MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

22 May 2025

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act Request

Thank you for your email of 27 March 2025, requesting information about the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) guidance for interacting with agents or clients with known or suspected mental health concerns.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Please find my decision on each part of your request set out separately below.

> *(1) Please provide MSD's policy/process/guidance for interacting with a client's agent.*

As well as information contained on the Ministry's Manuals and Procedures (MAP) website regarding Agents which you linked in your request, I have also included the Ministry's internal intranet (Doogle) page on Agents with this letter. Please note that the links contained in this document are inaccessible to the public, please let us know if you would like to request this information.

> *While MSD has this MAP section on agents, it does not cover how case managers should:*
>
> *(a) correspond after the appointment of an agent, for example, that correspondence should be sent to the agent as well as the client; or*

This is covered under the Client's Mail section of the Agent Doogle page referenced above.

> *(b) how to process conflicting information, for example, if an agent and client contradict each other; or*
>
> *(c) the weight that should be placed on an agent's comments/concerns about the client's mental health or capacity and how this impacts the interactions with the client.*

Your request for this information is refused under section 18(e) of the Act as this information does not exist.

> *(2) Please also provide any policy/process/guidance for dealing with clients with known or suspected mental health or capacity concerns.*

The Ministry has the following training for staff which I have also included with this letter:

- MSD – Engaging with MSDs Disabled and Tangata Whaikaha Community.

- Unconscious Bias – Reshaping our Thinking.

The Ministry also offers access for staff to a 'Raising Mental Health Awareness' workshop which is provided by TELUS Health which is designed for front line workers to provide the knowledge and skills to recognise early signs of mental health challenges in clients they support. Staff will explore common conditions such as anxiety, depression, and vicarious trauma, learning how to empathetically respond to clients who may be struggling. The workshop equips staff with practical strategies to adapt their responses, ensuring they can approach difficult situations with sensitivity and care.

I will be publishing this decision letter, with your personal details deleted, on the Ministry's website in due course.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with my decision on your request, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi nui

pp.

Anna Graham
General Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services

Agents

This page provides information about agents and how to correctly record the appointment of an agent in CMS and SWIFTT, as well as rules around a client changing their agents' rights and responsibilities.

On this Page:

Appointment of an Agent

An agent is a person or organisation who acts in the interests of another. What an agent can do depends on what a client wants them to do. Clients must decide exactly what rights and responsibilities they want to grant their agent, as well as decide if there is anything they want to specifically exclude their agent from doing. Clients can also have several different agents each with unique responsibilities at any time. For example, a client can appoint one agent to act for them for housing-related matters, while appointing another who can only act on their behalf regarding financial matters. The client simply needs to provide a new form for each agent.

For more information see: Who can be an agent? [http://doogle/map/income-support/core-policy/agents/who-can-be-an-agent-01.html] and Examples of where agency may be relevant [http://doogle/map/income-support/core-policy/agents/examples-of-where-agency-may-be-relevant-01.html]

What an agent can't do: While an agent can act for clients in some circumstances, they cannot undertake any job search requirements a client may have or attend a Public housing assessment appointment for them when their housing need is being assessed for the first time (unless there is a very good reason, such as the client being temporarily in hospital). Clients must meet these obligations themselves.

For more information see: What an agent can do [http://doogle/map/income-support/core-policy/agents/what-an-agent-can-do-01.html] and What an agent cannot do [http://doogle/map/income-support/core-policy/agents/what-an-agent-cannot-do-01.html]

See also:

Agents - MAP [http://doogle/map/income-support/core-policy/agents/index.html]

Temporary Agency [http://doogle/map/income-support/core-policy/agents/temporary-agency-01.html]

StudyLink Agents - MAP [https://doogle.ssi.govt.nz/map/students/agents/index.html] and StudyLink Agents - Doogle [http://doogle/business-groups/helping-clients/service-delivery/centralised-services/centralised-services-studylink/systems/agents.html]

Appointment of Agent Form

The MSD Appointment of Agent form [https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/documents/forms/appointment-of-an-agent.pdf] covers the appointment of agents for clients of MSD including Work and Income, Senior Services and Public Housing (also known as social housing) clients, but not clients of StudyLink who are instead required to use the StudyLink Appointment of Agent form [https://www.studylink.govt.nz/documents/forms/appointment-of-agent-form.pdf] . When StudyLink clients and their agents are dealing with Work and Income (for example, for a public Housing assessment) they need to complete the MSD Appointment of an Agent form as well.

Note: The previously available 'Agent - Extension for Housing Assessment' form is no longer available, as the public housing privileges that the form contained are available on the current MSD Appointment of Agent form.

Rights and Responsibilities

The client can assign the following rights and responsibilities to an agent (note: social housing refers to public housing respectively):

Access to their files to obtain personal information about the client (under the Privacy Act 1993);

Give information about them to MSD, such as income details, housing need, or changes in circumstances;

Change details in their personal file with the Ministry of Social Development;

Receive all their mail from MSD;

Selecting this option causes the agent's mail to be forwarded to the agent's address in CMS.

Complete and sign forms on their behalf;

Agents with this permission can apply for assistance on behalf of the client.

Be allowed to deal with money they owe MSD, which may include arranging repayments;

Have authority over their affairs with MSD, as granted by a current Power of Attorney [https://doogle.ssi.govt.nz/map/income-support/core-policy/agents/power-of-attorney-01.html] (POA);

This requires a valid POA or Enduring Power of Attorney [https://doogle.ssi.govt.nz/map/income-support/core-policy/agents/enduring-power-of-attorney-01.html] (EPOA) see MAP link below for process of EPOA.

Speak or make enquiries on their behalf;

Speak to social housing providers about a potential property match or offer.

Process for dealing with EPOA - MAP [https://doogle.ssi.govt.nz/map/income-support/core-policy/agents/process-for-dealing-with-enduring-powers-of-attorn-01.html]

Appointing an Agent without a form

Work and Income and Senior Services require any agent relationship to be recorded in writing and signed by both client and agent (this does not include a Temporary Agent [http://doogle/map/income-support/core-policy/agents/temporary-agency-01.html] who was added over the phone or in person while present with the client). Clients should be encouraged to use the MSD Appointment of Agent form, however, any agency privacy waiver or similar document which gives the agency agent status can be accepted. The document needs to describe what information can be shared and/or under what circumstances.

It must also:

include the name of the client and the person (or organisation) who is being made an agent

be signed by both the client and the agent

confirm what rights and responsibilities the agent is being granted.

A client who is on the public housing register or applying for public housing can authorise MSD to pass on their agent's details to public housing providers who may have properties available to offer them. The agent must agree that their details can be given to the provider, and the provider will decide whether they will deal with the agent directly or the client.

Where an agent is being appointed due to a current Power of Attorney or Court Order, an MSD Appointment of Agent form should be requested, but it cannot be insisted upon. If requested, both the client and the agent can be supplied with copies of the agent form (either the official Ministry of Social Development form, or any other acceptable agency documentation); these copies must be either given in person or sent by mail.

Power of Attorney – MAP [http://doogle/map/income-support/core-policy/agents/power-of-attorney-01.html]

Agent appointed by a Court Order - MAP [http://doogle/map/income-support/core-policy/agents/agent-appointed-by-a-court-order-01.html]

Appointing an agent without the client's informed consent - MAP [http://doogle/map/income-support/core-policy/agents/appointing-an-agent-without-the-client-s-informed-01.html]

Adding an Agent

It is essential that when a client appoints an agent that all the information regarding the agent and their rights and responsibilities are recorded. Agents must have their own record in CMS, whether they are an individual or an organisation. Staff must either create a record where one does not exist, or link the existing record of the agent to the client they are representing. This allows case managers and contact centre representatives to quickly establish that the client has an agent and act accordingly.

For more information see: Creating an Agent [http://doogle/resources/helping-clients/procedures-manuals/work-and-income/core-procedures/agents/creating-a-must-view-note-for-agents.html]

When processing a request for the appointment of an agent, ensure that:

the agent has a Person or Provider record in CMS

the client is aware of what they are agreeing to, and is satisfied with their choice of agent

the form is completed in full or the privacy waiver or other document establishing an agent relationship has all necessary information included, and is signed by both client and agent

the client has confirmed the rights and responsibilities they are granting the agent

if the agent is an individual, the agent has stated their date of birth and provided two forms of documentation to verify their identity and

if the agent is an organisation, the individual signing the agent form on behalf of the organisation has provided documentation to:

verify their own identity, and

verify their connection to the organisation, for example, a business card or letter on official letterhead.

All items that the client has selected on the form must be entered in the 'Client Contact' screen in CMS. Any other rights or responsibilities they want to assign to the agent should also be added in the 'Client Contact' screen under 'comments' in the Agents link. Any more urgent requirements can be captured in a must view note if required.

When adding an agent to a client record and the client has selected 'Give information about me to the Ministry of Social Development, such as income details, housing need or changes in my circumstances', or the client has answered 'Yes' to Question 12—'Do you want social housing providers to contact your agent when a property becomes available?', the following rights must also be added in CMS:

Provide information

Provide information about housing need.

If you are appointing an agent without the client's informed consent, ensure the required documentation to support the application has been provided (such as a valid Power of Attorney including statement of mental incapacity if this is required for the Power of Attorney to be valid, or Court Order).

You need to scan and save all the documentation relating to the agency, for example: MSD appointment of agent form, privacy waiver, power of attorney, enduring power of attorney, and court orders should be scanned into the client's record in CMS.

The agent's ID should be scanned into the agent's record in CMS.

For more information see: Process for Appointing an Agent - MAP [http://doogle/map/income-support/core-policy/agents/process-for-appointing-an-agent-01.html]

Amending an Agent

Clients with existing agents can amend or end their agents' rights and responsibilities at any time. Clients whose identity has been verified can amend their agents over the phone. Clients can also add or remove rights from an agent by returning a completed Personal Details form outlining the changes they would like to make to their agent—they do not need to complete a new form. These are so long as the agent has not been appointed via way of Court Order, Power of Attorney, or without the client's consent due to exceptional circumstances. In the instance of a Power of Attorney, a client can cancel this though they may need a statement of mental capacity if a statement of mental incapacity was used to activate the POA/EPOA. If the agent was appointed via way of a Court Order then a similar document would need to be supplied by the court to show they are satisfied the agent can be removed.

Clients who need an agent to act on their half immediately but whose agent is not in CMS can call and provide their agent temporary agency over the phone or in person so long as their agent is present with them.

See Temporary agent [http://doogle/map/income-support/core-policy/agents/temporary-agency-01.html] for how a client can grant temporary agency.

Redirection of Benefit

When redirecting a payment to an agent's bank account there are certain requirements depending on the type of assistance being redirected.

For information on how to process a redirection of benefit to an agent see Redirection of Benefit [http://doogle/resources/helping-clients/procedures-manuals/work-and-income/core-procedures/redirection-of-benefit-payment/adding-a-redirection-of-benefit.html]

Client's Mail

In some instances, clients may want their mail to go to their agent. If an Agent has the right and responsibility of accepting the client's mail, then CMS will direct the mail to the linked Agent's address. If a client has opted to receive mail electronically via myMSD then this cannot be forwarded, and the client will still receive it. Whether a client has opted for electronic mail can be found under 'Contact Details' screen under the client's 'Evidence' tab, and by looking under 'Contact Preferences'.

Note: If the client is also having their benefit redirected to their agent then you must also enter a Y into the "Agent to Receive Client Mail" field of the PYECA screen in SWIFTT.

Note: A separate postal address can be added to public housing applications, this is for use in situations such as family violence where the client may want to make an application for public housing without alerting other household members. The staff member carrying out the public housing assessment should confirm with the client if they want mail about their public housing application to be sent to their agent's address or a different address.

In some instances the client may want their mail to go to their agent. If an Agent has the right and responsibility of accepting the client's mail, then CMS will direct the mail to the linked Agent's address.

Note: if the client is also having their benefit redirected to their agent then you must also enter a Y into the "Agent to Receive Client Mail" field of the PYECA screen in SWIFTT

Public Housing Clients without a Work and Income Agent

Public housing clients who want to appoint an agent to act on their behalf for public housing purposes need to complete the MSD Appointment of Agent form. This is regardless of whether the client is a Work and Income, StudyLink, or other client.

As of October 2019, the 'MSD – Extension for Social Housing Assessment' form is no longer available. Agents no longer specifically require this form to conduct a public housing assessment on behalf of the client. An agent can conduct a public housing assessment for a client, so long as it is not the first assessment (unless the client has exceptional circumstances, such as being in hospital). Clients who require an interpreter for their assessments can access interpreting services, and deaf clients can access sign language interpreters.

Interpreting Services - Doogle [http://doogle/resources/helping-clients/procedures-manuals/work-and-income/core-procedures/interpreting-services.html]

Booking a New Zealand Sign language Interpreter - Doogle [http://doogle/resources/helping-clients/procedures-manuals/work-and-income/health-disability/interpreter-services-for-deaf-clients/booking-a-new-zealand-sign-language-interpreter.html]

Note: Social Housing is now referred to as Public Housing

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MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

Engaging & Consulting with MSDs disabled and tāngata whaikaha community

Today's session

- Defining Disability @ MSD

- Who are MSDs disabled whānau?

- Disabled Affirming language

- Guidelines for engaging disabled people

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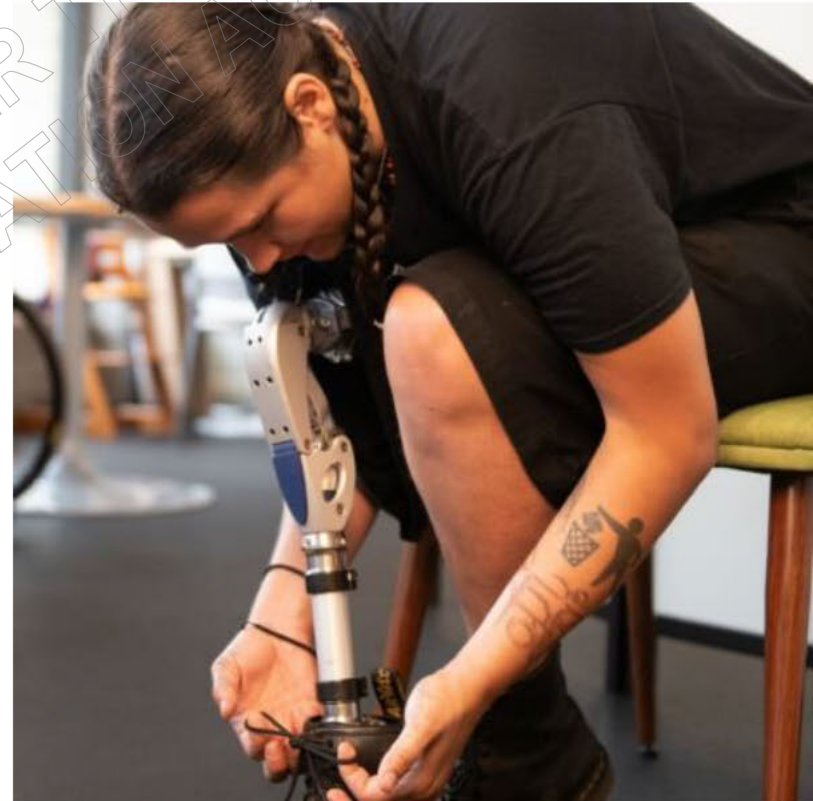
What we know?

- What comes to mind when you think of disability?

- Can you name some types of disability?

- What percentage of MSD's clients are disabled?

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Defining disability at MSD

MSD uses the definition of disability from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People (UNCRPD).

The UNCRPD defines disability as **"any long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder the full and effective participation of disabled people in society on an equal basis with others"**.

MSD interacts with over 70,000 disabled people every year, often multiple times.

It's not uncommon for one household to contain more than one adult and/or child with a disability. This has been shown to have a significant impact on the financial costs of the household.

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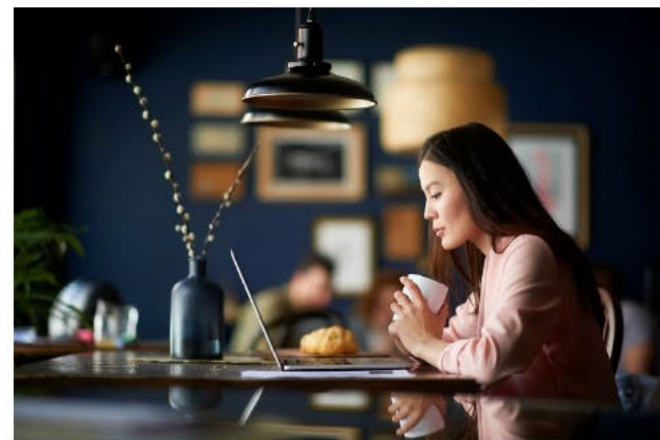
Defining Disability

This definition includes people with physical health impairments or conditions, people who are **neurodiverse/divergent, people who live with mental health and addiction issues, and older people who have age-related impairments**.

Some people are born with an impairment, others acquire it through accident or illness. Some people live with multiple impairments which may be caused by a single disorder or multiple disorders. Multiple impairments are more common with increasing age.

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Defining disability

- 'Disability' is an umbrella term – not everyone who meets the MSD criteria for 'disabled' will identify with this term. '

- This is often true for the neurodiverse community, people living with mental health issues or substance addiction or people whose impairment level can change on any given day (e.g. people living with chronic fatigue or arthritis).

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Why does MSD have so many disabled clients?

For many people, living with an impairment often means low income, exclusion from the job market and high health and disability costs relative to income.

This often means they are less likely to be able to afford accessible housing, and their general health and wellbeing outcomes are worse than for non-disabled people.

A number of our clients come to MSD just for Disability-related support such as the Disability Allowance or the Child Disability Allowance.

They may also come to us for employment supports.

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Are clients with health conditions considered disabled

People with temporary or short-term health conditions do not meet the definition of being disabled, although they may face the same barriers to MSD services and supports for the period of their illness.

While their needs may be the same for a period of time, disabled people often face significant additional inequities that non-disabled do not.

NOTE: To meet criteria for a disability-related support from MSD, a person must be likely to experience the impairment for a minimum of six months.

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Why does MSD have so many disabled clients?

- Disabled people are more likely to have low incomes than non-disabled people and live in more deprived areas.

- The employment rate for disabled 15–64-year-olds was 39.4 percent, compared with 81.7 percent of non-disabled people.

- Disabled adults are about five times more likely to have an unmet need for a GP due to lack of transport.

- Four in 10 tāngata whaikaha Māori (Māori disabled) adults have no formal educational qualifications, almost double the proportion of non-Māori disabled people without qualifications.

- 72% of Pacific people who are disabled live in socioeconomically deprived areas, making it harder for them to access disability support services and other mechanisms. They are also less likely to have had a needs assessment, and to claim on ACC.

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Which MSD services do disabled people use?

- **income support** – for people receiving Jobseeker (Health Condition or Disability - HCD) or Supported Living Payment benefits

- **disability and health care support** – for people seeking disability-related health care costs through the Disability Allowance; or for parents of young children requiring additional care and attention through the Child Disability Allowance

- **accommodation support** – for people seeking accessibility-adapted accommodation through our Housing services.

- student based support for **disabled students** seeking Student Loans/Accommodation Support/Disability Allowance

- **employment support for disabled** people seeking support through one of our disability-specific employment services through Oranga Mahi or School-Based Transition Services

- employment and training support for disabled people using Support Funds

- **youth support services** and/or our school transition services

- older age-based support - such as **Superannuation and Gold Card** support

- emergency response supports - such as the **Civil Defence Payments or Emergency Benefits**

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Social model of disability

Increasing focus on rights of disabled people has shifted focus from the individual and onto society to remove the barriers that it has imposed through oppression, marginalisation, discrimination and stigma.

Internationally, the social model/rights-based model of disability began in the 1970 and was largely brought about due to increasing knowledge of human rights, which led to the closing of large institutions and leading to wider engagement within communities.

Previously we used the terms' person with disabilities' however, we now use the term **'disabled people'** to indicate that these people are disabled by those around them.

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Disabled voice...

[A DAY IN THE LIFE - YouTube](#)

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Disabled-affirming language

Autistic person: Person who identifies as autistic / living with autism (note that autistic traits are not linear or on a spectrum and every autistic person is impacted differently).

Blind or visually impaired person: Person who cannot see at all or who is visually impaired

Deaf or hearing-impaired person: Person living with hearing loss or a hearing impairment

Deafblind person: A person living with a hearing and visual impairment

Disabled person: Person living with a long-term health impairment or disability

Invisible / Hidden disability: A disabled person whose impairment is not immediately visible to others e.g. neurodiversity, arthritis, dyslexia, depression

Neurodiverse person: Person who identifies as neurodiverse / neurodivergent. This includes conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), Attention Deficit Disorder, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Sensory Processing Disorder

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Disabled affirming language

Person with learning difficulties: A person who has learning difficulties (this includes people with intellectual disabilities)
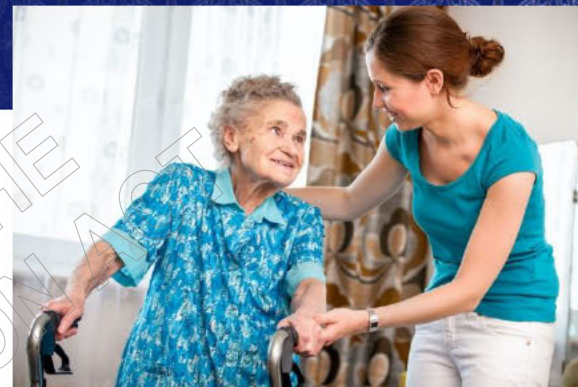
Person with lived experience of mental illness or mental distress: A person who lives with mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, psychosis, eating disorder or trauma disorder.

Person with lived experience of substance misuse or addiction: A person who lives with misuse use of alcohol, drugs, gambling and the internet.

Person with a speech impairment: People who live with a speech impairment or may include a deaf person who is able to speak some words

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Disabled affirming language

Tāngata whaikaha: Māori living with a disability

Tāngata turi: Disabled Māori who are deaf or hearing-impaired

Tāngata kāpō: Disabled Māori who are blind or visually impaired community

Tāngata whahangu: Disabled Māori who are non-speaking/have speech impairments

Tāngata takiwātanga: Disabled Māori who lives with autism

Tāngata whaiora: Māori person with lived experience of mental health and substance use / addiction

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Disabled people excluded from engagement

Some examples of people and groups often excluded from government engagement:

- neurodiverse, mental health, and substance misuse communities are some of our most vulnerable client groups due stigma and discrimination

- disabled communities in rural settings

- carers, whānau, whānau support groups and advocates who have important knowledge of barriers and needs that some disabled people may not be able to communicate themselves

- clients who are long-term users of our services including those receiving residential subsidy, in long-term care (e.g. forensic services, assisted living).

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Including disabled people when you're unsure.. Tips and tricks

Not all engagement is neat and tidy.

Sometimes you need to do the work to find out…

- How this person prefers to communicate?

- What accessibility needs they have ?

- More about the disability and how it impacts the person

In these situations, **just ask!**

- Respectful inquiry is always okay.

- You might not always feel comfortable, but you don't have to always have the answers.

- If you don't know something, offer to go away and find out

- If someone has a complaint, apologise and ask what you / MSD could do better

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Intersections matter

Some disabled clients will come with other identities as well – meaning they may face multiple life challenges.

For example, our clients will likely include an older Māori disabled person or a young disabled person from the Rainbow community.

We may be supporting an older Pacific person who is speech impaired as well as an amputee, or a young student who uses a computer to communicate.

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Guidelines for engaging with disabled people and tangata whaikaha Māori

Step 1

- Clear purpose
- Are you wanting new ideas, feedback or informing about decisions already made
- One-off or ongoing?
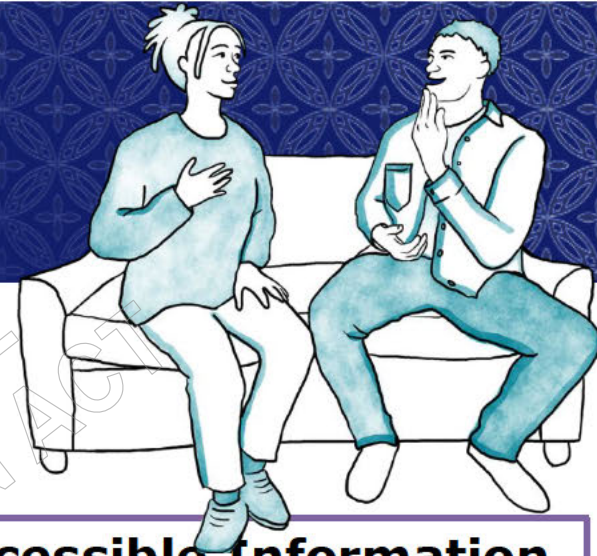- Do you need certain disabled communities or general feedback

Step 2

- Identify and engage with MSD staff who already hold existing relationships
- National Relationships
  - Principal Disability Advisor
- Regional Relationships
  - Regional Health Advisor
  - Regional Disability Advisor
  - Health & Disability Coordinator

Northland
7 service centres

Auckland
31 service centres
2 contact centres

Bay of Plenty
12 service centres

Waikato
14 service centres
1 contact centre

Taranaki
10 service centres

East Coast
9 service centres

Nelson/Marlborough/
West Coast
6 service centres

Central
8 service centres

Wellington
8 service centres
2 contact centres

Canterbury
9 service centres
1 contact centre
(including Chatham Islands)

Southern
10 service centres

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Guidelines for engaging with disabled people and tangata whaikaha Māori

Step 3 – Planning your venue

- Prepare your engagement
- Plan your venue or location
  - Is the event online or in person?
  - Do you need an accessible venue? Parking?
  - Are assistance dogs allowed?
  - Does it have accessible bathrooms?
  - Does it have a range of seating options?
  - Do you need additional support for clients?

- Make sure your meeting has frequent breaks
- If you include food, ensure it is easily edible i.e. Does not need utensils

Step 4 – Accessible Information

- Ensure all information is available prior to the event (word versions only)
- Powerpoint presentations are inaccessible to blind peopole – have these made into accessbile versions (accessiblilty@whaikaha.govt.nz)
- Have multiple options for gathering information. Take additional scribes who can write as needed
- Do you need an NZSL interpreter? Do you know how to work with an interpreter?

Accessible Information

Best practice disabled engagment is best practice engagement made accessible

Plain language

Write all client information in [plain language](#). All readers, including those outside of government roles, should be able to read the content easily and understand the messages.

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Accessible Information

Accessible documents

You can [make a document more accessible](#) for screen readers or those with computer reading devices by following some simple rules.

These include switching to accessible font types and sizes, removing tables, pictures and graphs wherever possible and adding alternative text ("alt text") to these.

We encourage all kaimahi to go through online accessibility training on Teams. Members of the disabled community present this session providing information on how to increase accessibility when you're engaging with the disabled community. It's a great internal resource to grow your knowledge.

To register or find out more email accessibility@whaikaha.govt.nz.

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Where to next?

- Go to **Guidelines: Engaging with MSDs disabled and tāngata whaikaha community**

- **Contact:** MSD Principal Disability Advisor

- **Book yourself** in to do the Accessible Information training – accessibility@msd.govt.nz

- **Attend** MSDs Digital Accessibility team weekly clinics providing information and support around accessible digital information

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Quiz

- Are age-related conditions considered disabilities?
  - Yes
  - No

- How many disabled people does MSD interact with each year?
  - A: 30,000
  - B: 45,000
  - C: 70,000
  - D: 115,000.

- To Meet MSD criteria for disability related supports a person must experience disability for:
  - A: 1 Month
  - B: 4 Months
  - C: 6 Months
  - D: 8 Months

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Quiz continued.

- The Māori name for disabled Māori who are deaf is:
    - A: Tangata Turi
    - B: Tangata Whaikaha
    - C: Tangata Kapo
    - D: Tangata Whaiora.

- True or False - PDFs are the accessible format preferred by Blind people?

- What is the best way for you to increase your accessibility knowledge – Hint it is held monthly, online via teams right here in this building!

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

Unconscious Bias: Reshaping our Thinking
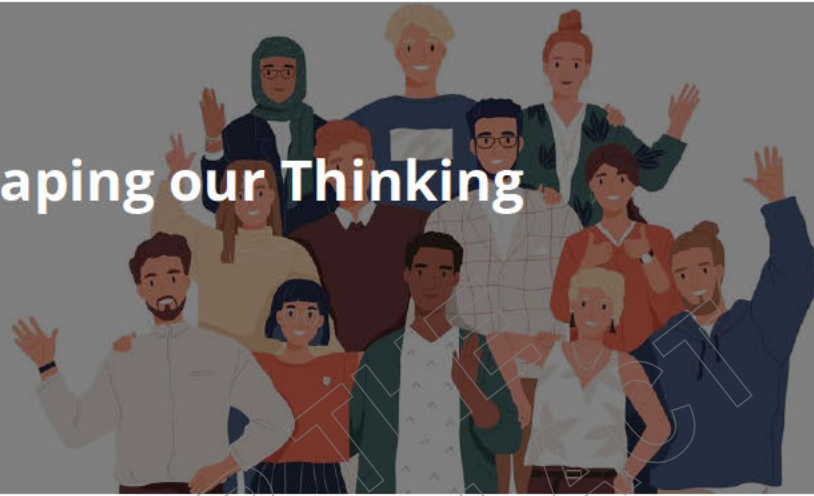
Kia ora and welcome to this Unconscious Bias: Reshaping our Thinking module

Learning objectives:

Once you've completed this module, you will:

- Be able to describe Unconscious Bias and explain where to find further information about it

- Understand how our brains cope with information and why it takes shortcuts

- Be able to identify intersectionality in personal and whānau situations

Kia ora and welcome

How our brains cope with information overload

Common biases

Pause point

Creating in-groups

Kia ora and welcome

> ## How can we make a bigger and better difference for New Zealanders?

Whānau have told us that amongst other things, they want to be treated with respect, to be listened to and to be involved in decision making. MSD took this feedback to heart and ensured that this reflects on our future direction and strategy.

Te Pae Tāwhiti – Our Future

Te Pae Tāwhiti – Our Future sets out what we want to achieve as an organisation and how we're going to get there. To achieve this, we are focusing on three key shifts.

Mana manaaki

Looking after the dignity of people with warmth, listening, respect, compassion, openness and fairness. Helping people, whānau, families and communities is at the centre of what we do.

Kotahitanga

We're stronger when we work together with whānau, families, hapū, iwi, providers, communities and other government agencies.

Kia takatū tātou

We will ready ourselves for the future and take a long-term approach to community, regional and economic development. To improve employment outcomes, people will need our support to acquire skills for current and future jobs.

These strategic shifts link with Te Pae Tata - our Māori Strategy and Action Plan, Pacific Prosperity, and He Korowai Manaaki – our People Strategy. Keep this in mind as you go through this module.

How does this relate to you?

Our attitudes can influence how we treat people who we interact with every day. Think about how different the world could be if we treated each other with respect, care and compassion; if we interacted without preconceptions or judgement; if we were kind to ourselves and to each other.

You'll be familiar with a lot of the information in this module. Though even when we think we've understood a new concept, there is always opportunities to reflect on our behaviour and make changes. Our busy lives take over, and at times, concepts like this are pushed to the background. We need to have the message reinforced for it to become part of our everyday life.

One of the amazing things about the human brain is that we can learn, unlearn and relearn, that we can reflect on our behaviour and make changes.

CONTINUE

How our brains cope with information overload

Do you make decisions using your gut instinct or do you allow your more logical brain to make decisions?

It's probably a mixture of both depending on the situation, time, environment, and many other things. **Our brain wants to make a quick decision and our gut instinct can save us from danger**. It can also adversely affect logical decision making and reinforce our unconscious bias.

We expect our brains to cope with **11 million bits of information every second**. It has the ability to process all the information we take in, but at a cost.

Our brains are designed to look for quick ways to unconsciously organise and sort large amounts of information. Mental shortcuts help with this organising by **deleting, distorting and generalising.**

Click through the tiles below to get more information on deleting, distorting and generalising.

We ignore some information and don't make it conscious.

Deleting

For example, our breathing and heartbeat... and not seeing the end of our nose!

Distorting

We emphasise and fade information depending on how important our brain considers it.

For example, we don't remember much about the details of brushing our teeth. But if we were to run out of

Generalising

We make generalisations about the world around us based on our experiences.

For example, assuming a switch in a hotel room will turn on the light because it looks similar to the light switches at home.

Summary

Of course, these shortcuts don't stop here...

Unconsciously we delete, distort and generalise information based on the way we think, feel and act towards different groups of people. Our assessments of others are never as objective as we believe them to be.

CONTINUE

Common biases

There are six common biases that affect decisions relating to people:

Attribution Bias —

Attribution bias is the tendency we have to explain any given situation based on a series of preconceived stereotypes.

For example, **when a driver cuts someone off in traffic, we might assume they're a reckless driver.**

Confirmation Bias

Confirmation bias is the tendency to process information by looking for or interpreting information that is consistent with our own existing beliefs and disregards any information that contradicts those beliefs.

For example, in an altercation between a dog and a person on the street, one person may think **dogs are inherently dangerous and think the dog is attacking an innocent person**. Another person who loves dogs thinks the **the dog is defending itself against the person**.
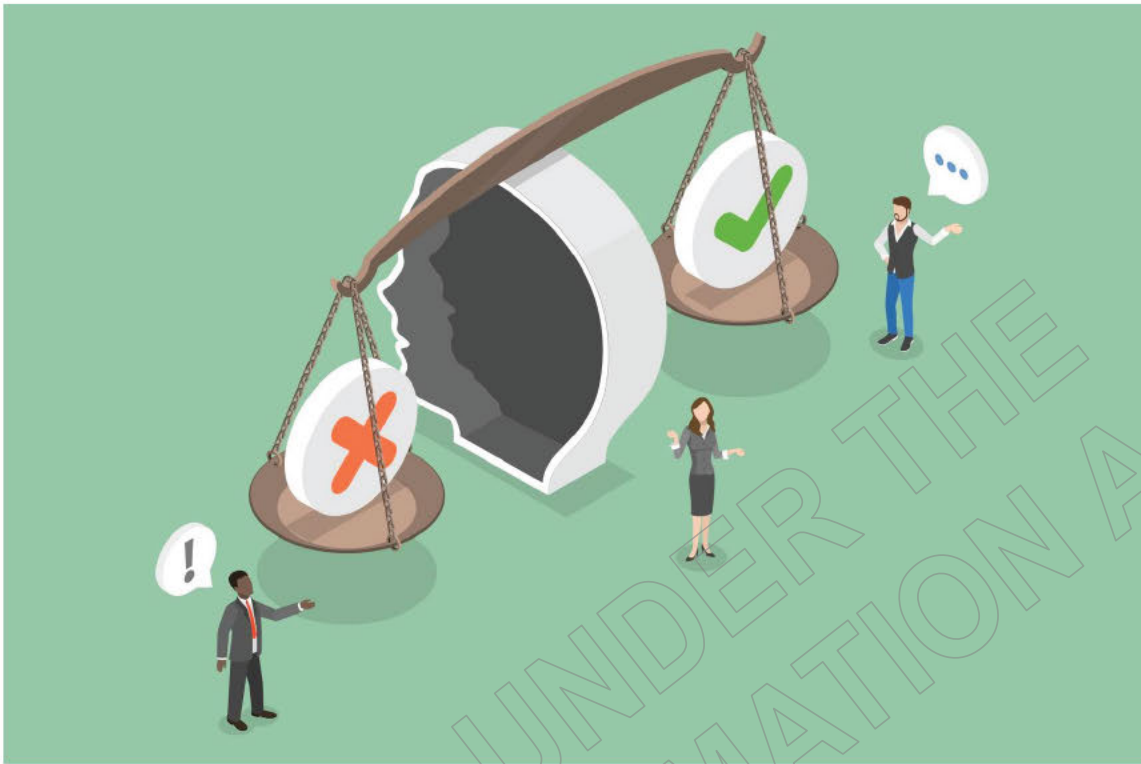
Affinity Bias

This is when we have a strong preference for people like ourselves. It's natural to favour people who share the same interests and experiences as us, but we can unconsciously reject people who act or look different to us.

For example, in an MSD recruitment context, this could be **"I don't know why, I just love this candidate. Even though they don't have all the skills required, I'm sure they'll soon learn."**

Conformity Bias

We see this bias in team brainstorming and decision making, where people tend towards the majority. People unconsciously change their beliefs or behaviour to fit in with others instead of using their own judgement.

This can be seen when people agree with a **dominant person**, which can cause groupthink.

Anchoring Bias

When a decision needs to be made, anchoring bias can cause us to give more weight to the first bit of information we're given.

For example, a car dealer **shows a buyer an expensive car**, which they decline as it may be **out of their budget range**. After **seeing the higher price**, showing cars that are slightly less expensive **may seem more reasonable**.

Halo and Horn Bias

Our judgement is influenced by a particular trait, either positive or negative, in our decision making. The first impression we make is the one that lasts the longest.

Important decisions can be affected by many things, from the **clothes someone wears, to a habit you find annoying, or even their name** through Halo and Horn bias.
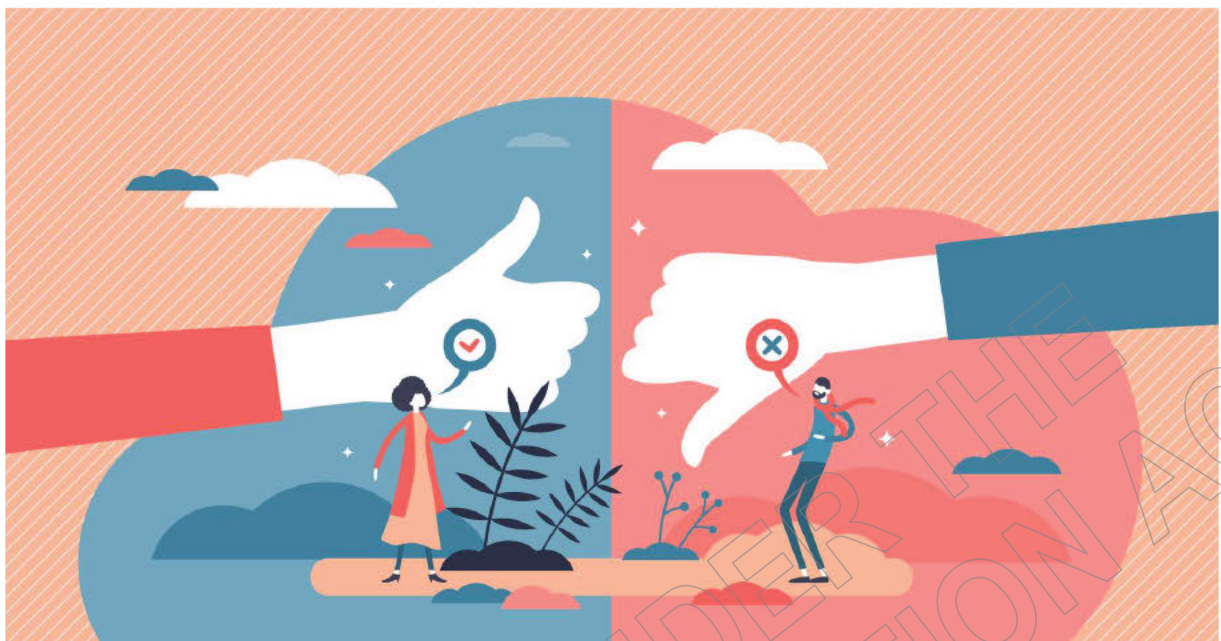
Summary

It's really helpful to take time to recognise these common types of unconscious bias because all unconscious bias minimises your ability to make the best decisions.

CONTINUE

Pause point

Some questions to think about...

When have you seen these common biases play out, either in your workplace or outside of work?

How did you react?

Do you feel your reaction was appropriate in that situation?

Upon reflection, was there anything that you would have done differently?

CONTINUE

Creating in-groups

Evolutionary psychology gives us a bit of an understanding on how unconscious bias plays out.

This is because as humans, we:

- are **tribal**
- have a **same group** orientation
- have a powerful **visual** system
- are **categorical** thinkers

1. **We group together for survival.** That grouping together is based on people we see as the same as ourselves.

2. In Social Psychology, this is generally known as in and out groups, and **our brains are constantly forming these groups.**

3. **Our brains like to put people into boxes.** This is how stereotypes occur; they're a way to make sense of things, are often generalisations and can have an element of truth in them.

4 Who forms our in and out groups depends on how we are feeling. **It's usually something that we can see.**

5 At work, in and out groups can form on other dimensions like roles, functions, what team you're in, or who you report to.

CONTINUE

Intersectionality

Intersectionality refers to the ways in which different aspects of a person's identity can expose them to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation.

The term 'intersectionality' was first coined by American critical legal race scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989. She explained it as:

> "A metaphor for understanding the ways that **multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves** and **create obstacles** that often are not understood among conventional ways of thinking."

Intersectionality can include ethnicity, gender identity, language, religion, ability, mental health, age, education... and many more.

In MSD's context, you may be speaking to a woman who is having trouble finding accommodation, but there may be other things going on in her life that are affecting her house hunting. For example, she may have a disability or a disabled child, or she may be a single mother facing a custody hearing.

When multiple aspects or characteristics combine:

- Whānau find it harder to get the help they need

- There's an increased risk of social isolation

- It's probable that they will be faced with ongoing prejudice and unconscious bias

Micro-affirmation and Micro-aggressions

How we make people feel, even little things we say or do, can build people up or knock them down.

Micro-affirmations are terms used for small acknowledgements of another person's value. It's a subtle act of inclusion and kindness that goes a long way when built into our everyday practice. **Micro-affirmations** build us up and make us feel we're appreciated. They increase our mana and our self-confidence.

For example, if you're interacting with someone who you feel comfortable with, you're more likely to be **micro-affirmative** towards them. You might look at them, smile, nod while they're talking and seem really engaged.

Check out the video below for an example of micro affirmations. Note, there is no sound in this video.

00:18
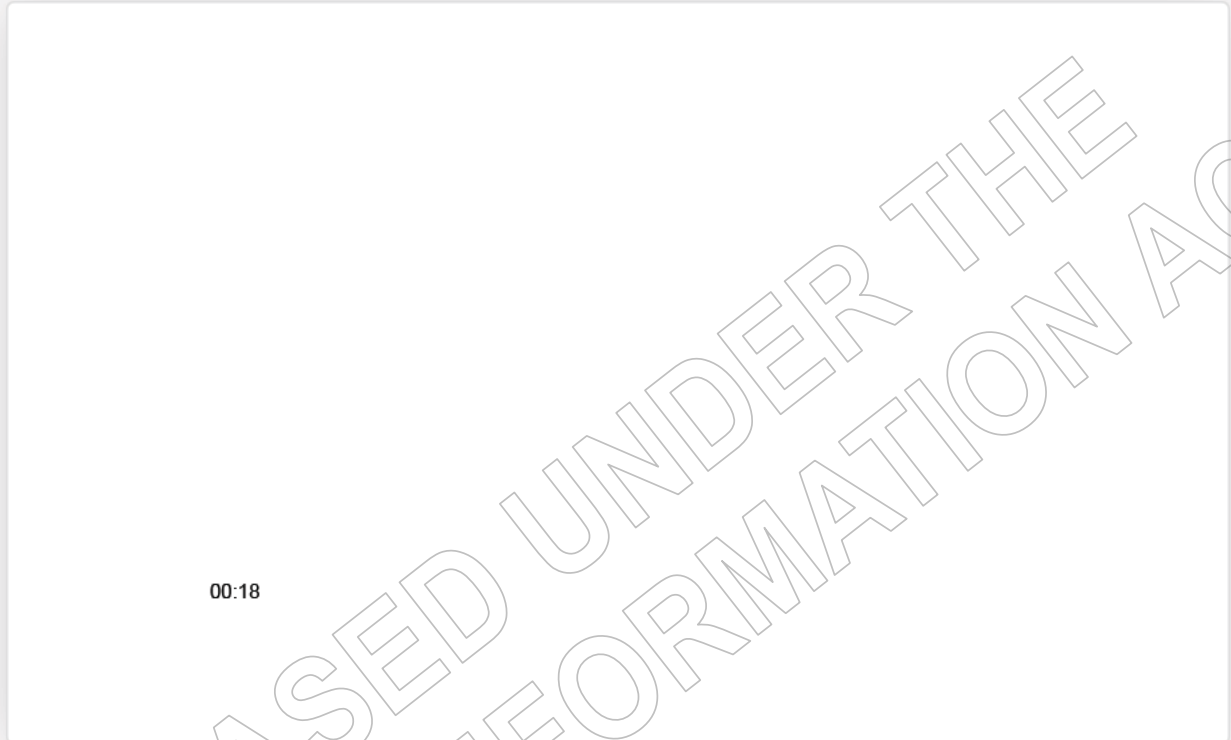
Video description:

A man and a woman sitting at a table, conversing over a piece of paper. The man is describing what is on the paper, using hand gestures and positive body language such as maintaining eye contact and smiling. The woman is listening attentively, nodding her head, leaning forward, maintaining eye contact, and smiling at the man.

On the other hand, if you're interacting with someone you don't like, or you don't have a connection with, you may be **micro-aggressive**.

Micro-aggressions are terms used for commonplace verbal, behavioural or environmental slights, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative attitudes toward stigmatised or culturally marginalised groups.

Think about what an accumulation of micro aggressions would do to our feelings of self worth.

For example:

- people continuing to use a dead name (the name they were given at birth that no longer aligns with their gender). Their deadname may be associated with a time that was traumatic and therefore triggering to them. Using a person's incorrect pronouns or dead name perpetuates misgendering them, this is a form of disrespect and discrimination.

- one of our kaimahi who constantly over hears comments   and sometimes direct comments   about why she feels it necessary to wear a hijab in the office

Check out the video below for an example of micro-aggressions. Note, there is no sound in this video.

00:08

Video description:

A man and a woman sitting at a table, conversing over a piece of paper. The woman is sitting slouched in her seat. The man is also sitting slouched in his seat, and using negative body language, such as crossing his hands over his chest, looking away from the woman and picking at his nails.

Although the comment you make may seem minor and even unoffensive, compounding micro-aggressions can have a lasting negative impact on someones wellbeing, for example being ignored or mis-gendered multiple times a day or in a meeting. Being mis-gendered or mistreated also compounds over a life time of stereotypes and discrimination that can have a lasting and profound negative affect on someone. So that 'off handed' comment in the lunch room can severally impact on a colleagues wellbeing.

Summary

So, what's important for us to understand is that unconscious bias doesn't just impact us in one go or simple decision making... it affects us in subtle, persistent and complex ways.

These two videos are examples of what micro-affirmations and micro-aggressions may look like. No two situations are alike. There are many variables that govern our body language; cultural differences, autism spectrum, pain and disabilities, just how we're feeling on the day, etc.

When we're interacting with others, we need to be open to the individual and cultural differences that may exist within the interaction – and be open to explore the potential that sits within this.

CONTINUE

PAUSE

_____

Having a thought and acting on it are two different things. Addressing unconscious bias is about bringing awareness to your thoughts, feelings, and reactions.

Because our biases are coming from parts of the brain that are designed to look for shortcuts in understanding, it is impossible to eliminate our biases. The good news is that we can become aware when we are acting on them and make conscious decisions to behave differently – **to PAUSE and reflect before we are quick to make judgements or assumptions.**

When we PAUSE, we can:

Pay attention to what's happening beneath our judgment

When we slow down and look at what's really happening, we have an opportunity to distinguish between an event and our interpretation of that event.

For example, say somebody shakes your hand softly, you might think, **"that handshake seemed weak".**

But, what actually happened was that they used less pressure to shake your hand than what you are used to. The rest is your interpretation.

Acknowledge our own reactions, judgments and interpretations

This is where you realise your interpretation was just that, an interpretation, not reality. You might say something to yourself like, **"I can see that when they shook my hand softly, I interpreted that as weakness".**

Understand others' reactions

There might be a number of reasons for their behaviour. They might have shaken your hands softly because of:

- Their culture

- A hand injury

- A medical condition like arthritis

Looking at the different possibilities helps you understand other people's behaviour.

Search for the most productive way to deal with this situation

Take a moment to think: should I assume that the person is weak because of my initial reaction to their handshake, or should I get to know them a little better before I make a definitive assessment?

- What makes the most sense?

- What should I say?

- What is the best way to handle the circumstance?

Execute your action plan

Once you decide what makes the most sense, act upon it.

Over the next few sections, you will be presented with scenarios outlining different forms of unconscious bias in the work place. Keep this section in mind as you go through the scenarios as this will be an opportunity to apply what you've learnt so far.

CONTINUE

Scenario: George

Meet George

A colleague of yours, George (he/him) is a fifth generation Kiwi who is of Māori, Samoan and Chinese descent. People tend to assume that George is a Chinese immigrant. George is relatively new to the organisation and has been enjoying team bonding activities such as having lunch together.

At 10:00am, you, George and two of your colleagues go to the tearoom and sit at a table with a couple of people from another team that you'd like to get to know better. You've chatted previously to Meg (she/her) and introduce her to George. Meg starts off the conversation by asking George **"How long have you lived in New Zealand?"**

George is caught off guard with this question but sees Meg and other kaimahi (staff) looking at him awaiting a response. As his cheeks start to blush from being put on the spot, he quietly answers, **"I've always lived in Aotearoa".**

After you've read through the scenario above, click 'Start' and have a go at identifying the bias(es) George experienced below.

George from Aotearoa

Start

Summary

When introducing a new member of staff to the team, ensuring that there is sufficient time and space for an introduction which allows for whakawhanaungatanga (process of establishing relationships, relating well to others) is important. This situation could have been avoided if George had been able to share his whakapapa (genealogy) to start with.

To open the conversation, Meg could share something about her cultural background and give space for herself and others to comfortably share more about themselves in a more organic and safer way.

There are ways you can respectfully challenge behaviour and encourage self-reflection; questioning with curiosity and discussing how situations like this can be best approached moving forward to help you understand how to unlearn assumptions like these to reduce your own unconscious bias.

He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata he tangata, he tangata! What is the most important thing in the world? It is people, it is people, it is people!

Quick wins

- Te Kanorautanga me te Whai Wāhitanga | Diversity and Inclusion Hub

- Intercultural Capability E-learning | Ministry for Ethnic Communities

- Ethnicity Matters - a guide to working with ethnic communities | Ministry for Ethnic Communities

- myLearning – Te Rito: Enhancing Cultural Awareness

CONTINUE

Scenario: Zita and Sam

Meet Zita and Sam

Zita (she/her) is a disabled member of the team who experiences issues with mobility and vision. She is **highly experienced**, having spent many years of her career at MSD, and she is well regarded across the portfolios as a Senior Advisor but would like to further progress in her career, specifically as a Principal Advisor. Zita and her partner are avid travellers and often bring back great stories to share with the team.

Being relatively new to people leadership, Sam (they/them) has been managing Zita for the past 18 months and has discussed goals with her during their Te ara piki conversations. Sam tells her that they appreciate the work that she does, enjoys working with her, and acknowledges her potential with her growing skillset, expertise across portfolios and understanding of how government works. Zita mentions her interest in applying for the Principal Advisor opportunity that is advertised.

Sam knows that the role would require frequent travel across the country to present to Senior Leaders in the business. Sam doesn't tell her this, but doesn't think Zita would be a preferred candidate for this role.

Sam feels that Zita doesn't fully understand how strenuous the additional travel is and how it could compromise her work; although she's travelled, it's always been with her partner who could support her.

She already has to work from home two days a week to manage her fatigue levels. Sam thinks she's better placed to stay as a Senior Advisor until something more suited to her situation comes up. Sam considers what new work they could offer to keep her busy.

After you've read through the scenario above, click 'Start' and have a go at identifying the bias(es) Zita experienced below.
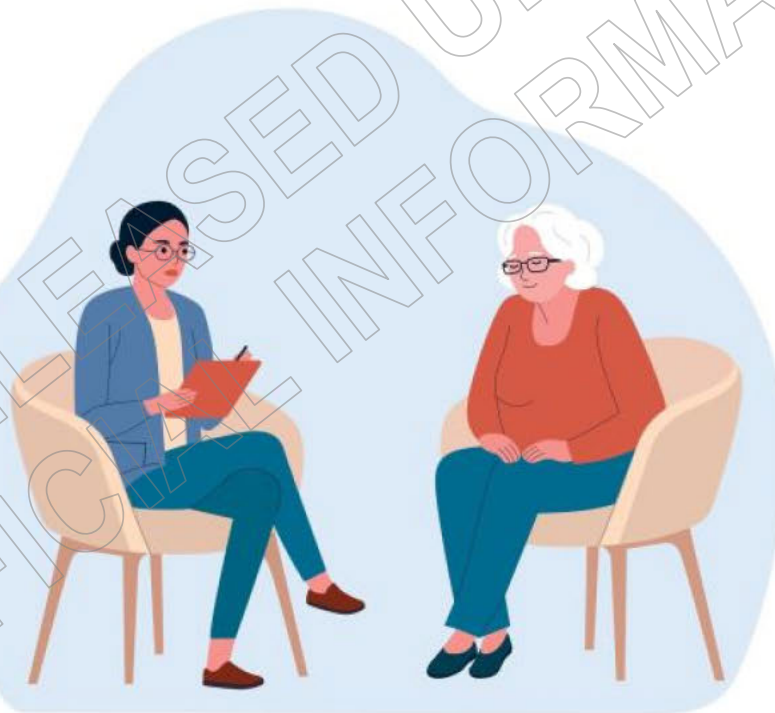
Summary

Everyone deserves the same opportunities based on merit, not on someone else's opinion of physical or mental capability. Don't assume; if in doubt, ask. This is to ensure that we reduce unconscious bias in the workplace.

Celebrate diversity of abilities, thought, and experiences; it all adds to life's rich tapestry. This helps us overcome unconscious bias.

Anei au, tō pou whirinaki.

I'm here, I'll support you.

Quick wins

- A disability inclusive MSD Doogle
- Te ara piki Doogle
- Reasonable Accommodation in Employment Guidelines
- Reasonable Accommodation Manager Quick Guide for Requesting Equipment
- Benestar Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)
- Poutuarā Peer Support at MSD
- Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Equal opportunity | Employer Guides

CONTINUE

Scenario: Max and Stacey

Meet Max and Stacey

Max (he/him) joined your team a couple of months ago. You often chat about sport or the weather in the tea-room and will soon be working together. Max wears a wedding ring and often talks about what he and Stacey got up to during the weekend. He's told you that he and Stacey recently adopted a cat, their first fur-baby.

Once a month, you and some of your colleagues have dinner together. Usually, partners attend as well. To make Max feel more included, you invite him to the next dinner and tell him to bring his wife along so they can all meet her.

You can see immediately that you've upset or offended Max in some way and ask him directly what you've said that you shouldn't have. Max says it's not important, and leaves. Another of your colleagues tells you that Stacey identifies as non-binary and as Max's partner.

After you've read through the scenario above, click 'Start' and have a go at identifying the bias(es) Max experienced below.

Max and Stacey, and the Dinner Party

Start

What we did in this instance was automatically associate the name, Stacey, to that of a woman. We should pause and start to unlearn some of our existing assumptions. We can start to use more gender-neutral terms in our everyday language such as "partner" to create a more inclusive environment for all.

We may have also assumed because Max identifies as male, that his partner would be a female, which is a more common bias.

Creating a safer space for people to be their authentic selves, particularly when they share about their family dynamic and relationships will only help build more of a rapport and help with the mahi that we do here at MSD.

Summary

Despite our best intentions, unconscious biases may affect the way we think, the way we talk and behave. We make assumptions, we base our thinking on cultural stereotypes embedded in our belief systems from a young age. The good news is that we can learn, unlearn and relearn. Our brain loves a good workout!

Adopting gender-neutral terms into your everyday language stops us from assumption-based behaviour impacting people in our communities and ensures we are inclusive of everyone here at MSD, in Aotearoa and beyond.

Coming from a place of curiosity and having open and honest conversations to help support each other will help us all on our learning journeys. Be proactive by utilising the resources above and doing your own research on the internet with trusted local and international sources to ensure the onus isn't placed on those from the Rainbow community. Let's make sure we do our bit as allies to one another.

He tao rākau, e taea te karo; he tao kōrero, e kore e taea te karo. The taiaha can be pushed aside but words cut straight to the heart.

Quick wins

- Rainbow   Doogle
- LMS Collection: Unconscious Bias
- Trans 101: glossary of trans words and how to use them
- Gender identity offers useful definitions, prepared by Rainbow Youth
- InsideOUT links to short videos from the rainbow communities prepared by InsideOUT
- Takatapui: Part of the Whanau is a resource providing information and support for takatāpui and their whānau, prepared by Dr Elizabeth Kerekere with Tiwhanawhana Trust and The Mental Health Foundation
- Proud@MSD provides information about our employee-led network for our employees who are diverse in sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, and their allies
- Belonging@MSD provides the findings from MSD's inclusion survey in 2019

CONTINUE

Conclusion

Congratulations!

In this module we open by acknowledging what whānau want from us – how they want to be treated with respect, to be listened to and be involved in decision making. Creating environments that are safe, inclusive and how we can show respect to everyone – employees, clients and whānau.

Manaaki
We care about the wellbeing and success of people

Mahi tahi
We work together, making a difference for communities.

Whānau
We are inclusive and build a sense of belonging and place.

Tika me te pono
We do the right thing with integrity.

People are at the heart of what we do. Our MSD values represent who we are, what we stand for and guide our work and the behaviours that we need to adopt to ensure we achieve our outcomes in helping New Zealanders to be safe, strong and independent.

By completing this Unconscious Bias: Shaping our Thinking module, you have built on your skills to:

- Be able to describe Unconscious Bias, the multiple ways we're affected by it, and how it shows up in our work and personal lives

- Explain where to find further information about it

- Be aware of how our brains cope with information and why it takes shortcuts

- Be able to identify intersectionality in personal and whānau situations

E kore e mutu te ako
One never stops learning

Now, kaimahi, it's time to step beyond knowledge and intentionally put what you've learned into action:

- When we're aware of our subconscious making decisions for us, we can consciously foster a more inclusive, welcoming and productive work environment

- If we know people from a variety of backgrounds, experiences, ethnicities and beliefs it grows our thinking and challenges our unconscious stereotypes

- Let's all challenge ourselves by seeing things from an objective lens and applying this to our decision-making. It is important to acknowledge when unconscious bias behaviours may overcome us from time to time

Inclusion starts with "I".
What will I, as the learner of this module, take and action upon moving forward?

More resources

- Unconscious Bias 101 Programme: these five e-learning modules are a deeper look into Unconscious Bias. Please note that these modules are only accessible to MSD staff.

  - The value of supporting diversity and inclusion

  - The unconscious bias

  - Addressing unconscious bias in the workplace

  - Common workplace biases

  - Becoming aware of your bias

- myLearning Collection: Empathy

- myLearning Collection: Diversity

- myLearning Collection: Neurodiversity

- myLearning - Recognising Diversity: workshop for Contact Centre staff

- MSD's Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan

- Gender Transitioning Guidelines - Te Kōmako

- Inclusion Series Learning Modules: Unconscious Bias, Diversity and Gender Diversity activities

- Learning Pathways – Service Delivery, resources including:

  - Active empathic listening

  - Compassion

  - Critical thinking

  - Cultural intelligence

  - Emotional intelligence

  - Self-awareness

You may now exit this module.