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Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
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Submission to Senate Community Affairs References Committee Inquiry on Future of Australia's aged care sector workforce

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Submitted by



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This submission

Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) is the peak policy advocacy body for Victoria's ethnic and multicultural organisations and communities. ECCV drafted this submission collaboratively with Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre, CO.AS.IT Italian Assistance Association Melbourne, Italian Services Institute, the New Hope Foundation, and Australian Croatian Community Services.

The submission focuses on:

- Creating a culturally competent and inclusive aged care workforce;
- Attracting and retaining a culturally competent and inclusive workforce;
- Cultural competency of workforce in rural and regional towns and areas;
- Role and registration of Registered Training Organisations (RTO's).

Creating a culturally competent and inclusive aged care workforce

Australia is a multicultural nation. According to the 2011 Census 26 percent of Victoria's population were born overseas and almost 47 percent of Victorians were either born overseas, or have a parent who was born overseas. Acknowledging and celebrating cultural diversity is as relevant as enshrining access and equity in service responses.

It is imperative that aged care workforce strategies take into consideration cultural, linguistic and spiritual diversity aspects of aged care workers and older clients from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Recommendation 1

That aged care workforce initiatives and strategies are inclusive of Australia's multicultural aged care workforce and older clients from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Recommendation 2

That research design on the future of Australia's aged care workforce incorporates mechanisms that ensure equitable participation and is inclusive of the voice of older people and workforce from multicultural backgrounds.

Recommendation 3

That culturally inclusive training, such as by Partners in Culturally Appropriate Care program, is continued and a whole of organisation approach to deliver culturally appropriate services is supported.

Approximately a third of Victorian seniors are from non-English speaking and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. They may revert to their mother tongue as they age and often do not speak English well.

Ethno-specific, multicultural and culturally inclusive organisations employ bilingual workers to enable and facilitate communication with clients and leverage on the cultural capitals of the workforce. Community embedded ethnic and multicultural organisations and its multilingual workforce are often the first point of call for seniors from non-English speaking backgrounds due to long-term relationships and established networks and trust. They also provide vital social support and participation, direct care, information, assistance in navigating aged care system and facilitate healthy ageing.

Ethno-specific and multicultural agencies have been advocating for ethno-specific and culturally appropriate care delivered by bilingual, bi-cultural, and spiritually responsive workforce as an important pillar of quality and excellence in aged care.

In light of the increasing multicultural ageing population and the current low number of bilingually trained aged care workers, Australia needs to invest in a culturally responsive aged care workforce.

ECCV suggests training job seekers from non-English speaking backgrounds in certificate courses in aged care, including at Certificate IV and degree level, as they have cultural and linguistic know-how to work with culturally diverse clients. This is also relevant to more recently arrived communities which need culturally specific aged care workers. An effective pathway is to provide an entry point to certificate courses through ESL classes in ethnic and multicultural organisations, followed by placement opportunities and job support.

Recommendation 4

That certificate training courses in aged care have an in-built cultural competency unit as minimum standard.

Recommendation 5

That bilingual certificate training courses in aged care are established through partnerships between and input from education providers, ethno-specific and multicultural agencies, Ethnic and Multicultural Communities' Councils, and the Partners in Culturally Appropriate Care program.

Recommendation 6

That certificate training courses in aged care include practical placements in ethno-specific and multicultural agencies.

Attracting and retaining a culturally competent and inclusive workforce

Employees from non-English speaking backgrounds are more likely to seek employment and are likely to be more effective in an organisation where the employer is inclusive of and responsive to people's cultural traditions and know-how. Creating a culturally inclusive work environment encourages diverse viewpoints and promotes a welcoming workplace.

In Victoria, Home and Community Care (HACC) providers, develop diversity plans to meet needs of a diverse clientele and workforce.

Recommendation 7

That aged care service providers design diversity plans with a view to capitalising on people's diverse skills and responding to client preferences.

Cultural competency of workforce in rural and regional towns and areas

Many regional centres in Victoria are diverse in terms of cultures, languages spoken and spiritual beliefs. Migrant Resource Centres and Ethnic and Multicultural Communities' Councils in regional areas have been attracting culturally competent staff and working with clients from non-English speaking backgrounds including in Settlement Services and in facilitating access to aged care services. Some ethno-specific aged care providers from metro Melbourne maintain small offices in regional centres which enables them to engage with and service their regional clients.

The Partners in Culturally Appropriate Care program and in some cases regional Victorian Ethnic and Multicultural Communities' Councils have been working in close partnership with aged care agencies and healthcare providers to develop regional specific resources, strategies, training and network that support mainstream organisations on culturally appropriate care and practices.

Recommendation 8

That training and network opportunities relating to culturally inclusive practices in aged care is delivered and provided in regional and rural areas.

Role and registration of RTO's

The role of Registered Training Organisations (RTO's) has been of a particular concern to the Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre in Dandenong. Many new arrivals are attracted to aged care certificate courses; however, there is concern about the variability in course requirements, cuts in the delivery of curriculum and poor regulation of providers.

In some cases, RTO's have not been fulfilling training standards as stipulated by the Australian Skills and Qualifications Authority standards. There have been cases of providers delivering Certificate 4 in Aged Care courses in a significantly shorter period than regulations require.

Many aged care service providers will not consider job applicants who hold qualifications from particular education providers. As a consequence, students and former students from multicultural backgrounds have limited access to jobs in aged care and at the same time are no longer eligible for further training. Furthermore, in some cases students are not adequately prepared in terms of English language skills and training pre-enrolment.

Recommendation 9

That the quality of RTO courses are audited comprehensively including by obtaining feedback by current and past students from non-English speaking backgrounds including on employability after finishing aged care certificate courses.

Recommendation 10

That people from non-English backgrounds have access to comprehensive English language training before entering certificate training courses in aged care.

Further reading

- Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing, 2011, *Working with Bilingual Staff in Aged Care - Practice Guide*, available at: <http://www.culturaldiversity.com.au/dmdocuments/Bilingual%20Workers%20Practice%20Guide.pdf>.
- Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, 2014, *Multicultural Aged Care Strategy*, available at: http://www.eccv.org.au/library/ECCV's_Multicultural_Aged_Care_Strategy.pdf.
- Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, 2011, *ECCV Submission for the Inquiry into Opportunities for Participation of Victorian Seniors to the Family and Community Development Committee*, available at: http://www.eccv.org.au/library/file/policy/ECCV_submission_to_Inquiry_into_Opps_for_Partn_of_Vic_Seniors_2011.pdf.
- Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA), 2013, *Harmony in the workplace*, available at: http://www.fecca.org.au/images/Documents/Harmony/full_harmony%20in%20the%20workplace_delivering%20the%20diversity%20dividend.pdf.
- Leading Age Services Australia (LASA) Victoria, 2014, *CALD Employee Engagement & Cross Cultural Resources List - October 2014*, available at: http://www.lasavictoria.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/CALD-Employee-Engagement_Cross-Cultural-Resources-List_October-2014.pdf.
- Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, *Diversity planning and practice*, available at <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/ageing-and-aged-care/home-and-community-care/hacc-quality-and-service-development/diversity-in-hacc/diversity-planning-practice>.
- Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2016, *Population and Migration*, available at: <http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/population-and-migration>.

Websites of submitting organisations

- Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria on www.eccv.org.au
- Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre on www.smrc.org.au
- CO.AS.IT Italian Assistance Association Melbourne on www.coasit.com.au
- Italian Services Institute on <http://italianservicesinstitute.com.au>
- The New Hope Foundation on www.newhope.asn.au
- Australian Croatian Community Services on www.accs.asn.au.

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