

Fact Sheet 3: What is a *Welcoming* Business?

A welcoming and inclusive business is one that has taken a number of small, but important steps to ensure that ALL members of the community feel they have equal opportunity to access and participate in the services on offer.

Small changes in attitude and communication are the cheapest and most effective way to become more welcoming.

Respect

All customers need and want to be treated with respect and dignity regardless of their diversity, differences or abilities.

Focusing on the person:

- Treat each customer as an individual customer with their own likes and dislikes.
- Always focus on the person, not their disability or difference.
- Always address the customer directly, not the other people who may be with them (such as a carer, aide or interpreter).

Giving assistance:

- Always ask the customer first if they want help; do not assume they need assistance. Always accept the answer if the customer declines your help.
- Ask all customers how they would like goods and services to be provided particularly where there are barriers to equal access.
- If you have a conversation that will last more than a few moments with a customer using a wheelchair, pull up a chair to converse with them at eye level.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

- Remember that based on past policies and past experiences, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may have some distrust of business and may feel fear or not confident in doing business.
- Demonstrate respect, a smile and a nod are welcoming, even without words.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags, artwork, signage and other visual cues may communicate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that your business is culturally safe and welcoming, and a place that they can enter without fear of being discriminated against.
- When talking with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person – put the person first before Business – ask first about family and share information about yourself. It is all about developing a positive respectful relationship.

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- Research shows that subtle or casual racism can be just as harmful as more overt forms. Imagine being judged in a job interview but the colour of your skin, rather than strength of your CV. How would you feel if you were watched in a shop or treated differently because of your ancestry?

For people who come from a cultural and linguistic diverse (CALD) background:

- Spend some time talking with your customers and learn about their culture so you can better meet their needs.
- Do not think all people from a particular background are all the same.
- When communicating with the customer, pay attention to whether they use a lot of non-verbal communication. For example do they smile a lot? Reflect the way they communicate with you and it will affirm with them that you are welcoming of them.
- If possible employ people from different cultures and abilities. When people are able to see that you are open to diversity they are more likely to become a customer because you value diversity.

For the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ) community

- Demonstrate respect. Do not make assumptions about someone's sexual orientation or gender identity or rely on stereotypes.
- The Rainbow flag, artwork and signage and other visual cues may communicate with the LGBTIQ community that your business is culturally welcoming and embracing of diversity.
- Respect privacy and confidentiality.

For people who may have a learning difficulty, an intellectual disability or a brain injury:

Being clear:

- Address the customer directly, listen carefully, speak clearly and check for understanding. Always use clear language without being patronising and if necessary, re-word what you have said to assist with clarity.
- Offer written information or catalogues that customers can take away and look at later. This can help people to remember what they have seen and what you have told them.
- Don't be afraid to ask the person to repeat something if you don't understand. Don't correct or complete sentences for the person.

Allowing time:

- Allow your customer time to ask questions and try not to rush them. Try not to overload people
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with an intellectual disability with information.

- Reassure your customer you are there to help if they forget the information.
- Be patient.

Advertise your advantages

- If your business is accessible, let people know. For example, if you have wheelchair access include this in your promotions and advertisements.
- Put up clear external signs to help people with vision impairments or learning difficulties identify what your shop is.
- Put signs up to indicate you are welcoming and inclusive, for example an Aboriginal Flag sticker or Rainbow sticker to indicate you are welcoming of Aboriginal people or the Lesbian and Gay community. Just ensure your staff are welcoming and will not discriminate or give poor customer service to these diverse communities.



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Go to www.dss.gov.au or www.dhhs.vic.gov.au for more information.

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The welcoming business program has been developed and endorsed by these organisations:

