not own the land, instead the land owns them. The term ‘Traditional Owner’ reflects that their land was never formally ceded to anyone. It also reflects Australia’s history of denying ownership and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ sovereignty over their lands.

You can use either term, however, it is always best to ask individuals for their preference.

3.5

CAPITALISATION

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should always be capitalised to demonstrate respect. Capitalisation should extend to terms such as:

- » First Peoples/Nations/Australians
- » Indigenous
- » Elders
- » Traditional Owners/Custodians (can use either term, ask individual for their preference)
- » Country (and corresponding terms such as 'Land,' when it is used in place of 'Country'), as well as the names of particular Language Groups
- » Acknowledgement of Country, Welcome to Country, Smoking Ceremony, and the names of other cultural practices.

3.6

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY AND WELCOME TO COUNTRY

Incorporating an Acknowledgement of Country or Welcome to Country into meetings, gatherings, and events shows respect by upholding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultural protocols.

For guidance on how to perform an Acknowledgement of Country or Welcome to Country please see [Section 10.6 Key resources](#).

3.7

ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE TIPS

Remember that not all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities are the same.

Take the time to reach out to check what the local community preference is.

Use	Re-think
Indigenous Australians	Indigenous
Aboriginal	Aborigines *
Aboriginal	part-Aboriginal or half-Aboriginal *
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander(s)	native/native Australians
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander(s)	'full-blood,' 'half-caste' and 'quarter-caste' *
Torres Strait Islander(s)	'Islander(s)'
May I ask what your cultural heritage/ background is?	What percentage Aboriginal are you? Where are you from? Where are you really from? (often asked innocently to show interest in someone)

**These terms are considered inappropriate and offensive and should not be used*

AGE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

04

Ageism refers to the stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination directed towards people on the basis of age. Age discrimination can happen at any point in a person’s life, but it is most likely to happen to older and younger people.

4.1

AGE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE TIPS

- **Use person-first language:** Making references to someone’s age is not necessary in a work context. Use neutral terms and strengths-based language to describe a person.
- **Do not make assumptions or apply generalisations** about someone’s skills or abilities because of their age, for example, older people are inactive or teenagers are lazy.

Use	Re-think
Older person/people	Old person/people, the elderly, seniors, mature age
Participants aged 65-85	Older participants
People living in residential aged care	Institutionalised elderly
Person with dementia / Person living with dementia / Person with a diagnosis of dementia	Dementia sufferer

Use	Re-think
Mary described how she lives with diabetes	Mary described being a diabetes sufferer
Some older people access support for day-to-day activities	Older people rely on others to help them with day-to day activities
Child/children under the age of 12 years	Junior(s)
Young people between 12-18 years	Teenagers, youths
Use adolescents, babies or paediatrics when referring to developmental phases and/or clinical context and minors in legal settings.	

Visit the National Aging Research Institute, [Strategies for combatting ageism through age-positive language \(NARI\)](#) to learn more.

DISABILITY INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

05

5.1

KEY TERMS

Ableism is the systemic exclusion of people with disability and can be perpetuated and reinforced by using language that is derogatory, abusive or negative towards people with disability.

Person-first language ('people with disability') and **identity-first language** ('disabled people') are both used in Australia. If possible, ask the person or group their preference, follow their lead, and if in doubt, use person-first language or refer to that person by name.

5.2

DISABILITY INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE TIPS

- Reference disability only when it is relevant.
- Focus on the person, not the disability.
- Use person or people with disability, NOT person with a disability or people with disabilities.
- Disability may not be apparent, and people may choose not to share information.
- Autistic and Deaf people may identify as part of a cultural group/community and/or with disability. You can learn more in [Section 10.6 Key resources](#).

People with disability

Use	Re-think
People /children with disability	People living with disability, the disabled
Zhang has a chronic health condition	Suffers from, victim of, afflicted by, crippled* by
Ash has paraplegia/quadruplegia	Paraplegic
Jessie is a wheelchair user/uses mobility device	Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound

People with sensory disability

Use	Re-think
Martin is d/Deaf, hard of hearing	Deaf as a doorpost, deafie*
Mina is blind, vision impairment, vision diversity, is a person with low vision	Blind, person without sight, blind as a bat*
Ash is non-speaking/non-verbal	Mute*, dumb*

Family Member and Support Worker

Use	Re-think
Support worker, family member, carer	Paid carer, unpaid carer, primary carer

People with intellectual/cognitive disability

Use	Re-think
Suresh has learning/cognitive/intellectual disability	Intellectually challenged, simple, mentally retarded*, mentally disabled, handicapped, special needs
Rory has Down Syndrome	Downy, mongoloid*
Maria has dementia	Demented*
Will has acquired brain injury	Brain-damaged, brain impaired

People with psychosocial disability

Use	Re-think
Jo has psychosocial disability	Crazy*, insane*, mad*, manic*, mentally ill*, unstable*, nuts*, psycho(tic)*, psychopath(ic)*
Sam has schizophrenia	Sam is schizophrenic (which describes the person as their illness), schizo*
Van has depression	Depressive

Neurodiverse people

Use	Re-think
Jo has autism	Mild autism, autism spectrum disorder
Lindsay is autistic/Autistic	High/low functioning, Aspy/aspie,
Li is neuroatypical/neurodivergent	Mental*
Marcia has ADHD	Hyper/hyperactive, space cadet
Alex has a learning disability	Slow learner, stupid*

**These terms are considered inappropriate and offensive and should not be used.*

If you are making comparisons, write:

- 'person without disability' – rather than 'able-bodied'.
- 'sighted person' for someone who is not blind.
- 'hearing person' for someone who is not deaf.
- 'neurotypical' for someone who is not neurodivergent.

You can cause offence when you do not use respectful language, even if it is well intentioned.

- Re-think saying a person is inspirational because of their disability.
- Re-think euphemisms and made-up terms, such as 'differently abled'.

Visit the [PWDA Language Guide: A guide to language about disability](#) to learn more.

GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

06

Using gender neutral or gender inclusive language assists in removing gender-based biases by not assuming or reinforcing another person's gender. It also means people who may not identify as a binary gender (who are gender neutral or non-binary) can feel included.

Everyday phrases can unintentionally reinforce gender stereotypes. Examples include language associated with strength and power ('manpower', 'policeman') being masculine and emotional and caring language ('motherhood statement', 'drama queen') being feminine. By using gender inclusive language, you can disrupt those unhelpful stereotypes.

Reverse sexism is a term to describe the perceived discrimination against men and boys or for anti-male prejudice. This term does not consider structural power dynamics that underpin sexism. The prejudice faced by men and boys is not the same experience of the systemic power that causes and maintains disadvantage due to a person's gender or sex. Reverse sexism is thus inaccurate and offensive. An example of perceived discrimination can include comments like "They are only giving promotions to women now". It makes a general claim, often unfounded, and does not acknowledge or consider that women have been historically and systematically discriminated in promotion pathways.

It is important to note that men and boys can and do experience sexism. This often comes from the harmful effects of rigid gender stereotypes. Examples include when men find it more difficult to access flexible work or parental leave due to a stereotypical perception that women, not men or gender diverse people, are carers and nurturers. This can be an example of discrimination and shows how gender stereotyping is harmful to all people, including men and gender diverse people.

6.1

GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE TIPS

Ask: Does the wording or phrase used cause harm or reinforce rigid gender stereotypes? If so, is there a gender-neutral phrase that can be used instead?

Gender inclusive language

Use	Re-think
Everyone, all, team, folks, honoured guests	Guys / ladies and gentleman / men and women
Chairperson, Chair	Chairman / Chairwoman
People, humanity, society	Mankind
People power, workforce	Manpower
Parental leave	Maternity/paternity leave
Parent, caregiver	Mother/Father
Middle person, mediator, go-between	Middleman
Family name	Maiden name
Children, child	Son/Daughter
Partner, significant other, spouse	Girlfriend/boyfriend/husband/wife

LGBTIQA+ INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

07

AV adopts the term LGBTIQA+ as an umbrella term for gender, sex and sexuality diverse peoples.⁴ LGBTIQA+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and gender diverse, Intersex, Queer and questioning. The '+' represents other gender identities and sexualities not explicitly included in the term LGBTIQ, such as asexual, aromantic, and pansexual.

When we talk about gender, sex characteristics or sexuality, we're not talking about preferences or choices, we're talking about how people are.

When we use inclusive language, we demonstrate respect, build trust between AV and LGBTIQA+ communities, including our workforce, and help address the prejudice and discrimination people face.

Don't assume that everyone is heterosexual (straight), or that this is the norm. Words and phrases such as 'partner', 'parents', 'relationship', 'in a relationship' are examples of LGBTIQA+ inclusive language.

Gender, sex and sexuality are all separate concepts

GENDER

Gender can be expressed in different ways, such as through behaviour or physical appearance.

Many people understand their gender as being female or male. Some people understand their gender as a combination of these or neither.

SEX

Sex refers to a person's biological sex characteristics. This has historically been understood as either female or male. However, we now know that some people are born with natural variations to sex characteristics.

SEXUALITY OR SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Sexuality or sexual orientation describes a person's romantic and/or sexual attraction to others.

A person's gender does not necessarily mean they have particular sex characteristics or a particular sexuality, or vice versa.

Visit the [LGBTIQA+ Inclusive Language Guide | Victorian Government \(www.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.vic.gov.au/lgbtiqa-inclusive-language-guide) to learn more.

7.1

PRONOUNS

Pronouns are one way people refer to each other and themselves. Most, but not all men (including trans men), use the pronoun 'he'. Likewise, most, but not all, women (including trans women) use the pronoun 'she'. 'They', 'them' and 'theirs' are common gender-neutral pronouns which are typically used by gender diverse or non-binary identifying people. There are also other terms that may reflect a person's identity such as 'mx' as an honorific for non-binary instead of Miss/Mrs/Mr.

Pronouns are tied to a person's identity and using incorrect pronouns may cause you to misgender a person. Misgendering is a term used to describe **accidentally or intentionally using incorrect pronouns about or towards a person**. For example, referring to a woman as "he" or calling her a "guy" is an act of misgendering. Misgendering can have negative impacts on a person's confidence, their ability to express themselves and their overall mental health.

If you are unsure of a person's pronouns, you can ask them in a way that is safe and sensitive for the individual. For example, if in a group, to avoid singling anyone out, you could provide your own pronouns when introducing yourself. Alternatively, you could wait until you're alone with an individual to ask, 'what pronouns do you use?'.

AV encourages our workforce to include pronouns in [email signatures](#), name badges, when introducing yourself to a group and in online profiles, such as on Workplace and Microsoft Teams. Section 10 on "Where to from here?" provides an example signature. For more information, check out the [Sharing Pronouns FAQ](#).

7.2

LGBTIQA+ INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE TIPS

- If someone discloses to you that they're from one of the LGBTIQA+ communities, respectfully ask what terms they use to describe themselves, then use those terms.
- Don't question or make assumptions about someone's gender, sexuality or relationship. Accept and respect how people define their gender and sexuality.
- No one will get the language right 100 percent of the time for 100 per cent of people. The important thing is to keep trying and if you make a mistake, quickly apologise and continue the conversation.

Use	Re-think
All genders	Both genders / opposite gender
Assigned male / female at birth	Born male / female
Intersex	Hermaphrodite
Gay / lesbian	Homosexual / homo*
Trans woman / trans man (note: include spacing between words)	Transwoman / transman
They	"It" when referring to someone*

Use	Re-think
Sexual orientation / sexuality	Sexual preference / lifestyle choice
Gender affirmation / gender affirmation surgery	Sex change
LGBTIQA+	Gay and lesbian/the gay community
Assigned or presumed male or female at birth	Born male, born female
Is gay, asexual, transgender, etc.	Identifies as gay, asexual, transgender, etc.

SISTERGIRLS AND BROTHERBOYS

The terms 'sistergirls' and 'brotherboys' are general terms used in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities to describe transgender people and their relationships as a way of validating and strengthening their gender identities and relationships.

The terms sistergirls and brotherboys may also be used by non-trans people, but non-conforming Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples - for example, both lesbian and heterosexual Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women - may refer to themselves as 'sistergirls', 'sisters' or 'tid-das', which is a shortened version in Aboriginal English of the word 'sisters'. Gay Aboriginal men may also refer to themselves as sisters.

RACE AND ETHNICITY INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

08

Race, ethnicity and culture are all separate concepts.

RACE

Race is used to describe a group of people who appear to share physical traits, such as skin colour and facial features. Biological categories of race do not exist (for example, African or Latino).

ETHNICITY

Ethnicity describes groups that often share cultural heritage and ancestry. This includes country of birth, language, heritage, values, customs, and food.

A person's ethnicity should generally be used as a descriptive word. For example, say "He is Pakistani" not "He is a Pakistani".

CULTURE

Culture is the values, beliefs, languages, traditions, and other behaviours within a social group. Cultural groups could include ethnicity (for example, Fijian-Australian), socioeconomic class (for example, working class, middle class), gender (for example, women, men, transgender) or sexual orientation (for example, gay, lesbian, bisexual).

A person's racial, ethnic and cultural identity may overlap but may also be different. For example, an individual could be racially Asian, ethnically Chinese, and have grown up in Australia to Vietnamese Chinese parents, so have cultural elements from Vietnam, Australia and China.

A person can have traits from multiple cultures whilst having one ethnicity.

The term 'ethnic' is no longer used so all reference to ethnic culture below is referred to as cultural identity or cultural background. It is not to be confused with the definitions of ethnicity or culture.

OTHER KEY TERMS

Australians

Australians is widely used to refer to Australian-born persons of Anglo-Saxon descent when Australians include people who live in Australia, born in Australia or hold Australian citizenship, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

Based on the 2021 census, nearly half of Australians have a parent born overseas and almost 30 per cent of Australians are born overseas. Thus, using 'Australians' to only describe someone of an Anglo-Saxon background is not accurate and does not reflect the multicultural country we live in.

If you need to refer to someone of an Anglo-Saxon background, refer to them as a person with Anglo-Saxon descent.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) is generally used to refer to people for whom English is not their principal language or who have a background that is not Anglo-Saxon. Avoid using this term, including as an acronym and abbreviation. Where necessary, use 'Culturally and Racially Marginalised' (CARM) or 'multicultural' (see below) communities depending on what cohorts or groups of people you are referring to.

CALD supports the underlying assumption that the Anglo-Saxon culture is the default culture, and all other cultures deviate from it. However, everyone in Australia is part of the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australia, no matter their cultural backgrounds. People may not be able to access healthcare services because of their English language abilities, independent of their race or ethnicity. Further, research from Diversity Council of Australia (DCA)⁶ indicates that CALD was problematic as an umbrella term for any kind of racial difference, as the term does not specifically reference race as a key characteristic that informs people's experiences. They noted that race should be a part of any term used, as race so profoundly affects people's access to opportunities, often more so than culture or language.

Where possible, describe people based on their needs without referencing their race. For example, Karen's English language abilities are limited so they may need translation services when dialling Triple Zero (000).

Culturally and racially marginalised (CARM)

Culturally and racially marginalised (CARM) refers to people who are non-Anglo-Celtic nor European, including those born here and overseas. This includes people who are Black, Brown, Asian, etc. who face marginalisation due to their race. 'Culturally' is added because they may also face discrimination due to their culture or background. For example, a woman who is a Muslim migrant from South Sudan may face discrimination because of her race, religion and cultural background. This group of people cannot be racialised to be Anglo-Celtic or European.

People of Anglo-Celtic or European descent are considered racially privileged (powerful) compared to CARM people who are racially marginalised.⁷

Multicultural

Multicultural or multiculturalism relates to several cultural or ethnic groups within society, including the Anglo-Saxon culture. It does not only relate to people of non-Anglo-Saxon descent. Use this term to describe groups with several races and cultural backgrounds, including CARM and people of European background or descent. Be mindful when using this term to avoid generalisation.

8.2

RACISM

Racism refers to the belief that human races have specific characteristics which determine their respective cultures, usually involving the idea that one's own race is superior and at the same time, this person's race has the right to rule, dominate or limit the rights of others.

Not all racism will be obvious.

Everyday racism

Remarks that use prejudice, bias or stereotypes to say something about a person's race or ethnicity, even when the intent is not to cause harm. A lack of intent does not reduce the negative impacts of racism. Some examples include:

- » I don't see colour, just the human race. This type of comment brushes off the history of racism and the everyday racist experiences people continue to face.
- » Telling a colleague that they "speak really good English". This may seem to be a compliment, but this is in fact, harmful. This is because this comment indicates an assumption about someone's language skills based on their race or ethnicity, marking them as 'other'.
- » Asking someone "Where are you from?". Asking this makes assumptions that someone's physical appearance, accent, or name indicates they are not Australian or that they cannot be from Australia. With nearly half of Australians having a parent born overseas and almost 30 percent of Australians being born overseas, this shows that not all Australians have Anglo-Saxon appearances, accents, or names.

Covert racism

Harder to identify and address and includes mispronouncing someone's name on purpose or giving them a nickname as their given name "is just too hard".

Systemic racism

Much harder to identify than everyday and covert racism. This refers to the way that cultural norms, laws, ideologies, policies and practices of a society, or organisation result in unequal treatment, opportunities and outcomes for people from racially marginalised backgrounds.

Xenophobia

Xenophobia is the fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners.

REVERSE RACISM

is sometimes used to describe actual and perceived racial prejudice faced by a person of a socially or culturally dominant race. In Australia, this refers to Anglo-Celtic and European people, both migrants and those born here. But this term does not consider the structural power dynamics that underpin racism. The racial prejudice by Anglo-Celtic and European people does not constitute racism because racism includes the notion of having the “right to rule, dominate or limit the right of others”. Anglo-Celtic and European people do not experience systemic racism that causes and maintains disadvantage and oppression due to a person’s race or ethnicity. Reverse-racism is thus inaccurate and offensive.

8.3

RACE AND ETHNICITY INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE TIPS

- Racism may be hard to identify, especially when it is not intentional or is meant to be a ‘joke’. A lack of intent does not reduce the negative impacts of racism. If someone calls you out, take the time to understand why it was harmful, apologise and commit to listen and learn.
- If a person makes jokes or uses terms to describe their own race or ethnicity, this does not mean they will be comfortable with others using that language to or about them.

- Always ask someone how they define their cultural identity. Don't question or make assumptions about someone's race, ethnicity and culture based on their name, accent or physical appearances.
- Use person-first language. Making references to someone's ethnicity or cultural background is not necessary, especially in a work context. Describing a colleague as 'Middle Eastern' indicates that because of their ethnicity, they are in some way, unusual.

Use	Re-think
Australians	<p>Ethnic Australians/ ethnic groups / migrants/ immigrants/ refugees – can serve to erase a person's Australian identity and create a false 'hierarchy' of 'Australian-ness'.</p> <p>Migrants/ immigrants/ refugees may be used to refer to people who have recently arrived in Australia in specific contexts.</p>
May I ask what your cultural heritage/ background is?	Where are you from? Or where are you really from? – often asked innocently to show interest in someone.
Person of ... descent, for example, person of Tunisian descent	Where it is appropriate or necessary to speak about a person's ethnicity, be specific. For example, a person of Tunisian descent instead of African. Referring to someone as 'African' overlooks the unique languages and cultures of many countries within the continent.

Use	Re-think
Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CARM), or Multicultural communities, depending on context	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)
Given and family name	First and last name/ surname – these terms take for granted European conventions and order of names.
Biracial, multiracial	Mixed race
Person of colour	Black/brown/yellow or coloured person

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND FAITH INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

09

Religious belief and faith can be a deeply personal part to someone's identity and may or may not be physically visible. It may also affect their interactions and requirements.

A form of xenophobia is the fear and/or hatred of a different faith or religious belief (for example, islamophobia towards Muslims and antisemitism towards Jews). Stereotypes or making assumptions based on someone's religious beliefs is harmful and should be avoided. For example, referring to terrorism specifically when there is a link to Islam.

9.1

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND FAITH INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE TIPS

- Use the right terms when referring to specific practices, places, food or clothing. For example, a Muslim person may eat Halal food and a Jewish person may eat Kosher food.
- Use person-first language: Only refer to a person's religion or faith when necessary. For example, introducing a colleague as a Sikh person even if they wear a headwear (for example, a turban), is not appropriate. It indicates that they are in, some way, because of their faith, unusual or different from their colleagues.
- Where it is appropriate or necessary to speak about a person's faith, be as specific as possible.
- Don't question or make assumptions about someone's religious belief or faith based on their name and physical appearances. Accept and respect their religious beliefs or faiths.

Use	Re-think
Dietary requirements	Dietary restrictions / religious food
Given name	Christian name
Person of faith	Religious person
Person wearing a hijab (Muslim women) or turban (Sikh men)	Towelhead, raghead *

*These terms are considered inappropriate and offensive and should not be used.

**WHERE TO FROM
HERE?**

10

10.1

START USING INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN YOUR COMMUNICATIONS

Inclusive language can be used in all forms of communication. For example when speaking with patients, colleagues and in meetings, writing emails, documents, web, social media and presentations.

10.2

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN ACTION: CASE STUDY

AV's Digital and Technology Services Division made a pivotal shift towards inclusive language. It began when a team member identified problematic Information Communications Technology (ICT) terminology. The team member suggested changing these potentially harmful standard ICT words and phrases to neutral ones. For example, they proposed replacing the term 'whitelist' with 'allowlist' and changing 'master' to 'primary'.

The Executive Director embraced this team member's proposal, encouraging everyone in the division to replace these terms and asking people to come forward with information about additional problematic ICT language. This sparked a ripple effect of change. As the Executive Director said:

"Previously, I would have listened and acknowledged the concerns of [the team member], but I don't think I would have raised it with the wider organisation...I am much more

conscious about [potential harm] today.”

Team members then identified further problematic terms and phrases. For example, one person suggested replacing the term ‘disabled’ with ‘inactive’, changing ‘native feature’ to ‘core feature’, and substituting ‘employees or personnel’ for ‘manpower’. The language changes snowballed, and a proposal for inclusive language training was made. As this team member identifying language that needed to change said:

“For me, when I hear about inclusive, I had to learn what inclusive actually means.”

The Digital and Technology Services Division now has a list of acceptable terminologies, supported by a comprehensive inclusive language guide.

This example shows how proactive leadership signals a commitment to a shared responsibility for fostering a more inclusive workplace. The mindset shift that resulted promotes a workplace environment empowering team members to speak up, act and support transformative changes. These changes support the transition to proactively preventing workplace harm.

10.3

UPDATE YOUR EMAIL SIGNATURE

You can update your email signature to the following accessible and inclusive format. Here are a few options:

Name (they/them) 1

Job Title

Team area, Division

Work Days Monday - Friday 0800-16:30hrs 2

Ambulance Victoria

375 Manningham Road Doncaster VIC 3108

PO Box 2000 Doncaster VIC 3108

E person.name@ambulance.vic.gov.au

W ambulance.vic.gov.au



Ambulance Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands across which we work and travel, and pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging. 5

Ambulance Victoria is working towards a shared vision of a safe, fair and inclusive workplace. 6

1	Pronouns	Common pronouns include: She/Her He/Him They/Them She/They He/They
2	Availability	Work hours and availability can help promote part time and flexible work options.
3	Flag Banner	Flags are a way of showing respect and support for diverse communities
4	Descriptive Text	Images require a written description to be accessible. Right click the image, select "view alt text" and enter image description
5	Acknowledgement	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Acknowledgement
6	Inclusion Statement	You can show your commitment to working towards a safe, inclusive and respectful workplace by linking to YourAV.
Font		The font must be 11pt Arial

10.4

NOT SURE? FOLLOW THE FOUR STEPS TO INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

01

KEEP AN OPEN MIND, BE OPEN TO
LEARNING AND CHANGING

02

FOCUS ON THE PERSON

03

IF IN DOUBT, ASK

04

KEEP CALM AND RESPOND

HOW TO RESPOND TO NON-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

It is important to remember what may be funny to one person may be offensive or upsetting to another person. Comments or jokes with no intention to harm may be considered a form of harassment or discriminatory behaviour. Any comments that demean or make fun of certain groups of people or characteristics are best avoided.

Where safe/comfortable, address it directly

Consider your own safety in the situation and whether it is appropriate to address any non-inclusive language directly, at the time it occurs.

You may choose to do one of the following.

- Call out the language or behaviour openly with kindness and curiosity: *“What did you mean by that?” or “I think it’s important to take care with the language we use. I don’t believe language like [x] is consistent with AV’s Values”.*
- Take the person aside at a later moment and explain why the language or behaviour was upsetting to you (whether you were the intended recipient or a witness to the incident). Where possible, personal stories and anecdotes can be a powerful way of communicating.

Address it indirectly

Where you do not feel comfortable or safe to call out the language or behaviour directly, you may choose to express your discomfort in a safer space or at a later time after you have had a chance to reflect on the language used, such as with your team or people leader later.

If this response does not generate the desired effect, you may seek further guidance from People Partnering Hubs or the Diversity & Inclusion Department.

KEY RESOURCES

- » [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander AV guidelines](#)
- » [Why inclusive language matters as a manager](#) – Victorian Public Sector Commission
- » [LGBTIQ Inclusive Language Guide](#) – Victorian Public Sector
- » [Demonstrating inclusive and respectful language](#) – Reconciliation Australia
- » [Racism. It stops with me.](#) – Australian Human Rights Commission
- » [Cultural and linguistic diversity](#) – Style Manual
- » [Age diversity](#) – Style Manual
- » [People with disability](#) – Australian Government Style Manual

For the most up to date resources please visit the [Diversity and Inclusion Knowledge Library page](#)

10.6

If you would like more information on inclusive language, diversity and inclusion and how to engage with different communities, contact the Diversity & Inclusion Department at diversityandinclusion@ambulance.vic.gov.au.

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INCLUSIVE EVENTS CHECKLIST

12

This checklist will assist you to plan a more accessible and inclusive event. This is not an exhaustive list and depending on whether your event is online, in-person or hybrid, some of these may or may not be relevant.

If you are planning an event, you can contact the Diversity and Inclusion Team for further advice.



Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country	
A Welcome to Country or Acknowledgment of Country is organised depending on event type (see AV guidelines)	
Facilitators and Speakers	
Diverse representation and/or lived experience sought, especially from priority groups (i.e., Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and racially marginalised, disability, LGBTIQ+ communities)	
Names, pronunciation, titles and pronouns confirmed	
Invitations and Promotion	
A contact name and details are provided for attendees to request any accessibility accommodations and ask questions	
Plain and inclusive language is used and text is accessible font 11+ size	
Images include diverse representation and alternate text for screen readers	
Details on how to request Auslan, live captioning and language interpreters is provided	
A map of the building, public transport options and parking is available	
The event timing avoids major holidays, cultural or religious day of significance, school holidays, late finishes for people with long travel commutes	

In person and online settings	
The space, parking and equipment has been checked, tested for accessibility and any signage provided	
There are accessible and gender-neutral toilets, ramps/lifts, clear paths, signage drop-off/pickup points, a quiet space for prayer or quiet time	
Staff are identifiable and briefed on requests, facilities and features	
Reserve seating at the front, close to exit and facilities for people who request this	
Online platform accessibility features are understood by organisers and shared with audience	
Catering	
Select a caterer who can safely accommodate food allergies and inclusive food options such as halal, kosher, vegan and gluten free	
All attendees including speakers' dietary requirements have been collected and food labelled	
During the event	
Printed and online materials are available in plain language, other languages, Easy English as needed/requested	
The host has been briefed on inclusive language, housekeeping and how to advise attendees to seek assistance in the event of an emergency	
There is space for pronouns (or stickers) for people to add to their nametags	
There are adequate breaks and/or quiet spaces for large and/or lengthy events	
Jargon, cluttered slides, flashing, strobing animations are avoided online	
Time provided between agenda items for interpreters, captioners and note takers	
Microphones are silenced to minimise background noise, lighting is adequate for lip reading	