

ECCV Response to The Victorian Government's Royal Commission into Family Violence Report, April 2016

April 2016

ECCV congratulates the Victorian Government on producing this comprehensive report and including a section on cultural diversity and faith communities. ECCV sees this report as an opportunity to strengthen the Victorian Government's response to family violence in culturally diverse communities.

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria Inc. (ECCV) is the voice of multicultural Victoria and the peak policy advocacy body for eight regional ethnic community councils and up to 220 members including ethnic and multicultural organisations across Victoria since 1974. During this time, we have been the link between multicultural communities, government and the wider community.

Terms of Reference

ECCV provides the following comments on the terms of reference in the final report of the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

ECCV found that the terms of reference of the Royal Commission were sufficiently broad to capture issues relevant to CALD communities. It specifically mentioned the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Overview

ECCV found the consultation efforts with CALD communities to be adequate to effectively inform recommendations but noted in our original submission to the Commission a systemic lack of data outside of what is collected by ethnic-specific organisations.

ECCV notes the importance and substance of the final Report and are pleased to see culturally diverse family violence issues included in the final recommendations.

Through ECCV's Women's Policy Sub-Committee we noted the good will of the recommendations and congratulate all who worked on the final report. The sector notes that culturally diverse family violence issues remain separated from the bulk of the recommendations, rather than integrated across the recommendations.

ECCV welcomed the section on cultural diversity and its related recommendations numbers 156 to 162, as well as the section on faith issues with recommendations 163 to 165. We note however, that they more "guidelines" than recommendations to impact an change the current system.

As noted, a systemic lack of data outside of what is collected by ethnic-specific organisations exists, especially across government services. Some of the words and perspectives in the recommendations reflect this lack of data and culturally diverse awareness.

Priorities

- Regarding the cultural diversity recommendations in the final report, ECCV would like to see a percentage of overall resources for each recommendation to reflect the demographics of the State and therefore the percentage of culturally diverse family violence.
- As a second priority ECCV advocates for more time to allow culturally diverse organisations to consult with families around the pertinent issues in the final report.
- ECCV recommends better resourcing of multicultural family violence service providers to implement the recommendations in the report.
- ECCV highlights the importance of including representatives from culturally diverse providers on higher level working groups to design and implement the recommendations.

ECCV Community Feedback

A meeting of the ECCV Women's Policy Sub Committee was convened on the 8th April 2016. It included a broad based representation of ethnic and multicultural organisations, health and women's centres and multicultural family violence service providers.

Participants provided the following feedback about the Royal Commission final report.

The final report is a very large document and the sector requires more time to work through the recommendations to respond in detail.

The absence of current data collection may result in "CALD family violence" issues being addressed last, despite having similar critical levels of need of universal services.

Of 7 key cultural diversity recommendations identified by our committee, 4 were for interpreters. A concern of this point is that "cultural competence" goes beyond interpreters and may result in creations of "gateways for referral services", rather than immediate relief for culturally diverse women and families to meet the compliance dates for the final recommendations.

Recommendation 162 used the term "female genital mutilation" (FGM). ECCV consultation find that FGM is an inappropriate term and advocates for the use of "female genital cutting" (FGC). Furthermore, linking FGC with domestic violence disempowers multicultural women's groups who are working with women who see FGC as a cultural issue.

There was no mention of new funding with the announcement of the Royal Commission's final report. There remains some confusion about unspent funding from 2015 for family violence.

ECCV committee members noted that while consultation with culturally diverse communities and service providers was made, there was still significant need during consultation for multicultural voices to "bang the table to be heard" across the full range of issues raised by the terms of reference. This point was specifically made to address culturally diverse and refugee and women's issues around family violence.

There was still a lack of knowledge across government policy makers about culturally diverse family violence issues and how they connect with the terms of reference. Similarly, for universal services, their need for culturally aware skills remains urgent and they feel out of their depths to meet critical needs from diverse communities.

Feedback to ECCV found a lack of understanding of the role that ethno-specific services provide and, on recommendations involving confidentiality, some intimation on the reliability of multicultural family violence services.

Safety hubs are an area where ECCV and its stakeholders see an opportunity to provide immediate relief, referral, and prevention programs and data collection.

While applauding Recommendation 162, ECCV would like to see more attention focused on women without permanent residence as the recommendation is a guide only that does not respond to critical incidents for this group of women.

Given the breadth, scope and size of the final report, multicultural family service providers need more time to effectively respond to the final report to assess the effectiveness of the recommendations. This includes any omissions or oversights.

Next Steps

- There needs to be recognition of an increase in the reporting of family violence in culturally diverse and refugee communities. This requires adequate resourcing of multicultural family violence services to enable them to respond appropriately.
- Workforce strengthening is required to enable the cultural competency training and bilingual support in the recommendations.
- ECCV still has a strong advocacy role towards government and politicians and there is still a lack of knowledge concerning ethnic and multicultural service provision in this area.

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