

ECCV Position Paper – The impact of Ebola in West Africa on multicultural Victorian communities

Victoria

1. ECCV confirms that an outbreak of the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in West Africa is the largest ever reported, with the potential for international spread (Australian Medical Association, 4 August 2014).
2. ECCV is saddened and alarmed to know that the outbreak of EVD centred in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone continues to worsen, has led to an unprecedented number of deaths and has spread to some other countries in that region.
3. ECCV is aware that Victoria's multicultural community includes people from the West Africa region who are anxious and distressed about the health of families in their countries of origin and who lack understanding about the Ebola crisis, both clinical and international.
4. ECCV notes that many people in Victoria with family members and friends in the West Africa region are in real time contact through mobile phone and internet connections and are emotionally distressed by the impact of the Ebola crisis but often lack a deeper understanding of the disease.
5. ECCV advocates for local initiatives that raise awareness about EVD in public forums in Victoria to better inform and ease the burden on our migrant and refugee families and communities.
6. ECCV notes with pride that a 2014 VMC (Victorian Multicultural Commission) Award for *Meritorious Service to the Community* was made to an individual on 22 September 2014 for his outstanding voluntary service to the Liberian and broader community of Greater Geelong.

Ebola virus overview

7. ECCV notes according to the World Health Organisation (WHO) (August 2014), there have been over 3,000 medically confirmed cases of Ebola and 1,400 deaths making this the largest Ebola outbreak ever recorded with a case-fatality rate of about 50 per cent.
8. ECCV verifies that the symptoms of EVD are severe and can include high fever, muscle pain and weakness, headache and sore throat, followed by vomiting, diarrhoea and in some cases, internal and external bleeding.

9. ECCV verifies that despite nearly 40 years of medical experience in EVD control, there is currently no vaccine to prevent Ebola and no proven safe treatment making care of sick people largely supportive.
10. ECCV notes that EVD is not highly contagious to the general population, as transmission requires direct contact with infected bodily fluids.
11. ECCV is distressed to note that an unprecedented number of front-line health care workers in affected countries were infected and died due to Ebola outbreak.

International policy

12. On 8 August 2014, the WHO announced that the current outbreak of EVD in West Africa is a *Public Health Emergency of International Concern* leading to new travel restrictions and increased international support efforts in West Africa.
13. The WHO has released an *Ebola Response Roadmap* to provide an international response and coordination to stop Ebola transmission in the affected countries and to prevent international spread.

Australian travel advice

14. ECCV empathises that the risk to Australia remains very low as the Australian Government carries out health checks for passengers from affected countries in Africa; has robust border health protection procedures; and our infection controls in hospitals are first rate.
15. ECCV reports that in September 2014 the Australian Government used its website, smartraveller.com.au to advise Australians to reconsider their need to travel to Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone due to the outbreak of Ebola and potential related civil unrest.
16. ECCV reports that on 23 September 2014 the Australian Government announced that a team of eight health workers and journalists were killed in a village in south east Guinea while on an outreach visit to raise awareness of Ebola.
17. ECCV is aware that several airlines have changed or suspended their flights at short notice and recommends that people travelling by air in West Africa contact their airline for up-to-date information on service changes.

Ebola in West Africa

18. ECCV is concerned that the severely affected countries such as Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone are struggling to control the escalating outbreak of EVD with severely limited health systems and rampant community fear.

19. ECCV notes that Monrovia, Liberia was the first city to face Ebola's full onslaught since the virus was discovered in 1976 and Liberian authorities have implemented a state of public emergency in response to the Ebola outbreak.
20. ECCV is saddened to note that in 2014 entire families in Monrovia are dying at home, unable to obtain the services of the city's few ambulances and or gain admission to the overcrowded health centres.
21. ECCV believes that in countries such as Liberia, families often cover up the cause of deaths at home due to fear of becoming social outcasts, worsening the contagion in their communities.
22. ECCV believes that countries in West Africa are desperately seeking health support from the international community.