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35 YEARS OF POLICY ADVOCACY FOR MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES IN VICTORIA

Access and Equity

It's all about relationships

Policy Submission

2/2/2012



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**ECCV Submission to the
Access and Equity Inquiry
of the
Multicultural Policy Section, Department of Immigration and Citizenship**

February 2012

Access and Equity Inquiry Secretariat
Multicultural Policy Section
Department of Immigration and Citizenship

On behalf of Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) I am pleased to present this submission to the Access and Equity Inquiry Panel.

As the statewide peak advocacy body that lobbies all levels of government on behalf of Victoria's multicultural communities, ECCV welcomes the opportunity to shape the future direction of the Australian Government's Access and Equity Strategy.

For over 30 years ECCV has remained the principal liaison point between ethnic communities, government and the wider community and has been a key player in building Victoria as a successful, harmonious and multicultural society.

ECCV believes that Access and Equity should be the cornerstone of service delivery for our multicultural community. All Victorians should be able to use government services where and when they need them regardless of their cultural and linguistic or religious backgrounds.

This submission presents our recommendations on how existing Australian Government services can be improved to ensure that people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are able to access and receive appropriate services.

I look forward to further opportunities to contribute to the Access and Equity Policy on behalf of Victoria's culturally diverse communities.

Sincerely

Joe Caputo OAM JP
Chairperson

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Key Recommendations:

ECCV recommends:

- a. That the Access and Equity Strategy and its implementation consider a 'rethinking' that encompasses notions of 'diversity' planning that responds to diverse and local, evidence-based populations needs.
- b. That effective access and equity policy and programs focus on improved relationships with both culturally diverse people as well as the ethnic and multicultural community sector.
- c. That the level of authority of the Access and Equity Strategy be linked to the Commonwealth Ombudsman.
- d. That cultural diversity workforce training and working in partnerships with ethnic and multicultural agencies be core requirements of access and equity implementation.
- e. That covert racial discrimination is recognised and addressed as an inhibitor that limits culturally diverse people reaching their full potential through service support.

Concepts of 'access' and 'equity'

1. *Is there a clear understanding of what the concepts 'access' and 'equity' mean in delivering services to people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?*

1.1 ECCV believes that agencies have a reasonably good understanding, as the access and equity policy and accompanying strategy has been developing for the past 26 years since it was introduced by the Australian Government in 1985.

1.2 ECCV believes that the concepts of 'access and equity' require some redefining. As services move towards a client-focussed, self-directed approach, the notions of individual rights and diversity become more prominent.

1.3 ECCV would like to see clearer links in understanding access and equity regarding human rights, multiculturalism and building diversity. As such it should be linked to Australia's People of Australia Multicultural Policy and aligned with the *Racial Discrimination Act*, its consolidation reforms, and complaints about racial discrimination and vilification at the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Recommendation 1

That the concept of access and equity is linked to human rights, multiculturalism and building diversity.

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2. Is there a need to communicate the meaning of access and equity better to Australian Government agencies and/or the community? How would that be best done?

2.1 ECCV would like to see staff in government agencies reflect a practical hands-on understanding of access and equity in terms of how to enable people to reach their full potential regardless of their culturally diverse backgrounds and self-ascribed identity. Of key importance is a focus on respect for diversity.

2.2 ECCV points out that staff in government agencies do not always see that access and equity is a fundamental part of 'diversity strategies' that empower and respect people from non-English speaking backgrounds to reach their 'full potential' in relation to employment, education, community participation and wellbeing.

2.3 Whilst ECCV applauds support programs that are specially tailored to assist people from refugee and culturally diverse backgrounds overcome aspects of marginalisation, ECCV cautions service providers about falling into a 'do-gooder' way of thinking that could underdevelop their clients and eventually restrict culturally diverse people from reaching their full potential. This is sometimes perceived as covert or indirect racial discrimination.

2.4 ECCV feedback indicates that people from culturally diverse backgrounds in community do not have much awareness that what service providers are doing ought to be accessible and equitable for them. ECCV would like to see a community education campaign that focusses on access as the social and economic rights of people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

2.5 ECCV actively utilises a range of conventional and social media such as media releases, Facebook, Twitter, e-bulletins and DVD website postings as effective avenues to promote positive culturally diverse events and issues.

2.6 Even though many people from refugee and culturally diverse backgrounds do not use computers and or the Internet, and some have limited English literacy, ethnic organisations are providing computer training programs for people from non-English speaking backgrounds. Ethnic agencies have extensive, bilingual information networks that reach ethnic communities in a range of media.

Recommendation 2

That the Australian Government conducts an access and equity communication campaign utilising a range of media targeted at ethnic communities and culturally diverse people in the community.

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Recommendation 3

That government departments and agencies provide human rights and cultural diversity training for all staff and management as part of the Access and Equity Strategy.

Authority for Access and Equity

3. Is the level of authority for the access and equity strategy (i.e. endorsement by the Australian Government) adequate?

3.1 ECCV welcomes the endorsement by the Australian Government of a whole-of-government Access and Equity Strategy.

3.2 ECCV would like to see the level of authority for the strategy shifted to the Commonwealth Ombudsman to ensure that government services receive independent assessments about compliance. This would ensure that services are usable and used by culturally diverse people so that service up-take, retention rates and programs are at the very least comparable with the broader community.

Recommendation 4

That the level of authority of the Access and Equity Strategy be linked to the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

4. Should stronger authority for access and equity be considered? What mechanisms would be most feasible?

4.1 ECCV advocates for a stronger government role in the Access and Equity Framework and Strategy by promoting an effective complaints mechanism where individuals from non-English speaking backgrounds can take a relevant grievance to the Ombudsman.

4.2 ECCV welcomes the multilingual online brochure on the Ombudsman's website that describes the kinds of complaints the Commonwealth Ombudsman can investigate, how to make a complaint and how complaints are handled, and notes that 'access and equity' is not listed in 'kinds of complaints'.

Recommendation 5

That 'Access and Equity' is listed on the online multilingual *Making a Complaint Brochure* on the website of the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

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Access and Equity Strategy and Framework

5. How should Australian Government departments and agencies best ensure that their policies, programs and services are accessible and equitable to clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?

- 5.1 ECCV welcomes retaining the government's Access and Equity Strategy Framework with the four principles and performance indicators of responsiveness, communication, accountability and leadership as a valuable guide for service providers.
- 5.2 Regarding the implementation of the access and equity principles, ECCV considers critical factors to be diversity training in the workforce and coordinated support in the form of building partnerships across the government and ethnic not-for-profit sector.
- 5.3 In a climate of scarce resources ECCV believes that making policies and programs accessible and equitable does not necessarily require more funding. Rather a restructure of resources is needed that that would flow from a different way of thinking about diversity. In this sense cultural awareness training of staff would improve their sense of self-esteem regarding work with ethnic agencies and individual clients from culturally diverse backgrounds.
- 5.4 ECCV acknowledges that increasingly local councils in Victoria are working with existing multicultural agencies to more effectively deliver local government services to culturally diverse communities. ECCV applauds the Stonnington City Council for its commitment to staff training to ensure that the 19 percent of its population who are from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. Stonnington trained 100 aged care staff to work with culturally diverse HACC clients and 70 senior managers received cultural awareness training and a further 120 front line staff in 2011.
- 5.5 ECCV highlights the Stonnington City Council's formal partnership with the New Hope Foundation as a best practice example responsible for achieving better access and equity in the take-up and retention of services such as Home and Community Care (HACC) among people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (reported in Municipality December 2011:39 produced by Municipal Association of Victoria). The New Hope Foundation is a migrant resource centre that provides a range of support services to culturally diverse residents and refugees. By working with the New Hope Foundation, Stonnington has been able to identify the need to increase HACC staff awareness of culturally diverse residents and has provided translated information for clients, translated handbooks, a multilingual client survey and improved access to telephone interpreter services across the council's services.

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Recommendation 6

That diversity workforce training and working in partnerships with ethnic and multicultural agencies be core requirements of access and equity implementation.

6. What support do agencies need from DIAC in implementing access and equity?

6.1 ECCV feedback indicates that agencies would benefit from DIAC conducting a broad promotion campaign to service providers of the Access and Equity Framework to better inform staff and management of its four principles and performance indicators and examples of direct service delivery strategies.

6.2 ECCV believes that an acknowledgment of the need for culturally responsive case management is important and advocates for the continuation of DIAC case management training.

Recommendation 7

ECCV recommends that DIAC widely promotes its Access and Equity strategy and provides culturally responsive case management training.

7. Is the current Access and Equity Strategy and Framework appropriate to guide access and equity implementation by departments and agencies?

7.1 ECCV welcomes the current Access and Equity Strategy and Framework as a guide to implementation by departments and agencies. ECCV believes the guide could be improved by increasing and highlighting its cultural responsiveness through the inclusion of additional strategies such as language services training, human rights training and ways to engage with local ethnic and multicultural agencies.

7.2 ECCV believes that providing appropriate training for staff to develop a positive and respectful attitude to cultural diversity and multiculturalism is paramount.

Recommendation 8

That the Access and Equity Framework include more strategies on language services training around working with interpreters and translators.

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8. Is there a need for clearer performance standards for agencies?

- 8.1 ECCV consultation with its members from new and emerging communities indicated that they had difficulties in having their complaints and concerns adequately heard by service providers who often sent them on a 'referral roundabout'.
- 8.2 ECCV points out that clearer access and equity performance standards would be beneficial around 'respect for diversity' training, utilisation of language services, human rights training and cross-cultural communication and listening.
- 8.3 ECCV would like to see clearer standards on providing multilingual information, culturally responsive handling of grievances and complaints and prominently displaying the National Interpreter Symbol on websites and places of service provision.

Recommendation 9

That the Access and Equity Framework provides clearer performance standards to agencies around cross-cultural listening and communication; culturally responsive consumer complaints and providing multilingual information and support.

9. Should access and equity put more focus on core services such as employment, health, welfare and education instead of the full suite of policy and services provided by the Australian Government?

- 9.1 ECCV community consultations indicated that core services accessed, by people from new and emerging communities, older people from non-English speaking backgrounds and younger people with temporary and permanent residence were employment, health, welfare and education as well as taxation, consumer complaints, public transport, aged care, hospitals, housing, immigration issues and telephone interpreter services. ECCV concludes that the focus on core services would need to be broadened to cover the range of settlement, aged care services, international students' issues and aged care needs.

Alignment with other Australian Government policies

10. How does the Access and Equity Strategy align with the Australian Government's Social Inclusion Agenda? Does it need to be better integrated? How?

- 10.1 ECCV is mindful that access and participation are becoming more and more relevant in the 21st century and would like to see access and equity promoted alongside social inclusion. Whilst the Social Inclusion Agenda is generally understood as focusing largely on economic and social

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disadvantage, ECCV believes that Agenda has a vital role to play in complementing the Access and Equity Strategy by recognising the need for cultural responsiveness if service delivery is to reach people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

10.2 ECCV notes social exclusion encompasses people from non-English speaking backgrounds that lack access to services regarded by most people as part of normal living. ECCV believes that building a relationship between the Access and Equity Strategy and the Social Inclusion Agenda would facilitate the much needed focus of social inclusion indicators on overcoming cultural and linguistic disadvantage.

Recommendation 10

That the Access and Equity Strategy provides the Social Inclusion Agenda with practical 'how-to' guides, tools and performance measures for ensuring the cultural inclusion of people from culturally diverse backgrounds.

11. *What opportunities are there to align the Access and Equity Strategy with other Australian Government strategies?*

11.1 ECCV suggests that the Access and Equity Strategy uses as a guide the principles in the Australian Department of Health and Ageing *Aged Care Accreditation Standards for monitoring and accountability*.

11.2 ECCV community consultations on access and equity indicated that people from culturally diverse backgrounds typically experienced difficulties with consumer complaints, finding out if agencies have interpreter services and with taxation registration issues (please see appendices).

Recommendation 11

That the relationships between the Access and Equity Strategy, and government departments be strengthened especially in the areas of consumer complaints and taxation issues.

Service Delivery, Contracts and Contract Management

12. *How well are access and equity obligations transmitted to contracted service providers?*

12.1 Access and equity has been a core process of government service delivery for several decades and yet ECCV's consultations indicate that at the local level working relationships between government and ethnic and multicultural community groups still require strengthening and improvement.

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13. Are access and equity obligations in contracts effectively monitored and managed by departments and agencies?

13.1 ECCV consultations with multicultural agencies and culturally diverse community groups indicated they would like to see stronger monitoring and accountability of demonstrated:

- Working partnerships and coordinated support between local government and ethnic welfare agencies
- Cultural awareness training of staff in government agencies
- Effective use of language services

Recommendation 12

That service delivery contracts of access and equity be strengthened in particular regarding cultural diversity workforce training and language services utilisation.

Recommendation 13

That access and equity obligations in contracts include a requirement that providers work in partnership with local ethnic and multicultural agencies.

Standards/performance measures

14. Are clearer and more measurable performance standards required to measure Australian Government agencies' performance in providing accessible and equitable services? If so, should they be uniform across the Australian Government or more tailored to individual agencies?

14.1 Access and equity programs are implemented by agencies ranging in size and capacity such as local government, larger migrant resource centres and smaller ethnic organisations. Whilst measurable performance standards would ensure more equitable service delivery, flexibility is required so that smaller agencies are not over-burdened with compliance requirements.

Recommendation 13

That measurable performance standards for a sustainable Access and Equity Framework are flexible and incorporate a steady quality improvement component.

15. What standards should agencies meet to effectively implement the Australian Government's Access and Equity Strategy?

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15.1 ECCV research *Practising Positive Partnerships in the Ethnic and Multicultural Community* (Monash University 2010) highlights the importance of partnerships and culturally diverse working relationships as an important aspect of cultural responsiveness. Individuals and community groups continually said, "It's all about relationships" with appropriate local ethnic partners.

16. *Does the current Access and Equity Framework provide adequate standards for measuring performance?*

16.1 ECCV would therefore like to see partnerships included as a fifth principle in the Access and Equity Framework alongside responsiveness, communication, accountability and leadership.

17. *Is the current 'self-reporting' adequate or should there be some independence in the assessment of departments' and agencies' performance? How?*

17.1 ECCV advocates for greater monitoring and reporting within a flexible and sustainable quality framework to ensure that agencies are meeting the standards. ECCV interprets 'sustainability' as systemic conditions that lead to a steady improvement in the quality of life of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Recommendation 14

That the standards for measuring performance be based on Access and Equity Framework responsiveness, communication, accountability and leadership and include diversity partnerships.

18. *Should all agencies report against specific measures? (for example, against ethnicity data for planning and service usage; resource and expenditure on interpreting and translating; increasing cultural competence etc.)*

18.1 ECCV feedback from multicultural service providers indicates that some generic agencies in the Melbourne metropolitan area were well connected with their local ethnic groups. ECCV asserts that it is critical for service providers to have a good understanding of their local population data so that they can respond better to the spread of cultural diversity.

18.2 ECCV community consultations indicate that people from new and emerging communities and older people from culturally diverse backgrounds had difficulties accessing services due to lack of interpreters, insufficient information and lack of cross-cultural understanding (see appendices).

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18.3 ECCV would like to see reporting against the five suggested standards in our Recommendation 14 to include a breakdown of specific performance measures that include local data based on ethnicity and languages spoken and preferred, resources used and expenditure on interpreting and translation services, the number of staff that received cultural diversity training and the number of ethnic and multicultural partnerships formed.

Recommendation 15

That all agencies report against five standards or principles that are broken into detailed cultural competencies as performance indicators.

Access and Equity Report

19. Is reporting on Australian Government access and equity initiatives necessary?

19.1 ECCV received copious feedback about challenges and difficulties from a range of culturally diverse groups and new and emerging communities (see attached appendix). These suggest that more rigorous reporting requirements by service providers would ensure more accessible and equitable services.

20. If reporting is considered necessary, what should be the form of reporting and reporting frequency?

20.1 ECCV advocates for annual statistical as well as narrative reporting on access and equity programs to ensure adequate implementation of the policies and programs. The narrative reporting should take the form of case studies and case management examples.

21. What should be the purpose of access and equity reporting? (to showcase best practice? measure agency performance in delivering access and equity to clients? improve Australian Government services? communicate Australian Government achievements within government / to community?)

21.1 ECCV service provider consultations with multicultural agencies suggests that the purpose of reporting should be about providing evidence about real-life cases in local regional networks to share:

- what worked well
- what did not work
- what additional tools, guides and resources are needed
- how can services be more culturally responsive

22. How could better performance reporting be achieved?

22.1 ECCV believes better performance reporting could be achieved by establishing accountability mechanisms that clearly identify non-compliance as

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well as best practice of principles and performance measures related in particular to cultural diversity training and coordinated support through partnerships with ethnic agencies. Furthermore mal-administration could be subject to a publicised complaints mechanism such as through the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

Recommendation 16

That a range of reporting mechanisms be established that focus on sharing case management examples in regional networks for continuous improvement as well as to monitor compliance of standards.

Focus of access and equity reporting

23. Should the Access and Equity Report have an annual theme? What implications, if any, would this have for the reporting?

23.1 ECCV community consultations generated a range of themes that need to be addressed in the access and equity programs. These are:

- Developing policies and support in partnership with ethnic organisations and community input
- Capacity building for ethno-specific agencies to provide support beyond the initial five years of DIAC funded settlement support.
- Providing education and training for people from new and emerging communities on using computers and the Internet to access information.
- Use of social media networks and innovative media to reach younger people.
- Easy language access and cross-cultural communication
- Culturally responsive trained staff that take time to listen and understand when interacting with people from non-English speaking backgrounds
- Prominent display of the National Interpreter Symbol
- Multilingual information using a variety of multimedia especially in audio format
- Culturally responsive management of grievances and complaints
- Social housing support provided by employers.

23.2 ECCV is mindful that if annual themes are introduced, other critical areas are not neglected or diluted.

Recommendation 17

That annual themes focus on processes such as use of languages services, forming partnerships or increasing culturally responsiveness training.

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24. Should examples from each department or agency be included in the report or should the report include only good practice examples? If the latter, what should be done with the excluded input?

24.1 ECCV is mindful that, for practical reasons, it may not be feasible to include examples from all government departments beyond a few best practice examples. It would be beneficial, however, if more specific examples could be made available on a relevant website, so that providers have the option to look up how an agency handled, for instance, the need for social housing or plain language information on taxation registration.

25. How should the input of FECCA be presented in the report? How should the report respond to this input?

25.1 ECCV welcomes additional qualitative input from the FECCA report that refers to the day-to-day living needs of people from non-English speaking backgrounds who are not permanent residents. In particular ECCV would like to see issues raised concerning the need for transport, social housing, taxation registration and one-to-one bilingual advocacy support for people from culturally diverse backgrounds who are on temporary visas such as international students, seasonal workers and those on category 475 visas so that they are treated with greater respect and compassion.

Recommendation 18

That the Australian Government give consideration to the access and equity needs of culturally diverse people on temporary visas.

Location of Access and Equity Policy and Reporting Responsibility

26. Is DIAC the appropriate agency to administer the Access and Equity Policy and Strategy and coordinate the Access and Equity Report? Is any agency better placed to do these tasks?

26.1 ECCV would like to see legislation of the access and equity strengthened through more rigorous monitoring, reporting and accountability. ECCV offers as a suggestion the approach used for the implementation of the Australian Department of Health and Ageing *Aged Care Accreditation Standards*.

Recommendation 19

That consideration is given, in consultation with ethnic peak organisations, to appointing an accredited agency to administer the Access and Equity Policy and Strategy, coordinate the Access and Equity Report and provide adequate training and support for agency staff.

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Other Comments

ECCV conducted a community consultation that provides more detailed insights into access and equity issues for both permanent residents and those on temporary visas and international students. The consultation summary is attached as an appendix.

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Appendix 1

Access and Equity CALD Focus Group Consultation

Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) conducted a focus group consultation on access and equity for people from diverse cultures and language groups, held in Carlton, Victoria on 3 February 2012. The participants consisted of ethnic community leaders. They represented:

- new and emerging communities with settlement needs
- older culturally diverse people with aged care needs
- international student's with health, transport and settlement needs

Discussion centred on the eight *Questions for Communities and Clients* presented in the *Access and Equity Discussion Paper* (December 2011) of the Australian Government Inquiry.

ECCV points out that the focus group discussion raised similar issues pertinent to culturally diverse groups that were permanent residents in Australia as well as those on temporary and student visas.

Introduction

ECCV believes that Access and Equity should be the cornerstone of service delivery for our multicultural community. All Victorians should be able to use government services where and when they need them regardless of their cultural and linguistic or religious backgrounds.

ECCV is taking part in the Access and Equity Inquiry that is looking into the responsiveness of Australian Government services to our culturally and linguistically diverse population.

Purpose

The purpose of the focus group was to:

1. Provide ECCV members with the opportunity to discuss any good, and not so good, experiences with Australian Government services and to suggest ways to improve them.
2. Provide insights into access and equity issues experienced by CALD participants and their communities to assist ECCV in its submission to the Inquiry.

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Notes of responses to the questions

1. What Australian Government services do you and your community use most (for example: employment, health, welfare)?

Older people from non-English speaking backgrounds used:

- Aged care services provided by local, State and Federal Governments

International students experienced difficulties with:

- transport, health and taxation issues

People from new and emerging communities needed help with:

- applying for a Tax file number; registering with Medicare; obtaining employment; housing; schooling and immigration issues
- counselling and support regarding family conflict, domestic violence and homelessness for both men and women from non-English speaking backgrounds

Other issues included advice and support service for

- unfair workplace issues
- making consumer complaints.

2. Have you or your community found it easy or difficult to use these services?

All participants agreed that the over focus on online content was difficult for those in their communities. It was felt that due to varying levels of computer literacy among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) groups, this increased the pressure that was placed on ethno-specific agencies, as increasing numbers of community members attend their offices, seeking assistance with online forms and information (including Centrelink forms). Ethno-specific community organisations are in most cases the first point of call for those seeking accessible information.

It was felt that language barriers were not being adequately addressed. It was felt that a toll-free number for interpreter assistance would be helpful, and that government websites should promote this service in a range of community languages and using visual cues.

International students commented that while most of them were “tech savvy”, they often found government websites to be overloaded with overly-complex information and unfamiliar terminology. It was observed that international students are reluctant, for these reasons to utilise government websites, turning to fellow students, ethno-specific organisations and informal friends and contacts for (often non-expert) advice instead.

With regard to accessing services via the telephone, participants observed that community members often did not feel listened to by telephone staff,

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saying that they did not feel that their circumstances were being understood or that their difficulties were important and of concern to the person they were talking to. In many cases, it was observed, people feel like they are talking to a “brick wall” when speaking to service staff. It was also commented that long holds and referral roundabouts added another disincentive to accessing government services by telephone.

Participants noted that when people from non-English speaking backgrounds engage with service providers, their expectation of support is not met and they lose confidence and feel disappointed by service support staff.

Many tire of “referral roundabouts” and script-like responses they are given and give up. Then they either disengage from support services, or return to their community agency for help.

It was felt that government service staff should be provided with cultural responsiveness training and not subject to strict performance target arrangements, which may require them to move hastily through calls, when more time and consideration is needed.

3. In your experience, do Australian Government services adapt to the needs of people from your cultural or language background?

Participants felt that culturally competent communication is vital for all aspects of service delivery to break down barriers and improve access to information and support. They had difficulties getting staff on telephone help lines to listen to their stories and came away feeling frustrated and without relevant advice.

4. If you or your community have had problems, what were they? Did they get resolved?

Transport

- International students reported they do not have access to public transport concessions which adds to the expense of student life or they avoid using transport.

Health

- International students had health insurance that covers the minimum of health needs. Some students had difficulties accessing public hospitals or were even denied access in serious cases of illness and during pregnancies.

Online services

- Whilst Centrelink claims can be made online, not everyone from new and emerging communities has a computer and some have

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no prior experience with computer and the internet. They continue to seek support from settlement services in ethnic organisations. These issues were resolved through providing detailed and time-consuming one-to-one support in ethnic community organisations.

One comment was, "Online claims are supposed to make people more self-reliant but the number of people requesting support from ethnic organisations had not reduced."

Unfair dismissals

- There appears to be a considerable number of non-English speaking people from refugee backgrounds who get jobs and then after a while lose their jobs in instances of perceived discrimination. They, or their advocate, struggled to find assistance or even to have the case heard over the telephone, via websites and in person to Worksafe Victoria and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC). Culturally diverse people requesting assistance felt they were led on a "referral roundabout" and had to contact many different places to raise their issue regarding personal rights. Outcomes often resulted in unresolved issues or advice to engage a lawyer which was not feasible for people on low incomes who are trying to get settled in Australia.

A typical comment was, "I didn't even get 50 percent of the assistance I expected and some people were just not listening to me – we just lose trust in the system."

Consumer complaints

- People from non-English speaking backgrounds contacting Australian and Victorian consumer regulator peak organisations by telephone with a complaint felt they did not get a beneficial or positive response. They felt that the person on the telephone did not listen and persisted in repeating standard phrases. As a result people lost faith in the system and did not attempt to pursue their rights.
- Access to the peak consumer regulator and complaints websites was confusing and unhelpful. The result was escalated feelings of frustration and confusion and lost trust in the system that should address their rights and complaints and low levels of satisfaction due to unresolved outcomes.

Taxation issues

- An international student spoke about difficulties she had when lodging a tax return. The financial strain of being a student, with limited earning capacity and very little government support led her to try to lodge her own tax return rather than seek professional assistance.

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- The confusion related to the question of whether she was an Australian Resident, for tax purposes. Not being an Australian resident, as far as she understood it, she answered no to this and was then required to pay 30 percent of her earnings in tax. She attempted to call the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) regarding the question of her residential status, but did not find them to be helpful. After her telephone call to them she remained under the false impression that she was not an Australian resident for tax purposes. In the end a fellow international student (accountancy student) advised her that she had made an error and suggested that she fill out an amendment form. Once this was done, she had to place two follow up calls to the ATO as no action was initially taken. Following this, the matter was resolved. It is important to keep in mind that the woman in question here has a tertiary level education and perfect English proficiency, this situation would have been even more challenging for someone with little English or education.
- It was suggested that awareness raising was required among international students with regard to taxation issues. At no point did this student come across promotion of the Tax-Help program, which suggests this initiative needs to be better promoted.
- The participant also commented that, although some students experience quality orientation in their country of origin many do not and, upon arrival in Australia, orientation is mainly related to academic matters, not government supports.

A typical student's comment was, "We don't have taxation or legal advice. Some universities have better support than others. It's really confusing for students."

Housing and homelessness

- A participant reported that in situations of family conflict vital support is provided by women's refugees and related counselling however there were often no supports for men from non-English speaking backgrounds at risk of homelessness.
- The migration community consists of both permanent residents and people from non-English speaking backgrounds on temporary visas. Workers on a Temporary Class 457 Visa experienced, despite having jobs, experienced homelessness due to lack of money to support themselves and employers placing them in an hotel at an unreasonable distance from the place of employment.

A participant commented, "One person was placed in the hotel at the Tullamarine airport and had to work in Dandenong."

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5. If you or your community have had good experiences, what services worked best for you? Why do you think they worked so well for you?

Best practice website

Participants found the DIAC website easy to use for online information and highlighted it as a best practice example of online information.

Tax Help

- An ethnic settlement service provided a free bilingual 'Tax Help Volunteer' service that worked well for new and emerging communities.

A typical comment was, "Taxation is a big issue for new and emerging communities and the Tax Help Volunteer system works well."

Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS)

- Participants reported the TIS was very helpful when accessing Government services. It was helpful when the national TIS symbol was prominently displayed on government websites.

Partnerships with ethnic agencies

A local council organised a multicultural responsiveness event in partnership with local community groups, for example the Cambodian community was invited to a local hospital providing cultural briefings for nurses, doctors, police and city councils.

Ethno-specific settlement support

Regarding ethno-specific settlement support a participant indicated that the numbers of clients is increasing whilst DIAC funding targets have stayed the same or are cut back. In addition the people from refugee backgrounds require support beyond their initial five years of settlement due to cultural and linguistic disadvantage.

6. What are the best ways for the Australian Government to tell you about its services and how to access them?

Regarding access to information, it was suggested that web based approaches can work, but only if ethno-specific agencies are better resourced so that they can offer assistance. It was observed that joint ethnic community/government partnerships in running community education and awareness raising programs would be very valuable.

Also desirable is a toll-free, language accessible telephone number that could act as a one-stop-shop for government services.

International students reported that they prefer to receive information through more innovative approaches, including social media, animation and visuals as this is more accessible and engaging than the high volume of complex written

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information presented to students at orientation and when they click on to a government website.

A new and emerging group representative commented that posters, flyers, CDs/DVDs and language accessible websites all work well and are well liked by his community.

All participants agreed that there are too many different sources of information and that information needs to be simplified and centralised. A one-stop-online-shop for government services would be helpful, where people could click on a general area of interest and find links to more specialist services.

7. Are there ways Australian Government services could be improved to help you or your community access them better?

International students suggested that language barriers are a major issue so visual cues may assist in getting information across. They welcomed internet information campaigns developed in partnerships between the government and ethnic youth organisations. Improvements they recommended included the use of animations, social media networks, Facebook and twitter as well as links to specific services. A best practice example was the thinkbefore.com website, a student safety initiative that focuses on safety awareness when travelling at night and on public transport routes supported by a range of government departments and tertiary institutions. They valued its simplicity, links and animations.

Participants noted that it was not always easy to find interpreter services support. They recommended clearer and more obvious promotion of the national telephone interpreter symbol on government websites.

All participants spoke of the need for more plain English and the elimination of jargon from government services websites.

All mentioned that better support for and partnerships with ethno-specific agencies is essential in order to provide the support that CALD people require when navigating unfamiliar processes and formats.

8. Most Australian Government services have standards about how they deliver services to you. Do you think there should be specific standards to make sure culture or language doesn't make it harder for people to get the help they need?

Participants valued the Australian Government service standards to assist people from diverse cultural and language backgrounds. They felt however that there was room to improve the implementation of such standards and to ensure that they are effectively practiced through:

- Developing policies and support in partnership with ethnic organisations and community input

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- Capacity building for ethno-specific agencies to provide support beyond the initial five years DIAC funded settlement support.
- Providing education and training for people from new and emerging communities on using computers and the Internet to access information
- Use of social media networks and innovative media to reach younger people
- Easy language access and cross-cultural communication
- Culturally responsive trained staff that take time to listen and understand when interacting with people from non-English speaking backgrounds
- Prominent display of the National Interpreter Symbol
- Multilingual information using a variety of multimedia especially in audio format
- Culturally responsive management of grievances and complaints
- Social housing support provided by employers.

International students wish to highlight the strong desire of the international student community to be able to access government support, most specifically in the area of transport (student concessions) and health care. They also seek more support from government in order to better understand visa arrangements and taxation.

A typical was, "Many international students felt discriminated against and excluded from the Australian community, despite their contributions, both cultural and financial, to our institutes of higher learning."

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