



ethnic
communities'
council of
victoria

Valuing Victoria's Diversity

ECCV State Budget Submission 2013-2014

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria Inc. (ECCV) is the peak body for ethnic and multicultural organisations in Victoria. It is a community based, member driven organisation committed to empowering people from diverse multicultural backgrounds. We are proud to have been the key advocate for culturally diverse communities in Victoria since 1974. For over 35 years we have been the link between multicultural communities, government and the wider community.

The organisation advocates and lobbies all levels of government on behalf of multicultural communities in areas like human rights, access and equity, improving services, racism and discrimination, community harmony, employment, education and training, health and community services, disability, child protection law and justice, and arts and culture. We advocate on any issue that is of concern to our members.

We also help build the capacity of new and emerging communities and develop policy on a wide range of issues including undertaking original research often in collaboration with major tertiary institutions.

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Foreword

Victoria's multicultural community has contributed economically, socially and culturally to Victoria. The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) is pleased to provide a budget submission to the Victorian Coalition Government on behalf of Victoria's ethnic and multicultural communities.

Our submission contains key priority recommendations to improve the productivity, health and wellbeing of Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse population. We believe savings could be achieved through governments valuing diversity. Access to service provision and a talented workforce would be made more sustainable by directing resources into initiatives that engage with Victoria's energetic network of ethnic and multicultural community-based organisations.

I commend this Victorian State Government Budget submission for the financial year 2013-2014 on behalf of Victoria's culturally diverse communities.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Joe Caputo', is centered on a light blue rectangular background.

Joe Caputo OAM JP
Chairperson

Executive Summary

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) is a policy advocacy organisation with 210 members, representing Victoria's ethnic and multicultural communities and organisations.

The ECCV believes a State Budget that builds on the economic, social and cultural potential of multicultural Victoria would deliver sustainable community services. Of the Victorian population 45 per cent were either born overseas or have at least one parent born overseas originating from more than 230 countries, representing 120 religions and speaking as many as 200 languages other than English (VMC, 2011 Census).

Extensive research indicates that many people from new and emerging communities experience considerable settlement difficulties for the first five to ten years in Victoria. Their needs include access to affordable housing, culturally responsive health care, effective education and finding job pathways. Long-term disadvantage can result. The Regional Advisory Councils of the Victorian Multicultural Commission indicated that many people from new and emerging communities in regional and rural Victoria are struggling with the prohibitive cost of interpreters, limiting their access to information and services.

The ECCV believes that government investment in early intervention and culturally responsive support for people from culturally diverse backgrounds would lead to longer-term cost savings in government service delivery. If the right services are not accessible to the people from culturally diverse backgrounds at the right time, the government risks spending more funds later on people in crisis and with complex needs.

The following budget initiatives focus on culturally responsive government services; activating under-utilised workforce talent; and improving public and community sector engagement. It provides a long-term view for the State's economic growth as well as the enhanced wellbeing of Victorians from culturally diverse backgrounds.

The key priority recommendations in the following section focus on valuing cultural diversity in:

- housing for new and emerging communities
- women and children
- workforce diversity
- youth issues
- seniors
- health
- community grants

Priority Cultural Diversity Initiatives

1. Housing for new and emerging communities

The ECCV notes that people from refugee and non-English speaking backgrounds experience significant difficulties in accessing safe and affordable accommodation. Young unaccompanied minors from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds, especially those in their late teens, experience difficulties obtaining foster care and require affordable housing combined with support to find education, employment and adapt to life in Australia. Urgent support is needed for those living on the fringe of society, particularly recently arrived youth from non-English speaking backgrounds and older people from non-English speaking backgrounds experiencing poverty and mental illness.

Recommendation 1

That the Victorian Government provides adequate community housing resources to enable partnerships with not-for-profit registered housing agencies to provide housing assistance to people from refugee backgrounds and emerging communities.

Recommendation 2

That the Victorian Government re-allocates its housing resources into private renter assistance and bond loans to support people from new and emerging communities.

2. Addressing violence against women and children

The ECCV welcomes the \$7.89 million State Budget allocation to Victoria's *2012-2015 Action Plan to Address Violence against Women and Children*. It is important that the Victorian Government funds a culturally responsive 2013 strategy to meet the needs of vulnerable women and children from culturally diverse backgrounds, as they tend not to seek assistance. Research indicates that many families from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds experience family conflict after the first 18 months of settlement. Partnerships between government and the relevant culturally diverse community sector are crucial.

The ECCV advocates for the recruitment of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) foster carers and case managers to ensure that culturally diverse children requiring protection do not risk becoming alienated from their culture and heritage.

Recommendation 3

That Victoria's *2012-2015 Action Plan to Address Violence against Women and Children* allocates an adequate portion of the \$7.89 million budget to strengthen culturally diverse community organisations and CALD Specialist Training and Support Services to educate family violence justice and protection service providers to improve their cultural competence.

Recommendation 4

That adequate resources support the Broadmeadows Children's Court to be more culturally responsive to the needs of families from culturally diverse and refugee backgrounds.

Recommendation 5

That a Multicultural Foster Care Program is resourced in metropolitan Melbourne, incorporating respite care and mentoring for CALD and refugee children and young people in mainstream out of home care.

3. Promoting diversity in the workforce

The ECCV notes that workforce diversity improves organisational performance, productivity and employee satisfaction (Deloitte, VEOHRC report 2013). People who arrived in Australia under the skilled migration and humanitarian programs are keen to find work but often experience difficulties in gaining employment and achieving job advancement pathways.

Recommendation 6

That the Victorian Government invests in a public sector campaign to promote the benefits of diversity in the workforce.

4. Youth from refugee and emerging communities

The ECCV is aware that young people from refugee and emerging communities are at risk of being alienated from their families, the workforce and the community in general. Early intervention and targeted support programs would create significant budget savings in the area of youth justice, health and complex case management. Young people from refugee backgrounds have the right to quality education however they require culturally responsive mentoring and additional support.

Community feedback indicates that young people from culturally diverse programs welcome social, recreational and educational initiatives that provide opportunities for interaction and dialogue beyond their ethno-specific groups and open prospects with other groups.

Recommendation 7

That the State Government ensures adequate resourcing of the Gonsky *Review of Funding for Schooling* (2012) recommendations on the Schooling Resources Standards (SRS) for disadvantaged students from refugee and non-English speaking backgrounds.

Recommendation 8

That the State Government diverts community funds into partnership initiatives between Victoria's local councils, Migrant Resource Centres and multicultural youth organisations to improve and coordinate local youth inclusion programs for young people from refugee and non-English speaking backgrounds to better support them and improve their settlement experiences.

5. Seniors from culturally diverse backgrounds

Almost one third of Victoria's ageing population is from a non-English speaking background. According to the 2011 Census, 28 per cent of Victorians aged between 55 and 64, and 31 per cent of Victorians over 65 are from a culturally diverse background.

Small Ethnic Organisations

The ECCV welcomes the *Participation for CALD Seniors Grants Program* offered to Victoria's ethnic seniors clubs via Seniors Online Victoria. Same-language social contact significantly improves the health and wellbeing of Victoria's culturally diverse population. Ethnic and multicultural welfare organisations play an important role in providing early intervention welfare support and referrals to Home and Community Care (HACC) and related services. Some small and emerging ethnic communities have missed previous funding opportunities for aged care service provision and yet they have a key role to play in providing culturally responsive social support programs for culturally diverse seniors.

ECCV welcomes the additional \$72 million for the Victorian Home and Community Care (HACC) Program over the next four years to keep senior Victorians living independently. Research (Monash 2010) indicates that many culturally diverse seniors miss out on vital aged care support as they have a preference for culturally appropriate aged care services.

Pensioner Lifestyle

In October 2012 over 100 Victorian pensioners, largely from culturally diverse background took part in the Get on Board rally in Melbourne to campaign against increases in living expenses such as food, utilities, transport and council rates. The majority of full pensioners in Victoria, from non-English speaking backgrounds are struggling to maintain a basic healthy lifestyle. Motor vehicle registration has increased by \$35 per vehicle.

Recommendation 9

That the Victorian Government allocates a portion of the additional \$72 million HACC budget to provide aged care funding opportunities for smaller and emerging ethnic welfare agencies.

Recommendation 10

That the Victorian Government increases the pension concession rates for gas, electricity, transport and council rates as well as re-instates the motor vehicle registration concession for pensioners.

6. Raising awareness of elders rights

Families and seniors from non-English speaking backgrounds have limited understanding of, access to and information about elder abuse support. The ECCV welcomes the three-year ECCV project (2012-2015) to raise awareness of elder abuse in ethnic communities. The pilot initiatives with six ethnic communities are developing resources and partnerships to deliver culturally appropriate messages

about elder abuse, its prevention and pathways to support. This is an important community-based partnerships model that has the potential to reach multicultural communities across Victoria and improve their quality of life.

Recommendation 10

That the State Budget commits to on-going funding of the *ECCV project (2012-2015)* to raise awareness of elder abuse in ethnic communities to ensure information, access and support for Victoria's seniors from culturally diverse backgrounds.

7. Improving cultural responsiveness in health services

The ECCV welcomed the record \$1.14 billion State Budget allocation to improve access to mental health services in 2012. The ECCV health and aged care service sector consultations indicate that older, frail people from culturally diverse backgrounds have higher rates of depression, dementia, and incontinence than other population groups. Furthermore, they tend to access healthcare services later, when they reach a point of crisis.

The ECCV is aware of the reduction in Commonwealth health funding to Victoria's hospitals in the 2012-2013 mid-year outlook. It is vital that public hospitals maintain easy access to language services. The funding cuts had an adverse effect on non-English speaking Victorians, for example Northern Health cut out 7,000 interpreting appointments in 2013.

Improving access to health information in languages other than English and enhancing the health literacy of people from non-English speaking backgrounds are key recommendations in ECCV's report: *An Investment Not an Expense – Enhancing Health Literacy in CALD Communities* launched in 2012.

Recommendation 11

That the State Government re-invests in the provision of interpreters and translators in the healthcare sector and in particular in the public hospital system to maintain adequate language services.

Recommendation 12

That the State Government allocates an adequate portion of the \$1.14 billion Mental Health Budget to cultural responsiveness training for professionals and workers in healthcare and the mental health service system.

Recommendation 13

That resources are provided for culturally responsive health and mental health prevention and promotion initiatives to work in partnership with Victoria's ethnic and multicultural organisations.

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