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**ECCV Submission for the  
Inquiry into Opportunities for Participation  
of Victorian Seniors  
to the  
Family and Community Development Committee  
August 2011**

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) advocates and lobbies all levels of government on behalf of multicultural communities in a range of areas especially aged care.

ECCV represents the views of the Aged Care Policy Committee whose members consist of ethnic aged care providers, multicultural centres and peak bodies with an interest in ethnic aged care.

ECCV and its stakeholders welcome the opportunity to take part in the Inquiry into Opportunities for Participation of Victorian Seniors and make a submission to the Family and Community Development Committee of the Victorian Parliament.

**1. Stakeholder engagement**

This submission focuses on the social and economic participation of senior Victorians from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

ECCV conducted a broad-based consultation for this submission with managers from ethnic aged care agencies, multicultural centres and peak bodies in Victoria with an interest in cultural diversity and ageing issues and a peak health provider.

**2. Backgrounds facts and statistics**

Multicultural Victoria is characterised by the following facts:

- Victorians come from over 200 countries (VMC)
- Victorians follow more than 120 religious faiths (VMC)
- 20 per cent of Victoria's population speaks a language other than English at home (VMC)
- 40 per cent of Victorians over 65 are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Howe 2006)
- From 2011 to 2026 ethnic people over 80 will increase by 59% compared with 29% in the Australian-born population (Gibson AIHW 2001)
- By 2026 one in every four Australians aged over 80 will be from a culturally and linguistically diverse background (Gibson AIHW 2001)

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- A large group of 'hidden ethnic carers' have informal caring roles looking after frail seniors in ethnic communities
- Victorian non-English speaking seniors tend to have low levels of health literacy and internet literacy and are at a higher risk of poor health outcomes such as advanced dementia, depression and incontinence
- There are over 400 ethnic senior citizens clubs in Victoria
- There are about 50 ethno-specific social support and respite programs conducted through the Victorian Home and Community Care (HACC) Program such as Planned Activity Groups (PAGs)
- Victorians from non-English speaking backgrounds make up the highest number of full and part pensioners

### **3. Contributions of ethnic senior Victorians**

Seniors from non-English speaking backgrounds provide significant social capital to Victoria in the form of:

- Grandparents looking after young children to enable their adult children to remain in the workforce
- As informal carers of frail, older people
- As volunteers on Friendly Visiting Programs who provide same-language support for isolated non-English speaking seniors in residential aged care facilities and in the community
- As volunteers in ethnic senior citizens clubs

Older unemployed and retired people from culturally diverse backgrounds form a valuable, untapped local pool that could be trained to enter or re-enter the workforce.

### **4. Three top concerns for senior Victorians from culturally diverse backgrounds**

There is a need for:

- a) Governance support for volunteers in ethnic Senior Citizens Clubs
- b) Community health and internet education via same language social support groups
- c) Targeted up-skilling for the ethnic workforce

### **5. Emerging issues for ethnic seniors for the next 20 years**

The main challenge in the coming decades is to ensure that seniors with culturally diverse backgrounds strengthen their existing social support networks and are able to maintain healthy lifestyles alongside all Victorians. They require:

- Improved health and wellbeing information in community languages
- Recognition of the valuable caring role provided by ethnic seniors
- Lifelong learning opportunities in community languages

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- Succession planning and support for ethnic clubs
- Increased same language social activities
- Targeted migrant workforce re-training
- Improved transport access
- Improved internet literacy

## **6. A snapshot of senior populations in Victoria**

As multicultural as Victoria is, this picture is not commonly reflected in demographic descriptions of Victoria's ageing population. Australians over 65 from culturally diverse backgrounds will experience a growth rate of 44 per cent for 2011 to 2026 which means 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).

## **7. Diversity**

7.1 Culturally diverse older people are missing out on social and economic participation due to:

- social isolation
- varying levels of English
- low levels of literacy even in languages other than English
- lack of information in languages other than English
- no driver's license
- lack of confidence using public transport

7.2 Volunteering opportunities for non-English speaking seniors depend on:

- Strengthening partnerships to create bridges with ethnic groups
- Improved health and wellbeing information
- Improved transport support
- Language services
- Building trust

7.3 Ethno-specific social support programs conducted through the Victorian Home and Community Care (HACC) Program such as PAGs provide a broader role than social support for ethnic communities, as they are an important avenue for community education and information provision in languages other than English.

7.4 Several ethnic seniors citizens clubs are experiencing difficulties with succession planning due to lack of information about how to deal with increased club regulation, financial and legal compliance and complex insurance regulations. As a result some have been forced to close down in the last few years. They require a systematic approach to governance and leadership training.

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- 7.5 These clubs provide a valuable pool of potential volunteers for peer education programs on dementia awareness, seniors' rights and elder abuse prevention programs.
- 7.6 Family dependency is a valuable worldview amongst Victorian ethnic communities that provides a wealth of unrecognised caring roles such as grandparents caring for young children to enable their adult children to stay in the workforce and as 'hidden ethnic carers' of frail and elderly people from a non-English speaking background.
- 7.7 Strategies to be considered for improved social participation of ethnic seniors include:
- Building on the existing PAGs and culturally and linguistically relevant social support programs
  - Improved opportunities for linking ethnic senior citizens clubs with programs in local libraries
  - Increased community education programs in languages other than English
  - Improved partnership opportunities between ethnic seniors citizens clubs, National Seniors Association of Australia (NSA), the Council on The Ageing (COTA) and the U3A
  - Improved opportunities for non-English speaking grandparents to participate in playgroup networks

## **8. Ageing well**

### **8.1 Best practice model**

Several best practice models for positive and active ageing exist in the ethnic aged care community sector. For example the Moorleigh Ethnic Senior Citizens Centre in the south eastern metropolitan area of Melbourne provides a wide range of activities for various ethnic groups that focus on same language social interaction; computer training; multilingual health literacy information; and fitness for seniors in a well outfitted gym; as well as day outings. Ethno-specific sessions are provided for speakers of Greek, Arabic, Italian and Chinese to mention but a few. The Moorleigh Centre is located in a converted secondary school building. It is a useful model that could be replicated in other areas with minimal costs that cover an appropriate venue, a number of coordinators, support funding and public transport access.

- 8.2 In order to revitalise Victoria's ethnic senior citizens clubs, and largely untapped culturally diverse volunteer pool, a number of paid coordinators are needed in peak bodies and multicultural centres to harness and develop them into a dynamic network for better social participation.

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Key issues to assist non-English speaking Victorians plan for ageing well are:

- Health literacy and community education in languages other than English
- Computer and internet training in languages other than English
- Strengthening existing culturally relevant social programs
- Leadership and governance training for ethnic clubs
- Bilingual peer volunteer training

## **9. Enabling participation**

- 9.1 Effectively integrating approaches to ageing requires building trust with ethnic seniors clubs as well as more cultural awareness training for local government and local health providers to develop inclusive diversity planning and practice.

More resourcing and coordination of ethnic senior citizens clubs is required that focuses on leadership planning assistance around financial and legal compliance and succession planning assistance for younger retirees in ethnic communities.

- 9.2 Some good models exist in Neighbourhood Houses that provide access to club incorporation compliance and networking. Simple step-by-step guides need to be provided in plain English and multilingual formats for people from non-English speaking backgrounds for example on how to be a member of a committee; about incorporation rules and grant submission writing.

- 9.3 Improved resourcing is required for the coordination of ethnic and multicultural organisations to harness and strengthen ethnic clubs and PAGs. Currently coordinators in ethnic and multicultural centres are under-resourced and overstretched, for example one large ethno-specific agency is able to engage only one officer to support 101 clubs which effectively averages out to three days a week per club in one year. That officer is restricted to devoting considerable time to assisting clubs process forms rather than doing much more sustainable community development and leadership work.

## **10. Health and wellbeing – key enablers**

We are living in times of transition where older people benefit from improved health and wellbeing. People in ethnic communities have traditionally held cultural perceptions of family dependency as they grow older. If Victorians from culturally diverse backgrounds have the prospect to work till they are in their 70s and to live 20 years longer, they need to be given the chance to explore what their new identity as actively engaged seniors could be. Even

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their ethnic senior citizens clubs require a transition time to move from simply socialising to more productive activities. The Victorian Government should facilitate partnership opportunities between universities and ethnic and multicultural organisations to initiate research on those changing roles.

Key enablers for improved health and wellbeing in ethnic communities are:

- Better access to information in languages other than English
- More same language, same cultural social support opportunities
- Time and resources to enable ethnic senior citizens clubs to work through transition periods
- Research into the changing perceptions of ageing in ethnic communities

## **11. Community and social participation**

Victoria has an extensive network of well-established ethnic community welfare agencies that are members of ECCV, as well as a range of multicultural centres such as New Hope, Spectrum and various Migrant Resource Centres in metropolitan and rural and regional areas. These organisations have trusted links with ethnic senior citizens clubs and coordinate ethno-specific PAGES. Their resources are already overstretched. They require additional resources to deliver more effective volunteer leadership programs, health and computer literacy programs. The coordination of peer volunteers programs would be beneficial in ethnic clubs in the areas of dementia and elder abuse prevention community education. This depends in meticulous coordination with public transport routes as many potential volunteers do not drive cars.

## **12. Economic participation**

Many culturally diverse senior Victorians who are not active in the workforce had fragmented working lives, did not participate in the workforce and filled unskilled jobs. They form a potential local pool of people who could be trained to enter or re-enter the workforce.

We need to move beyond the general attitude in society about workforce re-training which is 'white collar' based. Many people from non-English speaking backgrounds have been pushed into retirement due to lack of computer-based skills. The post war migrants filled many jobs in the construction industry and low skilled jobs in the manufacturing sector. If older Australians are to be seen as an asset to be valued rather than a problem to be solved then, as they become older, those people need real opportunities for re-training to enable them to participate in other types of work.

Successful models exist in Victoria's ethnic organisations and multicultural centres that are Registered Training Organisations and offer older migrants a combination of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, certificate

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courses in aged care and subsequent job placement. Older people from non-English speaking backgrounds lack self-esteem but have high levels of trust in ethnic agencies and prefer such programs. They have had successful outcomes where mature aged people from non-English speaking backgrounds have received jobs and employers have valued their maturity and life experiences.

### **13. Barriers to participation**

Many older people from non-English speaking backgrounds who settled in Australia during the decades of the assimilation policy in the 1950s and 60s missed out on English language teaching and settlement support services. They were made to feel unpopular if they publicly expressed their cultural identity in those years. As a result they established their own ethnic community welfare and support services and did not develop strategies for connecting with local government services and other networks.

Research commissioned by ECCV through Monash University (Radermacher et al 2008 and 2010) exploring partnership opportunities shows that older people from non-English speaking backgrounds have a preference for ethno-specific social and support services.

#### **13.1 Social participation**

Barriers to social participation are:

- Social isolation
- Varying levels of English and low literacy
- Lack of information in languages other than English
- Difficulties with public transport

Regarding lifelong learning and social support the University of the Third Age (U3A) has not been successful for older people from non-English speaking backgrounds. Innovative approaches are needed to form partnerships with U3A and the ethnic community sector. The CALD Senior Surfers Program conducted via Vicnet and the State Library of Victoria provides a successful model for engaging Victorian ethnic communities in greater social participation. The U3A and the CALD Senior Surfers models could be adapted to similar programs via local libraries that are targeted specifically at ethnic communities.

#### **13.2 Workforce participation**

Barriers to workforce participation are:

- The cost of courses for retraining
- Lack of interpreters for form filling, work compliance and inductions to access jobs

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- Insufficient flexible arrangements in the workforce to enable informal caring roles to continue
- Lack of easy access to affordable transport
- The cost of re-entering the workforce for people on pensions

### 13.3 Transport

Lack of easy and affordable transport options are barriers to inclusive participation for all Victorians. Older people from non-English speaking background have reduced confidence in using public transport due to:

- Poor English
- Being housebound due to no driver's license
- Transitioning from being a driver to not being a driver

### 13.4 Suggested solutions:

- One-to-one same language travel companions to assist older non-English speakers attend leisure and entertainment activities especially in the Central Business District (CBD) of Melbourne
- Better multilingual promotion of peak cultural events such as:
  - Ethnic festival at the Immigration Museum
  - Melbourne's Food and Wine Festival
  - Melbourne's International Flower and Garden Show
  - Melbourne's International Comedy Festival
  - Melbourne's International Film Festival
  - Victorian Seniors Festival and related World Music Concert
- Coordinated travel and transport support for seniors during these seasonal events

## 13. Looking to the future

Respect for Victoria's cultural diversity and better bridging partnerships are the keys to improved opportunities for participation of Victoria's seniors. Recognition and respect for informal caring roles in ethnic communities would facilitate more flexible workforce arrangements.

Capacity building and improved partnerships are required for existing social support programs in ethnic communities. People from culturally diverse backgrounds would be empowered through additional resources for ethnic and multicultural organisations to coordinate and support existing seniors' networks especially through governance training.

Research is needed that examines the transitions and changing attitudes needed to better engage Victoria's culturally diverse seniors. This would provide guidance for encouraging Victorian ethnic seniors to re-enter the

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workforce, increase their volunteering and improve their health and wellbeing, and lead to a harmonious society of happy and productive seniors.

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