



Submission to the Department of Social Services on Foundational Supports

December 2024



About ECCV

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.

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.

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Further Information

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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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Introduction

ECCV appreciates the consultation process being implemented by the Australian Government Department of Human Services, and welcomes the opportunity to have input into the design of Foundational Supports for people with disability, particularly to improve the lives of those from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

The disability support system in Australia is undergoing significant change, especially with the recent passing of the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Getting the NDIS Back on Track No.1) Bill* in August 2024. We understand that many changes will be made through new NDIS rules affecting access to the Scheme, and the level and types of support that will be available to those deemed eligible. In fact, some of the new NDIS laws are already in effect. Within this new regime Foundational Supports are evidently of supreme importance, as they will assist people with disability outside the NDIS, and their families and carers.

As the peak body for Victoria's migrant and refugee communities, ECCV is aware that Australian and state and territory governments are currently working together to ensure social inclusion and equity for people with disability, including through the design of Foundational Supports that meet their needs and aspirations, while also supporting families and carers. In this submission we outline particular issues and barriers for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, and ways to address them in the design of Foundational Supports.

Our submission is informed by insights and experiences from various ECCV policy advisory committees and networks, our project and policy work, and our advocacy for and with people with disabilities from culturally diverse backgrounds. We convene a multicultural Statewide Disability Network that acts as a forum for sharing and discussing important information, and identifying issues for advocacy. We also manage a Multicultural Disability Hub on our website, which was developed as a resource for people with disability from migrant and refugee communities, their families, carers, as well as the disability sector in general. Our current projects also include:

- 'Raise our Voices', which empowers and improves self-advocacy skills for people from migrant and refugee communities with disability and their families and carers
- 'Speak My Language', which is a national initiative featuring culturally diverse Australians sharing real stories, experiences and tips about living well with disability through radio and audio and video podcasts.¹

ECCV is committed to supporting and empowering people with disability and carers from migrant and community backgrounds through our research and our program, policy and advocacy work. This work is necessarily *with* and *for* people with disability. At this important juncture we believe it is vital that Foundational Supports are established and developed that can address the needs and aspirations of people with disability, their families and carers from diverse communities - upholding their human rights, while supporting a good quality of life of their choosing.

¹ The Speak My Language (Disability) program is an initiative funded by the Commonwealth Government under the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) Framework, National Disability Insurance Scheme. It is proudly supported by ECCNSW and the primary national Partners ECCV, ECCQ, MCCSA, MCNT, MCOT, ECCWA, and our national broadcasting partner SBS. The Program has a person and life focus, rather than a disability or NDIS one. It focuses on living well, inclusion and dignity.

The information in this submission is drawn from ECCV's substantial work in the disability sector, including our Statewide Disability Network and other policy networks, our various consultations, and research projects, and ECCV program work with people with disability from migrant and refugee backgrounds. We specifically draw from recent consultations we carried out with our members and networks for our Victorian Pre-budget Submission 2025-2026.

This submission addresses three main areas of importance for Foundational Supports that will support people with disability, uphold their human rights, and enable them to live fulfilling lives of their choosing:

1. Information, advice and referrals
2. Capacity building
3. Sector and workforce development.

Recommendations are organised under these headings.

Summary of Recommendations

1 Information, advice and referrals

- 1.1. Provide information to people with disability and carers via community-based groups and support groups in ethno-specific and multicultural organisations, and resource them to provide this service.
- 1.2. Fund programs to raise awareness in multicultural communities of disability, stigmatisation and its impacts, and ways that people with disabilities can be better included for the benefit of all.
- 1.3. Fund programs to increase access to information, support, and social connection, for people with disability from migrant and refugee backgrounds, through ethno-specific and multicultural organisations, and community leaders.
- 1.4. Resource partnerships between Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) and community-based organisations, including multicultural and ethno-specific organisations, to raise awareness about disability in culturally diverse communities.
- 1.5. Leverage existing relationships of trust with ethno-specific and multicultural organisations, bicultural/ bilingual workers, and community leaders to disseminate information about Foundational Supports.
- 1.6. Provide funding for research on the optimal avenues of communication about supports for different culturally and linguistically diverse communities.
- 1.7. Resource frontline health services to provide culturally appropriate information and referrals to people with disability and carers from migrant and refugee backgrounds.
- 1.8. Continue the Disability Liaison Program to provide direct support for people with disability to access the health care they need, with adequate resourcing to support people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.
- 1.9. Provide funding for ethno-specific and multicultural organisations to train workers in mainstream organisations in culturally appropriate and sensitive communication to support people with disabilities, families and carers.
- 1.10. Always provide alternative avenues of government information, communication and engagement to digital.
- 1.11. Continue the development and implementation of communication strategies by all government departments, at all levels of government, to include those who are currently digitally excluded, with a particular focus on people with disability and older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Include ethnic media in the form of newsletters, newspapers and radio programs, as well as ethno-specific and multicultural organisations, and community leaders.
- 1.12. Improve government departmental and service websites within existing digital technologies to make them more user-friendly for people with disability and older people, particularly those from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

2 Capacity building

- 2.1 Provide the required resourcing for tailored support and empowerment of people with disabilities from migrant and refugee backgrounds to connect with groups and communities and pursue their goals and interests.
- 2.2 Provide culturally sensitive training and awareness-raising to carers from migrant and refugee backgrounds so they can support decision making by the person with disability in their care.
- 2.3 Proactively include carers from migrant and refugee backgrounds in *all* information and training initiatives by the government relating to disability and disability support.
- 2.4 Fund community organisations to enable them to be inclusive of people with disability from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

3 Sector and workforce development

- 3.1 Increase investment in training programs in cultural competence for disability service providers, to provide them with the skills and knowledge to effectively support people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.
- 3.2 Invest in the development of workforce targets for the next generation of bicultural workers in the disability sector, including the professional development and training of disability workers from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- 3.3 Provide longer-term block funding to smaller trusted ethno-specific and multicultural organisations that provide key services and support to culturally diverse communities, to support and include people with disability and carers.
- 3.4 Include in the Victorian Government Support for Carers Program (SCP) resourcing for the establishment of interagency partnerships between multicultural community organisations and mainstream carer services to deliver projects that identify and address the needs of carers from multicultural backgrounds, and connect them with respite and support services, and social activities.
- 3.5 Provide mainstream schools with additional resourcing to help them support and educate children with disabilities from diverse cultural backgrounds, and resource cultural awareness training for teachers and educators to assist them to communicate and constructively engage with and support parents from migrant and refugee backgrounds.
- 3.6 Adopt a co-design approach for supports for people with disability, families and carers from migrant and refugee backgrounds, including people with intersecting experiences of being: LGBTQI, a woman, older, younger, and/or a person of colour.
- 3.7 Implement a developmental evaluation approach whereby people with disability and carers are involved in the design and development of programs and supports, and their ongoing monitoring, evaluation and adaptation.
- 3.8 Governments and data collection bodies co-design data collection frameworks, including monitoring and evaluation, based on disaggregated data models and participatory practices.

1 Information, advice and referrals

Information is often most accessible for people with disabilities from multicultural backgrounds through support groups and community-based groups in their own language, especially for members of new and emerging communities. Such groups need not necessarily be specifically for people with disabilities and may have a gender or special interest focus, for example; ethno-specific social groups or women's groups.

In such settings participants may raise something they have heard and have casual conversations to collectively make sense of the information. Sometimes a community leader or group member might identify a community need or area of interest and may invite a person with expertise to present on this. With presentations in English, someone in the group may have the capacity to interpret.

Recommendation:

1.1. Provide information to people with disability and carers via community-based groups and support groups in ethno-specific and multicultural organisations, and resource them to provide this service.

Awareness raising and de-stigmatisation of disability in some cultural groups and communities may be necessary to increase channels of communication and inclusion of people with disability, thus eliminating barriers to obtaining vital information and social connection.

Initiatives to increase understanding and awareness about disability among culturally diverse communities may be best delivered through partnerships between Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) and community-based organisations, including multicultural and ethno-specific organisations.

Recommendations:

1.2. Fund programs to raise awareness in multicultural communities of disability, stigmatisation and its impacts, and ways that people with disabilities can be better included for the benefit of all.

1.3. Fund programs to increase access to information, support, and social connection, for people with disability from migrant and refugee backgrounds, through ethno-specific and multicultural organisations, and community leaders.

1.4. Resource partnerships between Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) and community-based organisations, including multicultural and ethno-specific organisations, to raise awareness about disability in communities.

For people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, including those with disability and their families and carers, information is often best delivered through existing relationships of trust – usually with community-based multicultural or ethnic-specific organisations.

Employment of bicultural and bilingual workers based in a range of organisations is also crucial, and should be central to a strategy to connect with and empower people with disability from

migrant and refugee backgrounds to know about and access Foundational Supports, and other supports that might be needed.

Community leaders are often important for disseminating information relating to available supports. This being said, there is no 'one size fits all', and the optimal avenues of information dissemination will vary by cultural and language group, as well as by age cohort, gender and geographical area. Thus a first step will be to conduct research to identify the optimal avenues, with some periodical review built into relevant communication plans.

Recommendations:

- 1.5. Leverage existing relationships of trust with ethno-specific and multicultural organisations, bicultural/ bilingual workers, and community leaders to disseminate information about Foundational Supports.**
- 1.6. Provide funding for research on the optimal avenues of communication about supports for different culturally and linguistically diverse communities.**

Frontline health services and practitioners such as occupational therapists, speech therapists, psychologists, General Practitioners, hospital emergency departments and similar have a substantial role to play in giving information to people with disabilities from migrant and refugee backgrounds, and providing them with options and referrals to meet their needs and aspirations. This is especially important for people with disability, as well as carers, who are isolated from their own community, and are not connected with local groups and organisations. So that health services can perform this role, resources need to be dedicated to upskilling providers, and providing clinics and services with up-to-date information and flyers in preferred languages. This should include information about disability and cultural awareness, to assist them in linking people to appropriate services.

In addition, it is vital that the Disability Liaison Officer (DLO) program continues to provide direct support for people with disability to access the health care they need, and that DLOs continue to be based in health services across metropolitan and regional Victoria.

Recommendations:

- 1.7. Resource frontline health services to provide culturally appropriate information and referrals to people with disability and carers from migrant and refugee backgrounds.**
- 1.8. Continue the Disability Liaison Program to provide direct support for people with disability to access the health care they need, with adequate resourcing to support people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.**

Presenters providing formal information to community groups, including people with disability and carers from migrant and refugee backgrounds, need to be skilled in plain speaking, without resort to jargon or bureaucratic language. This applies whether they are speaking in English, or in a community language.

Social permission and spaces also need to be created for people to have the confidence to say when they don't understand, ask questions and have their questions addressed. This is especially

important when information is not being delivered through organisations and groups that have existing relationships of trust with community members.

Training in plain English and culturally sensitive communication may be provided to people in mainstream organisations by workers in ethno-specific and multicultural organisations, however they would need to be funded adequately to carry out this work.

Recommendation:

1.9. Provide funding for ethno-specific and multicultural organisations to train workers in mainstream organisations in culturally appropriate and sensitive communication to support people with disabilities, families and carers.

Reliance on digital communication and connection acts as a barrier for many people with disability, who may not have digital skills, devices or online connection. The social and organisational exclusion that results from this is compounded by language barriers for those from migrant and refugee backgrounds, especially those who are older. (For more information see ECCV research on this topic: <https://eccv.org.au/bridging-digital-divide/>).

Recommendations:

1.10. Always provide alternative avenues of government information, communication and engagement to digital.

1.11. Continue the development and implementation of communication strategies by all government departments, at all levels of government, to include those who are currently digitally excluded, with a particular focus on people with disability and older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Include ethnic media in the form of newsletters, newspapers and radio programs, as well as ethno-specific and multicultural organisations, and community leaders.

1.12. Improve government departmental and service websites within existing digital technologies to make them more user-friendly for people with disability and older people, particularly those from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

2 Capacity building

As outlined in the introduction to this submission, ECCV has been supporting and empowering people with disability through various programs for some time now, including self-advocacy workshops. This informs some of the insights and suggestions below, along with intelligence gathered through our networks and various consultations. Certainly, government resourcing to support self-advocacy needs to be ongoing, and funded for no less than five years, given that building trusting relationships and the capacity and confidence for self-advocacy invariably takes time.

Supporting people with disability and carers to better connect with communities also requires a high level of awareness and relationship-building by the service provider. Support workers need time and the capacity within funded programs to learn about the person with disability and their culture, and their needs, concerns, interests and aspirations. Only after doing this, can they sensitively think about and discuss what sort of groups, activities, or courses they might like to join. People with disabilities or carers may wish to link with people and interest groups in the mainstream community. In any case, support workers will need to know what is available, and how to seek it out.

Building the capacity for decision making is particularly important, as the power to make decisions about their own lives has too often been taken away from people with disabilities by their families and carers, even with the best intentions. In these cases it may take time to (re-)build this capability, and the associated self awareness, confidence and self determination that is required – and even learning to consider what one’s own wishes are in the first place, when the habit of considering this has been diminished.

Also, as elaborated in the previous section (1), health providers such as GPs play an important role for people with disability who are not connected to community, and to supports and services. Health providers will certainly need to know about the Foundational Supports available that promote capacity building.

Recommendation:

2.1 Provide the required resourcing for tailored support and empowerment of people with disabilities from migrant and refugee backgrounds to connect with groups and communities and pursue their goals and interests.

Families and carers of people with disability often need support and capacity building so that they can support people in their care to make their own decisions and direct their own lives. This is essential for the exercise of human rights by people with disability.

Family members and carers from migrant backgrounds who routinely make decisions for people with disability in their care invariably have their welfare in mind, however their concerns may work against the fostering of independence for the person receiving care.

Very often carers will need some training and awareness-raising to enable and facilitate decision making by the person with disability. From ECCV’s experience this works well in group learning sessions, especially when the training is delivered by a person with disability from a multicultural background. Families and carers may also need additional, enhanced support given

that assisting a person with disability to make their own decision will invariably take longer than making key decisions themselves.

As a minimum, carers and families from migrant and refugee backgrounds should be considered front-of-mind in *all* information and training initiatives by the government relating to disability and disability support.

Recommendations:

- 2.2 Provide culturally sensitive training and awareness-raising to carers from migrant and refugee backgrounds so they can support decision making by the person with disability in their care.**
- 2.3 Proactively include carers from migrant and refugee backgrounds in all information and training initiatives by the government relating to disability and disability support.**

More funding is needed for community organisations and activity groups to enable and support them to be inclusive of people with all disabilities, particularly those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Funding could include education/awareness training for the providers, to increase inclusiveness and reduce discrimination against people with disability. Participation in such training could be included as a requirement in funding agreements.

Recommendation:

- 2.4 Fund community organisations to enable them to be inclusive of people with disability from migrant and refugee backgrounds.**

3 Sector and workforce development

While we expect a lot of disability workers, more resources are required to build their capacity, to improve the quality of their support and also to avoid 'burnout'. Those who have the required skills are more likely to stay in their work, which assists in building the workforce as a whole. Furthermore, training needs to be accessible in diverse languages so that we have the workforce capacity to support people with disabilities from a range of backgrounds.

In addition, the return of 'block funding' to organisations is crucial so that they have the resources to support people with more complex issues, especially those from migrant and refugee backgrounds. This would fill a service gap that has emerged with more individually-tied funding under the NDIS, which appears to have incentivised the support of people with less complex needs.

As 'essential volunteers', carers should not be forgotten when providing disability-related information and training in their first languages, as well as respite and social opportunities.

In the mainstream education system, schools require additional resourcing to enable them to support and educate children with disabilities from diverse cultural backgrounds in mainstream schools. In particular, cultural awareness training for teachers and educators is required to assist them to communicate and constructively engage with parents from migrant backgrounds to identify, assess and address developmental, learning or mental health issues that their children may be experiencing.

Recommendations:

- 3.1 Increase investment in training programs in cultural competence for disability service providers, to provide them with the skills and knowledge to effectively support people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.**
- 3.2 Invest in the development of workforce targets for the next generation of bicultural workers in the disability sector, including the professional development and training of disability workers from diverse cultural backgrounds.**
- 3.3 Provide longer-term block funding to smaller trusted ethno-specific and multicultural organisations that provide key services and support to culturally diverse communities, to support and include people with disability and carers..**
- 3.4 Include in the Victorian Government Support for Carers Program (SCP) resourcing for the establishment of interagency partnerships between multicultural community organisations and mainstream carer services to deliver projects that identify and address the needs of carers from multicultural backgrounds, and connect them with respite and support services, and social activities.**
- 3.5 Provide mainstream schools with additional resourcing to help them support and educate children with disabilities from diverse cultural backgrounds in mainstream schools, and resource cultural awareness training for teachers and educators to assist them to communicate and constructively engage with and support parents from migrant and refugee backgrounds.**

Many of the systemic reforms in [Victoria's State Disability Plan 2022-2026](#), such as 'Intersectional approaches', and 'Aboriginal self-determination', are laudable in principle and should be included in any new Foundational Supports. 'Accessible communications...' is the focus of much of this submission as is 'Disability-confident and inclusive workforces'. Certainly intersectional approaches to support, capacity building and empowerment of people with disability need to encompass the experiences, perspectives and barriers associated with being: LGBTQI, a person of colour, from a migrant or refugee background, being a woman, being older or younger, as well as having a disability.

Of fundamental importance is the co-design of any future support system with people who have disabilities, including a range of intersectionalities, some of which are mentioned above.

Alongside such co-design, people with disability should be included in ongoing monitoring, evaluation and program development. In such a 'developmental evaluation approach', disability advisory group/s can oversee both the design and development of programs and supports, and their ongoing evaluation and monitoring, so that meaningful and effective changes can be made as the need arises. This is the most sophisticated approach to evaluation when working with complex and dynamic systems (which the disability support system certainly is). In particular, the 'developmental evaluation' approach includes consideration of 'summative' (quantitative) outcome data, but is not limited to this. As well as being a well-suited form of evaluation, it addresses objectives of co-design and co-research, and in the process the empowerment of people with disabilities.² Alongside, and as part of, a developmental evaluation approach, a data collection framework needs to be developed and utilised that better captures the issues and service use of people with disabilities, families, and carers from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Recommendations:

- 3.6 Adopt a co-design approach for supports for people with disability, families and carers from migrant and refugee backgrounds, including people with intersecting experiences of being LGBTQI, a woman, older, younger, and/or a person of colour.**
- 3.7 Implement a developmental evaluation approach whereby people with disability and carers are involved in the design and development of programs and supports, and their ongoing monitoring, evaluation and adaptation.**
- 3.8 Governments and data collection bodies co-design data collection frameworks, including monitoring and evaluation, based on disaggregated data models and participatory practices.**

² Reference: Patton M Q 2010, *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use*.