The Voice of Multicultural Victoria

Delivering for Multicultural Victoria

STATE ELECTION PLATFORM 2022

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) is the peak body for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in Victoria. ECCV works closely with more than 220 member organisations including ethnic associations, multicultural service providers, and regional ethnic communities' councils. ECCV has been advocating for human rights, freedom, respect, equality and dignity for migrant and refugee communities, and for a socially cohesive and inclusive Victorian community, since 1974. ECCV has a strong record of informing industry, practice and influencing Federal, State and Local governments to promote culturally responsive approaches and equitable access to services, anti-racism and socially just policy.

Acknowledgments

ECCV would like to gratefully acknowledge our Members, Working Groups, Policy Advisory Committees and Victoria's network of Strategic Engagement Coordinators for participating in consultation sessions and sharing their insights and expertise. In total, we consulted with more than 80 representatives from across the community services, social advocacy and multicultural sector. Thank you to everyone who contributed to the development of this platform.

A note on language

The term 'people from migrant and refugee backgrounds' is used in this document to refer to people and communities who have entered Australia through a variety of pathways, including through humanitarian, family, and skilled migration pathways. ECCV uses this term to refer to people with backgrounds and ancestry that is not part of the dominant Anglo-Celtic Australian population. This term is inclusive of people seeking asylum in Australia, people on temporary visas, undocumented migrants, and people born in Australia.

ECCV acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Victoria and their continuing connection to land, water and community. We pay respect to their Elders past and present.

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Delivering for Multicultural Victoria

This year's Victorian election comes at a time of great turbulence but also great opportunity, as the state continues to respond, rebuild and recover from the widespread impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Victoria's migrant and refugee communities have been severely affected by the health impacts and social and economic disruption of the pandemic, while being creative and resilient in their responses.

During this time, we have seen an unprecedented level of collaboration between government and community organisations. Multicultural and ethno-specific organisations have been at the forefront of providing outreach and information to Victoria's diverse communities. Working with the multicultural sector, and employing a bicultural and bilingual workforce, have been key to the success of community-led pandemic responses in areas such as health literacy, food relief and mental health support.

ECCV acknowledges the Victorian Government's efforts to foster these partnerships and support multicultural communities to not only stay safe, but build back stronger in areas such as employment, emergency resilience and anti-racism. These new alliances must be consolidated and strengthened.

The pandemic has, however, also exposed systemic gaps in the delivery and accessibility of services and support for Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds, particularly those who are most vulnerable due to intersecting forms of disadvantage. People born outside Australia were overrepresented in rates of infection and deaths from COVID-19.[1] People from migrant and refugee backgrounds have been disproportionately impacted by job losses, business closures, racism, health concerns, mental health deterioration, family violence, isolation and disruption to education.

While our under-served communities have stepped up to face these challenges, the last three years have left multicultural and ethno-specific organisations exhausted and insufficiently resourced to keep delivering the work expected of them.

Victoria has made significant and timely investments in education, employment, health infrastructure and mental health, but a more targeted approach is required to ensure that migrant and refugee communities are supported, empowered and have their voices heard.

ECCV's Election Platform calls on the Victorian Government to learn from the experiences and systemic gaps exposed by the pandemic and ensure that our diverse communities can respond and recover equitably.

Our Platform makes 55 recommendations and outlines actions across key priority areas - including health and wellbeing, aged care, disability, employment, youth services and emergency management.

At the heart of our Platform is a call for new Multicultural Strategy, that takes a whole-of-government approach, and sets clear priorities for making policies and services more equitable, accessible and culturally responsive.

The Victorian Government must do more to meaningfully engage, support and collaborate with multicultural and ethno-specific organisations in the design, coordination and delivery of services.

We call on Victorian Government to recognise the value and tireless contributions of the underfunded multicultural sector by building long-term sector capacity through a centralised, responsive and equitable funding model. It's time to put an end to the current fragmented drip-funding.

Our comprehensive platform focuses on measures that will help build a stronger and more resilient Victorian community, strengthen social cohesion, inclusion and equality, and improve service delivery and design.

We've come a long way in advancing equality and equity in Victoria. As we face new challenges, we must continue to build a state that is more welcoming, responsive, and supportive of people from all backgrounds. Ultimately, our institutions, policies and services should reflect and serve our community.

We urge all political parties and candidates to work together to implement the priorities set out in this Platform, and to work with us and the multicultural sector in delivering them over the next four years.

Summary of key recommendations

Our election platform focuses on four key areas of action that the next Victorian Government should take to enhance the wellbeing of Victoria's migrant and refugee communities.

1 Supporting a stronger multicultural Victoria

Victoria needs a new Multicultural Strategy that encompasses a whole-of-government approach to engaging and supporting migrant and refugee communities.

ECCV calls on the Victorian government to recognise the value of the multicultural sector by increasing sector capacity on a longer-term basis, streamlining funding, and embedding multicultural voices in the coordination, design and delivery of services.

Improved planning and coordination and a new funding framework are key to addressing constraints caused by fragmented and short-term funding and ensuring equitable outcomes.

KEY ACTIONS

- **Commit $2 million to resource the development and co-design of a new Multicultural Strategy (p.11)**
- **Develop a more centralised, responsive and equitable funding model for the multicultural sector to build its capacity to engage in co-design, collaboration and partnerships that address challenges and deliver better policy and service outcomes (p.11)**
- **Move the Multicultural Affairs portfolio back to the Department of Premier and Cabinet, to elevate it as a key state priority and help streamline coordination and funding (p.12)**
- **Recognise the value and support the development of the bilingual and bicultural workforce through a co-designed framework (p.13)**
- **Commit $20 million over four years to enhance support for growing regional multicultural communities (p.13)**

2

Building safe, strong and resilient communities

With migrant and refugee communities continuing to be affected by higher rates of COVID-19 transmission, the Government must act now to integrate multicultural and ethno-specific organisations into service systems to help provide equitable, ongoing access to health and welfare supports and employment services.

We also need increased funding and capacity building programs to provide targeted employment services, support small businesses, improve access for migrant workers to legal services and provide education on employment rights.

It is also critical to continue to support community preparedness and resilience in the face of future emergencies.

KEY ACTIONS

- Support migrant-owned small business owners to access grants and other assistance measures (p.15)
- Commit phased funding to help build the capacity of multicultural and ethno-specific organisations to provide ongoing health and welfare supports (p.16)
- Commit $10 million to addressing barriers to employment through the development of a comprehensive co-designed multicultural employment plan for migrant and refugee communities (p.17)
- Provide education for employment brokers and connectors about employment law and how to prevent their clients falling prey to exploitative practices (p.19)
- Support community-led actions to enhance emergency preparedness and resilience, with a dedicated plan to enhance the cultural diversity and knowledge within emergency services workforces, and targeted education and awareness-raising at the grassroots and leadership level (p.21)

3 Strengthening social cohesion, inclusion and equality

Sustained funding for the Victorian Anti-Racism Strategy is critical to addressing all forms of racism in our society. The strategy must be informed by ongoing consultations with people with lived experience of racism and supported by an evaluation and measurement framework.

To ensure that the voices of our communities are reflected in the arts, a diversity and inclusion strategy should be developed, which promotes leadership opportunities for people from migrant and refugee background and empowers them to influence what stories are told, and how they are told.

With women from migrant and refugee backgrounds still facing many barriers to full and equal participation in society, the Victorian Government must support gender equity initiatives to improve their financial security and economic position, and provide dedicated resources to address family violence.

KEY ACTIONS

- Commit $32 million to the development of Victoria's Anti-Racism Strategy (p.23)
- Increase funding for multicultural arts and festivals, and develop a diversity and inclusion strategy that ties funding for arts organisations to diversity targets (p.24)
- Commit $10 million over two years to promote gender equity initiatives (p.25)
- Support research about the experiences and needs of unpaid carers from migrant and refugee backgrounds (p.25)
- Commit $16 million over four years to resource multicultural organisations to provide culturally appropriate responses to family violence (p.26)

4 Improving service delivery and project design

The Victorian Government must address gaps in service provision to provide equitable, accessible and culturally responsive support for people from migrant and refugee communities across health, aged care, disability, youth services and other key social services.

Providing culturally appropriate mental health support must be a key part of the current reform of Victoria's mental health system process. With the COVID-19 pandemic having demonstrated the importance of health literacy and effective provision of health information, it is crucial that the Victorian Government provides further funding for multicultural and ethno-specific organisations to employ bicultural and bilingual workers and provide community-specific health education initiatives.

We also call on the Victorian Government to promote healthy and positive ageing for older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, by supporting multicultural and ethno-specific organisations to provide suitable aged care services to their communities, including capacity building for seniors' clubs.

KEY ACTIONS

- Invest in ongoing mental health and wellbeing support across multicultural communities, including $40 million over four years for the multicultural sector to deliver mental health services, and support people with lived experience to contribute to decision-making (p.28)
- Increase core funding for the Victorian Disability Advocacy Program to address unmet demands for self-advocacy and improve access, coverage and awareness of disability support services, particularly in rural and regional areas (p.34)
- Provide additional funding for the Home and Community Care Program for Younger People (HACC PYP) and ensure continuity of services for people not eligible for the NDIS during the transition to the Care Finder model (p.35)
- Support multicultural and ethno-specific organisations, and new and emerging communities, to establish aged care community infrastructure and programs (p.38) and engage older people in social, civic and leadership opportunities (p.41)
- Commit $16 million for prevention, early intervention and response to elder abuse against people from migrant and refugee backgrounds (p.39)
- Support tailored digital literacy training programs and subsidised access to digital devices to assist older people to maintain social connections (p.40)

1

Supporting a stronger multicultural Victoria

Cultural diversity brings immense economic and social benefits to Victoria. Our society has been enriched by the experience, innovation and productivity of our migrant and refugee communities. The next Victorian Government must build on these advantages and advance multiculturalism as a core priority in our state.

We need a new *Multicultural Strategy* for Victoria to meet the changing needs of the population. Without a robust and up-to-date policy framework, multicultural voices will not be adequately embedded in the coordination, design and delivery of services. A new Strategy must set clear whole-of-government priorities, outline a process for evaluating outcomes, and recognise the strong capability of multicultural and ethno-specific organisations as we look towards implementing systems reforms across a range of portfolios.

A more coordinated approach to multicultural affairs and a more centralised, responsive and equitable funding model is needed to support and strengthen the sector in the long term and ensure that multicultural communities are adequately serviced. An historically piecemeal and decentralised approach has led to a chronically under-funded and under-valued multicultural sector. Throughout the pandemic, however, we have seen a dramatic change in how governments work with multicultural communities, with targeted and increased spending creating more opportunities for social impact. Post-COVID, it is important that the multicultural sector does not become an afterthought again.

The Victorian Government must also do more to improve planning and coordination by engaging and collaborating with multicultural and ethno-specific organisations in the design, coordination and delivery of services. These organisations can utilise the expertise, skills and networks of a highly adept bilingual and bicultural workforce to coordinate innovative solutions to pressing community needs, as we saw in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Develop a new multicultural strategy

Victoria's Multicultural Policy Statement, Victorian. ***And Proud of It,*** sits alongside the Multicultural Act 2011 (Vic) and sets out strategic priorities, including a Multicultural Affairs Outcomes Framework. Published in 2017, the Statement is now outdated and unable to adequately address new and emerging needs, including those brought about by COVID-19. There is currently no requirement that the Statement or Outcomes Framework be updated, reviewed or evaluated to ensure it is achieving strategic goals or meeting the needs of the population. There is a need for change with much stronger commitments at the highest level.

Language is an overlooked but important part of communicating policy. The policy framework must go beyond simply being a Statement: a 'Multicultural Strategy' denotes Victoria's commitment to multiculturalism and whole-of-government approach to engaging migrant and refugee communities. In line with other Victorian Government initiatives, the development of a new Multicultural Strategy must be informed by migrant and refugee communities – including new and emerging – through an open consultation process, to ensure that their lived experiences are reflected. An overarching Strategy that is co-designed by and engages directly with multicultural communities will not only improve coordination, but also help build trust and channels of communication.

A new Multicultural Strategy must also recognise the strong capability of the state's ethno-specific and multicultural organisations and engage them as partners across all portfolios. These organisations are one of Victoria's greatest assets. They are well-connected and trusted in the communities they serve, and have historically played a key role in driving innovation in service delivery. A new Multicultural Strategy will translate to opportunities for migrant and refugee communities to participate in and lead positive change.

KEY ACTION

Commit $2 million to resource the development and co-design of a new Multicultural Strategy

Develop a secure, responsive and flexible funding framework

Our multicultural sector has worked tirelessly to fill gaps in public policy and service provision that were exposed and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As we return to 'business as usual', it is important that the Victorian Government does not lose sight of the unique value of multicultural and ethno-specific organisations.

A more streamlined, responsive and coordinated approach to multicultural affairs is needed to strengthen the sector, and ensure that it can effectively contribute to partnerships, facilitate greater collaboration, and coordinate support for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Developing a clear and equitable funding framework will be central to this, and to sustaining the multicultural sector in the long term. The Victorian Government report on multicultural affairs highlights the commendable developments and initiatives made across departments in the 2020-2021 financial year.[2] Although pockets of funding are available, they are often short-term and not sustainable.

The *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011* mandates that departments report annually on their performance. However, there is no independent process for ensuring that their policy accountabilities effectively or sustainably meet the needs of multicultural communities.

Funding for the sector currently comes from a variety of sources in different departments and lacks an overall framework to clarify where responsibilities lie. The result is often duplication of funding across departments for similar objectives, with recipients receiving small amounts of short-term funding, reducing the potential to achieve sustainable change.

The current approach to funding can lead to gaps in service delivery, as funded organisations are effectively placed in competition with one another, diminishing collaboration and reducing the cross-referral of clients between organisations. Short-term funding also affects staff turnover in the multicultural and community sectors, as people seek greater job security elsewhere. Organisations often do not receive notice of whether programs will be ongoing until the end of contracted periods, hampering their ability to meet

growing demands and adapt innovative pilot programs for the long term. It has also been difficult for organisations to renegotiate deliverables for funded projects during the pandemic, creating a significant administrative burden.

Moving the Multicultural Affairs portfolio back to the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC), where it previously sat, will elevate it as a key state priority and help streamline coordination and funding. This will also reduce the duplication that comes with resourcing the sector through separate departmental funding streams, and ultimately bring savings for the state. This includes, for example, the provision of innovation funding, which currently sits between several departments. To drive innovation, a streamlined funding framework must also take an intersectional approach that recognises that people from migrant and refugee backgrounds have multiple identities and needs.

KEY ACTIONS

- Develop a more centralised, responsive and equitable funding model for the multicultural sector to build its capacity to engage in co-design, collaboration and partnerships that address challenges and deliver better policy and service outcomes
- Move the Multicultural Affairs portfolio back to the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC), to elevate it as a key state priority and help streamline coordination and funding.

Support the development of a bicultural and bilingual workforce

Bicultural and bilingual workers bring a depth of cultural knowledge and lived experience to the organisations and communities they work with. Their networks, cross-cultural skills and knowledge have been crucial to the delivery of pandemic response initiatives and, as outlined elsewhere in this Platform, play a key role in supporting migrant and refugee communities in areas such as health literacy, mental health support, and addressing family violence.

To build on existing work, the value of bilingual and bicultural workers should be recognised. In Victoria, there are few standards, policies and little training to support the critical role that bicultural and bilingual workers play in supporting multicultural communities. This has led to an inconsistent approach to the engagement of bilingual and bicultural workers in a range of program areas, their employment conditions and expectations around the role they play within organisations.

Developing a framework for this workforce will assist with the recruitment and placement of bicultural and bilingual workers across both specialist and mainstream service providers. Our stakeholders have expressed concern that rural community health services are not adapting to the needs of newly arrived and resettled groups from refugee and migrant backgrounds, particularly in the provision of in-home health care. A strong bicultural and bilingual workforce will assist with building the cultural competency of mainstream services, ensuring that they have that capability in the first instance, or referring them to a specialist service that can provide culturally safe and appropriate care.

As the Victorian Government looks to develop a Bicultural Worker Strategy, we need a greater understanding of the value and benefits that bicultural bring, and a more considered approach to how they can help build the cultural competency of services systems.

KEY ACTION

- Recognise the value and support the development of the bilingual and bicultural workforce through a co-designed framework

Enhance the capacity of regional multicultural organisations

Regional ethnic communities' councils provide invaluable advocacy, education and support services to the community. The direct resettlement of newly arrived refugees and migrants in regional areas, and the secondary movement of these populations from metropolitan centres, has placed increased demand on regional ethnic communities' councils. In 2021, 8.4% of the total population in regional Victoria reported speaking a language other than English at home, an increase from 7.5% reported in 2016.[3]

Despite growing demand, many regional ethnic communities' councils rely on rolling grant and funding opportunities to maintain operations. Recurrent core funding is needed to continue to provide supports and scale them to a growing multicultural population. The **Strategic Partnership Program (SPP)** has provided valuable support by providing funding for services that have strengthened the reach of regional ethnic communities' councils. Without secure funding, organisations have found it difficult to plan strategically to address new and emerging needs.

Strategic Engagement Coordinators (SECs) bridge service gaps by identifying new opportunities for community engagement and linking communities to service providers and government agencies. Working across metropolitan and regional Victoria, SECs have built trust and deepened relationships, allowing them to mobilise quickly to respond to significant community needs. This includes, for example, tapping into their networks to set up Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) distribution hubs during periods of high demand. SECs have played a critical role in strengthening the settlement and participation outcomes of migrant and refugee communities. The services and communities that SECs work with have benefited immensely from the networks, cross-sectoral linkages, and programs they have facilitated.

We commend the $6.7 million allocated to fund settlement services, community hubs, and legal support in the 2022-23 Budget, which will ensure that the SPP and the SEC program can continue to support priority migrant communities over the next two years. However, it is essential that these programs are resourced in the long-term to provide certainty and stability in the provision of services.

KEY ACTIONS

- Commit $20 million over four years for regional ethnic communities' councils to prioritise issues, coordinate resources and lead local initiatives
- Commit to recurring funding for Strategic Engagement Coordinators to support settlement in regional Victoria.

2

Building safe, strong and resilient communities

Members of multicultural communities have intersecting needs and can face specific barriers to living safe and productive lives. It is important to recognise that settlement is a life-long process, and that people must be supported by services that can meet their needs as they age, enter the workforce, give back to the community and look to fulfil their personal aspirations. All members of migrant and refugee communities have the right to feel safe at all times, and to have access to supports that are necessary to enable them to participate fully and equally in society.

Similarly, migrant and refugee communities can be especially vulnerable to emergencies such as natural disasters or pandemics like COVID-19. The Government must acknowledge these needs and invest sufficient resources to build the resilience of diverse communities to be prepared for future emergencies.

An equitable and inclusive COVID recovery

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, people from migrant and refugee backgrounds have encountered many of the same issues as the general population, such as economic stress, social isolation, and challenges with mental health and family violence. However, due to existing inequalities, these issues were felt much more intensely by Victoria's multicultural communities, as highlighted in ECCV's 2021 report, *Our Voices, Our Struggles, Our Views: Will you choose to hear us?*

People from migrant and refugee backgrounds experienced significant job and income losses and were three times more likely to die from COVID-19 compared to the general population.[4] A key reason for this difference is the way that people from migrant and refugee backgrounds are treated in society, with many in casualised work, living in insecure housing, and experiencing barriers to accessing timely support.[5] These factors, combined with the lack of early engagement, outreach and planning, contributed to higher rates of mortality and transmission.

Supporting migrant and refugee communities to re-build, reconnect and maintain high rates of vaccination must be a priority for the Victorian Government. For our communities, who are already significantly under-resourced and under-served, COVID-19 recovery is likely to require a longer-term approach.

The longer-term physical, mental, social and economic wellbeing of communities must inform the next phase of Victoria's public health approach.

Facilitate the recovery of migrant and refugee businesses

People from migrant and refugee backgrounds play a disproportionately large role in the small business sector in Australia. One third of small businesses in this country are run by migrants,[6] and almost 30% of adult refugees will start a small business within 10 years of their arrival in Australia.[7]

Small businesses were greatly impacted by the public health measures associated with Australia's COVID-19 response. Many suffered significant losses of revenue or were forced to close altogether. Revitalisation of the small business sector will therefore be an important part of the state's economic recovery from COVID-19, and as the above statistics demonstrate, migrant-run small businesses will be at the heart of this.

Several grants and assistance measures are available to support small business owners, but these are often not visible or readily accessible to people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, especially for people whose first language is not English. Community members often find it difficult to determine if they are eligible for them, or don't know how to access them. ECCV calls on the Government to develop a strategy to communicate more directly with business owners from migrant and refugee backgrounds about what support is available to them and how to access it.

KEY ACTION

- Co-design a strategy for disseminating information about available supports for small business owners in multicultural communities

Ensure ongoing access to health and welfare supports

COVID-19 case numbers in Victoria have started to stabilise but remain at high levels, with current trajectories suggesting that the virus is now part of everyday life.[8] However, daily case numbers and mortality rates only represent a fraction of the problem.[9] Although research about the long-term health effects of COVID-19, known as 'long COVID', remains sparse, it is predicted that the persistence of symptoms following infection will impose a significant burden on health systems.[10] Many affected people are unable to return to work or normal functioning up to a year after diagnosis, while others may need to use a wide range of health services to support their needs on an ongoing basis.[11] New public health strategies are needed to address the potential of COVID-19 to cause long-term suffering.

Migrant and refugee communities continue to be disproportionally affected by higher rates of transmission and are more likely to absorb the brunt of the disease burden. This will have quantifiable health, economic and social impacts for society as a whole. The Victorian Government must prioritise healthcare resource planning, education, and accessible services for post-COVID-19 care. This will be critical to equitable recovery in the short and long term.

It is more cost effective for governments to address these issues now by ensuring equitable, ongoing access to health and welfare supports, including maintaining an accessible vaccination program. Humanitarian arrivals require additional support to enable them to catch up on immunisation schedules, and this can be achieved through enhanced funding for

the **Program for Immunisation, Monitoring and Education (PRIME).** Integrating multicultural and ethno-specific organisations into service systems will be key, as they are best placed to address the barriers associated with accessing available supports and ensuring that community members remain connected.

KEY ACTION

Commit phased funding to help build the capacity of multicultural and ethno-specific organisations to provide ongoing health and welfare supports

Secure, decent and sustainable employment

People from migrant and refugee backgrounds have long experienced disadvantage in the labour market. Many face barriers to sustainable employment such as employer demands for local experience, lack of local networks, non-recognition of overseas qualifications, difficulties navigating the employment services system, bias, and concerns by employers about their job readiness.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused upheaval in the labour market and exacerbated many of these barriers. Many of the industries most affected by job losses, such as retail, hospitality and food services, had workforces with high numbers of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. As the pandemic unfolded, unemployment rates rose in many migrant communities well above the rate for people born in Australia.[12]

However, the closure of the nation's borders and subsequent lack of skilled migrant intake also created unprecedented opportunities in the labour market for people resident in Australia. The challenge going forward will be to ensure that as the labour market settles down and immigration returns to pre-COVID levels, past barriers do not return, and that the opportunities that have recently presented themselves are sustained in the long term.

Address barriers to employment

In recent years, the Victorian Government has created various programs to address barriers to employment and support jobseekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds (amongst other disadvantaged jobseekers) in the labour market. These include the creation of Jobs Victoria in 2016-17, and the **Working for Victoria** program, established in 2020 as part of the state's COVID-19 response plan.

Working for Victoria was an extremely positive program for jobseekers. Through its multicultural consortia, it provided highly valued opportunities for members of migrant and refugee communities to gain local work experience, build networks, receive training and acquire a range of new skills, greatly enhancing their long-term employment prospects.

Historically, multicultural and ethno-specific organisations have been forced to compete for resources and were not incentivised to form alliances and partnerships. Working for Victoria supported multicultural and ethno-specific organisations to collaborate, which enabled them to effectively reach people from CALD backgrounds, and work with them in a complex environment to deliver positive employment outcomes.

Working for Victoria's outcomes should be used to inform future government employment strategies, encouraging organisations to build knowledge and share information through shared resourcing and collaboration.

There has been considerable recent government investment in employment services and support for disadvantaged jobseekers, particularly since the creation of the Jobs Plan in the 2020-21 Victorian budget, but this is often not visible to the people who most need to access it. Members of multicultural communities regularly inform ECCV that they find the employment system confusing and difficult to navigate.

ECCV calls on the Government to facilitate pathways to sustainable employment for jobseekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds through the creation of a comprehensive multicultural employment plan, co-designed with community education providers and multicultural organisations.

This strategy should include employment programs and brokerage services delivered by ethno-specific organisations, and support for multicultural organisations to take on increased student placements, provide more workplace-based training and provide wage subsidies for employers who employ jobseekers from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds.

The Strategy should also include support for multicultural organisations to create partnerships with industry to assist them to meet social procurement requirements for employment of disadvantaged job seekers, and an online platform that is accessible and navigable for people with diverse needs, to enable access to industry-based resources, employers, events, discussion boards and work opportunities, as well as information on overseas qualifications recognition processes.

A multicultural employment plan should also acknowledge the strong representation of migrant and refugee communities in the small business sector and provide support for people who want to seek self-employment opportunities. Current Jobs Victoria programs focus mostly on helping jobseekers to became salaried employees, rather than assisting jobseekers interested in running their own business.

Jobs Victoria should provide greater support to assist people into self-employment. This should include a training element, which would cover matters such as how to establish and register a business, acquire an ABN, connect with other entrepreneurs, and access seed funding. Jobs Victoria Employment Services recipients should also be supported to enter contracting arrangements, which can be a fast and efficient way of entering self-employment.

KEY ACTIONS

- **Commit $10 million to addressing barriers to employment through the development of a comprehensive multicultural employment plan for migrant and refugee communities, including contracting of ethno-specific and multicultural community organisations to provide employment services to their communities**

- **Fund Jobs Victoria Employment Services providers to provide training and support for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds seeking to establish small businesses.**

Secure the rights of migrant workers

An increasing body of evidence has in recent years highlighted large-scale exploitative employment practices affecting people living in Australia on temporary visas.[13] Although such practices are not confined to workers on temporary visas, their migration status and the nature of the work they do makes them particularly vulnerable to mistreatment.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a majority of temporary migrants reported that they had suffered a critical loss of income from loss of work and/or diminished family support, and that many could not meet their basic living needs.[14] This acute financial stress, compounded by ineligibility for Federal Government support such as Jobkeeper Payments, has caused many migrant workers to remain in dangerous or exploitative workplaces.[15]

The effects of the pandemic have emphasised the need for urgent action to combat the abuse and exploitation of workers on temporary visas. Although laws relating to the conditions of migrant workers come primarily under the Federal Government's jurisdiction, there are steps that the Victorian Government can take to support their rights. The important work being done by community legal centres and other organisations in providing workers with legal, education and casework support should be recognised and guaranteed ongoing funding.

Another issue of concern is the increased reporting of cases of "sham contracting," where employers misrepresent employment as independent contracting, requiring workers to register as a business and therefore making them ineligible for entitlements such as annual leave, sick leave and superannuation. Due to their unfamiliarity with Australian employment law, this issue particularly affects jobseekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

While the federal *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) outlaws sham contracting and provides serious penalties for those found to have engaged in it,[16] the Victorian Government has enforcement powers through Industrial Relations Victoria and the Wage Inspectorate. The Government can also play a key role in educating jobseekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds about sham contracting and facilitating access to assistance through community legal centres and organisations supporting migrant workers.

The Government should provide more support to programs aimed at educating migrant workers about their rights as employees and the supports that are available to them.

To help their clients avoid exploitative practices, support is also required for employment law education programs for community employment connectors and others who work as intermediaries to connect jobseekers to employment. Jobs Victoria could play a key role in educating and supporting their providers to help clients who encounter unfair work practices.

ECCV commends the recent initiative to provide workers in casual or insecure jobs with greater security through access to sick or carer's pay under the Victorian Sick Pay Guarantee. It is important that migrant and refugee communities are informed about this scheme.

KEY ACTIONS

- Provide education to jobseekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds about sham contracting and facilitate access to community legal assistance
- Provide education to employment brokers and connectors about employment law and how to prevent their clients falling prey to exploitative practices
- Provide more support to programs aimed at educating migrants and migrant workers about their rights as employees and supports available.

Enhance education and training pathways

People from migrant and refugee backgrounds faced significant barriers to participating in the labour market prior to the pandemic. Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic will require more accessible education and training pathways to facilitate better employment and economic outcomes.[17]

Collaborative, partnership-based models can create pathways into Vocational Education and Training (VET) and then on to sustainable employment for Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds, many of whom have experienced interrupted education. Such collaborations have proven highly successful in creating opportunities for specific communities - many of them in regional Victoria.

The final report of the Victorian Government's Skills for Victoria's Growing Economy review, released in February 2021, places a strong emphasis on collaboration in creating a stronger and more responsive VET sector, including tools to create partnerships.[18]

Partnerships can play a key role in helping to meet regional skills shortages, as well as providing pathways into education and sustainable employment for community members who face barriers to accessing the VET system. Multicultural and ethno-specific community organisations, such as ethnic communities' councils and migrant resource centres, can connect communities to training providers such as Learn Locals With assistance from Skills and Jobs Centres, and partnering employers that provide workplace training and experience, students can be supported to access educational pathways and employment.

There are numerous examples of the value of successful partnerships. but many have been funded only as pilots or short-term projects. Longer-term funding commitments are needed to ensure that these partnerships can be sustained for long enough to provide real, ongoing benefits to local communities

KEY ACTION

- Invest $20 million over four years to establish collaborative models to support new migrants to access Vocational Education and Training

Develop emergency and disaster resilience

Bushfires, floods and the COVID-19 pandemic have tested the resilience of Victorians and our emergency management systems in recent years. While these events impacted all members of the community, it has been evident that existing socioeconomic inequities meant that some groups were better able to cope, adapt and recover than others.

While structural disadvantage is at the heart of this disproportionate impact, there is a critical role for community-led action to support preparedness and resilience in the face of these and future emergencies.

Improving the emergency management system in Victoria is imperative at a time when climate change, demographic shifts and the higher frequency of natural disasters are all expected to increase the pressure on our communities and support structures.

The Government can play an important role in supporting migrant and refugee communities to prepare for future COVID-19 outbreaks, as well as natural disasters including bushfires, storms and floods.

Consultations conducted by ECCV in 2021 with representatives from ethnic communities in metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria reported a major disconnect between how official information is presented and disseminated, and the ways in which migrant and refugee communities obtain information.

New migrant and refugee communities cannot build their emergency preparedness and resilience safely and 'share responsibility' without adequate access to knowledge, training and trusted relationships with local institutions.

Supporting migrant and refugee communities to better understand and engage with emergency services requires a dedicated plan to enhance the cultural diversity and knowledge of the emergency services workforce.

The Victorian Government should continue to support the Multicultural Resilience Project, led by VCOSS and ECCV, as well as the work of the Regional Multicultural Emergency Management Project, led by ECCV in collaboration with regional ethnic communities' councils. These initiatives both grew out of the need to improve communication, coordination and collaboration between the emergency management sector and multicultural communities during the pandemic.

We need to build on the positive outcomes achieved through working with communities and supporting greater engagement with the emergency services sector. Additional funding is needed to sustain project work, including co-design of culturally relevant education and awareness-raising campaigns.

The Government should continue to leverage critical learnings and best-practice developed during the pandemic to achieve broader emergency preparedness outcomes.

Emergency preparedness also requires advance planning by government in areas likely to experience severe disruption in the event of future emergencies. For example, the government should have an employment model based on the Working for Victoria program (see p.16) ready to implement for emergencies that significantly disrupt the labour market.

KEY ACTIONS

- Improve diversity and inclusion in the emergency services workforce, with ongoing training on cultural responsiveness and cultural safety
- Fund delivery of regular and ongoing training to leaders of migrant and refugee communities about preparation for emergencies that impact their communities
- Fund initiatives to improve communication, coordination and collaboration between emergency services and migrant and refugee communities, both at state-wide and regional levels.

3

Strengthening social cohesion, inclusion and equality

The pandemic exposed many Victorians to prolonged periods of stress and isolation. Ongoing fear and uncertainty have left many feeling powerless and disengaged, increasing tensions in our community. We saw an escalation in incidents of racist abuse against people from Asian backgrounds.[19] The mobilisation of extremist far-right groups in Victoria also remains a pressing concern. Nationally, the 2021 Mapping Social Cohesion Report indicated that people from non-English speaking backgrounds continue to experience higher rates of discrimination.[20]

As we recover from the impacts of the pandemic, it is important that we prioritise how we connect with each other. Making clear commitments to combatting racism and promoting multicultural arts are some of the approaches we can take to do this. To promote substantive equality, specific initiatives are also needed to foster gender equality and address family violence in multicultural communities.

The social and community contexts in which we live and work are a key determinant of health and wellbeing. Hateful conduct diminishes people's dignity, self-worth and sense of belonging. If we do not address the harms of abuse and discrimination, we risk widening existing inequalities across all areas of life. To strengthen Victoria's social cohesion and promote our diversity, we must foster mutual trust and build resilient communities in which we all feel safe, connected and respected.

Develop strong anti-racism and anti-vilification measures

The Victorian Government's commitment to developing an **Anti-Racism Strategy** is a welcome step forward in addressing all forms of racism in our society. We are pleased that initial consultations have centred the priorities of a diverse range of stakeholders, organisations and people with lived experience across metro and regional Victoria. It is important that the Strategy's measures are strong and impactful, and not merely symbolic. This requires sustained and ongoing funding.

ECCV's consultations with people with lived experience of racism highlighted the need for preventative measures in priority settings, such as education and work, as well as culturally safe and trauma-informed support. A monitoring and evaluation framework to support the implementation of the Strategy and appropriate lines of government accountability, including racial equity considerations for decision-makers,[21] were also identified as priorities. To make a valuable impact, the Strategy must be able to address systemic forms of racism through such measures.

The Parliamentary Inquiry into Anti-Vilification Protections has highlighted the need for a more robust and accessible framework for addressing hateful and vilifying conduct. We encourage the Victorian Government to engage in targeted consultations to inform the drafting of new laws. ECCV works extensively with religious and cultural organisations and would be well-placed to coordinate consultations in partnership with the state government. We also commend the Victorian Parliament for heeding calls to formally investigate the rise of far-right extremism and the risks it poses to migrant and refugee communities.

Reform of the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001* (Vic) must complement the Anti-Racism Strategy. A whole-of-population approach is needed to respond to the intersectional reality of hateful and vilifying conduct, the various forms it takes, and how it affects our communities. The Victorian Government must support proactive measures to educate the community on the negative impacts of vilification and racism, the channels available for reporting, and the protections available.

KEY ACTIONS

- **Commit $32 million to ensure that Victoria's Anti-Racism Strategy is:**
  - **resourced and funded on an ongoing, multi-year basis**
  - **informed by ongoing consultation with people with lived experience**
  - **supported by an evaluation and measurement framework to review outcomes and priorities on an ongoing basis.**
- **Consult widely to implement the recommendations of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Anti-Vilification Protections, and ensure they are adequately resourced.**

Promote diversity through multicultural arts

Arts and culture are crucial to a diverse society. They provide safe spaces for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to express themselves, participate in the community, and recover from trauma. Sharing stories and learning about each other can help break down barriers and create a sense of belonging for people who are settling into life in Australia.

Despite increased cultural diversity in Australia, research has found that people from from migrant and refugee backgrounds continue to be under-represented in the creative and arts sector. The Australia Council's 2017 'Making Art Work' report indicated that only 10% of artists in the sector are from culturally diverse backgrounds.[22] A 2019 study by Diversity Arts Australia found that 51% of Australia's major cultural institutions had no diverse representation at the level of leadership. Further, only 9% of the 1,980 leaders and executives of major cultural bodies come from culturally diverse backgrounds.[23]

Cultural expression is a human right,[24] and the continuing absence of our diversity being reflected in the arts denies the right of many Victorians to be seen and heard. Remedying this must go beyond a 'tick-box' approach to diversity. At the heart of the problem is an imbalance in decision-making power. We must address the structural barriers that prevent people from migrant and refugee backgrounds from occupying leadership positions that allow them to make decisions about what stories are told, and how they are told.

Victoria's multicultural festivals and events bring immense economic, cultural and social benefits. Through sharing of culture and tradition, they help build a society that respects and

celebrates our diversity as our greatest asset.

ECCV stakeholders have expressed concern that the **Multicultural Festival and Grants Program** is considerably under resourced to meet its stated objectives of promoting and fostering social cohesion. To effectively support capacity-building and engagement with multicultural festivals and events, the Government must increase funding, introduce multi-year funding programs with less complex application processes, and partner with multicultural and community organisations. Celebrating our diversity through the arts increases the visibility of minority groups and voices, and ultimately emphasises our common humanity.

KEY ACTIONS

- Develop a diversity and inclusion strategy which ties funding for arts organisations to diversity targets
- Prioritise multicultural arts in the State's COVID recovery efforts, including the Melbourne City Revitalisation
- Increase funding for the Multicultural Festival and Grants Program to $10 million annually to better respond to current demand from Victoria's migrant and refugee communities
- Institute a multi-year program of support for festivals and events to support capacity-building and sustainability of culturally diverse festivals and events in Victoria.

Promote gender equality initiatives

Women from migrant and refugee backgrounds face many levels of disadvantage that hold them back from participating fully and equally in society. They are more likely to work in industries that offer low wages and rely on part-time and casualised roles, such as the service industry, hospitality and the care sector. Many also shoulder the burden of unpaid labour, such as childcare, housework and home-schooling.

Women are also often expected to provide informal care for family members, which can significantly impact the carer's ability to engage in paid employment. Minimal government support is offered for unpaid carers, and for carers from migrant and refugee backgrounds, access barriers and a lack of social support can lower their quality of life and amplify feelings of social isolation. Despite bringing an estimated value of up to $650.1 billion to the Australian economy, unpaid care work by all Australian women continues to be vastly under-valued.[25]

We know that crises such as the pandemic deepen existing gender inequalities. Mounting research suggests that migrant and refugee women experienced greater job and income losses throughout 2020 and 2021 as COVID-19 stay-at-home orders came into effect.[26] On top of this, they were also more likely to feel socially isolated, experience mental health issues, and find it difficult to access healthcare.[27] For women on temporary visas, the lack of eligibility for income and housing assistance left many unable to meet basic living needs.[28] Even when women on temporary visas are able to access crisis support, they have limited pathways for re-establishing economic independence, and this increases their reliance on those services. These pressures are known to increase the risk of family violence.

Despite this, stimulus and recovery initiatives have been primarily channelled into male-dominated industries, including defence, building and construction. We have not seen the same level of targeted measures in industries that care for children, older people, and people living with a disability, in which women are over-represented.[29] Although these areas are primarily a federal responsibility, the Victorian Government can invest in targeted gender equity initiatives that address the combined drivers of gender and race discrimination in the workplace.

ECCV applauds the Victorian Government's commitment to gender-responsive budgeting, however, it is important that it embeds an intersectional approach to address intersecting forms of inequality, such as racism and homophobia.

KEY ACTIONS

- **Commit $10 million over two years to promote gender equity initiatives that can improve the financial security and economic position of migrant and refugee women, such as:**
  - **Retraining and work readiness opportunities**
  - **Financial counselling**
  - **English language training**
  - **Leadership and capacity-building programs**
- **Support research about the experiences and needs of unpaid carers from migrant and refugee backgrounds**

Effectively address family violence for migrant and refugee women and their children

The Victorian Government has demonstrated a strong commitment to addressing family violence by resourcing services that aim to prevent violence before it occurs. However, funding for intervention services has not been as sustained or targeted. This has led to significant gaps in services that provide specialist support for migrant and refugee women.

Women from migrant and refugee backgrounds are more likely to experience multiple hardships that place them at greater risk of experiencing family violence – including financial insecurity, social isolation, and other stresses associated with settlement.[30] Migrant and refugee women also face a range of barriers when it comes to accessing support for family violence. This includes language difficulties, fear and distrust of authorities, difficulty navigating systems, and reliance on informal family or community networks, which can impact their willingness or ability to seek help.

The risk of experiencing family violence was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic due to lost employment, income losses, discrimination, and the increased burden of care work.[31] For refugee women, trauma experienced prior to, during and following migration has also been shown to increase the risk of intimate partner violence.[32]

Family violence is a leading cause of homelessness in Australia and is closely tied to the financial independence of the survivor. Women on temporary visas face increased risks as they are not eligible for a range of welfare and social entitlements, including social and crisis housing. Migrant and refugee women are also often financially dependent on their partners

or unable to work due to visa restrictions. Access to housing that is secure, affordable and immediately available is a critical factor in their support pathway.

Studies have found that migrant and refugee women often seek help following long periods of violence, particularly when the wellbeing of their children is at risk.[33] Multicultural and ethno-specific providers have the required expertise to engage with migrant and refugee communities and empower women in culturally meaningful ways. They are trusted, have existing relationships with community networks and are better equipped to consider the diverse values and personal experiences that affect the choices that a woman can make.

It is important that multicultural and ethno-specific providers have the capacity to respond to these needs and meet growing demand in metro and regional Victoria. The longer women are without appropriate support, the higher the risk of harm to themselves and their children.

KEY ACTIONS

- Commit $10 million to resource long-term housing options for women on temporary visas
- Commit $16 million over four years to resource multicultural organisations to provide culturally appropriate responses to family violence and facilitate partnerships with wraparound housing, legal advice and counselling supports.

4

Improving service delivery and project design

Members of migrant and refugee communities often face barriers to accessing services that support their health and wellbeing. Barriers include limited availability of culturally safe and responsive care, lack of awareness and knowledge, lower levels of health and digital literacy, and distrust of mainstream services. People from migrant and refugee backgrounds can struggle to navigate complicated service systems. These barriers are heightened by added layers of disadvantage, such as racism and a lack of cultural responsiveness in mainstream services. There is underutilisation by migrant and refugee communities of services like the mental health, aged care, and alcohol and other drug (AOD) systems.

Providing people from migrant and refugee backgrounds with the same treatment as the mainstream population is not inclusive. Exclusion from service systems inhibit settlement, health, social and economic outcomes. The pandemic response has shown the importance of bilingual and bicultural workers in providing tailored information and service connection. Greater investment is needed in bicultural workers in a wider variety of settings.

Multicultural and ethno-specific organisations are often best placed to provide appropriate services and care, as they are peer-led, employ bilingual and bicultural workers, have cultural expertise and strong relationships and networks within their communities that can be leveraged to deliver services effectively. Likewise, seniors, young people, and people with disability from migrant and refugee backgrounds often have specific needs to which mainstream supports and services are not responsive.

Tailored and peer-based responses designed and delivered by ethno-specific and multicultural organisations, in collaboration with mainstream providers, can fill these gaps and ensure greater substantive equality for Victorians from all backgrounds.

Promote good health and wellbeing

Build a supportive mental health system

Migrant and refugee communities have consistently identified that mental health concerns have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Victoria's mental health system has historically not been accessible or culturally responsive for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, resulting in low rates of utilisation.[34] Accessing and using the mental health system can be a profoundly alienating experience for many people from migrant and

refugee backgrounds, with the result that many people receive sub-optimal mental health care or do not use mental health services when they are needed.

These circumstances mean that many Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds seek mental health support from organisations in their own communities. The multicultural sector is well-equipped to play this role, through its existing relationships with communities, its cultural expertise, and community-led governance structures. However very few multicultural organisations are currently funded to deliver mental health services.

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System recommended that mental health service providers collaborate with diverse communities to develop services to meet their needs, and to assist them with navigating the system.[35] It also recognised the importance of greater diversity in the workforces of mental health providers to support a more culturally responsive system.[36]

ECCV is pleased that the Victorian Government has recognised the need for the state's mental health system to provide fair and equitable services for all members of our community through the establishment of the Diverse Communities Mental Health & Wellbeing Grants Program.

However, to fully implement the Royal Commission's recommendations, more long-term funding should be invested in the multicultural sector, including specialist multicultural mental health agencies, multicultural service providers, ethno-specific organisations, settlement services, faith-based organisations and community groups.

The mental health needs of migrant and refugee communities can be further addressed by building the capacity of mental health services to provide culturally sensitive care and to recruit bicultural and bilingual workers and provide them with mental health training. The Government must support settlement and multicultural services to provide trauma-informed care, and support mental health services to recruit and train bicultural and bilingual workers and integrate them into mental health teams.

ECCV also stresses the importance of giving people from migrant and refugee backgrounds with lived experience of the mental health system the opportunity to contribute to governance, co-design and decision-making. Investments should be made to build the capacity of those with relevant lived experience to participate in this process.

KEY ACTIONS

Improve mental health and wellbeing support across multicultural communities by:

- **Investing $40 million over four years for the multicultural sector to deliver mental health services**
- **Investing $8 million over four years to support people with lived experience of the mental health system to contribute to decision-making.**

Improve health literacy

The Victorian Government has recognised the importance of health literacy for migrant and refugee communities and commissioned several effective community health education projects. Prior to COVID-19, however, funding for such projects was generally short-term and not provided in the systematic manner necessary to increase health literacy in the long term.

The pandemic has shown the importance of bicultural workers in providing tailored health information and service connection. Bicultural workers based in community organisations have been key to this approach, providing support with contract tracing, outbreak management, and access to testing and vaccinations. The value of bicultural workers was recognised in the 2021-22 Budget, which provided $4.4 million for the development of a bicultural worker strategy.

Bicultural workers are ideally placed to co-design capacity building projects with their communities to enhance health literacy and improve participation, access, understanding and use of the health system.

ECCV proposes initiatives where communities would work with bicultural workers to co-design and deliver projects on their identified priorities. Projects should be locally based, use the skills in the community and develop their capacity to understand the health system.

The bicultural worker strategy should determine the areas of highest need to allocate funding most effectively, and create a model that ensures consistency of funding, remuneration and governance across all bicultural worker programs.

Access to quality translations of health information and professional interpreting services are key pillars for increasing health literacy and facilitating better engagement of migrant and refugee populations with the health system.

ECCV research has found that many Victorians do not understand the risk of miscommunication and adverse health outcomes when interpreting is provided by family members. There is also a lack of quantitative data about how often interpreters were requested by patients, and what proportion of requests were met. Health Services do not always offer interpreters to patients when they are required.

Studies have shown that the use of professional interpreters decreases the risk of communication errors and improves health outcomes for people with limited English proficiency. A longitudinal study by Northern Health of the effect of the re-establishment of its language services department and increased use of interpreters found the average length of stay and re-admission rates for patients with limited English fell considerably.[37]

The Victorian Government must provide sufficient funding to increase the supply of accredited interpreters to meet growing demand, particularly from new and emerging communities. Interpreters must always be available when requested by patients.

It is also vital that Victorians with limited English proficiency are made aware of their right to use professional interpreters, and of their importance in facilitating accurate communication in healthcare settings. An education campaign can help raise awareness about how to access interpreters, and about the Code of Ethics by which interpreters are bound. This could include simple measures such as placing multilingual posters in healthcare and community centres.

KEY ACTIONS

- Provide increased and ongoing funding for multicultural and ethno-specific community organisations for the employment of bicultural workers and the provision of local, community specific, health-based education initiatives
- Develop a campaign to raise awareness among multicultural community members of their right to access free interpreting and of the AUSIT Interpreters and Translators Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct.

Expand refugee health services to meet increased demand

The number of new migrants eligible for refugee health services is likely to increase in the coming years, beginning with the additional intake of refugees from Afghanistan, and the [38] arrival of refugees from Ukraine. There are also increasing numbers of new migrants arriving on Special Humanitarian Visas that are not part of Australia's capped humanitarian intake but are eligible for support because of their refugee backgrounds.

These trends are increasing demand and leading to the over-subscription of refugee health services. ECCV was pleased to see increased funding to support the health needs of refugees and people seeking asylum in the 2022-23 State Budget. However, to provide long-term support, the **Refugee Health Program** will require a sustained funding increase to employ a greater number of refugee health nurses to provide care for humanitarian entrants. The demand for refugee health nurses will be highest in the local government areas with the most sustained settlement growth - Wyndham, Casey, Monash, Greater Dandenong, Whittlesea, Hume, Moreland and Brimbank.

The **Refugee Health Fellows** program must also be expanded to include specialist psychiatry, and support for links to be fostered between psychiatric fellows and the Refugee Health Program, such as through mental health nurse liaisons who would provide links between primary care (and the Refugee Health Program) and tertiary mental health and psychiatric care.

The future health of humanitarian arrivals risks being compromised due to low rates of immunisation upon arrival in Australia. To mitigate this risk, the **Program for Immunisation, Monitoring and Education (PRIME)**, the catch-up immunisation program for newly arrived

refugees and people seeking asylum, needs to be expanded. Investment should be particularly focused on areas with high levels of humanitarian settlement that have gaps in program capture, such as Hume, Cardinia, Casey, and Wyndham.

KEY ACTIONS

- Fund additional refugee health nurses through the Refugee Health Program and expand the Refugee Health Fellows program to include specialist psychiatry
- Ensure sufficient funding for the Program for Immunisation, Monitoring and Education to meet current and future requirements.

Improve access to Alcohol and Drug Services

As with the mental health system, evidence shows that overseas-born Australians underutilise the alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment system. Data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows that just 14% of closed treatment episodes in the AOD system were for people born outside Australia, whereas 29% of the Australian population were born overseas.[39]

There is a lack of adequate data detailing the prevalence of harmful AOD use within migrant and refugee communities. People from migrant and refugee backgrounds may face increased risk of harm related to AOD use due to torture, trauma, grief and loss experienced in their country of origin and during, or following, the migration process. This risk may be aggravated by factors such as unemployment, language barriers and a lack of culturally appropriate services. To help inform policy decisions, the Victorian Government must establish a baseline of data about AOD prevalence and patterns of use within migrant and refugee communities.

The Government must also invest to improve access to culturally appropriate AOD information and services for migrant and refugee communities, and to improve the cultural competency of staff in AOD treatment services so that they can provide more effective treatment to people from diverse backgrounds.

Evidence shows that moving away from a punitive approach to illicit drug use, and adopting well-devised harm-reduction measures, can lead to better health and human rights outcomes. AOD use in all communities must be recognised as a health issue that is properly managed by health professionals. For this reason, ECCV supports the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Decriminalisation of Possession and Use of Drugs of Dependence) Bill 2022, and believes that this should be followed by further legislation aimed at moving towards a health-based, harm-minimisation approach to AOD use.

KEY ACTION

- Fund the creation of a team of bicultural AOD workers and develop culturally specific AOD resources in order to increase migrant and refugee community access to AOD services and build the capacity of local services to cater for their needs

Support peer-based support programs in dedicated hubs

Victoria's cities and local council areas are estimated to steadily grow at an average annual rate of 1.5%.[40] As we continue to welcome new migrants, particularly in regional areas, it is important that we have flexible and responsive supports in place to increase opportunities for social and community connection.

Research suggests that peer-based supports can offer unique benefits for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Such initiatives are culturally appropriate as they are facilitated by peers who share similar experiences. A central feature of peer-based supports is their focus on the strengths and assets of participants and their communities, rather than their deficits. They have been shown to enhance social connection and knowledge of services, and to improve mental health, acculturation, and other settlement outcomes.[41]

Migrants from new and emerging communities are more likely to have experienced trauma prior to and during the migration process. For many communities, mental health issues remain highly stigmatised. Peer-based supports can assist with emphasising the benefits of accessing such services and with navigating the broader mental health system. Longitudinal studies show that without appropriate support at settlement, the mental health and wellbeing of migrants and refugees is likely to worsen over time.[42]

In Victoria, the City of Melbourne's Multicultural Hub provides spaces for people from different cultures to meet, participate in events and activities, and cultivate new social networks. The central location of the Hub and the dedicated rooms and facilities it offers allow for a range of different programs, workshops and conferences to be hosted, at subsidised rates. Priority access is also given to First Nations communities and people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. The availability of low-cost and ready-to-use infrastructure is essential for less-established groups who may otherwise have limited means to hire a venue to deliver peer-based support.

KEY ACTIONS

- Commit to resourcing the evaluation of existing peer-support programs and models to assist with their replication across different communities and for different cohorts
- Partner with metro and regional communities with growing multicultural populations to pilot and replicate the Melbourne Multicultural Hub.

Improve access and inclusion for people with disability

People with disability want to live full and equal lives, free from discrimination, stigma and social isolation. The release of Inclusive Victoria: state disability plan (2022-2026) highlights the considerable progress we have made in recognising a human rights model of disability, which centres the needs, rights, dignity and autonomy of people with disability.

A guiding principle of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is that society places limits on a person, not their disability. Communities, services and spaces that are not accessible or inclusive remain a barrier to all people with disability. For people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, these barriers are exacerbated by added layers of disadvantage, including racism and a lack of cultural responsiveness in mainstream services more generally.

Without secure and long-term funding, Victoria's disability advocacy sector is unable to equitably meet the needs of people with disability. Increased core funding is required for the **Victorian Disability Advocacy Program** to address unmet demands for self-advocacy and improve access, coverage and awareness of disability support services, particularly in rural and regional areas. The new State Disability Plan (2022-2026) has committed to an intersectional approach, and it is important that this is reflected in its implementation so that it can adequately address the multiple forms of structural disadvantage that affect people with disability.

Equality that only involves the same treatment as people without disability is not inclusive of people with disability and, ultimately, leads to exclusion. Exclusion can have far-reaching negative impacts in all aspects of life – for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, exclusion from service systems can inhibit their settlement, health, social and economic participation, and full inclusion in Australian society. As we plan for the future of our state, we need to continue to be guided by people with disability and listen to what works best for them.[43]

Improve access and coverage of disability advocacy

People from migrant and refugee backgrounds may not always have the skills, knowledge, confidence or trust needed to articulate their needs and preferences. They may struggle to navigate Australia's complex system of services due to lower levels of health literacy and English-language proficiency, and lack of informal support networks. Advocacy services provide vital support, enabling people with disability to connect with services and genuinely participate in the decisions that impact their lives. At a systems level, advocacy influences law and policy to ensure that the rights of people with disability are promoted and secured.

In recent years, there has been a significant effort to improve the reach and capacity of Victoria's disability advocacy sector. However, services continue to lack secure and long-term funding, which not only limits their coverage but also their capacity to take part in outreach and community engagement. Access data for the **Victorian Disability Advocacy Program (VDAP)** suggests that people from migrant and refugee backgrounds are less likely to access disability services resourced under this scheme.[44] Minimal and inconsistent data collection limits our understanding of advocacy utilisation rates in general, but research also suggests that there is little awareness of the initiatives available among people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Research by ECCV has highlighted the need to improve awareness of the availability and benefits of advocacy for this group. Many people with disability from migrant and refugee backgrounds may simply be unaware that an advocate could help with their issue, or be in a situation where information about advocacy is withheld from them. Others may have had a poor experience with disability advocacy, leading to their disengagement.

Peer-led initiatives such as ECCV's Raise our Voices can help develop self-advocacy skills in a culturally safe and affirming context. This program helps people with disability to build the autonomy to make their own choices, voice their concerns and better navigate the disability support system. Improving the coverage and reach of Raise of Voices and similar programs will help empower people from migrant and refugee backgrounds with a disability, and their families and carers.

KEY ACTIONS

- Increase core funding for the Victorian Disability Advocacy Program (VDAP) to:
  - Include more representative organisations for people with disability from migrant and refugee backgrounds
  - Ensure advocacy organisations can undertake systemic advocacy
  - Improve data collection practices of VDAP organisations and improve our understanding of the demographics, service utilisation rates, and needs of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds
- Address unmet demands for self-advocacy and improve access, coverage and awareness of available support services, particularly in rural and regional areas.

Effectively resource state-based disability supports and partnerships

Much like other jurisdictions, Victoria retains a responsibility to provide disability support and funding for people who are not eligible for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) or who may not be able to secure appropriate funding under the consumer-driven model. This includes people who do not meet the residency requirements of the NDIS and those with complex health conditions. Others may be eligible, but there are no available services in their area, particularly in remote areas where there is not a sustainable market for providers.[45] This results in a significant gap in disability support for many Victorians.

Victoria's **Access and Support Program (A&S)** has been essential in bridging this gap. A&S workers assist people with disability from diverse backgrounds, regardless of visa status, to navigate available services and connect to vital supports. A&S workers across the state are familiar with local services and can work directly with the person to understand their specific needs and address cultural and language barriers. The program is unique to Victoria and has been running for over 10 years with many positive outcomes. It has been used as an example of best practice for the new Care Finder roles being rolled out nationally from January 2023.

The **Home and Community Care Program for Younger People (HACC PYP)** also provides vital disability support for people who are not eligible for the NDIS. However, since the 2015 aged care reforms – which split the administration of the former HACC – the sector development work that previously supported the HACC PYP has become fragmented. Many of the service system support roles that promoted cross-sector collaboration, networks, information-sharing, and practice development have been discontinued or have not had adequate resourcing to continue. The HACC PYP has not been able to meet demand across Victoria and has become increasingly difficult to navigate.

Without adequate staffing, A&S Workers and HACC PYP service providers have found it difficult to coordinate and secure the required assistance for people with chronic health conditions. We commend the $135 million commitment in the 2022-23 State Budget to support people with disability who are not eligible for the NDIS. However, a substantial decrease in funding for the HACC PYP, which also funds the A&S program, will see many at-risk Victorians fall behind.

As further reforms take place in the coming years, it is essential that sector development roles within HACC PYP and the A&S are sufficiently resourced to support the sector to adapt. From 2023, the A&S program will be merged into the new national Care Finder program. It is vital that the Victorian Government continues to support people who are not eligible for the NDIS.

The Victorian Government must set clear funding priorities to continue to support people with disability and provide them with greater certainty as they continue to plan for their futures. The review of the *Disability Act 2006* (Vic) also provides a timely opportunity to legislate for state-based safeguards for people who are not eligible for the NDIS.

KEY ACTIONS

- Ensure continuity of services for people not eligible for the NDIS during the transition from the Access and Support program to the Care Finder model
- Provide additional funding to multicultural HACC PYP service providers to help meet demand

- Raise awareness of HACC PYP in migrant and refugee communities as an alternative means of support for people who are ineligible for certain government services.

Build an inclusive environment for people of all abilities

In consultations with ECCV, people with disabilities from migrant and refugee backgrounds have described how the COVID-19 pandemic caused feelings of isolation, frustration and boredom, particularly for children with disability and their parents. Many of the restrictions introduced by the government to reduce the spread of the virus did not consider the challenges of people with disability. People living with disability felt forgotten during the crisis, and their needs an afterthought for government. These issues compounded many of the frustrations already felt by people with disability about the accessibility of infrastructure, transport and built environments. Migrants and refugees with disability have also stressed that they would benefit from targeted community education about disability rights, so that their communities can become more welcoming and inclusive of people with disability.

As part of the current review of the *Disability Act 2006* (Vic), ECCV has recommended strengthening various provisions that local governments are required to include in their Disability Action Plans.[46] It is important that these Plans abide by all relevant national disability standards and include more robust mechanisms for monitoring local built environments.

The new State Disability Plan commits to working across government to embed universal design principles in all elements of the design and delivery of infrastructure. This includes releasing a whole-of-government Universal Design Policy, and sharing examples of good design practice with communities, industry and local government. ECCV applauds this commitment and believes that embedding universal design principles in all areas of infrastructure is a crucial step towards building an inclusive environment for all Victorians.

In consultations with ECCV, community members have also emphasised the importance of an accessible transport network as part of an inclusive environment, and the limitations they can face when the network fails to meet accessibility standards such as those formulated under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth). Accessibility is a systemic issue and requires solutions that don't rely on individual complaints made under discrimination law.

ECCV believes that a comprehensive transport accessibility strategy is necessary to identify and remove the barriers to transport accessibility for Victorians with disabilities, and we are pleased that a commitment to do this is also contained in the new Disability Plan, along with a commitment to appoint a Chief Accessibility Advocate to oversee improvements to transport inclusion and access.[47]

KEY ACTIONS

- Publicly release a whole-of-government Universal Design Policy and share examples of good design practice with communities, industry and local government
- Ensure that the Disability Action Plans of local governments prioritise disability standards and include more robust monitoring of built environments for accessibility.

Promote active and positive ageing for older people

Older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds are a large and highly diverse group, with varying experiences, needs and perspectives. At the time of the 2016 Census, there were over 922,000 older people aged 65 and over in Victoria, 22% of whom spoke languages other than English at home.[48] In 2021, the population of older people (65+) increased by 170,254, now totalling over 1.09 million.[49] As our population continues to age, we need to ensure that responsive and culturally appropriate supports are in place to allow older people to continue to lead healthy lives and age well.

To promote healthy and positive ageing, we must use an intersectional lens that recognises that older people's circumstances – such as their gender, cultural background, their income level and whether they live with a disability – affect how they interact with and are viewed by society. These factors, among others, can influence how they access support services, their vulnerability to elder abuse, and their level of engagement with their communities.

ECCV's submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Support for Older Victorians from Migrant and Refugee backgrounds highlighted the need to improve health systems, build the capacity of culturally specific services, invest in data collection, and engage in participatory research to inform the design of services. ECCV calls on the government to accept and implement the recommendations of the final report of the Parliamentary Inquiry. It is important that we do not lose sight of the personal stories, insights and experiences shared in public hearings – such stories connect us to the factors responsible for broader problems and help illuminate paths for systems change.

Address gaps in service provision and culturally responsive care

In 2015, reforms to the aged care system transferred all funding responsibility for aged care to the Commonwealth and led to the implementation of a consumer-driven model for accessing care. Prior to the reforms, many older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds relied on **Commonwealth Home Support Program** (CHSP) services provided through local government, which is no longer available. This has led to service gaps.

Organisations that receive funding under both the CHSP and Victoria's Home and Community Care Program for Younger People (HACC PYP) are now contending with the transition of the CHSP to a new model in 2024 (a single Support at Home Program). These changes risk eaving organisations with a funding shortfall, with smaller organisations reporting that they

may not have the resources to continue to deliver services. This is of particular concern in regional communities where there are no other service providers that offer culturally specific care, leaving older people extremely vulnerable to living without care.

Australia-wide, people from migrant and refugee backgrounds remain underrepresented in their use of aged care, although utilisation rates are steadily increasing. As of 2020, 27% of people in this group accessed home care packages, 20% accessed residential care, and 21% accessed home support.[50] A range of barriers preclude older people from accessing services, including a lack of awareness and knowledge, the complexity of the system, and distrust of mainstream services. These challenges highlight the need for aged care navigation that can assist older people with accessing appropriate care. Aged Care navigation support provided by Victoria's Access and Support Program has been essential in this regard (see p.35).

Stakeholders have consistently informed ECCV that the limited availability of culturally safe and responsive aged care is a significant factor that also accounts for these gaps in service utilisation. Many older people from migrant and refugee communities prefer care that is delivered in-language, offers culturally appropriate food, and is inclusive of their beliefs and cultural needs. This is not just about accommodating personal preferences; maintaining connections to culture is an important source of wellbeing and is fundamental to ageing well.

Bilingual adults who live with dementia may also require in-language care. Language deficits are a common symptom of dementia, and emerging research suggests that bilingual patients most often lose their second language – English – as the disease progresses.[51] Without access to bilingual workers, older bilingual people with dementia may not be able to communicate effectively with their peers and carers, and this can have a significant impact on their care and wellbeing.

As the Victorian Government retains responsibility for direct provision of some residential aged care, there is an opportunity to enhance cultural responsiveness and access within Victorian government-operated residential aged care facilities.

Research also suggests that older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds rely on informal family care for support, due to safety and cultural concerns. Demographic shifts will see family members having less capacity or willingness to care for older relatives, resulting in this cohort of older people seeking other forms of care out of necessity.

Where older people do seek residential support, mainstream services are often unable to meet their cultural, language and culinary needs. Short-term strategies can be adopted to improve the cultural responsiveness of mainstream services, including providing more personalised care, clustering people from similar backgrounds together, and leveraging the language and cultural skills of the existing workforce by training them as bicultural workers.

The Government must support organisations that provide culturally appropriate and responsive care through increased funding and integration into the care system. Compared to more established migrant communities, new and emerging communities have not had the opportunity to obtain resources to establish ethno-specific aged care services. These gaps can result in vulnerable groups missing out on essential services, support and entitlements

KEY ACTIONS

- **Review the support provided to older people through local government since the 2015 aged care reforms and develop a plan to ensure ongoing support**
- **Support multicultural and ethno-specific organisations, and new and emerging communities, to establish aged care community infrastructure and programs**

- Commission research that examines what ageing well means to older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to help inform the design and delivery of services
- Resource education and awareness raising programs to empower older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds and their families to make informed decisions about their care.

Combat elder abuse

Victoria's population is steadily ageing, with people from migrant and refugee backgrounds projected to become the dominant group of people aged 65 and over. More attention must be paid to prevention and early intervention of elder abuse in this growing population. However, many current initiatives are not specifically tailored to address their needs.

There is also very little research about the drivers and risk factors of elder abuse in this group, such as cultural norms, intergenerational factors, cognitive capacity, and immigration status. Improving the evidence base and developing collaborative and community-wide solutions needs to be a high priority for the Victorian Government.

In a recent national study, the Australian Institute of Family Affairs estimated that 15.3% of older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds experienced elder abuse, with 4% reporting abuse that was related to language and culture. While this does not differ significantly from the general population of community-dwelling older people (14.8%), qualitative research suggests that how elder abuse occurs, how it is perpetuated and by whom, can differ in migrant and refugee communities.

For example, vulnerability to elder abuse has been linked to cultural perceptions of what constitutes abuse, tolerance for certain types of abuse, and reluctance to report abuse due to cultural expectations about privacy and taking care of elders in the family.[52] Conflict about the challenges of informal caregiving may also lead to frustration with the older family member, which can escalate to abuse.[53] Older people may be unwilling to identify actions perpetuated by a family member as abuse, and may be afraid of the stigma attached to disclosure. They may also lack awareness of the information and services available to them.

These factors, among others, can intensify the effects of elder abuse as they prevent older people from accessing timely support. Since 2012, ECCV has coordinated a state-wide project that raises awareness and delivers community education about elder abuse.

Community-based initiatives such as ECCV's Elder Abuse Prevention Project provide best-practice examples of how bicultural workers and educators can be trained to deliver in-language, culturally appropriate and safe information sessions to people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

he Government must resource tailored initiatives to prevent and respond to elder abuse in migrant and refugee communities. ECCV supports the recommendations of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Support for Older Victorians from Migrant and Refugee Backgrounds to develop an elder abuse strategy that builds on past work and research.

KEY ACTION

- Commit $16 million to resource prevention, early intervention and response to elder abuse against people from migrant and refugee backgrounds

Improve digital inclusion and literacy

Digital technology played a major role in the way we maintained contact with each other and managed daily life during COVID-19 public health restrictions. Over the past decade, governments in Australia have made slow advances in digitising public services. The pandemic has significantly accelerated this trend and most government services and utilities are now digitised. However, as with any other change in policy implementation, governments must also ensure that older people are not excluded or left behind.

This also extends to ensuring that seniors have access to digital devices and affordable internet connections to enable digital inclusion. The 2021 Australian Digital Inclusion Index report highlighted that digital literacy and access to technology are closely tied to age, with older Australians recording a lower average score on the digital inclusion index (47.4 compared to 71.1 in the general population).[54]

Digital literacy is increasingly becoming a barrier to accessing services, and to social participation, particularly for older people with low levels of education, income and employment, who have recently settled or do not speak English as a first language.[55] Many older people also cannot afford access to internet connections or digital devices. Moreover, although online-based scams affect people of all ages and backgrounds, older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds may be more vulnerable due to social isolation, increased financial stress, and limited English proficiency. Systems-based interventions in banking and cybersecurity will be most impactful at preventing financial losses due to scams, but targeted education and digital literacy initiatives also play an important role for this cohort.

ECCV stakeholders have indicated that most older people prefer accessing 'analogue' services and engaging in-person with others. The reduction in face-to-face services and information delivery has resulted in long waiting times and increased complexity for older people looking to access vital information and engage with their communities.

The Government must address barriers to digital inclusion to ensure that older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds can access information, connect with services, and communicate with family and friends in Australia and overseas. To be effective, training programs must be culturally appropriate, in-language, and delivered through local touch points such as councils, libraries, and community groups.

KEY ACTIONS

- **Deliver tailored digital literacy training programs and subsidise access to digital devices and internet connections for older people on low incomes**
- **Provide alternatives to online platforms, such as face-to-face contact, to improve access to services and information for older people.**

Engage older people in social and leadership opportunities

ECCV members and stakeholders have informed us that older people are being underestimated and under-utilised in our communities. Older people have many important contributions to make and would benefit from increased opportunities to participate in civic decision-making, peer-based education and leadership opportunities. Yet, we often focus on their needs and problems as recipients of services. Older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds must be engaged in decision-making processes and the design of programs, policies and services. We must recognise and build on their strengths and the many benefits they bring to our communities.

Efforts to improve inclusion also have tangible positive effects on health and economic wellbeing. Loneliness has been identified as Australia's 'silent killer', costing up to $2.7 billion each year.[56] Social isolation affects all age groups and can significantly harm our mental and physical health. Older people are more likely to experience many of the risk factors that cause loneliness and social isolation, such as the death of a partner, retirement, changes in income, and chronic health conditions.[57] For older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, the risk of social isolation can be compounded by language and cultural barriers, lack of existing social networks, and low knowledge of support services and how to access them.

Ethno-specific seniors' clubs and associations provide culturally-relevant, peer-based support to their members, and have considerable health and wellbeing benefits for older people who may otherwise feel socially isolated. Seniors' clubs and associations function as positive ageing hubs for older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. They support their members by facilitating a range of healthy ageing activities and connecting peers through common culture, food and language.

Many seniors' clubs face challenges with resourcing and with continuing to operate in line with COVID-safe requirements. They also encounter difficulties with applying for grants online, covering fees such as insurance, meeting funding requirements, and booking local venues due to increased privatisation.

To engage older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, the Government must support seniors' clubs to ensure that they can operate sustainably, develop inclusive strategies to build their leadership capacity, and ensure that grant and reporting requirements are accessible and inclusive.

KEY ACTIONS

- Develop inclusive recruitment and promotion strategies to include older people in decision-making and co-design processes
- Support new and emerging communities to establish seniors' clubs and help cover ongoing running costs, such as public liability insurance
- Work closely with seniors' clubs and associations to understand their varying support needs, and to inform future grant programs and reporting requirements.

Empower and engage young people

Young people from migrant and refugee communities face specific challenges that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.[58] Prior to the pandemic, young people in Victoria were already facing increased unemployment, insecure housing and mental health concerns. They have been particularly disadvantaged by the increasing casualisation of work, the rising number of unpaid internships, and difficulties gaining volunteer roles. Young people make up the majority of workers in industries such as hospitality and retail that were most impacted by job losses due to COVID-19 public health regulations.[59]

COVID-19 has also had a negative impact on the mental health of young people from migrant and refugee communities, who were already under-served by mental health services before the pandemic.[60] A rise in youth disengagement in many communities has been reported to ECCV.

Young people who have recently settled in Victoria have distinct needs compared to adults and Australian-born peers, requiring specific supports and resources.[61] The COVID-19 pandemic has had severe impacts on young people in disadvantaged circumstances, such as disrupted education, increased family and domestic responsibilities, and financial stress.

These impacts will affect young people, their families and communities for years to come. Without the opportunity to build networks, develop a broad range of skills, and establish social connections with peers, recently arrived young people will be at risk of falling through the gaps.

The majority of settlement services focus on adults and family groups, while the majority of youth services focus on young people born in Australia.[62] Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds need specific supports to address the potential long-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Support with education, after-school programs, partnerships between schools, parents and communities, and support with coaching and mentoring are needed to improve labour market outcomes for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.[63]

ECCV commends the release of the new state-wide youth strategy, Our Promise, Your Future 2022-2027, which has prioritised recovery from the pandemic, re-engagement in education and employment, embedding young voices in service design and delivery, and addressing increased social isolation. The strategy has also prioritised investment in services that are coordinated, responsive and accessible to young people. However, there is little reference to the additional barriers that newly arrived young people face when accessing services, and the need for targeted support.

The Government should prioritise support for young people who have recently arrived in Victoria by establishing new youth work positions in LGAs with high concentrations of newly arrived young people. These positions should be supported with resourcing to establish programs and initiatives that support recently arrived young people to progress with education, build their networks, establish social connections and develop skills. Additional youth work positions located in areas where significant numbers of young people have settled will more effectively reach young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds and assist with a broad range of settlement related and other needs to recover and thrive after the pandemic.

KEY ACTIONS

- Increase culturally tailored mental health and well being support for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds
- Develop employment initiatives to support young people, including international students and people seeking asylum, in employment
- Invest $8 million over four years for new youth work positions in the seven LGAs with the highest concentrations of newly arrived young people.

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