



**ECCV presentation at  
International Federation of Ageing 10th Global Conference  
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**Unready, Unwilling and Ageing: Strategies for Supporting Ethnic Baby  
Boomers and Their Parents**

**Presented by Marion Lau, OAM, JP, Deputy Chair, Ethnic Communities Council  
of Victoria**

**As part of the symposium: Who Cares? Supporting Ethnic Family Carers**

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land we are meeting on today and pay my respects to the elders past and present.

I am pleased to be presenting here at the International Federation of Ageing 10<sup>th</sup> Global Conference. I also acknowledge my colleagues in this symposium from Carers Victoria and James Cook University.

Today we pose the question - Who cares...

Who cares about a hidden group that is making an enormous contribution to Victoria's growing non-English speaking and culturally diverse, ageing population?

Who cares about the older spouses and adult children looking after frail and elderly people in ethnic communities?

Who cares about the unrecognised ethnic family carers?

It is my pleasure today to present to you ECCV's findings of our non-academic, qualitative research on one specific group of ethnic family carers, the ethnic Baby Boomers.

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, the ECCV, is a peak advocacy body that lobbies all levels of government on multicultural issues, and in particular on aged care services.

The outline of my presentation will include:

- ◆ an overview of our ageing population
- ◆ our research methodology
- ◆ some definitions
- ◆ intergenerational findings
- ◆ and some recommendations for aged care practitioners and policy makers.

A spotlight into the not-so-distant future shows that the cost of aged care service provision is increasing. People know more about good health and are living longer. The ageing population is becoming increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse. By 2011 as many as 38 per cent of people over 65 in Victoria will be from a culturally and linguistically diverse background and in some Local Government Areas that figure is as high as 50 per cent and even 60 per cent.

In addition non-English speaking seniors choose to stay living at home longer than those in the average population. Combine all these factors and we can see that the aged care system will increasingly depend on ethnic family carers.

In 2008 and 2009 ECCV conducted several broad-based consultations with almost 150 aged care service providers that work in the ethnic and multicultural sectors. We produced the Discussion Paper – *Unready, Unwilling and Ageing: Ethnic Baby Boomers and their Parents*. It addressed the issue of an unprepared group of Baby Boomers. Many were faced, for the first time, with the responsibilities of looking after their frail and elderly parents who were born overseas. Subsequently we launched into a partnership with Carers Victoria, another peak organisation, and conducted further community consultations.

Our collaborative work is leading to the joint production of the report - *Who cares? Supporting Ethnic Family Carers?* In our consultations we used the World Café Dialogue method and conducted a consumer focus group of ethnic carers.

World Café is an innovative, yet simple, methodology for hosting conversations about questions that matter. The methodology enabled aged care and related service providers to make visible, their collective thoughts, on the topic of supporting ethnic family carers which then generated new insights for future action.

To set the context I will give you some definitions used in our studies. Firstly we have aligned our definitions of carers with those used by our project partners at Carers Victoria and with the 2009 Australian Government parliamentary inquiry into better support for carers.

- ◆ Carers are those individuals providing unpaid support for others in the community.
- ◆ Hidden carers represent an un-quantified population of people that do not identify themselves as carers and consequently do not appear in statistics and data relating to carers.
- ◆ Ethnic family carers is a simple term, used in our Discussion Paper, to describe a culturally diverse group of people that provide informal, unpaid care in ethnic families and communities.
- ◆ Ethnic Baby Boomers are rarely acknowledged as a specific group in population studies. At ECCV we have identified them in our Discussion Papers as those people born in Australia between 1946 and 1965 of non-English speaking immigrant parents, or who arrived as young children and then grew up here. This group is increasingly playing the role of unacknowledged ethnic family carers.
- ◆ The Forgotten and Silent Ethnic Seniors are the non-English-speaking, and culturally diverse, overseas-born generation that make up a large proportion of our rapidly ageing population who need care.

We made a number of key observations about the role of Ethnic Baby Boomers. Many are navigating the new frontier of the aged care system for the first time, not for their own, approaching ageing needs, but rather for their frail and elderly overseas-born parents.

Many ethnic Baby Boomers are unprepared for the changing roles and new responsibilities in supporting their ageing parents. Some ethnic Baby Boomers have become distanced from the culture and language of their immigrant parents. They do not know how to access information about culturally responsive aged care services.

Some adult children feel guilty about fast-tracking their own interests and having insufficient time for their ageing parents. This leads to intergenerational conflict which in turn impacts on carer support provision.

The overseas-born ageing parents and grandparents are the silent generation that feels disempowered. Many elderly immigrant parents, who have lived in Australia for 50 years, are feeling lost in space, time and history as their cultural expectations of

the ageing process are not acknowledged by their families or service providers. They fear changes in their health, impending helplessness and are slipping back into the past familiarity of their first language and culture.

We examined the generational shift in attitudes and values that has occurred in some ethnic communities. Among ethnic families who have lived in Australia for a long time, many culturally diverse seniors and their adult children think differently about ageing and cultural expectations. This sometimes leads to blame, guilt and family conflict.

When the ethnic Baby Boomers become overwhelmed by their roles as carers, our consultations showed that insufficient culturally responsive aged care services were available. Alternatively, because they did not identify as carers, they tended not to seek support.

We found they need information about aged care services, self-care strategies and a better understanding of appropriate ageing-related concepts. Three significant carer support needs emerged.

- ◆ Firstly they required more information about mental health support.
- ◆ Secondly they wanted to know about respite outings and holidays for both themselves and their elderly relatives.
- ◆ Thirdly they needed peer support opportunities to connect with others of a similar generation to share their emotional experiences and to learn more about caring.

Our studies also showed that information provision for the ethnic Baby Boomers needs to be generation-appropriate. This group has a preference for using the Internet to obtain information. It also needs generationally targeted face-to-face support and forums.

In addition many ethnic Baby Boomers were juggling work and care and wanted increased recognition of the work-family balance. We see there is some action in that area and we welcome the National Carer Recognition Bill 2010 that was recently tabled in Parliament.

Our reports touched on related concerns in rural and regional areas. We identified geographic dispersal, social isolation and lack of culturally responsive support as the main challenges for ethnic family carers and seniors living outside the metropolitan area. These issues require more in-depth research.

Our Discussion Papers and consultations are intended to open up a public discourse about the recognition and needs of ethnic family carers. We hope this will spur on policy makers and practitioners to provide more flexible and culturally responsive support for them.

As I said, ECCV is an advocacy organisation. Regarding support for ethnic family carers, we make the following recommendations to governments:

- ◆ In tandem with our partners at Carers Victoria, we jointly recommend client-centred, family-focused and culturally responsive approaches to carer support.
- ◆ More resources are needed to facilitate inter-agency partnerships between aged care providers, and ethnic community-based agencies and multicultural organisations.
- ◆ We would like to see more innovative and flexible models of ethno-specific respite support and carer information provision with a focus on ethnic families.
- ◆ We recommend further exploration of small existing home-based, ethno-specific respite models.
- ◆ In regional and rural Victoria, as a start, we advocate for increased recognition and visibility of ethnic family carers.
- ◆ Our research highlights the need for improved access to transport, additional outreach programs, and language services that use technology to cover distances.

We urge policy makers to think outside the box, expand their diversity thinking and recognise the valuable contribution of our ethnic family carers as they emerge from hiding. We would like more policies and programs to empower the ethnic Baby Boomer generation so that they can say, “We are willing, ready and well-prepared to support our frail and elderly ethnic relatives to grow old with dignity and the lifestyle of their choice.”

I conclude by saying: Who else cares? We care! Let’s try and make a difference.

This presentation and our Discussion Papers will be available at our website

For more information contact: Dr Irene Bouzo, Policy Officer Aged Care, Ethnic Communities’ Council of Victoria. This speech is accessible at [www.eccv.org.au](http://www.eccv.org.au)