

ECCV Focus Group Report On the Integration of the Commonwealth Home Support Programme and the Home Care Packages Program and their Accessibility

March 2018

Introduction

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) is the peak policy advocacy body for ethnic and multicultural organisations in Victoria. ECCV has a membership of 220 organisational and individual members including eight Ethnic Communities' Councils in regional Victoria.

ECCV organised this focus group as part of its commitment to the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services to biannually consult with its members and constituents on key ageing issues.

This consultation intended to seek general views from the perspectives of ethnic and multicultural communities and those working with culturally diverse clients on the national aged care reforms, in particular the Commonwealth Home Support Programme and the home care packages programme.

Some consideration has been given by the Commonwealth Department of Health to integrate the home care services and the Commonwealth Home Support Programme into a single care at home programme. The feedback from the focus group sessions informs this ECCV consultation report on the Commonwealth Home Support Programme and home care packages programme.

The Commonwealth Home Support Programme in Victoria used to be called the Home and Community Care programme and has been Victoria specific. The home care programme, or home care packages are delivered across Australia to support the care needs of older people living at home.

The following organisations and consumer representatives participated in the ECCV consultations on 29 January 2018 at the ECCV:

- Fronditha Care;
- Italian Assistance Association Melbourne (CO.AS.IT);
- Brazilian Association for Social Development and Integration in Australia (ABRISA);
- Macedonian Community Welfare Association (MCWA);
- Bolton Clarke (formerly RDNS);
- A consumer representative.

This is a summary of the discussions of the ECCV focus group session.

The Questions

Representatives were asked these consultation questions:

- What are your views on combining the Commonwealth Home Support Programme with the home care packages programme into a single care at home programme. Where do you see opportunities? Where do you see risks?
- What are your overall views on the accessibility of multicultural communities and individuals to the Commonwealth Home Support Programme and the home care packages programme?

Integration of the Commonwealth Home Support Programme with the Home Care Packages programme

Simplifying the system

Representatives from different community organisations expressed their different views on integrating the Commonwealth Home Support Programme with the home care packages programme.

“When I go to the website, I can see four programmes, including home care services. There is confusion between home care services and help at home, due to the different terminology.” (ABRISA)

It was suggested that entry level care (as part of the CHSP) should become part of the home care packages programme. This could mean introducing five levels of home care packages where the level 1 package could be the entry level and which would be equivalent to services provided under the Commonwealth Home Support Programme.

“There is duplication of the Commonwealth Home Support Programme and the level one and two packages of the home care packages programme.” (CO.AS.IT).

“Combining would be good in a way that it would streamline services and especially as services are very similar. From CO.AS.IT’s point of view this would hopefully simplify the system. From what CO.AS.IT has observed, services are similar. The system is confusing. It would be good to make the system simpler for clients.” (CO.AS.IT)

It was raised that “simplicity is required and also basic information how to navigate the system.” (ABRISA)

RAS and ACAS

It was highlighted that there should be only one assessment service and that the aged care system could be simplified by integrating Regional Assessment Services (RAS) and the Aged Care Assessment Services (ACAS).

“I would see a merit in combining the programmes. It is confusing that you have two different assessment services, RAS and ACAS.” (Consumer representative)

Fees

It was raised that there are “some major issues in inconsistencies” including fees between the Commonwealth Home Support Programme and the Home Care Packages programme (Consumer representative)

Currently, the Commonwealth Home Support Programme is being a fee for service that is not income tested compared to the fees and charges related to the Level 1 Home Care Package. Commonwealth Home Support Programme providers are required to have their own client contribution policy and use it to determine their fees.

It was recommended that in the case of an integration of the two programmes that the basic level package would not be subject to an establishment fee, case management fees, and administration and exit fees. It was also highlighted that such costs and associated income testing would put many potential consumers at a disadvantage.

Continuation of block funding for specific service types

It was mentioned that one of the opportunities of a combined programme was that it would streamline services. However, concerns were raised that if all services become client funded, this would not be sustainable for ethnic and multicultural aged care services providers as the Commonwealth Home Support Programme currently provides more flexibility in terms of delivering services to clients. Concerns were raised that an individualised funding model would impact negatively on seniors from ethnic and multicultural communities, especially in areas that are currently block-funded and directed at ethnic and multicultural groups. This is because social support programmes are not fully covered under the home care packages program. It was emphasised that specific services need continue to be block funded, particularly the Victorian Access and Support programme and Social Support groups and activities.

Additional consideration for integrating the CHSP and the home care packages programme

While there were a number of concerns raised to combine the two programmes, most representatives were in favour of combining the Commonwealth Home Support Programme with the Home care packages programme.

A combined programme should take into consideration:

- Reviewing of the funding models;
- Review of current assessment services;
- Continuation Commonwealth Home Support Programme services which are currently available;
- Financial accessibility of combined services;
- Continuation of block funding for the Access and Support program and Social support groups;
- Support for ethno-specific and multicultural services providers.

“A combined programme needs to look at the key weaknesses before making a change. It includes an audit of providers. The programme is full of weaknesses. We don’t want a centralised system with the same structure and weakness.” (ABRISA)

The group saw it generally as beneficial for consumers from non-English speaking backgrounds if the two programmes would be integrated and simplified.

Accessibility of the Commonwealth Home Support Programme and the Home Care Packages Programme

Effective service delivery

The point was made that reaching out to a specific culture can be more effective in terms of servicing clients than providing multicultural services and that service delivery needs to include the employment of bilingual aged care workers. Concerns were also raised about the over-casualization of the aged care workforce which impacts on the quality of service delivery.

It was highlighted that there was “a disconnect between the multicultural communities and service provision. There is no proactive approach between connecting the community at the grass roots level and service providers. Without the grassroots community it becomes very difficult to access services even where there is block funding. If you are lucky you have a Greek specific service yes, but if you a minority community it is a different ‘game’. Without the community doing the work, people or my clients don’t access the services.” (ABRISA)

Accessing the system through MyAgedCare

It was mentioned that “It is easier to access the system when you are in the hospital as compared to accessing local council services.” (ABRISA)

“Within my community, it is extremely difficult to access MyAgedCare, unless it is a hospital discharge. It is just not happening within my community.” (CO.AS.IT).

It was raised that MyAgedCare telephone line staff provide different answers and that these answers depends on who you speak to.

“In some cases local government is very helpful and in some cases it isn’t and this depends on the local government area. Some local governments only say: Ring MyAgedCare.” (Consumer representative)

It was suggested that all policies on MyAgedCare should be linked to a FAQs section, which would potentially improve the accessibility of MyAgedCare.

Consumer education and access

It was raised that clients from non-English speaking backgrounds need more information and direction about how to access home care packages and TIS and more help is needed for consumers to understand consumer directed care. It was suggested to resource community organisations to help people navigating aged care services.

It was highlighted that it is very difficult for clients from non-English speaking backgrounds to navigate the system. Consumers from non-English speaking backgrounds might feel overwhelmed with the plethora of information on aged care services. Families have a role to play to support seniors in navigating available services. It was recommended to provide funding to ethno-specific services to mentor clients and help facilitate access of consumer’s to services.

“At entry level clients should be given direction what consumer directed care is.” (Consumer representative).

“For the clients the name of the programme doesn’t matter, and under which programme they receive their service. The clients only need to know how they will get the service and what they will get. It is much easier if there is one programme.” (ABRISA)

It was suggested to give consideration to extend the Victorian access and support programme to the home care packages programme to help facilitate access to home care.

It was further recommended that consumers from non-English speaking backgrounds should be given a preliminary care plan to help consumers understand their future care. This initial care plan could be shared to help streamline services and also to help empower the consumers. This would be relevant for the Aged Care Assessment Services (ACAS) to consider.

For further information, please contact Nikolaus Rittinghausen, Policy Officer – Aged Care, on 03 9354 9555 and nrittinghausen@eccv.org.au.