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Eccv Response
to
Productivity Commission Draft Report
Caring for Older Australians
March 2011

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (eccv) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Productivity Commission's draft report *Caring for Older Australians* at the public hearing on 21 March in Melbourne.

About eccv

The eccv is a state-wide peak advocacy body that lobbies all levels of government on behalf of multicultural communities in a range of areas such as aged care. For over 30 years eccv has remained the principal liaison point between ethnic communities, government and the wider community in Victoria. The eccv has been a key player in building Victoria as a successful, harmonious and multicultural society.

The eccv membership consists of approximately 200 organisations that represent over 60 ethnicities and 65,000 members, organisations with an interest in these areas, and individuals who support eccv. The majority of those members are Not For Profit (NFP) community service organisations. They provide services in areas such as aged care services, migration services, discrimination, community harmony, employment, education and training, health and community services, law and justice, and arts and culture.

This response represents a broad-based consultation with members of the eccv Aged Care Policy Committee that consists of aged care providers in ethnic and multicultural organisations and peak bodies with an interest in ethnic aged care, and includes input from eccv members.

21st century aged care

The eccv commends the Productivity Commission draft report on its positive and hopeful approach to meeting the needs of older people from non-English speaking (culturally and linguistically diverse) backgrounds. There is room for improvement, however, to better embed an inclusive cultural diversity approach based on the following premises:

- a) Australia's aged care reforms should reflect an acceptance that Australia is a multicultural nation. In February 2011 the Government released its new multicultural policy *The People of Australia* recognising the amazing breadth and diversity of Australia's society. It reaffirms unwavering support for a culturally diverse country based on equality and a fair go for all Australians. It makes sense,

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therefore, that the aged care reforms are developed in line with that policy.

- b) The NFP sector, in particular ethnic and multicultural organisations have been key drivers of our culturally diverse aged care services. In 2010 the Australian Government launched its *National Compact with the Third Sector* providing a framework for improved collaboration between Government and the NFP sector. The aged care reforms should build on the invaluable contribution of the Third Sector.
- c) Cultural diversity needs to be seen as the core business of the aged care sector. Diversity is about much more than interpreter and languages services as referenced to the 'Gateway' draft recommendations. It is about the Australian Government's vision of a socially inclusive society in which all Australians feel valued and have the opportunity to participate fully in the life of our society. It is time to move beyond the mainstream versus special needs model. Ideally in the 21st century 'diversity in the mainstream' would represent 'business as usual'. It seems reasonable that the draft recommendations should reflect such thinking.

Positive aspects of the draft report

In the draft report *Caring for Older Australians*, eccv welcomes the recognition of:

- The increasing population diversity as a driver of future demand
- The future challenges of diversity expectations and preferences in aged care
- The need for the workforce to have close connections with the cultural backgrounds of their clients
- The costs associated with catering for diversity

The eccv welcomes the draft report's fundamental reforms that support future quality aged care for frail, older people from non-English speaking backgrounds. These are mainly in the Draft Recommendations 9.1 and 9.2 and focus on:

- Ensuring access to information and assessment services
- Interpreter services
- Professional development to increase cultural awareness
- Culturally appropriate diagnostic tools and culturally appropriate assessment of care needs

The eccv consultations conducted a considered analysis of these proposals from a provider perspective. Some suggested solutions for improvements to the structure of the recommendations and implementation processes follow.

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Reform improvements

Australia's aged care reforms face several challenges. Our suggested improvements to the Productivity Commission's proposed reforms to ensure better continuity of care, choice and dignity for older Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds are in the areas of:

- Embedding broader cultural diversity approaches into the Australian Seniors Gateway Agency
- Building on ethnic and multicultural NFP expertise as approved providers of continuous care
- Positively linking diversity costs to language services
- Clearer specification of culturally appropriate diagnostic tools
- Local solutions to workforce shortages
- Financial safety net recommendations
- Culturally inclusive research policies

Suggested solutions

1. Diversity as core business

The focus on the 'special needs' of non-English speaking frail and older people seems a welcome part of the draft report in the short-term. To be more sustainable, catering for cultural diversity should become the core business of the broader aged care system.

Solutions include:

Embedding the catering for diversity into all the recommendations rather than having them as a 'special needs' add-on.

2. Provider Choice

The Productivity Commission's focus on the continuity of care and choice for older Australians and their ability to access aged care services means more than just choice of service delivery type. Ultimately it is also about choice of aged care provider. For many years the work carried out by the ethnic and multicultural organisations, in the NFP sector, has been crucial in improving the wellbeing of older people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Historically some NFPs have been viewed as contractors by local government and aged care providers rather than equal partners in culturally responsive service delivery. The aged care reforms provide the Government with the opportunity to include new ways of incorporating the strengths in the NFP sector, in this instance, the ethnic and multicultural community organisations, alongside local government and health sector in aged care service delivery.

Currently in Victoria, the provision of aged care via ethnic and multicultural organisations is limited to only about 50 ethno-specific HACC Social Support and Respite providers and sporadic 'special needs' aged care packages. Many NFPs have the capacity to provide

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a seamless continuity of care in a culturally diverse framework that includes the full range of basic support, personal care, specialised care, carer support and even a role in client assessment.

Solutions include:

- Increased opportunities for the ethnic and multicultural NFP organisations to join the aged care industry as approved aged care providers of broader service delivery.
- Regulations to ensure effective partnerships between ethnic and multicultural organisations, and generic aged care providers to ensure adequate continuity of care for older people from non-English speaking backgrounds, their carers and families.

3. Language services – Draft Recommendation 9.1

The draft report has made important recommendations that support increased interpreter services and translated material for people from non-English speaking backgrounds. At the same time it recognises the additional costs associated with catering for diversity. The aged care reforms need to take this point a step further. They should devise a strategy that positively links the cost of diversity work to the delivery of language services.

Solutions include:

- Mandatory reporting and equitable policy and planning that appropriately budgets for and implements language services.
- Recommendations to develop a model of standardizing the remuneration of bilingual staff working in aged care.

4. Australian Seniors Gateway Agency – Draft Recommendations 1.9, 8.1 and 9.1

The proposed Australian Seniors Gateway Agency (ASGA) is important for older frail people from non-English speaking backgrounds as it provides information, assessment, care coordination and carer referral services. Older non-English speaking people tend to be under-represented in early intervention care such as Home and Community Care (HACC) or they are over-represented in the higher care, 'special needs' aged care packages, often in response to a situation of crisis. It is the entry point into the service that makes a difference for improved access to early interventions and adequate retention of people from cultural diverse backgrounds.

The Gateway Agency would play a key role in the community education of older people from non-English speaking backgrounds on healthy ageing and services information.

Solutions include:

- Face-to-face bilingual support linked to the ASGA via NFPs e.g. the inclusion of home visits.
- Ensuring a greater role for ethnic and multicultural NFPs as local, trusted agencies in the front end of the Gateway.

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- Building on, and creating Gateway links with programs such as the Victorian bilingual Support Access Pilot Project that assists non-English speaking older people navigate and access aged care services.
- Funded ASGA pilots to trial effective gateway pathways for specific special needs population groups that include service delivery via ethnic and multicultural organisations.
- Cultural competency training for ASGA staff specifically in the areas of access, care planning, dementia identification and appropriate cultural responses.
- Ensuring the Gateway Agencies provide multilingual health information promotions targeted at ethnic communities.

5. Cultural diversity assessment/diagnostic tools - Draft Recommendation 9.1

The eccv welcomes the important focus on cultural diversity diagnostic tools in the draft proposals. For practical purposes these need further clarification as the areas of dementia and assessment require separate tools.

Solutions include:

- The development and inclusion of a cultural diversity assessment tool as part of the standardized service coordination tools used in the intake, referral and assessment processes (i.e. current SCTT tools in the Victorian HACC Program).
- The utilization of cultural diversity dementia diagnostic tools such as the Rowland Universal Dementia Assessment Scale (RUDAS) designed to minimize the effects of cultural learning and language diversity in the assessment of cognitive performance.

6. Cultural awareness professional development - Draft Recommendation 9.2

The eccv commends the Productivity Commission for ensuring aged care staff undertake professional development to increase their cultural awareness. It is important to account for the turnover of staff in the aged care industry in relation to training. An effective mechanism is needed to ensure that such professional development is a regular on-going part of the services.

Solutions include:

- Embedding cultural awareness professional development as part of the regulated Aged Care Quality and Compliance standards.

7. Local workforce expansion - Draft Recommendations 11

The eccv supports the draft report's reference to the use of skilled workers through sponsored migration programs to expand the aged care workforce. There is also a considerable untapped local workforce in Australia's non-English speaking community that would benefit from

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specially targeted ESL (English as a Second Language) and vocational training packages.

Solutions include:

- Building the capacity of ethnic and multicultural organisations that are Registered Training Organisations to improve the recruitment, training and retention of bilingual aged care workers by targeting certificate courses in aged care at both mature aged and newly arrived people from non-English speaking backgrounds.
- A twofold approach to cultural awareness training for local aged care staff to work better with a diverse workforce as well as training for newly engaged overseas staff in Australian cultural work practices to ensure a good workforce transition.

8. Safety net – Draft Recommendation 1

The eccv welcomes the reference to a safety net for low income earners accessing aged care services. Many people from non-English speaking backgrounds had sporadic employment and women, in particular, had limited opportunities in the workforce. As a result they did not build up personal wealth or nest egg savings such as superannuation and feel anxious about their future care. It is important to retain a safety net component for low income groups in the draft proposals to ensure equity of access to aged care services, and especially to residential care.

Solutions include:

- The incorporation of clear recommendations concerning the safety net for low income groups.
- A multilingual information campaign to educate people from non-English speaking backgrounds of their options in aged care.

8. Aged care policy research – Draft Recommendation 13.1

The eccv welcomes the idea of a national clearing house for aged care data. Unfortunately the cultural diversity aspect is often omitted in aged care research due to additional costs of translations or time needed to engage non-English speakers. Data collection is sometimes inadequate as variables such as 'country of origin' and 'language spoken' create dilemmas that do not adequately match people's aged care preferences. Subsequently, the results and findings of evidence-based research provide an inaccurate picture of the community's needs.

Solutions include:

- Regulations that stipulate the inclusion of proportions of diversity groups in aged care research.

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9. Reform implementation

The implementation of a cultural diversity framework in the aged care reforms needs to build in explicitly stated strategies and accountability measures. Interpreter services, diversity diagnostic tools and information strategies are not going to solve the inequities of the aged care system faced by culturally and linguistically disadvantaged and marginalised groups if they are left open to general interpretation by different providers.

'Equity in diversity' needs to be the key focus area of all the planning, implementation and evaluation processes of the new aged care forms.

Solutions include:

- Ensuring multicultural representation on the proposed Aged Care Implementation Taskforce
- Mandatory cultural diversity standards applied to quality regulation and accreditation process and systems in aged care

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