

ECCV's response to Commissioner for Senior Victorians' *Ageing is everyone's business, a report on isolation and loneliness among senior Victorians*

April 2016

The report

The Commissioner for Senior Victorians' report titled *Ageing is everyone's business, a report on isolation and loneliness among senior Victorians* needs to be inclusive of Victorian seniors from non-English speaking backgrounds, their families and carers.

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria Inc. (ECCV) is the *Voice of Multicultural Victoria*. ECCV is the peak policy advocacy body for Victoria's ethnic and multicultural communities in Victoria with a membership of 220 organisations and individuals.

ECCV believes that integrating cultural, linguistic, and spiritual diversity is fundamental in creating the report's *building blocks for action* to achieve healthy ageing outcomes for older Victorians from non-English backgrounds. Providing access to healthy ageing support for older people from non-English speaking backgrounds and highlighting their contributions to the Victorian community is essential in promoting an inclusive and whole-of-community approach in the context of the Commissioner for Senior Victorians' report.

ECCV believes interventions to reduce social isolation and loneliness as outlined in the report, need to include culturally inclusive strategies directed at seniors from non-English speaking backgrounds, their families, carers and social networks.

The report proposes an integrated and co-ordinated approach where resource allocations for an ageing population are considered in a planned and consistent manner across all government departments. ECCV wishes to work with the Commissioner for Senior Victorians in developing integrated policy responses directed at seniors from non-English speaking backgrounds.

This needs to include:

- Ethnic seniors' clubs and their sustainability;
- Computer literacy among seniors from non-English speaking backgrounds;
- Entry into workforce by older people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Ethnic seniors' clubs

There are over 500 ethnic and multicultural seniors' clubs and incorporated associations in Victoria providing social participation and informal social support for seniors from non-English speaking backgrounds. Ethnic senior clubs are mostly run by volunteer seniors for their peers, have established local relationships and are trusted by their community.

Ethnic seniors' clubs play an important role for seniors from multicultural backgrounds as they are a place for

- Same language and same culture socialising that enhance social-emotional wellbeing, sense of belonging and combat social isolation;
- Enhancing wellness for older people, as they continue to engage with people and friends that understand their culture and the activities they enjoy;
- Sharing of information that enhances healthy and active ageing.

The ECCV Aged Care Policy Advisory Committee on Aged Care has convened a Working Group on Ethnic Seniors' Clubs which has consulted widely with representatives of ethnic seniors' clubs, ethno-specific aged care service providers, multicultural organisations, and mainstream agencies.

The working group found

- There is a high need to support and resource volunteers of ethnic seniors' clubs;
- There is a concern over the lack of support for succession planning in ethnic seniors' clubs;
- Ethnic seniors' clubs play a key role in promoting the health and wellbeing of seniors and, therefore, are an asset for the Victorian community;
- Clubs encounter difficulties in responding to reporting requirements and access to online information, including MyCAV.

Ageing is everyone's business can provide a framework that helps ethnic seniors' clubs to have access to targeted support to sustain ethnic seniors' clubs.

Computer literacy

ECCV emphasises that seniors from non-English speaking backgrounds lack opportunities to access culturally appropriate training on how to access internet and computers.

Many people came to Australia as refugees and displaced persons and have limited English and literacy levels. Learning about the Internet, Skype, You Tube and multilingual online podcasts provides them with access to lifelong learning in alternative formats and preferred languages as well as access to consumer driven e-Health programs.

It is critical that the implementation of *Ageing is everyone's business* facilitates and promotes culturally appropriate computer literacy programs through partnerships with telecommunication businesses, local libraries, and ethno-specific and multicultural agencies and seniors' clubs.

Mature aged workforce

ECCV believes it is vital to ensure access of older people from a non-English speaking background in participating in the workforce. As more ethnic baby boomers are retiring and with the growing trend of people living healthier and longer, there is a need to provide opportunities for older people from non-English speaking backgrounds to retrain and re-enter the workforce.

Often older people from non-English speaking backgrounds lack the confidence to be retrained. One of the effective pathways is to provide an entry point to certificate courses through ESL classes in ethnic and multicultural organisations, followed by job placement opportunities and support.

Recommendations

The Victorian Government is asked to consider the following recommendations in implementing *Ageing is everyone's business*

ECCV recommends

- That the Victorian Government provides volunteer and governance support to Victoria's ethnic and multicultural seniors' clubs through existing ethno-specific and multicultural seniors' clubs networks;
- That the Victorian Government encourages internet kiosks and Internet training targeted at older people from non-English speaking backgrounds.
- That the Victorian Government provides incentives for recruitment, training, and job placement initiatives for older people from non-English speaking backgrounds in ethno-specific and multicultural organisations.

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