

Regional ECC Forum Report



Introduction

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria Inc. (ECCV) is the ***Voice of Multicultural Victoria***.

As the peak body for ethnic and multicultural organisations in Victoria, we are proud to have been the key advocate for culturally diverse communities in Victoria since 1974. For 40 years we have been the link between multicultural communities, government and the wider community. Our membership includes eight rural and regional ethnic communities' councils (ECC) in Victoria.

We aim for a culturally diverse and harmonious society that is just, fair and inclusive where all people have the opportunity to participate in and contribute to, community life. We advocate for freedom, respect, equality and dignity for multicultural communities and strive with others, to build a strong, vibrant Victorian community.

Regional and Metropolitan ECC Forum

ECCV held the 2015 Regional and Metropolitan ECC Forum on 25 August 2015 in Carlton. The Forum aimed to explore strategies for improving the coordination of settlement services in regional Victoria. The Forum also discussed the matter of managing their local challenges. There was further discussion for strategies on how to enhance policy and advocacy activities between regional ECCs and Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV).

Participants

Six of the eight rural and regional ECCs attended the Forum. They were:

- Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council – Ballarat
- Diversitat – Geelong
- Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District – Shepparton

- Gippsland Ethnic Communities' Council – Gippsland
- Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services – Bendigo
- North East Multicultural Association – Wangaratta
- Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities' Council – Mildura

Presentations

There were several presentations at this forum, including government representatives who presented on the changing government policies and initiatives. This Forum is a platform for regional specific issues and provides opportunities for interaction between regional ECCs and government representatives.

The Hon. Mr Robin Scott, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship opened the Forum and updated the participants on the State government's strategies in promotion of multiculturalism and diversity in his new portfolio. The participants also listened to other speakers who provided an overview of their roles and its relevance to regional ECCs. Speakers included Ernest Zanatta from Department of Immigration and Border Protection, Bernadette Ryan, State Manager, Department of Social Services, Hakan Akyol, Director, Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship and Grahame Leonard, Commissioner, Victorian Multicultural Commission.

The Forum provided an opportunity for all the regional ECCs to give an overview on all the services and the work they provide to their communities. The Forum raised the following ongoing challenges for all regions.

Funding and innovation

Funding and organisation sustainability is a continuing concern for all regional service providers. Relying on

government funding for organisation support and service delivery is not viable long term. ECCs need to explore diverse funding options. Regional ECCs need to be innovative about their service delivery focussing on social enterprises and strategic partnerships and seeking for funding for different sources including philanthropic organisations.

Settlement

Settlement services continue to be one of the main services for most regional ECCs. Most ECCs are partnering with other local community services to provide better coordination of settlement services and other culturally and linguistically competent services to their communities.

Workforce

Employment services are a potential area of interest for regional ECCs. Development of innovative and small employment programs helps the target communities. ECCs are developing forward-looking services such as providing advice and programs for employers on working with people with diverse backgrounds. Other ECCs are establishing social enterprises to provide consultation to organisations and employers to be more culturally competent. ECCs need further collaboration rather than competition.

Disability

With the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) being implemented nationally from 2016, there are opportunities for the regional ECCs to become involved or partnering in the delivery of disability services, but they need some seed funding support.

ECCV and ECCs: Working together

For better policy and advocacy outcomes, it is important that ECCV and the ECCs work together. The Forums continue to discuss and explore how ECCV and the ECCs can better collaborate in order to achieve better outcomes for the culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Key themes discussed included better collaboration between ECCs, ECCV and ECCs working together and the role of ECCV.

Below are the key points which will aid with the drafting of an ECCV and Regional ECCs Collaboration Framework. This will guide how and when ECCV and ECCs can work together.

Options for better collaboration

- Active communication between ECCV and the regions
- Contact ECCV where there are issues within the region for better advocacy and media exposure
- Provide more opportunities to network with each other
- Use different ways of communicating with each other – using social media, technology
- Create media/ communication strategies that support local ECCs and embed brands in the local communities
- Talk to each other about potential joint submissions and media releases

Advantages to working together

- Learning from each other
- Supporting each other
- Create/ push consistent communications to local communities
- ECCs to protect data
- ECCs provide narratives and case studies to ECCV for better lobbying
- ECCs to find appropriate regional representatives to the Board

The regional ECCs felt the ECCV has a critical role as a strong partner to:

- Provide statewide collaboration and coordination of policy and advocacy
- Advocate and hold more accurate data in regions
- Assist potential research projects that help the regions to establish evidence of service, where practical
- Respond rapidly to fast changing culturally and linguistically diverse/ community issues, where practical
- Support and assist with information resources for regional ECCs

Other topics of discussion on included:

- Current progress in the reforms to the protection visa process
- Office of Multicultural and Citizenship's social media campaign #embracediversity
- Review of the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship and the Victorian Multicultural Commission
- National settlement framework
- Victorian Settlement Planning Outcome Committee
- Social Cohesion and Resilience Unit
- The renewal of Regional Advisory Councils
- A variety of Department of Social Services grants available
- Discussion of Aged Care Approval Rounds

Recommendations

Based on discussion with participants, the following recommendations are to be presented for the Board's consideration:

1. There needs to be a framework that outlines the collaborative roles between ECCV and ECCs
 - 1.1 Share regional ECC policy and research papers and activities with ECCV
 - 1.2 Regional media watch: sharing regional media articles between regional ECCs and ECCV
 - 1.3 Collaborate on branding strategies for regional ECCs and ECCV
 - 1.4 Share case studies for future policy, advocacy and media work
2. Investigate new ways of face to face meeting and communication:
 - 2.1 Use of social media and new technology such as Skype and videoconferencing tools for better communication between regions and ECCV
 - 2.2 Regular meetings for better sharing of information
 - 2.3 One face to face meeting with regional ECCs before the ECCV Board meeting
3. Alert the Board, Executive Officer and staff about news and issues relating to the regions
4. ECCV to work with ECCs to advocate for better data collection and establishing of CALD regional profiles – for better policy, advocacy and grants purposes
5. Identify project proposal opportunities that would be rural and regional specific
6. Further discussion on media/ communication strategies which supports local ECCs and embed their brands in the local communities