



Engaging
Arabic Speaking
Communities Within
Mental Health Services

CALD Toolkit

A Guide to Partnerships with
Arabic Speaking Stakeholders

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Why should we build partnerships?

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This guide will detail the essential considerations and steps to building partnerships with the Arabic speaking community (ASC). Partnerships are an important part of building the rapport of an organisation within the community they are serving, and a powerful marketing tool. Partnerships with the ASC can assist organisations to further understand service needs, access more potential participants as well as provide more comprehensive support to Arabic speakers struggling with their mental health.³³

How we should build partnerships

Different communities require different approaches when building partnerships and may produce a variety of outcomes for your organisation. There should be measures developed to understand the impact of the partnership on your client numbers, quality of service and presence within the community.³⁴ Building a partnership should include the following:

1. **Develop a demographic profile** about the cohort you are engaging using databases such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC). Community profiles are useful as they provide statistics relating to the number of languages other than English spoken at home, religion, and ancestry.³⁵ This information will help an organisation to identify potential points of initial contact with communities.
2. **Research the community group** you are engaging to learn about their socio-political history, culture and religious practices.

3. **Understand ethnic and religious differences** that exist across individuals originating from the same country. The Arabic speaking community have a large amount of faith-based diversity. For example, the Lebanese community in Sydney adhere to several different religions, some of these include Maronite Catholicism, Roman Catholicism, the Greek Orthodox Church, Sunni Islam and Shia Islam.³⁶ This diversity needs to be considered in any partnership with an ASC. If an organisation is to form a partnership with any of these faith-based communities, existing conflict or underlying prejudices between institutions will need to be considered. For example, forming a partnership with the Orthodox church would differ from a partnership with the Maronite or Catholic church. Although both churches are Christian and their underlying faith is the same, the culture, traditions, dates of celebrations vary from one church compared with the other.
4. **Co-design with community members** can build trust and rapport between service organisations and communities, ensuring a strength-based approach to service delivery.³⁴ Sourcing community members across faith-based institutions, professions and community leadership is essential. A skilled co-design consultant could be engaged if the budget allows it and the recommendations published and followed through.
5. **Capitalise on the resources and strengths** that exist within communities. An example would be to utilise bilingual members of a church you might be engaged with to translate your communication and serve as a community champion on behalf of your organisation.³⁴

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6. **Mental health literacy education** is an asset that can be utilised to engage hard to reach communities. Mental health education is an emerging need within Arabic speaking communities and mental health-based organisations may already possess education sessions as an existing resource. Providing education sessions might also facilitate partnerships across several community groups or institutions, particularly if more than one is invited to the same seminar.
 7. **Create a database** specifying the community groups and stakeholders your organisation would like to target.^{3,6} This is a great tool to monitor the progress of partnerships and highlight areas requiring improvement or further effort. Ensure all staff members receive the necessary training to input data, print reports and technical staff are available for support.
 8. **Study the organisation** you are forming a partnership with and understand its history, current programs and services. Ensure transparent conversations are initiated regarding other partnerships your organization may have within the community and the scope of services you offer. If necessary, profit and loss reports can be shared, and partnership scope and conditions established within a formal agreement.^{3,7}

Accessing gatekeepers: Religious leaders

Religious leaders access majority of the ASC within Australia and are often considered the first point of contact for people who struggle with their mental health. They serve as a crucial point of trust and respect and a wide source of knowledge and support on a variety of interpersonal, faith, legal and financial topics.^{3,38}

Research shows that religious leaders have great influence over an individual's desire for professional assistance with their mental health recovery journey. Members of the ASC who lack English language skills and experience difficulty navigating the mental health system in Australia will often seek support from a trusted religious leader.²

There is evidence to support the fact that religious leaders still have poor knowledge relating to recognising, supporting and referring individuals with mental health conditions to appropriate care. This can pose a potential barrier to streamlining referrals from religious leaders into relevant mental health services. While both Christianity and Islam acknowledge demonic possession and lack of spirituality as a valid cause of mental health, research has shown that leaders are willing to refer people to providers if they deem it necessary. Mental health education initiatives are extremely useful in opening up access to services for people in need by improving the capacity of the Arabic speaking clergy to better recognise and support people with mental illness.^{2,3}

When engaging religious leaders in the context of partnerships, organisations should ensure the following:

- **Sharing information:** when engaging religious leaders, organisations should prioritise a soft entry approach. Requesting to display your translated resources within their physical locations, being introduced by a community member to a religious leader or attending local community events run by the religious leader/community are all effective ways to make your presence known respectfully.²



- **Respect and humility:** it is vital that organisations honor the high regard Arabic speaking communities have for religious leaders. Respecting community protocols, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs is essential. For example, it is preferred to not walk into the mosque with your hair uncovered if you are a woman. Message or call religious leaders during main religious events such as Christmas, Easter or Ramadan and wish them a Merry Christmas or a Happy Ramadan (or Ramadan Mubarak which means 'Blessed Ramadan'). These gestures are appreciated and are a sign of respect.
- **Cultural competency:** religious leaders are more likely to refer individuals to services that provide support across the Arabic language and culture. Ensuring you provide culturally competent services will encourage referrals.²
- **Consultation:** as discussed, religion can serve as a great protective factor. Seeking the advice of spiritual leaders can build rapport and facilitate information sharing. This can be achieved by involving leaders within meetings and reference groups and providing training opportunities within mental health. If stakeholders are gaining knowledge or resources, they may be more likely to engage in a partnership.



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40

Wellways has been working for people with mental health issues, disabilities and carers for more than 40 years.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST



We develop and deliver mental health services including suicide prevention, follow-up after care and housing support programs. We understand the challenges and complexity of mental health issues for individuals, families and communities.

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Our experienced and trained staff work with people with complex needs and multiple diagnoses.

WORKERS WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE



Many of our workers have a lived experience. At Wellways we value personal experience together with learnt knowledge and believe this contributes to the depth of our programs.

WORKERS WHO IDENTIFY AS LGBTIQ+



Our programs aim to meet the needs of all participants who identify as LGBTIQ+ by providing them access to LGBTIQ+ peer and support workers.

RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN



We are committed to reconciliation, to closing the gap and addressing injustice in association with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Contact Wellways on **1300 111 400** to find out about services and supports available to help you achieve your goals.

Wellways acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People as the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we live, work and play and pays respect to their Elders past, present and future.

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