

ECCV Submission
to the
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
on
Extend of Income Inequality in Australia
August 2014
Melbourne

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) welcomes the opportunity to present to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs a submission on the Extend of Income Inequality in Australia. ECCV is the voice of multicultural Victoria, as its peak advocacy body and has a membership of over 220 ethnic and multicultural community organisations.

This submission focuses on older Australians from a non-English speaking background and income inequality. ECCV recognises that income inequality may relate to a wide range of people and age groups from a multicultural background.

Pensioners

Seniors from a non-English speaking background often have an increased risk of poverty. ECCV recognises the significant hardship facing senior pensioners as they struggle with rising cost of living and decreasing value of concessional discounts. ECCV's estimates indicate that the majority recipients of full aged pensions in Victoria are from a non-English speaking background.

Recommendation 1

That the Commonwealth Government introduces increases in the senior pensioner concession rates.

Homelessness

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011 Census, 30% of homeless persons in Australia were born overseas. On Census night 105,000 persons were counted as homeless in Australia, while 23,000 of them lived in Victoria. According to the ABS, 2,000 of homeless persons in Victoria speak English not well or not at all. ECCV is concerned that people from a non-English speaking background in receipt of government's pension find the private rental market an unaffordable and unattainable accommodation option given their limited income and increasing competition in private rental market. This places many at the risk of homelessness.

Recommendation 2

That the Commonwealth Government engages in a systemic initiative to address homelessness amongst members of the multicultural community.

Workforce Barriers

ECCV highlights that people from a non-English speaking background, encounter a variety of challenges in accessing employment opportunities. According to the ABS report *Perspectives on Migrants* of 2011, 35% of recent migrants, who arrived in Australia after the year 2000, experienced some difficulty finding their first job in Australia. The single biggest issue was the lack of Australian work experience or references. ECCV notes that the lack of employment opportunities for migrants increases the risk of economic hardship and is more likely to lead to poor health. ECCV also notes that a major barrier for migrants in finding a job in Australia is the recognition of an overseas qualification. ECCV suggests facilitating the recognition of overseas qualifications.

Recommendation 3

That the Commonwealth Government conducts a review of overseas qualifications and skills recognition processes to ensure appropriate recognition processes by trade associations, professional bodies and employer organisations.

Workforce Participation of Older People

ECCV believes it is vital to ensure workforce participation of older people from a non-English speaking background. As more ethnic baby boomers are retiring along with the growing trend of people living healthier and longer, there is a need to provide opportunities for older people from non-English speaking backgrounds to retrain and re-enter the workforce. They could be trained in certificate courses in aged care, as carers and in dementia support as they have the cultural and linguistic knowledge required to work with culturally diverse clients.

Further, some older people lack the confidence to be retrained. One of the effective pathways is to provide an entry point to certificate courses through ESL classes such as in ethnic and multicultural organisations, followed by placement opportunities and job support.

Recommendation 4

That the Commonwealth Government provides incentives for recruitment, training and job placement initiatives targeted at older people from a non-English speaking background.

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