

## Multicultural supervision: Building a diverse and strong AOD workforce

In an era marked by multiculturalism and cultural diversity within the workforce, cultural supervision has emerged as a critical element in promoting effective communication, reducing conflict, and fostering an inclusive work environment where everyone feels respected, valued, and safe regardless of their cultural perspectives or background. Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities are an integral part of the multicultural fabric of Australian society, contributing to the country's social, economic, and cultural development. Forming a multiculturally competent approach is essential to providing quality services tailored to these communities' needs.

### What is multicultural supervision?

Multicultural supervision is a specialised form of professional supervision that acknowledges and addresses the impact of culture on the supervisory relationship and process. It encompasses a range of theoretical frameworks, models, and interventions designed to promote effective communication and cultural understanding. Further, it provides a systemic approach for the consideration of language, cultural, migration, and resettlement needs across the supervisee and client care plan, as well as culturally relevant therapeutic techniques in cases where Western methodologies may not be desired or appropriate.

Multicultural supervision involves creating safe spaces where supervisees engage in dialogue, reflection, and learning related to their own cultural identities and biases within their professional practice. Its primary goal is to increase self-awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and skills related to culture-related issues (e.g., culture/ethnicity, gender identity, religion), thereby improving the quality of care delivered by professionals working with culturally diverse populations. Multicultural supervision also necessitates ethical considerations related to fairness, respect, and equity in all aspects of the supervisory relationship. Multicultural supervision encompasses a comprehensive approach that acknowledges the diversity within professional settings and helps to eliminate (identify) any biases while aiming to maximise supervisee growth through culturally informed guidance and support.

Multicultural supervision claims the same kinship with clinical supervision that culture claims with individual psychology and closely resembles clinical supervision. Cultural assessment, cultural formulation, cultural treatment planning and cultural intervention are necessary and critical dimensions of culturally safe clinical work. It is important to understand both the supervisee and their client's issues within the context of culture.

### The importance of multicultural supervision

Multicultural supervision can help to bridge any gaps between service providers and clients from different backgrounds. It facilitates client engagement by creating safe spaces of acceptance and respect rather than judgement and misunderstanding. An external cultural supervisor can coordinate with a clinical supervisor, managers, and team leaders to provide the cultural needs of the organisation. Importantly, organisations that embrace multicultural supervision gain a competitive advantage by leveraging their workforce's diverse perspectives and experiences. Culturally supervised teams experience enhanced creativity, problem-solving abilities, and innovation due to the inherent strength derived from multiple viewpoints. Engaging with CALD communities requires sensitivity toward different worldviews and perspectives. If the responsibility falls on clients, it is likely that clients will have to "fit" or change to match the treatment or program rather than treatment services responding to the needs of clients. Multicultural supervision promotes cultural awareness amongst professionals by fostering an understanding of the influence of diverse perspectives on health beliefs and practices held by various CALD groups, supporting professionals to tailor interventions or services accordingly.

Through the implementation of multicultural supervision, service providers can effectively demonstrate their commitment towards working in a culturally safe, ethical, and responsive way which, in turn, opens space for meaningful engagement with CALD communities.

### **What multicultural supervision offers?**

- Exploring and recognising culturally based social and emotional issues and culturally relevant ways of interpreting and working with those issues.
- Identifying culturally (responsive) resources and programs to best meet community needs
- Identifying the differences between cultures (i.e., in relation to 'family', parenting, communication, emotional expression, etc.) that impact the perceptions and actions of clients and other service providers.
- Mentoring and guidance – a 'go-to person' for culturally based questions, information, community complexities and challenges.
- Validation for cultural practices and ways of working, and evidence for working with culturally diverse families and communities.

### **Domains of interest in multicultural supervision may include:**

- The supervisee's cultural self-understanding and the need for cultural consultation and/or referral
- Cultural influences on the formation and function of a client's personal identity & personal healthcare preferences
- Cultural influences on the therapeutic relationship, including culturally determined power influences and imbalances.
- Family representations of cultural heritage & minority status & family history of immigration, migration, displacement, and relocation
- Cultural influences on professional theory, method, and practice
- Challenges to inequity, inequality, discrimination, and bias.

### **Multicultural supervision in practice:**

- Like all forms of professional supervision and workplace support - multicultural supervision and support is provided regularly, either fortnightly or monthly for both mainstream and multicultural services.
- Multicultural supervision is not internal, line management or operational supervision and should be provided externally to your organisation by a qualified cultural supervisor with extensive experience in multicultural approaches, perspectives and models of health and wellbeing.
- Supervisors should have in-depth cultural knowledge as well as an understanding of the context, i.e., alcohol and other drugs as well as the social and community/health system and have a solid understanding of how to navigate and implement cultural systems and approaches within this context.
- It can be delivered to both groups and individuals to any professionals who support culturally diverse clients and communities.

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