



POLICY TITLE: Inclusive Language Policy

RELATED POLICIES:

RESPONSIBLE OFFICERS: Chief Executive Officer

AUTHORITY: Chief Executive Officer

APPLICABLE FORMS: Nil

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Preamble

Language is a powerful tool for fostering inclusion. It can make individuals and communities feel valued, respected and included and should positively reflect the social and cultural diversity of the bowls and wider communities. Inclusive language plays an important role in acknowledging everyone and treating people equitably, and with sensitivity and respect to which all are entitled.

Why is inclusive language important?

Inclusive language is about welcoming all people to participate and contribute to our bowls community.

Language is our main form of communication, and it plays a powerful role both in contributing to and eliminating discrimination. Communication is not only what you say but how it is heard. How we are described by others has an enormous impact on our health and well-being. Making changes to use more inclusive language offers us a chance to grow and become better communicators while showing respect for those we are communicating with and about.

Placing limitations or expectations on individuals because they belong to a certain group is damaging, hurtful and discriminatory. Positive stereotypes can be just as damaging as negative ones and contribute to and perpetuate systematic differences in power and privilege. There is a lot of information and training available on inclusive language and practice, if you need to understand this further.

Inclusive language in practice

- Culture, race and ethnicity

How we speak to each other influences our behaviour and our culture. Language inclusiveness with respect to all cultures is important. Seek to understand different cultural norms around acceptable communication, and only refer to the ethnic or racial background of a person or group if it is appropriate for the context.

- Sexual orientation and gender identity

Language is inclusive when it respects and affirms people's genders, bodies, and relationships. These are not preferences or choices; it is how people are. You can demonstrate your respect by accepting identity and relationships as given and by acknowledging and using the words people use about themselves.

It is good practice to keep an open mind as it is not always possible to know someone's sexual orientation, gender identity and variations of sex characteristics simply by how they look or how they speak.

- Gender equity

In language terms, the most inclusive strategy is to avoid references to a person's gender except where it is pertinent to the discussion. This often involves seeking gender neutrality when using terms and pronouns. Examples are; '*greetings everyone*', instead of '*greetings ladies and gentlemen*', mixing up word order in common expressions, such as '*her and him*', rather than '*him and her*'. Care should be taken to use the form of address preferred by each individual. If in doubt do not use a title, use the person's first name. Avoid using gender-biased expressions or expressions that reinforce gender stereotypes (e.g. '*throws/ bowls/runs like a girl*,' or '*in a manly way*')

- Disability

Language is a powerful tool which can help break down significant barriers by creating a sense of empowerment, pride, identity and purpose for people with disability. Good practice inclusive language guidelines are to:

- Use first person language which focuses on the person, not the disability.
- Talk directly to the person with a disability, not the other people who may be with them.
- Ask the person first if they want assistance, and if they answer yes, ask how you can best assist them.
- Refer to a person's disability only when necessary and appropriate.
- Use terms that recognise that the disability is only one characteristic of the person or group.
- Change the focus from disability to accessibility, for example '*accessible parking spaces*', not '*disabled parking spaces*'.
- If a person is deaf or has a hearing disability; make sure you face the person when you speak, move away from areas with lots of background noise, have a pen and paper to help you communicate, if necessary.
- If a person has a vision impairment or is blind; identify yourself by name to them, if appropriate, ask for their name so you can address them directly and they know you are talking to them; if the person asks for assistance to go somewhere, ask which side they would prefer that you stand and offer your arm so they can hold it.

Language and practices to avoid are:

- Do not pat, talk to, or otherwise distract a guide dog or other assistance animal.
- Avoid the use of the term 'special' when referring to people with disability.
- Avoid terminology that implies victimhood or suffering as part of any illness, disease, disability or impairment.
- Avoid language that implies a person with a disability is inspirational because of their disability.

Conclusion

There is no place in public discourse, legally or ethically, for insensitive, inaccurate, or derogatory language stereotypes that are based on factors such as ability/disability, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, race or cultural, background.

Used with care and sensitivity, language can play a powerful role in minimising conflict and building connections between individuals and groups. In this way, it can play an important part in building a society in which all people are valued and feel included.

Definitions

The following are some commonly used terms in Australia. Their meanings are continually being contested and there is no worldwide agreement on them.

- Discrimination

Discrimination is less favourable treatment of a person because of a personal characteristic or treating everyone the same way because of a shared personal characteristic. Discrimination does not have to be intentional, nor does the effect have to be intended, for it to be unlawful. This includes:

- Calling a person a name that relates to a personal characteristic.
- Specifically excluding a person from an activity because of a personal characteristic.
- Not considering access needs of people in a wheelchair.

- Gender

Gender is part of how you understand who you are and how you react with other people. Many people understand their gender as being male or female. Some people understand their gender as a combination of these or neither. Gender can be expressed in different ways, such as through behaviour or physical appearance.

- Gender identity

Has nothing to do with sexual orientation. It is an inner sense of oneself as man, woman, feminine, masculine, neither, both, or moving around freely between or outside of gender binary.

- LGBTIQ+ communities

The 'LGBTIQ+' acronym is widely used because it is recognisable by many and is inclusive of diverse expressions of body, relationship, gender and biological sex. There are other terminologies and expressions that people use. It is important to remember that all language evolves and changes over time.