

Meaningful Volunteering and Mature Age Employment Opportunities

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE ETHNIC COMMUNITIES' COUNCIL OF VICTORIA (ECCV) HAS IDENTIFIED THE NEED TO PLAN FOR INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS AND RESPONSES IN THE AREA OF VOLUNTEERING AND MATURE AGE EMPLOYMENT IN ORDER TO FULLY UTILISE THE POTENTIAL, EXPERTISE AND SKILLS OF CULTURALLY DIVERSE SENIORS. ECCV BELIEVES THAT IT IS TIMELY THAT MORE GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY PLANNING IS FOSTERED TO STIMULATE CULTURALLY INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT AND VOLUNTEER INDUSTRY INNOVATION. ECCV RECOMMENDS THAT THE AUSTRALIAN AND VICTORIAN GOVERNMENTS DELIVER MORE TARGETED SUPPORT FOR VOLUNTEER COORDINATION AND ACTIVITIES IN ETHNO-SPECIFIC AND MULTICULTURAL ORGANISATIONS PARTICULARLY IN REGIONAL VICTORIA. WE ADVOCATE FOR THE FACILITATION OF EVIDENCE-BASED RESEARCH INTO THE IMPACTS OF VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES AND MATURE AGE EMPLOYMENT WITH A FOCUS ON OLDER PEOPLE'S MENTAL, SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL WELLBEING AND THE IMPACT OF VOLUNTEERING ON THE COMMUNITY AND THE ECONOMY TO BETTER INFORM THE POLICY PLANNING PROCESS.

Background

Older people from culturally diverse backgrounds contribute in many different ways to the community. Many older people give back to the community through volunteering in mainstream or ethno-specific organisations. Through working and volunteering, seniors feel valued and top up their age pension, remain socially engaged and develop or expand their skills. ECCV is aware that older culturally diverse job seekers often find it difficult to re-enter the workforce after having had caring roles or losing their job.

ECCV believes that more can be done in Victoria to address the specific issues of culturally diverse mature age job seekers. ECCV further highlights that ageing is a natural, continuous, life-long process for all people. Employment and volunteer policies and programs should be age-friendly, intergenerational, and culturally appropriate. This position paper summarises key findings, based on ECCV consultations, provides recommendations and outlines a way forward.

Key findings

Volunteering

- Volunteering has a positive impact on the mental and social wellbeing of older people and supports community wellbeing.
- Based on 2014 data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), about 30 per cent of the Australian population engages in volunteering activitiesⁱ.
- One in three Australians aged 65 years come from cultural and linguistically diverse backgroundsⁱⁱ.

- According to the Australian Human Rights Commission, Australians aged 65 years and over contribute nearly \$40 billion each year in unpaid and voluntary workⁱⁱⁱ.
- Compared to previous generations, the rates of volunteering among the recently retired, culturally diverse “baby boomer” generation wanting to contribute to their communities continues to rise.
- Many culturally diverse people who volunteer don’t consider themselves as *volunteers* but rather see themselves as community leaders or helpers.

Mature Age Job Seekers

- According to COTA Australia^{iv} and supported by ECCV, mature age workers are people who are over 50 years of age.
- The Victorian Equal Opportunity Act^v states that it is unlawful to discriminate against job applicants based on people’s age, religion, or ethnic/racial heritage.
- Many older people prefer flexible work arrangements due to caring responsibilities and the income threshold of the age pension.
- Culturally diverse age pensioners often look for part-time employment opportunities to make ends meet as age pension recipients.
- Many culturally diverse mature job seekers have had caring responsibilities and worked in areas such as the social services sector, manufacturing, construction, agriculture, and small businesses.
- Culturally diverse older people often look for employment or re-training opportunities as their employment circumstances change due to technological changes, industry redundancies or workplace injuries.
- Many older people from culturally diverse backgrounds lack adequate English language skills and the confidence to be re-trained.
- Culturally diverse job seekers sometimes require bilingual and bicultural job support to help them re-enter the workforce.
- Given the increasing demand for care workers in the health, disability and aged care industries and the rising number of culturally diverse services users, there is a need for trained bilingual and bicultural employees.

“A society that engages seniors for the benefit of the community will be a ‘senior-smart’ society. Success of such a concept is possible when seniors themselves desire to serve the community and come out with feasible and practical plans for consideration and implementation by government. Any imposed scheme will not be accepted well and will simply frustrate passionate individuals. Thus a ‘senior-smart’ society is only possible when all seniors work together towards a common goal of ‘giving back to society’”.

DR SANTOSH KUMAR, Northern Regional Indian Seniors Association and Member of ECCV Aged Care Policy Committee

Key ECCV Policy Positions and Recommendations

Feedback from multicultural seniors associations, aged care service providers and ECCV stakeholders, including members from the ECCV Aged Care Policy Committee, shows that there is a need to better utilise the skills of culturally diverse older people, whether in volunteer or paid roles. ECCV advocates for innovative models that effectively leverage the skills of culturally diverse mature age job seekers, workers and volunteers for the benefit of the wider community in Victoria.

ECCV recommends:

1. That the Federal and Victorian Governments facilitate innovative culturally responsive employment initiatives and volunteer support programs to leverage older people's capabilities, expertise and knowledge.
2. That the Federal and Victorian Governments invest in the development of a simple English language website directed at culturally diverse mature age job seekers, volunteers and service providers to better link up people with community organisations and businesses in culturally responsive ways.
3. That Government subsidises employment services to more strongly focus on personalised and culturally sensitive career counselling which includes initial job search preparation and 'on the job' training for older migrants.
4. That the Federal and Victorian Governments trial and facilitate ethno-specific and multicultural re-training programs for mature age job seekers such as in the social services industry to leverage people's bilingual and bicultural skills.
5. That the Federal and Victorian Governments provide more targeted support for volunteer coordination and activities in ethno-specific and multicultural organisations including ethnic senior citizens clubs and regional organisations.
6. That the Federal and Victorian Governments increase resources for the capacity building of older culturally diverse volunteers and their groups/organisations such as through expanding the *Community Visitors Scheme*^{vi} including in regional areas.
7. That innovative Federal and Victorian Government policies and programs provide effective pathways for older culturally diverse jobs seekers to be re-trained by ethno-specific and multicultural organisations followed by job placement opportunities and support.
8. That a Victorian Government ethnic media campaign is delivered to culturally diverse mature age job seekers and workers to inform them about their rights and responsibilities at workplaces as well as bilingual resources and advice that people can access to address experiences of discrimination.
9. That the Victorian Government funds community education for ethno-specific communities and organisations (in partnership with the VEOHRC^{vii}) to inform and educate culturally diverse community members about their rights and responsibilities including on age-related discrimination.
10. The development of a culturally appropriate older job seekers and volunteers online platform to promote access to employment and volunteering opportunities.
11. That the Federal and Victorian Governments facilitate evidence-based research into the impacts of volunteer activities and mature age employment on older people's mental, social and financial wellbeing and the impact of volunteering on the community.

12. That the Federal and Victorian Governments support research that showcases best practice examples of senior and community-driven initiatives which build on and enhance the skills of seniors and promotes these successful initiatives within the wider community, at government level, and within the multicultural and ageing sectors.

The Way Forward

ECCV believes that there are opportunities to strengthen the capacity of ethnic, multicultural and mainstream organisations through targeted volunteer support and by building on the skills of mature age job seekers. ECCV believes that it is timely that the Federal and Victorian Governments invest resources into projects such as an online platform to help older people link up to appropriate re-training, employment and volunteer opportunities.

ECCV looks forward to discussing ways to acknowledge and leverage the skills and contributions of older culturally diverse people to strengthen participation in the community.

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References

ⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017, *Discussion Paper: Information needs for Volunteering* data, April 2017, available at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4159.0.55.004>

ⁱⁱ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018, *Older Australia at a Glance*, available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/age/87/older-australia-at-a-glance/contents/demographics-of-older-australians/culturally-linguistically-diverse-people>

ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014, *Face the facts: Older Australian – 2014*, available at: <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/FTFOlderAustralians.pdf>

^{iv} COTA Australia, 2019, *Mature Age Employment*, available at: <https://www.cota.org.au/policy/mature-age-employment/>

^v Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, *The Equality Act 2010*, available at: <https://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/the-law/equal-opportunity-act>

^{vi} Commonwealth Department of Health, *My Aged Care*, 2018, *Social support and activities*, available at: <https://www.myagedcare.gov.au/help-home/social-support-and-activities>

^{vii} VEOHRC stands for Victorian Equal Opportunity and Humans Rights Commission, for more information, see: <https://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/>