



# Some tips on how best to engage and develop education sessions on sensitive health subjects with multicultural communities

This table was produced by the MHSS team in response to ongoing enquiries that we receive from organisations on how to successfully engage and undertake education session on sensitive topics with multicultural communities. Given the diversity of migrant and refugee communities in Australia, and the variations within each community, there is no single or simple answer to how to undertake this.

The issues and practical tips in this table have been put together from years of work by MHSS team members and others at CEH. They aim to highlight some of the issues you may need to consider when undertaking your work. The table attempts to represent a process of engagement and exploration that aims to maximise the chances of successful health promotion activities for both yourself and the communities in question.

This is not necessarily an exhaustive list, but hopefully, it will allow you to reflect on your engagement strategies so as to develop more effective processes and strategies for working with multicultural communities in Australia.

Issues to consider	Practical tips that may be of use
Time involved in engaging and connecting to reach out to diverse communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It can take time due to multiple commitments of the people and communities involved.</li> <li>• Do you understand the role of community leaders in communities?</li> <li>• Is the community/group reached via a religious group?</li> <li>• You may need to approach multiple community leaders</li> <li>• Think about what social platform are used by community members</li> <li>• Work and living arrangements of community members will impact on your engagement with them</li> <li>• Do some basic research to identify the main characteristics of the group you are trying to engage</li> </ul>
Who is the audience, are there sub communities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk to the group leader/facilitator to learn more about the group, such as the group size, meeting time, group dynamic, and the purpose of this group.</li> <li>• Collect demographic data about group members, i.e., find out how long people have been in Australia, their age group, and gender.</li> <li>• Learn more backgrounds of the group, e.g., cultural, political, and historical backgrounds which can be important.</li> <li>• Is the community unified or are there various internal groups divided along cultural, ethnic, political, or geographical issues?</li> <li>• Is there chance that trauma is a big issue for this group?</li> <li>• Are there cultural differences between the older and the younger generations?</li> <li>• Consider attending sessions/meetings with that group beforehand to get a better understanding.</li> <li>• Acknowledge their culture and ways of meeting and learning.</li> </ul>
What does the group/community actually want to know, and what are the best ways to connect/talk to them?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a conversation with the organiser or the co-ordinator.</li> <li>• Engaging with the group, and listening to them, and ask questions to find out their interests/needs beforehand.</li> <li>• Learn their knowledge base, as well as the gaps.</li> <li>• Possibly use a pre session survey</li> <li>• Is an education session the best option, or would other options/strategies be better</li> <li>• Do they want separate male and female sessions, or mixed</li> <li>• What is their health literacy level</li> <li>• What is their English/language levels</li> <li>• Go to the place where people meet regularly, i.e., playgroups, workplace, community centre, café, or religious centre</li> <li>• Ensure that the meeting place is safe and comfortable for all</li> <li>• Meeting place needs to be easy to get there, e.g. transport</li> <li>• What are their catering needs and provision of food</li> <li>• Is childcare needed to facilitate attendance</li> <li>• Consider time of the year, e.g. festivities</li> <li>• Consider whether major global issues may be impacting them</li> <li>• Facilitate the discussions within the group</li> </ul>

<p>Strategies on how to overcome taboos on sensitive topics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk to the group leader(s) and to the community to know more about their culture</li> <li>• Ask how topics and words are discussed and addressed within their community</li> <li>• Use a quick quiz to understand participants' knowledge level and attitudes</li> <li>• Ask community members what's the difference in their culture compared to Australian culture</li> <li>• Are there significant different health belief systems among the participants and you?</li> <li>• Do all the participants share/have the same views?</li> </ul>
<p>Consider the time when you go to the group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the group adhere to a different calendar system, if so, which one?</li> <li>• Are there any cultural festivals occurring concurrently with our scheduled sessions?</li> <li>• Might the group feel uneasy discussing sensitive topics during these festival periods?</li> <li>• Acknowledging the group's culture and any ongoing festivals at the start</li> <li>• Engaging community members by asking questions about their culture</li> </ul>
<p>People might think they were targeted at the session</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain the reason why this topic is delivered to this group – e.g. health is for everybody</li> <li>• Use case studies to avoid participants' feeling of being targeted.</li> <li>• Educator may want to share personal stories/relevant news</li> <li>• Allow the participants to share their views/feelings/fears</li> </ul>
<p>Issues that might occur during the session</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The topic you are looking at is more sensitive/controversial than first thought</li> <li>• The language/wording/tone you are using is at the wrong level</li> <li>• Images and messages used may be traumatising, inappropriate, or not understandable.</li> <li>• Participants self-disclose issues and problems</li> <li>• Space and equipment to be used may not be adequate</li> <li>• Be prepared for delays, equipment not working etc.</li> </ul>
<p>Be prepared</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be flexible</li> <li>• Have more than one type of presentation style</li> <li>• Be prepared to make content more simple or focus on particular topics depending on reaction of participants</li> </ul>
<p>Increasing shared understanding of topics covered</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See previous steps on engaging and connecting with communities</li> <li>• Use plain language</li> <li>• Avoid assumptions</li> <li>• Use Interpreters when needed – need to familiarise yourself in how best to use interpreters</li> <li>• Use the Explanatory Model of Health as a way to understand where the audience is coming from and their understanding of issues</li> <li>• Can use the Teach Back model as a way to check understanding of what you have said</li> </ul>
<p>Critical reflection after session</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do an appropriate evaluation</li> <li>• Self-reflect on what when right and what could be improved</li> <li>• Discuss with fellow workers and other presenters</li> <li>• Follow up with the organiser/co-ordinator(s)</li> </ul>