

## Connecting CALD NDIS Participants with Services that Respond to their Cultural and Linguistic Needs

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), with its shift away from block funding to individual, self-managed funding, has created a more consumer and market driven approach to service delivery (Hallahan, 2013). Individuals are now able to 'shop around' for service providers that meet their specific needs and preferences. This has led to enhanced competition in the market and a proliferation of online platforms that assist individuals to connect with suitable providers. Taking into account CALD communities' preference for culturally and linguistically congruent services, I spoke with representatives from two online platforms, Karista ([www.karista.com.au](http://www.karista.com.au)) and CareAbout ([www.careabout.com.au](http://www.careabout.com.au)) to find out how they are meeting the needs of CALD NDIS consumers.

Karista assists NDIS participants and carers to find services based on personal preferences. The CEO, Danielle Bodinnar, said that their service "actively seeks out providers with expertise in areas that are important to participants and their families and this includes cultural preferences and languages." Similarly, Marcus Bleechmore, from CareAbout, explained that their service has a database of NDIS registered providers (or 'partners') that includes whether services have bilingual workers. At present, they are partnered with providers who employ carers speaking Italian, Greek, Russian, Cantonese, Mandarin, Hebrew and German.

According to Marcus, "people who need help are often either overwhelmed with the options or have no idea about where or what to look for." He also said that sometimes disability providers have waiting lists or the provider fails to follow up after an initial enquiry. Both Karista and CareAbout do the research and follow up to ensure participants are matched with supports that are suited to their needs.

At present, however, neither of the two platforms have an online search option for language requirements. Participants and their carers and advocates need to contact the services directly to receive tailored assistance. Even though these services already receive some requests from CALD clients, they would like to increase access to their services for people from diverse backgrounds.

A commitment to continue to improve service access is especially important as a significant proportion of people with disabilities from CALD backgrounds lack awareness and understanding of the NDIS and available services, have low English proficiency and do not have the ability to navigate the complexities of service systems. Efforts need to be channelled into raising awareness of how platforms such as Karista and CareAbout can help connect participants to services that respond to their cultural and linguistic needs. Disability services, on the other hand, need to continue to diversify their workforces and effectively promote their work to CALD consumers to ensure real and meaningful 'choice and control' for this segment of our community.

Both Karista and CareAbout have been in contact with CEH to seek ideas on how to establish better connections with key ethno-specific and multicultural stakeholders to continue to broaden their reach into CALD communities. CEH provides resources and support to service providers, translated materials and data on language and disability. If you would like information on how CEH can help you to connect with CALD communities, contact Mary Gavranic at [maryg@ceh.org.au](mailto:maryg@ceh.org.au) or go to [www.cop.ceh.org.au](http://www.cop.ceh.org.au).

