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Communicating about COVID-19: Health Literacy and Language Services During the Pandemic

Lower levels of health literacy lead to higher costs for the health system due to poorer preventative practices and higher rates of illness and chronic disease.

“Through community consultations, surveys and focus groups, ECCV has gathered a clearer picture of how culturally diverse Victorians see the role of navigating and accessing the health system,” said Eddie Micallef, ECCV Chairperson.

“Translated materials are too often simply direct translations of English language resources, and do not take account of cultural differences and differences in how languages function. Translated resources can often be hard to understand for people from migrant backgrounds who are themselves not fully literate in their first language or who are fluent in dialects beyond standardised languages.”

Translated materials produced early in the COVID-19 pandemic response were generally such direct translations. More innovative and accessible resources were developed by community organisations and are examined in ECCV’s latest policy paper *Communicating about COVID-19: Health Literacy and Language Services During the Pandemic*.

“When language is a barrier text-heavy documents are unlikely to be widely read even if translated,” said Eddie. “Tailored resources for each community, involving images, graphics, audio and videos are greatly preferable.”

The COVID-19 pandemic and related public health measures to curb the spread the virus and keep the Victorian community safe led ECCV’s Policy Advisory Committee on Health and Wellbeing, comprising health and community experts, to re-examine a number of important issues on health literacy in CALD communities, and access to professional interpreting services in the Victorian health system.

“Despite positive initiatives and programs, the health literacy levels of groups within CALD communities remain of concern, and are likely to have had ramifications during the recent spread of COVID-19 in Victoria,” said Eddie.

“ECCV recommends the Victorian Government provide support for healthcare providers to improve their cultural responsiveness through agreed standards, measures and self-assessment and provide increased and ongoing funding for multicultural organisations to provide health-based education initiatives that address health literacy and access issues for CALD communities.”

For a full list of recommendations and detailed findings, please read [Communicating about COVID-19: Health Literacy and Language Services During the Pandemic](#).

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The [Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria Inc.](http://www.eccv.org.au) (ECCV) is the peak advocacy body for eight regional ethnic communities' councils and over 220 member organisations, including ethnic and multicultural organisations across Victoria. For over 45 years, we have been the link between multicultural communities, government and the wider community. www.eccv.org.au

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