5 November 2026
Version 2

Diversity and Inclusion

Terminology/Language Resource

Team Up has produced the following resources to assist partners with the preferred language and terminology related to diversity and inclusion.

The resource includes:

- A glossary of key terms
- Preferred language when referring to people with a disability and terms to avoid
- Specific terms for Deaf/deaf and Blind/vision impaired
- Cultural terms used for gender diverse people in the region

Remember, words do matter.

Your choice of words and language have an impact on the way people are perceived and treated in society. It's always important to respect the individual person's choice of language about themselves. As always, if in doubt – ask.

We hope that you find this resource useful.

Glossary of general terms

TERM	DEFINITION
Child or young person	The Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as any human being under the age of 18.
Child labour	Defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development.
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) or ethnically diverse	The terms 'Culturally and Linguistically Diverse' (CaLD), 'ethnically diverse' and 'non-English-speaking background' (NESB) are commonly used to refer to all a country's non-Indigenous ethnic groups other than the majority group.
Disability	The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) describes disability as an evolving concept, whereby disability results from the interaction between persons with long-term impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.
Direct and indirect discrimination	Direct discrimination occurs if a person treats someone unfavourably because of a personal characteristic protected by law (such as race, gender, disability). Indirect discrimination occurs where a requirement, condition or practice is imposed that, on the face of it applies equally to all, but in practice can only be met by certain advantaged people.
Diversity	The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognising our individual differences.
Equality	Refers to being equal, especially in status, rights, or opportunities.
Equity	Includes social justice and fairness to equalise outcomes.
Gender equality	The state of equal access to resources, rights and opportunities for men and women and people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity.

Gender and social inclusion	Gender and social inclusion refer to the inclusion of any social variables, which may result in marginalisation from decision-making around, or access to, sport within the chosen context. This particularly refers to gender, but may also include age, ability, disability, ethnicity, religion, indigeneity, sexual orientation and gender identity and so on.
Inclusion	Providing a range of options to cater for people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds, in the most appropriate manner possible.
Indigenous	The term 'indigenous' is often used to refer to the diverse groups of people indigenous to a country or island.
LGBTQ+	Stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or sometimes questioning), and others.
Mainstreaming	This is a process to ensure concerns and needs in relation to gender, persons with disabilities or other social factors are accounted for during the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies, legislations, programs and budgets in all areas and at all levels. It is about promoting and supporting more equitable approaches so that everyone can enjoy the same activity; mainstreaming by its nature should be inclusive so that the activity suits every participant.
Member/People Protection Policy	A Member/People Protection Policy is designed to protect members (including players/participants, administrators, coaches and officials) from discrimination, harassment and inappropriate behaviour, and outlines how complaints are dealt with.
Migrant/refugee/asylum seeker	A migrant is someone who leaves their country of origin voluntarily to seek a better life for a range or personal and economic reasons. The UN definition of a refugee is a person who is 'outside their home country because they have suffered (or feared) persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or because they are a member of a persecuted social category of persons or because they are fleeing a war'. An asylum seeker is a person who has sought protection as a refugee, but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been assessed.
People with a disability	According to the CRPD, people with a disability include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. Disability may occur at any time in a person's life or be

	present from birth. Some disabilities are obvious; others are invisible. Article 32 of the CRPD requires all international development programs to be inclusive of, and accessible to, people with disabilities.
Play gap	Women, girls and people with a disability face more barriers than other people to participation in sport, or are systematically excluded from participation, coaching, officiating, administrating and governing sport. By extension, this means they also are excluded from access to benefits that come with involvement in sport, including peer support, networks, access to resources, opportunities to practise and showcase leadership, better health and wellbeing, and opportunities to be visible and create a profile. This inequality is known as the play gap.
Positive discrimination/affirmative action	A range of measures or initiatives intended to redress the effects of past discrimination.
Reasonable accommodation	Reasonable accommodation means necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments, not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure people with disability access the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms (CRPD Article 2). Genuine commitment, time and resources are required to analyse and solve challenges in relation to how sport can be modified to enable people with different abilities and impairments to fully participate.
Social inclusion	Is about making sure that all children and adults are able to participate as valued, respected and contributing members of society.
Twin track approach to inclusion	A twin track approach to inclusion means both mainstreaming activities and providing affirmative opportunities for participation of those who have been excluded or discriminated against in the past.

Disability language

There are four definitions of disability:

- **Development disabilities:** may process information differently, find communication and daily living skills difficult and also have difficulty with abstract concepts such as money and time
- **Physical disabilities**: may affect, either temporarily or permanently, a person's physical capacity and/or mobility
- **Sensory disabilities:** a disability of the senses e.g. sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste
- **Mental illness or psychosocial disability**: a general term that refers to a group of illnesses that significantly affects how a person feels, thinks, behaves, and interacts with other people

It is important to remember that people with disability may experience multiple forms of disability.

Your choice of language has an impact on the way people with disabilities are perceived in society. We recommend using the following terms when talking about people with a disability:

- 'person with a disability' is the preferred phrase and focuses on the person first
- 'person with disabilities' can imply people with more than one disability or can be used to apply collectively to all persons with disabilities
- 'people with disability' describes a group (children with disability, women with disability etc)
- (name)… has a disability

It's important to respect the individual person with disability's choice of language that they use about themselves.

DO USE	INSTEAD OF
Person with [specify disability], for example:	
Person who uses a wheelchair, or 'wheelchair user'	'wheelchair-bound' or 'confined to a wheelchair'
John has cerebral palsy	John suffers from cerebral palsy
People with psychosocial disability	Mentally impaired
Person with schizophrenia/bipolar	Psycho or Schizo or crazy
Person of short stature	Midget or dwarf
Person with development disability	Mentally challenged or mentally impaired
Person with brain injury	brain damaged or brain impaired
Person with Down syndrome	Down's people
Person without a disability	Normal person
Accessible toilet/accessible parking space/accessible entry	Disabled toilet/disabled parking space/disabled entry

Terms to avoid when talking about people with a disability:

- normal and/or abnormal
- afflicted with… or suffering with… *(this type of language indicates people who have a disability are weak, a victim, or someone to be pitied)*
- handicapped, retarded, spastic, mental, imbecile
- special needs *(the needs are not special; person with disabilities have the same needs as everyone else)*
- birth defect/deformity
- brave, special, or inspirational *(implying that a person with a disability is inspirational or special just for getting through the day is patronising and offensive)*
- deaf-mute, deaf and dumb, or dumb
- physically challenged, differently-abled
- deficient, mentally deficient

- slow or slow learner *(a person may have a learning disability, but they are not slow or a slow learner)*
- mongoloid
- confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound *(wheelchairs are liberating and provide mobility to a person who cannot walk; use 'person who uses a wheelchair' or 'wheelchair user')*
- has the mental age of a three-year-old (or any age) (*there is no such thing as a mental age)*
- medical terms such as 'patient' or 'invalid'
- psycho, mental, or crazy
- psychiatric problems, psychiatric impairment, mental problems, mental impairment *(prefer the term 'psychosocial disability' because it focuses on the social and economic barriers associated with a mental illness rather than focusing on the person as a problem)*

(Reference: https://www.afdo.org.au/news/language-guide/)

While the above information may seem daunting if it's new to you, the most important thing to remember is to simply focus on the person, rather than the disability. Don't be so afraid of saying the wrong thing that you don't say anything at all. Relax, be willing to communicate, and listen.

Specific terms for Deaf/deaf and Blind/low vision

TERM	DEFINITION
Deaf (with a capitalised D)	is used to describe those who use sign language to communicate, and who identify as members of the signing Deaf community. These people may also identify themselves as 'culturally Deaf'. They are more likely to have been born deaf or become deaf early in life, are pre-lingually deaf and use sign language as a primary or preferred communication mode.
deaf (with a lower-case d)	is a general term used to describe people who have a physical condition of hearing loss of varying degrees, irrespective of which communication mode they use such as sign language and lip reading, for example.
Hard of hearing	is the term used to describe those who have a hearing loss, usually acquired post-lingually and whose communication mode is usually by speech. This term also covers those people who have become deaf later in their life.
A hearing impairment (HI)	is a full or partial decrease in the ability to understand sounds. The term 'hearing impaired' is often used to refer to those who are deaf, but it is viewed negatively by members of the Deaf community who prefer the terms 'Deaf' and 'hard of hearing'. The 'hearing impaired' term is incorrectly intended to cover Deaf and hard of hearing individuals under a single category. Deaf and hard of hearing persons in many countries reject this definition because it fails to recognise any distinction between these two groups.
Blindness	is the state of being unable to see due to injury, disease or genetic condition.
Partially sighted	means a person has partial vision, either in one or both eyes.
Low vision	refers to a severe visual impairment in which visual activity is 20/70 or poorer in the better-seeing eye and cannot improve with glasses or contacts.
Legally blind	means a person has a corrected vision of 20/200 in their best-seeing eye.
Blind	refers to a complete loss of sight.

Cultural terms used for gender diverse people in the region.

TERM	DEFINITION
Akavaine	a term used in Cook Islands to describe transgender or transexual women; or people who are assigned male at birth but identify as a woman and/or display feminine-gendered expressions.
'Akatāne or Tututane	a term used in Cook Islands to refer to 'tomboys' or people assigned female sex at birth, but who identify or display masculine-gendered expression.
Binabinaine	a term used in Kiribati for people assigned male sex at birth, but who behave or have feminine-gendered expressions and/or identify as women. It is also a recognised term to describe men who have sex with men (MSM) or gay, bisexual men and transgender women.
Binabinamwane	is a Kiribati cultural term for women who behave or display masculine-gendered expressions; this term is also used to describe lesbian, bisexual women and transgender men.
Fa'afafine	is a Samoan cultural term for biological males who behave or display a range of feminine-gendered ways or people assigned male sex at birth but who identify as a woman.
Fa'atama	is a Samoan cultural term for biological females who behave or display a range of masculine-gendered ways or people who have been assigned female sex at birth but identify as a man.
Fakafifine or Fiafifine	a cultural term used in Niue to describe the third gender – people who do not identify either as man or woman.
Fakatangata	is a Tongan cultural term which is used to describe people assigned female at birth but who display or behave or have a masculine-gendered expression.
Hijra	a cultural term used in Fiji by the Indo-Fijian community to make reference to people who don't identify either as male or female; can also be used by people that do cross dressing or a transgendered woman.
Leiti or Fakaleiti	is a Tongan cultural term which is used to describe people assigned male at birth but who display or behave or have a feminine-gendered expression.
Mahu	a native Hawaiian cultural term referring to an individual who may be considered third-gendered with characteristics of both sexes, usually a male to female. It

	can also be used in Hawai'i to describe people who are transgender or gay.
Palopa	a term coined in PNG to identify people assigned the male sex at birth, but who identify as women.
Pina or Pinapinaaine	these terms are used in Tuvalu for a person assigned male sex at birth, but who might regard themselves as, or be regarded by others as, a woman.
Vakasalewalewa	a Fijian term for people who don't identify either as male or female; they may or may not identify as a transgender.

Note:
In Australia, while most people understand the acronym LGBTQ+ to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or sometimes questioning), and others (and it is widely used within diversity programs both in Australia and internationally), we are aware that the acronym can be problematic and potentially exclusive of many people within our communities.

The LGBTQ+ label is Eurocentric and rigid. One of the Pacific acronyms for conception of diverse gender identities, **MVPAFF**, stands for *Mahu Vakasalewalewa Palopa Fa'afafine Akavaine Fakaleiti Fakafifini*, and it has no western equivalent.

Pacific Islanders of Diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristic (PIDSOGIESC) is the preferred terminology rather than LGBTQ+