



**ethnic
communities'
council of
victoria**

Patron

The Right Hon Malcolm Fraser
AC, CH, former Prime Minister of
Australia

**ECCV Submission
on
the Inquiry into Social Inclusion and Victorians with a Disability
to
the Family and Community Development Committee**

February 2014

I. About the ECCV

1. The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria Inc. (ECCV) is the Voice of Multicultural Victoria. As the peak body for ethnic and multicultural organisations in Victoria, we are proud to have been the key advocate for culturally diverse communities in Victoria since 1974. For 40 years we have been the link between multicultural communities, government and the wider community.
2. We aim for a culturally diverse and harmonious society that is just, fair and inclusive where all people have the opportunity to participate in and contribute to, community life. We advocate for freedom, respect, equality and dignity for multicultural communities and strive with others, to build a strong, vibrant Victorian community.

II. Disability within Victoria's culturally diverse communities

3. Victoria has a large culturally and linguistically diverse population, with more than a quarter of its residents (26.2%) born overseas, an increase from the 2006 census (23.8%). Of this group, 74.6% came from non-main English-speaking countries (72.8% in 2006) and 23.1% of Victorians were recorded as speaking a language other English at home (20.4% in 2006) (Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship, 2013, p. 2).
4. Against this demographic backdrop, people with a disability from culturally diverse communities face many problems and are under-represented as users of support services. According to the Productivity Commission's findings of 2009 (cited in the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, 2013), they are four times less likely to gain access to accommodation support services, two and a half times less likely to be the recipient of community support and access services, three times less likely to access respite services, and demonstrate a much lower participation rates in employment services. Of particular concern is the finding that, in the context of these figures, people from culturally diverse communities have higher reported rates of disability - 22% compared to 18% in the general population (Department of Human Services, 2012, p. 6).

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5. As indicated in the 'Shut Out' report by the Australian Government in 2009, this lack or limited access to support services exacerbates social exclusion for communities that readily experienced cultural and language barriers:

For families from different ethnic backgrounds, the issues are compounded. Many people from different ethnic backgrounds are not aware of their rights — to benefits, services, supports or respite. Due to the isolation felt by many carers and people with a disability from different ethnic backgrounds, language barriers or low levels of English proficiency still mean that these families do not access information and are unaware of what is available (cited in Productivity Commission, 2011, p. 164).

6. In 2012 and 2013, the ECCV conducted a series of consultations in partnership with the Department of Human Services (DHS) as part of its 'Taking Disability' project, which aims to improve culturally diverse communities' access to disability support services. The ECCV considers this inquiry a great opportunity to share concerns and issues surrounding the under-utilisation of disability services by people from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) emerged from the consultations, and proposes a number of recommendations to improve levels of social inclusion and participation.

III. Improving social inclusion for people with a disability from culturally diverse communities

7. As part of the 'Talking Disability' project, three community and stakeholder consultations were undertaken from 2012 to 2013 by the ECCV in order to identify barriers hindering access to support services by people with a disability from NESB. There are three areas that determine the degree of social inclusiveness (Anglicare, 2010);
 - Disengagement (lack of participation of social activities or interaction with communities)
 - Service exclusion (lack of access to adequate support services)
 - Economy exclusion (financial hardship as a result of lack of employment).
8. The ECCV recommends that special attention should be given to service and economy exclusions, as they are key to enhancing the participation of disabled people from non-English speaking backgrounds in relation to education, employment, and overall well-being.

A. Community-based support in navigating the complex service system

9. Most people from culturally diverse backgrounds originate from countries where disability care and support systems are not as developed and complex as those in Australia. Therefore, the responsibility of caring for a person with a disability invariably passes to immediate or extended family members. This approach in dealing with disability is very common within

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families who come from collectivist cultures that value social interdependence and an individual's role within the larger family, and therefore see caring for a disabled family member as normal behaviour. As they migrate to countries where independence and autonomy are held in high regard, they - particularly first generation immigrants - would continue maintaining these obligations and not consider the value of resorting to support services.

10. However, those who attempt to seek appropriate care and support often face considerable challenges. Feedback from consultations indicate that recent immigrants, older carers of adults with a disability, young carers and those living in rural areas find themselves in vulnerable situations when trying to access services. Factors that lead to vulnerability are pressing settlement issues, limited English proficiency and lack of familiarity with support services, as well as being geographically isolated from such services.
11. Some other challenges include (but are not limited to) administrative compartmentalisation of personal service assistance, lengthy disability services registration processes, culturally inappropriate support services and less culturally sensitive staff. In these circumstances, individuals and families from such communities experience disempowerment and abandon any initial attempts to seek assistance. In order to address these challenges, the ECCV proposes:

Recommendation 1:

That advocacy resources be allocated to disability services and support organisations assisting multicultural communities to link into culturally sensitive services.

Recommendation 2:

That 'no-wrong door' policies be adopted amongst relevant community agencies in areas containing a high proportion of people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Recommendation 3:

That bi-lingual supported access workers be provided especially for new arrival communities.

Recommendation 4:

That disability services be co-located with ethnic community and mainstream organisations that offer a wide range of services and are frequented by culturally diverse communities.

Recommendation 5:

That DHS encourages and promotes partnerships between ethnic communities, disability services and local community organisations such as neighbourhood community centres, schools and recreation facilities.



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Recommendation 6:

That local governments work together to ensure timely and effective access to services for people eligible for individual funding under the National Disability Insurance and who move between local authority areas.

Recommendation 7:

That disability liaison staff be placed in health services (e.g. hospitals), in a similar model to disability liaison staff within the education sector.

Recommendation 8:

That DHS supports the integration of mental health and disability sectors to facilitate increased access by multicultural communities to services.

Recommendation 9:

That more culturally sensitive approaches that keep people in their natural environments and allow them to remain in contact with families and communities be adopted.

B. Outreach and education campaign

12. Evidence from several publications by disability organisations indicate that under-representation in the disability sector occurs due to a lack of engagement of service providers to multicultural communities, and a lack of awareness about appropriate disability service provision. Some service providers acknowledged difficulty in locating members with a disability from a culturally diverse backgrounds and promoting their services to them. A number of methods identified during consultations conducted as part of the 'Talking project' (specifically, word of mouth, audio visual formats, ethnic media etc.) were deemed effective in regard to initiating community contact. Therefore, the ECCV recommends:

Recommendation 10:

That a 'word-of-mouth roadshow' consisting of sharing community stories and experiences be undertaken in cooperation with ethnic media.

Recommendation 11:

That ethnic, mainstream and social media be used to raise awareness about disability issues. This could take many forms - interviewing carers and families, talk-back radio shows featuring people with a disability sharing their stories, airing stories of people with a disability from multicultural communities - with focus on service access - on ABCTV's *Australian Story*, and using community announcement segments of 60, 45 and 30 second duration through SBS and Channel 31.

Recommendation 12:

That information be distributed in places of community congregation (e.g. religious and spiritual places, ethnic doctors, multicultural events, libraries, community language schools, ethnic community associations and neighbourhood houses) with the help of interpreters.



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Recommendation 13:

That plain, simple language, short words and brief sentences be used when conveying messages to individuals with limited English language proficiency.

C. De-stigmatising disability in ethnic communities

13. Cultural factors play a key role in migrant communities' perceptions of disability, including their understanding of disability and engaging with support services. For example, many cultures may attribute causes of disabilities to factors such as the influence of 'past lives', the past actions of a parent or the 'evil eye'. The ECCV believes that a number of initiatives should be undertaken to counter the false assumptions on which such stigma is based.

Recommendation 14:

That awareness campaigns on disability and the rights of persons with disabilities be conducted (refer to recommendations 10 & 11).

Recommendation 15:

That awareness raising and educational initiatives should utilise people with disabilities from diverse backgrounds who have achieved quality of life as role models.

Recommendation 16:

That diverse and respected community leaders be engaged via community education workshops to challenge myths and cultural stereotypes about disability.

D. Exclusion due to visa requirements

14. The current eligibility requirements stipulate that people with disabilities who migrate to Australia (except for those on humanitarian visas) are required to wait a period of ten years after their visa is granted to qualify for the Disability Support Pension (DSP). The ECCV has found these conditions to be challenging and leading to precarious living, poor health and security, and social exclusion. As a result, family members experience hardship and financial stress. Australia, as a signatory of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities since 2007, should uphold its obligations by ensuring their full enjoyment of human rights and equality under the law. Therefore, it is recommended:

Recommendation 17:

That the Victorian government lobbies the Federal government to review eligibility requirements for the Disability Support Pension.

E. Employment and economic opportunities

15. The ECCV is deeply concerned that inclusion of people with a disability from NESB backgrounds in economic activities has not been paid much



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attention. Anecdotal evidence has suggested a general belief that people with a disability do not have to work, and that the community will look after their needs. This presents further challenges for those from culturally diverse backgrounds who already experience significant barriers when seeking work and training. The ECCV believes that there needs to be an attitude shift in service providers, ethnic and mainstream communities. Persons with disabilities should be seen as equally capable of participating in society and making substantial contributions to the economy. The ECCV therefore recommends a number of strategies to improve their economic inclusion.

Recommendation 18:

That research be undertaken to examine the economic consequences of excluding people with a disability from culturally diverse communities from the labour market.

Recommendation 19:

That disability employment and mainstream services providers develop a culturally competent model of service delivery. This could be achieved in a number of ways, such as hiring employment consultants from culturally diverse backgrounds, providing culturally competence training to staff, or developing partnerships with various ethnic community organisations.

F. Participation of culturally diverse communities in decision making

16. The ECCV is of the opinion that 'social inclusion' and 'participation' has a 'cause and effect' relationship. Participation is important for people with disabilities and their families from multicultural communities, as it gives them an opportunity to have a say about issues and decisions that affect them, and subsequently improve social inclusion. The ECCV has been a strong proponent of this, and identified two options through its community and stakeholder consultations undertaken as part of 'Talking Disability' to ensure that disabled people from NESB have their voices heard.
17. The first option consists of establishing a quarterly-convening CALD Disability Network (CALDDN) resourced by the ECCV to determine priority themes and strategic directions and report to the Minister, Department of Human Services (DHS) and Victorian Disability Advisory Council (VDAC). The second option would involve an annual meeting between the CALDDN, VDAC and the Minister. This would provide an opportunity to convey information to the Minister on programs and support services, access issues for disabled people from culturally diverse communities and discuss policy proposals. The ECCV would make sure that disabled people, their families and advocates play a significant role in either option.

Recommendation 20:

That one of the following options be used as a policy advisory mechanism:

- CALD Disability Network resourced by the ECCV with quarterly meeting with the Minister and the Victorian Disability Advisory Council



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- An annual presentation by the ECCV's Disability Network to the Minister and the Victorian Disability Advisory Council

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