**ethnic
communities'
council of
victoria**

CARING FOR OLDER AUSTRALIANS IN ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

ECCV Submission to the
Productivity Commission Inquiry: Caring for Older Australians

www.eccv.org.au

Submission July 2010

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) is a non-partisan, broadly based, statewide peak advocacy body representing ethnic and multicultural communities across Victoria since 1974.

For over 35 years, ECCV has remained the principal liaison point between ethnic communities, government and the wider community in Victoria.

ECCV has been a key player in building Victoria as a successful, harmonious and multicultural society today.

In particular, ECCV advocates for improved access and equity for aged care in ethnic communities.

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Executive Summary

As Australia moves into the second decade of the 21st century, the country faces significant challenges in responding to the diversity needs of its rapidly increasing population of ageing ethnic seniors. Caring effectively for all older Australians, in a society where almost two-thirds (62%) of older overseas-born Australians come from non-English speaking backgrounds (ABS 2008), is dependent on changing the patterns of access and participation of culturally diverse seniors as well as maximising the specialist expertise of our ethnic and multicultural organisations.

ECCV research shows that Australia's overseas-born seniors have strong preferences to stay living at home longer. In order to live independently with dignity, comfort and ease, seniors with diverse backgrounds need good decision making, along with a strong rights awareness, adequate information and access to culturally appropriate support. There is considerable scope for engaging the expertise and resources within the ethnic and multicultural sector in areas such as the promotion of independence and active ageing in ethnic communities; culturally responsive service provision, greater contributions to a diverse workforce, and the enhancement of social capital amongst ethnic seniors, their families, carers and communities.

Caring for older multicultural Australians requires a 'partnerships in diversity' model based on equal responsibility, entitlements and appropriate resources. ECCV believes the Australian aged care system needs to move towards a mindset where the ethnic elderly as well as ethnic service organisations are seen as partners with equal rights. Furthermore, ECCV calls upon all levels of government to better acknowledge, utilise and maximise the specialist expertise, in terms of cultural proficiency, within the ethnic and multicultural community service sector. Many ethnic community service and welfare agencies have been in existence for decades, quietly and without much drama, providing valuable services to the community; services that are sometimes invisible to mainstream and not well understood.

On the organisational level this means a shift in thinking by professionals, policy makers and aged care workers to one that holds diverse cultures in high esteem. On the individual level it means greater assurance and promotion of a caring aged care system that automatically encompasses dignity, respect and cultural safety for Australia's ethnic seniors.

Key priority areas are:

- A National Cultural Diversity in Ageing Strategy
- A 'Partnerships in Diversity' Model
- Capacity building in ethnic communities
- Culturally responsive 'Living at Home' aged care services
- Cultural support models in residential aged care
- Culturally and spiritually responsive end-of-life care

Key recommendations include :

- That Government formulates a National Cultural Diversity in Ageing Strategy which reflects the positive promotion of diversity thinking and respect for cultural values within a seamless continuum of care for all older Australians.

- That government and organisations develop a 'Partnerships in Diversity' Model of caring for older Australians.

- That the ethnic and multicultural organisations are recognised and strengthened as specialists in the area of culturally responsive aged care provision.

- That the social capital and volunteering capacity within ethnic communities is strengthened.

- That culturally responsive aged care information, health education and rights awareness raising programs are targeted at seniors, families and carers with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

- That Government improves culturally responsive and integrated pathways of aged care services.

- That government allocates funding to ensure free interpreter services in residential and community aged care.

- That evidence-based research and evidence-based informed policy is encouraged into various aspects of culturally diverse active ageing and wellness.

Introduction

ECCV welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Productivity Commission's public inquiry into Caring for Older Australians. ECCV commends the Australian Government for asking the Productivity Commission to undertake a public inquiry into aged care and thus enable ethnic communities to provide input for future reforms and ensure that the aged care system is equipped to meet the challenges of our culturally diverse and ageing population.

ECCV regularly conducts broad-based community consultations via its Aged Care Policy Committee whose members represent ethnic and multicultural community organisations as well as peak bodies with an interest in ethnic aged care. That committee provides feedback on gaps in ethnic aged care services delivery with a view to improving access for culturally and linguistically diverse seniors and increase the cultural responsiveness of aged care services.

The proposals in this submission are based to a large extent on consultations and best practice diversity models within the Victorian HACC (Home and Community Care) Program, and the Victorian ethnic aged care sector. These provide a microcosm of learnings that can be applied throughout Australia. ECCV presents a long-term view with a focus on respect for ethnic seniors' personal choices; improved access to a culturally responsive aged care system, and a seamless pathway of care that builds on the capacity of the ethnic and multicultural community sector.

1. Ethnic Seniors – Australia's Rapidly Increasing Ageing Population

1.1 Australia is faced with a rapidly increasing population of ageing ethnic seniors. By 2011, in Victoria alone, approximately 40% of people aged over 65 will be from culturally diverse backgrounds (Howe 2006).

1.2 The proportion of older Australians with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is growing more rapidly than the Australian-born population of seniors (Gibson AIHW 2001). For example from 1996 to 2010 the population of ethnic seniors experienced a 66% growth rate compared with 23% for the older Australian-born population. In addition the number of people over 65 with culturally diverse backgrounds will experience a growth rate of 44% over the fifteen year period from 2011 to 2026.

1.3 Cultural diversity in Victoria's ageing population is a reality that will persist into the coming decades. The older culturally diverse population is ageing more rapidly than the average population of seniors.

FAST FACTS

- From 1996 to 2010 the proportion of over 80s in the culturally diverse population increased from 16.3% to 25.9% compared with 22.9% to 27.5% for the Australian-born.

- From 2011 to 2026 ethnic people over 80 will increase by 59% compared with 29% in the Australian-born population.

- By 2026 one in every four people aged over 80 will be from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Gibson AIHW 2001).

1.4   Seniors from ethnic backgrounds are living at home longer than the average population. Feedback from ECCV stakeholders shows that there is a tendency for ethnic seniors, their families and carers to delay accessing aged care services until they reach a crisis, rather than seeking early intervention services that promote active ageing.

1.5   Seniors and families in ethnic communities continue to face access risks to aged care and health services. Feedback from the ECCV Aged Care Policy Committee and research (Access Economics 2006; Radermacher et al 2008; Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing 2009) identified a number of factors that limit their uptake of mainstream services.

These are :

- Varying English language and literacy competency
- Cultural inappropriateness of services
- Cultural values of family dependency
- Limited access to information
- Fragmented families
- Social isolation
- Transport
- Cost

1.6   ECCV recommends ethnic media as an effective avenue for communication with ethnic communities especially for information about ageing, wellness and aged care services. Ethnic and multicultural community broadcasting is Australia's largest multilingual institution that provides information and maintains cultural connections in over 100 languages. There are around 600,000 non-English speaking regular metropolitan community radio listeners (NEMBC 2010).

1.7   Research (Radermacher et al 2008) commissioned by ECCV shows that meeting the challenge of caring for older people with culturally diverse backgrounds is no longer the sole concern of either the mainstream service system or the ethnic and multicultural community sector. Rather than an 'either-or' approach, it is the responsibility of both sectors working effectively together.

Recommendation

- **That ethnic media be better utilised as an avenue for communication with ethnic communities especially for information about ageing, wellness and aged care services.**

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2. A National Cultural Diversity in Ageing Strategy

ECCV proposes the development and implementation of a National Cultural Diversity in Ageing Strategy. Such a strategy is timely as the formulation of effective multicultural policy directions over the past decade in Australia has been lagging. ECCV believes there has been a general discomfort about the effects of diversity on social cohesion in the last decade and a reluctance of generic aged care providers to engage in key cultural issues.

Within the context of the increasing intersection of health and aged care services, ECCV welcomes current initiatives in national health reforms and the HACC Program at developing diversity policies and practices. ECCV highlights the importance of recognising the value of the past, current and future role of ethnic community services agencies and multicultural organisations in the provision of ethnic aged care. The role of their extensive and well-established networks and services needs to be re-explained to the health and aged care sectors within the framework of a National Cultural Diversity in Ageing Strategy.

2.1   Workforce Diversity in Aged Care

2.1.1. ECCV advocates more effective policy directions for the recruitment, training and retention of bilingual staff in aged care in response to the current lack of workforce diversity in the sector and to the 2010 Intergenerational Report's projection that the proportion of working age people to retired Australians will fall significantly by 2050. Increased workforce diversity in aged care requires cultural awareness training for both local and overseas-born staff.

2.1.2. Some ethno-specific community organisations in Victoria provide innovative workforce development models for non-English speaking people such as supported pathways from volunteer work to ESL (English as a Second Language) classes, to Aged Care Certificate courses and subsequently to supported workforce placement in the community or residential aged care sector. A national strategy would have the benefit of harnessing such creative solutions and providing a long-term strategic workforce view that taps into the ethnic sector as well as promoting employment in aged care.

2.2   Cultural Diversity Equity in Aged Care

2.2.1 ECCV would like to see the introduction of 'equity' as a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) of Australian Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) funding agreements for all projects and programs including aged care programs and national health initiatives to measure equity, in particular cultural diversity equity, in funding allocation, implementation and evaluation processes across and within projects, initiatives and programs.

Recommendations

- That the Australian Government conducts broad-based consultations with ethnic seniors, as well as ethnic and multicultural service organisations for the development and implementation of a National Diversity in Ageing Strategy.

- That a National Diversity in Ageing Strategy includes a cultural proficiency toolkit for the recruitment, employment and training of bilingual staff in the aged care sectors.

- That 'cultural diversity equity' is a Key Performance Indicator for government funded aged care programs.

3. A 'Partnerships in Diversity' Model

ECCV acknowledges the 2010 Intergenerational Report projections that cost effective approaches to caring for older Australians are needed. There are extensive networks of cultural diversity expertise, knowledge, skills and resources in ethnic and multicultural organisations which need to be acknowledged and mobilised across the health and aged care sectors.

ECCV proposes a 'Partnership in Diversity' model in caring for older Australians with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, based on the findings of new research commissioned by ECCV (Radermacher et al 2010 forthcoming) which details benefits and strategies such as equal power relationships with organisations of varying size and the importance of resources needed for initial work in forming alliances.

ECCV recognises the limitations of the Government's Primary Care Partnerships (PCPs) network. A 'Partnerships in Diversity' approach would foster greater possibilities for accessing existing diversity networks regarding information exchange, special needs identification and raising the cultural proficiency of the aged care sector. For example ECCV is aware that the Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency has produced a Cultural Competency Framework (VACA 2009) that has widespread applicability.

Recommendations

- That Government, and in particular local government, support a 'Partnerships in Diversity Model' of caring for older Australians.

- That the role of ethnic and multicultural organisations in aged care partnerships be promoted in the aged care sector.

- That Government allocates funds for initiating and sustaining partnerships between the ethnic and multicultural community sector and aged care services.

- That increased opportunity is promoted for Aboriginal agencies to provide mentoring to ethnic, multicultural and mainstream agencies in areas of cultural proficiency and culturally responsive service provision.

4. Capacity Building for Ethnic Communities

4.1 Cultural Proficiency Specialists

4.1.1 Ethnic and multicultural service organisations collectively have a well-established role in broad-based culturally responsive welfare and aged care service provision, albeit with varying capacity depending on agency size. Accordingly, ECCV sees a need for a general shift in thinking beyond the perception that ethno-specific organisations are only one-language, one-culture services; but rather are cultural diversity specialists.

4.1.2 ECCV advocates the promotion of ethnic and multicultural community organisations as culturally proficient 'specialised services' that provide a wide range of culturally and linguistically responsive services to the health and aged care sectors such as:

- Access to ethnic media such as radio, newspapers, community newsletters and internet
- Cultural and linguistically matched visiting programs to non-English speaking seniors
- Advice on general language services and plain language translations
- Mentoring for smaller ethnic and new and emerging communities
- Bilingual and bicultural aged care supported access
- Cultural briefings, advice and resources
- Diversity brokerage services.

4.1.3 The strengthening of the capacity of ethnic agencies and multicultural organisations as cultural proficiency 'specialists' would provide cost-effective culturally responsive services to generic organisations and thus improve the wellness of ethnic seniors.

Recommendations

- **That the role of ethnic and multicultural organisations be promoted and extended as specialists in culturally proficient aged care services.**

4.2 Social Capital in Ethnic Communities

4.2.1 An extensive network of ethnic seniors' social groups throughout Australia provides valuable social capital and social connectedness which decreases depression and social isolation (UCCO 2006). ECCV is concerned that many ethnic groups find succession planning for volunteers daunting and require culturally responsive governance and leadership skills development particularly in regional and rural areas (Golden Years 2008).

Recommendation

- That training modules on leadership and governance skills be developed for community volunteers in ethnic seniors clubs in metropolitan as well as in regional and rural areas.

4.3   Active Ageing Awareness Campaigns for Ethnic Communities

4.3.1 Research on how Australians deal with ageing wellness (Yates et al 2009; Health Literacy Australia 2006 ABS) indicates that people born in non-English speaking countries, and those in remote regions, have significantly lower levels of health literacy.

4.3.2 ECCV feedback indicates that, in ethnic communities, a reluctance to seek assistance often results in the need for urgent and complex case management. Increased health communication, promotion and education for Australia's ethnic elderly would lead to informed decision making and significant cost-savings.

4.3.3 Language is the primary barrier to participation in healthy living pathways, as well as diverse religious beliefs, cultural practices, and lack of access to culturally specific care (AIHW 2010:270). As a result many people, born overseas where English is not the main language, experience barriers in access to health care, in understanding health information or navigating pathways of care.

Recommendations

- That Government provides resource allocation for the family-focused education and awareness campaigns targeted at ethnic communities, in areas such as mental health, dementia, bowel and bladder health, healthy lifestyle and ageing wellness.

- That health and active ageing information be translated into community languages.

4.4   Seniors' Rights and Elder Abuse Prevention

The concept of elder abuse and seniors' rights are not well understood in ethnic communities according to the ECCV Discussion Paper "Reclaiming Respect and Dignity: Elder Abuse in Ethnic Communities" (ECCV 2009). Whilst there is no evidence that elder abuse is higher in ethnic communities than the average population, extensive ECCV survey feedback from Culturally Responsive Elder Abuse Prevention forums conducted in 2010, indicates that many health and aged care workers are challenged by suspected abuse in ethnic communities and require additional training to respond with cultural sensitivity.

4.4.2 ECCV recognises the Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) as a lead organisation in the development of elder abuse prevention strategies, in particular financial literacy modules for seniors and therefore proposes additional resource allocation for its targeted rollout in ethnic communities.

Recommendations

- That rights awareness and elder abuse prevention education programs be targeted at seniors, families and carers with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

- That Government regulates for culturally responsive elder abuse prevention training and resources for staff in health and aged care services.

- That Government allocates resources for the delivery of financial literacy modules in community languages and to culturally diverse seniors through ethnic sector networks.

5   Culturally Responsive Living at Home Services

5.1   Independence versus Dependence in Ageing

5.1.1 ECCV supports the Victorian HACC Active Service Model (ASM) approach to aged care service delivery that is in line with current trends which maximise the independence, choice and informed decision making of seniors.

5.1.2 In many ethnic communities, cultural values of dependency in ageing are perceived as a positive world view. ECCV research (Radermacher et al 2008) shows that seniors with culturally diverse backgrounds choose to live at home longer than the average population of people over 65. As many ethnic families, carers and communities place a high value on the interdependency of the extended families in their senior years, intergenerational HACC ASM awareness campaigns are required to introduce ethnic seniors, carers and their relatives slowly, sensitively and with adequate languages support via trusted ethnic networks to the new approach to aged care.

Recommendation

- **That Government allocates additional resources for the facilitation and promotion of the HACC Active Service Model and aged care support services that require person-centred choice and informed decision making.**

5.2   Ethno-specific Social Support

5.2.1 HACC funded social support programs in the form of ethno-specific Planned Activity Groups (PAGs) are an ideal model to innovatively meet the needs of localised diversity groups in that they provide a significantly broader role beyond that of social connectedness. PAGs provide ethnic seniors with important information about active ageing and their rights; access to other aged care services; emotional support and provide respect for their cultural identity.

5.2.2 Lack of accessible and affordable transport is one of the most significant risks to accessing social support programs for seniors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. ECCV advocates for the provision of cost-effective transport with flexibility to go across boundaries set by Local Government Authority areas (LGAs) and Department of Health catchments to assist culturally diverse seniors to access ethno-specific social support programs in metropolitan and rural and regional areas.

5.2.3 Smaller, as well as new and emerging ethnic community organisations, are challenged by the administrative HACC compliance requirements. Increased flexibility is therefore needed for larger ethnic and multicultural organisations to provide a mentoring and sponsorship role in the provision of social support programs such as PAGs.

5.2.4 ECCV recognises that when an older frail person moves between HACC social support programs, aged care packages and residential care, it is humane to allow an overlap transition period for non-English speaking seniors to maintain social connections with their PAGs. Currently separate funding arrangements require frail and elderly seniors with culturally diverse backgrounds to withdraw from their social support networks in PAGs when they move across the aged care service system.

Recommendations

- That Government increases HACC growth funds for ethno-specific social support programs in metropolitan as well as regional and rural areas and facilitates transport across designated catchment regions.

- That HACC Programs allow flexible transitions for culturally diverse seniors to continue attending social support programs such as PAGs throughout their pathways of aged care.

5.3   Supported Access Models

5.3.1 According to the AIHW report "Australia's Welfare 2009" up to 40 percent of people born in non-English speaking countries is more likely to need assistance than the average population of older people.   Furthermore, two thirds (62%) of older overseas-born Australians come from non-English speaking countries (AIHW 2009). Accordingly, the notion of supported access to assist with caring for culturally and linguistically diverse seniors is fundamental to social inclusion principles.

5.3.2 The Victorian HACC Program has been conducting an innovative one-to-one direct care support model, the bilingual, bicultural Supported Access Pilot Program (SAPP), located in ethnic and multicultural organisations to assist vulnerable ethnic elderly to navigate the aged care system.

5.3.3 ECCV advocates the expansion of two cost effective supported access models: the Community Partners Program (CPP) run by Partners in Community Aged Care (PICAC) and the Victorian HACC direct, one-to-one bilingual and bicultural Supported Access Pilot Program model to assist ethnic seniors in accessing early intervention 'Living at Home' HACC services.

Recommendations

- That Government considers the urgency and priority of the expansion of both the Community Partners Programs and the direct one-to-one Supported Access Program in ethnic and multicultural organisations.

- That Supported Access aged care models be provided for seniors with culturally diverse backgrounds in rural and regional areas.

5.4   Integrated, Culturally Responsive HACC and Community Aged Care Packages

5.4.1 Ethnic and multicultural organisations make significant contributions to caring for older Australians in ethnic communities as many are funded by the Australian Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) for ethno-specific Community Aged Care Packages (CACPs) and Extended Aged Care at Home (EACH) Packages in addition to HACC social support programs. The provision of HACC assessment, care co-ordination and domestic service delivery has largely remained the domain of local government and requires extensive development of culturally responsive training, guides, tools and resources.

5.4.2 Currently many seniors living at home tend not to access early intervention aged care support as evidenced by the high use of special needs, ethno-specific CACPs often in times of crisis which also indicates their preference for ethno-specific aged care support.

5.4.3 ECCV recognises the need for greater integration and improved continuity of aged care services that provides a seamless culturally responsive pathway of care for seniors with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Recommendation

- **That Government extends the provision of HACC aged care assessment, care co-ordination and home services delivery beyond local government to ethnic community service agencies.**

- **That Government facilitates the integration of HACC and community packaged aged carers.**

- **That Government regulates for increased cultural responsiveness of aged care services.**

- **That Government allocates growth funds for the provision of special needs ethno-specific CACPs and EACH packages.**

5.5   Dementia in Ethnic Communities

5.5.1 The prevalence of dementia by languages other than English spoken at home is predicted to increase six-fold by 2050 (Access Economic 2006).

5.5.2 Risk factors that affect the uptake of mainstream dementia support services for people in ethnic communities are: lack of English, social isolation, insensitivity to their cultural needs, transport, loss of acquired languages and lack of understanding of the concept of dementia (Access Economics 2006).

Recommendations

- **That Government facilitates the targeting of dementia support and education programs at ethnic seniors.**

- **That Government regulates for increased culturally responsive training and resources for mainstream dementia related service providers.**

5.6   Support for Ethnic Family Carers

5.6.1 The Australian Government inquiry report "Who cares?" (Parliamentary Paper 100/2009) shows that 25% of older carers are 'hidden' and unknown to service providers because they do not seek assistance.

5.6.2 Extensive ECCV consultation in partnership with Carers Victoria in 2009 indicated a hidden group of unacknowledged and unrecognised 'ethnic family carers' that required family-focused, culturally responsive respite programs, transport support and information about mental health support.

Recommendations

- That culturally responsive social support and respite programs for seniors, carers and families in ethnic communities be extended.

- That Government allocates resources for transport support and travel allowances for ethnic family carers and care recipients in regional and rural areas.

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6   Residential Aged Care for Ethnic Seniors

6.1   Cultural Support Models in Residential Care

6.1.1 Population trends are leading towards a higher incidence of lonely, culturally diverse older people in aged residential facilities in the next two decades (UNSW 2010). Being a sole non-English speaking resident in a generic aged care facility can be an isolating and dehumanising experience and adversely affects the emotional and physical wellbeing of elderly people.

6.1.2 Research (Deakin University 2010) indicates that respect and cultural contact are key factors in determining the quality of life of older people. In addition, compliance measures for cultural diversity in aged care are seriously under-funded especially for interpreting and translating (Russell Kennedy 2007).

6.1.3 ECCV would like to see the single 'cultural competency standard' within the government regulated residential aged care accreditation process extended across all 44 standards.

6.1.4 ECCV proposes a Cultural Support Model in Residential Aged Care based on learnings from ethno-specific facilities and visitors programs provided by ethnic volunteer programs for example:

- A 'Day Resident Program' in a nearby ethno-specific facility, for non-English speaking older persons who are permanent residents and culturally isolated in a generic facility.
- Ongoing training in culturally responsive aged care for staff and management in residential aged care facilities.
- Human Rights training for management and staff in residential care facilities as a 'diversity risk management strategy' to ensure that residents are not denied their cultural rights.
- Humane and flexible transitions from ethno-specific PAGs in the community to residential care.
- Incentives for bilingual GPs, nurses, and allied health professionals to work in residential aged care facilities.
- The provision of free interpreter services for residential aged care facilities.
- Fostering alliances for community-based bicultural visiting programs and the delivery of cultural meals to isolated and lonely residents.
- Evidence-based research to explore the range and benefits of culturally competent systems in ethno-specific residential aged care homes.

Recommendations

- **That the Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency applies the cultural competency standard across all 44 compliance standards in residential aged care.**

- **That Government provides free interpreter services for residents in residential aged care facilities.**

6.2   Flexible Needs-based Funding Model

6.2.1 ECCV notes that many seniors with culturally diverse backgrounds have had periods of unemployment and low-paid jobs resulting in a reliance on the Aged Pension from Centrelink and limited or no accumulated superannuation. ECCV therefore advocates a flexible needs-based funding model for admission to residential care facilities and for community-based aged care services.

Recommendation

- **That Government considers maintaining a flexible needs-based funding model for residential aged care into the next two decades.**

7 Culturally and Spiritually Responsive End of Life Care

7.1 Culturally Appropriate End of Life Care Planning

7.1.1 Diverse values related to spirituality and ethnicity profoundly affect the way people perceive and handle illness, death, and their practices regarding advance care planning (HIC 2007). In addition ECCV acknowledges that in many ethnic groups end of life decisions are made within a family context.

7.1.2 Whilst patient control and autonomy are often perceived as core values in Western bioethics and important components of end of life care, the autonomy of the patient as a decision maker may not be perceived as relevant to culturally diverse groups of people (HIC 2007).

Recommendations

● That evidence-based research is encouraged into diverse spiritual and cultural care responses to end of life support for people in ethnic communities.

7.2 Palliative Care Support for Ethnic Communities

7.1.1 There is currently a low uptake of palliative care services by people with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Palliative Care Victoria 2010).

7.1.2 Engagement between palliative care services and established ethnic groups, as well as newly emerging ethno-specific and multicultural organisations, is vital to ensuring that older people from diverse backgrounds have access to culturally safe palliative care services, including information, professional support, respite, and access to a flexible funding pool to meet the needs of carers.

7.1.3 Volunteers in palliative care can provide additional emotional and practical support to the ill person and their family. Bilingual and bicultural palliative care volunteers are urgently required to support people from ethnic backgrounds who are facing the end of their life within the community, hospital or aged care facilities.

Recommendations

• That Government allocates resources for culturally responsive training, guides and resources in palliative care services.

• That education about palliative care and related support services is targeted at ethnic communities.

Conclusion

In the 21st century one of Australia's greatest challenges will be caring for its ethnic seniors, a growing ageing group within the community. In a climate where the 2010 Intergenerational Report projects the need for cost-savings in community service provision; where there is greater intersection of the health and aged care sectors; and where there is increasing pressure to deliver culturally responsive services, ECCV proposes a range of policy directions that would refocus the aged care system and ensure older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are able to take part in informed decision making and gain respect for their cultural rights.

ECCV proposes that caring for older multicultural Australians requires a 'Partnerships in Diversity' model based on equal responsibility, entitlements and appropriate resources. The Australian aged care system needs to move towards a mindset where the ethnic elderly as well as ethnic service organisations are seen as partners with equal rights. ECCV would like to see diversity thinking and cultural responsiveness as an automatic mindset of anyone involved with policy and practice in aged care.

A National Cultural Diversity in Ageing Strategy would provide an important whole-of-government influence on caring for older Australians that reflects the diversity of the society. The aged care sector needs to sharpen its multicultural lens, and re-focus a multicultural spotlight to clearly highlight the valuable resources and expertise already developed in specialist ethnic and multicultural service organisations.

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