



**ethnic
communities'
council of
victoria**

ECCV Submission to the
CHOGM Charter of the Commonwealth
to the
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
February 2012

UN and Commonwealth Section
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
RG Casey Building
John McEwen Crescent
Barton ACT 0221

On behalf of Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) I am pleased to present this submission to the Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOGM) for consideration in its drafting of a Charter of the Commonwealth.

Australia is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world and the country's economic and demographic growth is driven largely by migration. There are many opportunities and challenges Australia has tackled to build this highly diverse society.

ECCV is a peak advocacy body that lobbies all levels of government on behalf of multicultural communities within the Australian State of Victoria, ECCV welcomes the opportunity to contribute to Commonwealth values and aspirations for the benefit of the people of the Commonwealth of Nations.

ECCV is one of several state-level organisations associated with its national body the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA). For over 30 years ECCV has remained the principal liaison point between ethnic communities, government and the wider community and has been a key player in building Victoria as a successful, harmonious and multicultural society.

Under the banner of Australia as an active and committed member of the CHOGM, it is with great pride that I commend this submission as input to the new Charter of the Commonwealth

Sincerely

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Chairperson

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Introduction

1. ECCV supports the statements in the Preamble, Values of the Commonwealth and Commonwealth Aspirations in the Draft Charter of the Commonwealth.
2. Whilst the responsibility of building a seamless national economy that brings together Australia's states and territories lies with the Federal Government of Australia, ECCV plays a vital role in the state of Victoria in engaging local ethnic communities and giving them a voice in policy making.
3. Victoria is geographically the smallest mainland state of Australia and has a large culturally diverse and ageing population. Victorians come from more than 230 countries, speak more than 200 languages and dialects and follow more than 120 religious faiths. In addition 40 percent of Victorians over 65 years are from a non-English speaking background. ECCV provides a voice for its 200 culturally diverse members and member organisations.
4. ECCV's mission is to help build a culturally diverse and cohesive society that is just, fair and inclusive with specific reference to the needs and aspirations of Victorians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
5. In this sense ECCV offers the Charter relevant democratic and human rights solutions that respect cultural diversity. The following key recommendations represent ECCV good practice examples of effective and innovative policy development that empower people with culturally diverse backgrounds in the areas of youth, workforce, ageing well, media and freedom from racial and religious discrimination.

Key recommendations

ECCV presents the following recommendations based on best practice examples of ECCV activities around grassroots consultations with culturally diverse civics organisations, diversity training in the workforce and working with the media.

ECCV recommends that the Charter reflects:

- Good governance and multiple sector partnerships
- Coordinated support in policy co-design
- Intercultural education and training on elections
- Innovative media mentoring

Good governance and multiple sector partnerships

6. ECCV is funded by the Victorian State Government but operates and develops policy positions with stringent independence. Independent policy advice plays an important role in assisting governments to determine what to do amongst competing or conflicting policy decisions.
7. ECCV focusses on good governance from the grassroots level through fostering partnerships between ethnic specific non-government organisations (NGOs), local government and State Government departments to improve policies and inclusive service delivery for Victoria's culturally diverse population.

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8. ECCV is well-placed to link the aspirations of both the ethnic community sector and government departments. For example, ECCV collaborated with the Victorian Government Department of Health in writing aged care service guides and protocols to ensure that policy and programs are inclusive and culturally responsive to the need of culturally diverse clients.

Coordinated support in policy co-design

9. ECCV believes that coordinated support provides cost-effective solutions that streamline resources and better manage bureaucratic tasks for improved policy and service delivery. An effective solution was ECCV's work in co-designing public policy regarding access to aged care assessment services by conducting a small-scale pilot project with low transaction costs funded by the public sector to minimise administrative hurdles, and network local ethnic NGOs with local government to improve healthy ageing services and care to frail older people with non-English speaking backgrounds.

Intercultural education and training

10. ECCV believes that culturally responsive or intercultural education and training in the workforce helps to uphold human dignity within cultural diversity, reduces discrimination, and encourages people to feel more positive about that diversity.
11. ECCV conducted a series of joint forums with representatives from Victoria's 79 local government municipalities that linked them with ethnic specific aged care providers to share stories, experiences and perspectives around the notions of working in partnership and securing equal access to services for older Victorians from culturally diverse backgrounds.
12. ECCV focusses on advancing democracy from the grassroots level. ECCV is a member-based organisation with a democratically elected governance board. ECCV runs governance training and workshops for its member organisations to encourage transparency and strong leadership amongst ethnic communities.

Innovative media mentoring

13. ECCV believes in innovative use of media mentoring to empower culturally diverse youth and young refugees to uphold the aspirations democratic nations.
14. ECCV has maintained a high public profile in the community and a visible presence in the media to give a voice to Victoria's multicultural communities by responding to racism and discrimination in in media reporting.

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