



Meaningful Ageing
AUSTRALIA

Spiritual Care as an Enabler

Information for the Aged Care Sector Committee Diversity Sub-Group

25 October 2017

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Thank you for your request for further information (received 20 October 2017) regarding our model of resources development to support older people with diverse needs. We are pleased to provide the following overview and are available for further comment by contacting us on the details provided on the front page.

1. Background

The Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP, Minister for Aged Care and Minister for Indigenous Health, has asked the Department of Health (the department) to co-design an Aged Care Diversity Framework (the Framework) by December 2017. To inform development of the Framework the Minister has established an Aged Care Sector Committee Diversity Sub-Group (Diversity Sub-Group).¹

Meaningful Ageing Australia is the Australian national peak body for spiritual care and ageing. We are a membership based not-for-profit incorporated association, supporting organisations and groups to respond to the pastoral and spiritual needs of older people, their significant others, and their carers. Our mission is to ensure that all older Australians have access to high quality pastoral and spiritual care. Our members are organisations and groups who support, care for and/or accommodate older people. We have begun our work by focussing on the aged care sector.

Our main activities are:

- primarily, the creation of practical resources and delivery of education to build capability amongst our members
- advocacy with government and key agencies to understand the contribution of spiritual care and importance of spirituality for older people to flourish.

Spirituality is often misunderstood. It is more than religion. It can be explained as “the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred”.² For some people this has a religious expression, and for others it does not. Understanding someone’s spirituality means understanding the person in their context, including all aspects of what makes them who they are (to the extent that they wish to share this). Spirituality is not confined to a private idea but rather is formed and expressed through relationship.³ There is a growing body of evidence that engagement with spirituality increases resilience, reduces depression and reduces anxiety.⁴

a. The National Guidelines for Spiritual Care in Aged Care

The importance of spirituality for older people from a wide range of backgrounds has been identified in numerous places,⁵ including the publication of federally funded National Guidelines for Spiritual Care in Aged Care that were launched in August 2016.⁶ The Guidelines were produced by Meaningful Ageing Australia in partnership with Spiritual Health Victoria and project managed by the National Ageing Research Institute. They were funded by the Australian Government Department of Health under the ACSIHAG program.

The Guidelines refer to the importance of making consideration of the particular contribution, challenges and issues that may be faced by people from special needs groups.⁷ By implementing the

¹ <https://consultations.health.gov.au/ageing-and-aged-care/development-of-the-aged-care-diversity-framework/consultation/subpage.2017-04-26.7223377225/>

² Puchalski, Christina, Robert Vitillo, Sharon Hull, Nancy Reller. “Improving the spiritual dimension of whole person care: Reaching national and international consensus”. *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, 17, no. 6 (2012): 642-656.

³ Swinton, John. *Spirituality and Mental Healthcare*. (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2001)

⁴ See for example the summary of research accessible from <https://meaningfulageing.org.au/other-resources/>

⁵ See for example Kidd, Jeremy, Tarryn Whitten. “Understanding Spirituality and Religiosity in the Transgender Community: Implications for Aging”. *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging* Vol. 20 , Iss. 1-2 (2008): 29-62; Kanitsaki, O. “Mental Health, Culture and Spirituality: Implications for the Effective Psychotherapeutic Care of Australia's Ageing Migrant Populations” *Journal of Religious Gerontology* 13, Iss. 3-4 (2003): 17-37; MacKinlay, Elizabeth, ed., *Ageing and Spirituality Across Faiths and Cultures*. (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2010)

⁶ Meaningful Ageing Australia, *National Guidelines for Spiritual Care in Aged Care*. (Parkville: Meaningful Ageing Australia, 2016) Available from <http://meaningfulageing.org.au/national-guidelines-for-spiritual-care-in-aged-care-documents/>

⁷ Meaningful Ageing Australia, *National Guidelines for Spiritual Care in Aged Care*, 11.

National Guidelines for Spiritual Care in Aged Care, organisations are positioning themselves to be more sensitive to the complex, inter-related needs of each older person.

b. Connection with the National Aged Care Diversity Framework and Action Plans

There are several important contributions that spiritual care offers the National Diversity Framework and the Diversity Action Plans.

- Firstly, there is the twin challenge and opportunity of:
 - understanding that the spirituality of people from diverse and/or vulnerable groups is recognised as *more than religion*
 - engaging with the *role* of religion in the life of someone who identifies with, or has been impacted by, a specific religious faith/culture where relevant.
- Secondly, a spiritual care approach provides an ideal lens through which to approach understanding and support of people from diverse backgrounds. This approach can be successfully applied at:
 - the level of resource development
 - as well as practitioner behavior.

Spiritual care is by necessity profoundly person-centred and orientated around collaboration and networks. It is deeply embedded in understanding and enhancing the experience of each older person who is engaged with the aged care system by knowing what is most important for him/her. Spiritual care means recognising not only the needs of the person you are supporting, but also the role of the system in the support relationship.

A spiritual care approach is aligned with the ‘conscious practices’ that were articulated in the department’s consultation paper such as: appreciation of the interdependence of the natural environment, culture and humanity, practising mutual respect, recognising ways of being and knowing,⁸ acknowledging structural barriers that create discrimination.⁹

2. Specific Resources Promoting Sensitive Practice

Meaningful Ageing Australia has a growing range of resources to assist our members with implementation of the National Guidelines and best practice spiritual care. The process of our resource development specifically in relation to people from diverse backgrounds provides an exemplar of how a spiritual care process can be used to develop resources that assist organisations to gently engage with people who come from a wide range of backgrounds.

a. Spiritual Care Considerations Series

The Spiritual Care Considerations Series are finely-tuned, short documents (one double-sided A4 page) providing thought starters and prompts for aged care organisations to engage their staff and volunteers in talking and thinking about potential spiritual need in relation to a range of groups and situations.

They are used by our members to initiate conversations with staff and volunteers to increase sensitivity and create pathways for engagement.

To date, we have completed ‘Considerations’ on the following topics:

- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Spirituality
- Catholic Spirituality & End of Life
- Intellectual Disability Considerations
- Intersex Older People Spirituality
- Islamic Spirituality & End of Life

⁸ See for example, Hudson, Rosalie. “Personhood”. In *Oxford Textbook of Spirituality in Healthcare*, eds. Mark Cobb, Christina M. Puchalski, Bruce Rumbold (New York: Oxford, 2012)

⁹ Patrick, Harold and Vincent Kumar, “Managing Workplace Diversity: Issues and Challenges”, *SAGE – Open Journal*, April-June, (2012): 1-15 cited at: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2158244012444615>

- Islamic Spirituality & Family/Home-based Care
- Jehovah's Witness Spirituality
- Jewish Spirituality & End of Life
- Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Older People
- Supporting Each Other when a Resident/client Dies
- Trans & Gender Diverse Older People
- Transition into Residential Aged Care

They are called 'Considerations' because the approach of spiritual care with any group, and in particular with vulnerable groups, should always take the stance of 'how about' rather than 'you must'. This relates to the 'ways of knowing' that were hinted at in the article included in the department's consultation paper on the aged care diversity framework.¹⁰

When writing resources specifically pertaining to spiritual care with vulnerable and diverse groups, Meaningful Ageing Australia engages a **participatory approach** that directly engages members of those groups, or those working with them. We begin with the question: if you could only tell care staff three things about what your potential spiritual need, what might they be? This means that the priorities are being set by people from the groups we are seeking to support. When answering this question, inevitably we have to understand broader issues that impact on a person's identity.

Representatives of minority groups are invited to share their experiences and concerns in the initial information gathering stage, to recommend resources such as websites or texts relevant to their experience, and then to provide feedback on drafts. Desk-based research is used to inform the expression of key issues. Representatives from relevant organisations, and individuals who have contributed, are then invited to read the draft and provide comments.

For example, when developing a resource on the possible spiritual care needs of **older trans and gender diverse people**, Meaningful Ageing Australia contacted Transgender Victoria. A series of questions was generated to guide an informal conversation to discover what is most important for workers in aged care to know about the spirituality and spiritual care of trans and gender diverse older people. The data from the conversation was collated into sections, using language simple enough for personal care workers (Certificate III level training). Others contributed to the conversation or provided feedback, including Brenda Appleton, a transwoman, advocate and activist for trans and gender diverse communities, Dr Sue Malta from the National Ageing Research Institute (a research fellow working with the Sexual Health and Ageing, Perspectives and Education (SHAPE) project), and select Meaningful Ageing members. Multiple drafts were edited to ensure that the language and concepts were accurate and reflective of the experience of trans and gender diverse people.

In order to develop our '**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Spirituality**' Spiritual Care Considerations document, we initiated conversations with the Indigenous Hospitality House; Catalyst Foundation (providing support to older ATSI, CALD and LGBTI South Australians); Roslyn Malay and Cath Josif (WA Centre for Health and Ageing, University of Western Australia), and Jana Stewart, a young indigenous leader from Victoria. Again, there was a process of drafting to ensure that essential information was included in the document, with a number of people providing feedback on drafts.

Further resources

Our online Resources Clearing House includes links to a range of websites, articles, documentaries, and best practice guides to support workers in aged care. This is a growing range and links with the Spiritual Care Considerations topics.

¹⁰ Patrick and Kumar. "Managing Workplace Diversity: Issues and Challenges," 1-15 cited at: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2158244012444615>