



7 May 2007

**ECCV Submission to the Consultation document,
*An action plan for consumer involvement in Victoria's public mental
health services***

1. Introduction

ECCV is the state-wide peak advocacy body representing ethnic and multicultural communities in Victoria. For over 30 years ECCV has remained the principal liaison point between ethnic communities, government and the wider community in Victoria. ECCV has been a key player in building Victoria as a successful, harmonious and multicultural community.

ECCV supports the Action Plan's aim to ensure that an effective approach to consumer participation in mental health is developed. ECCV understands that mental health issues are one of the most complex state services to deliver. For people who do not possess high level English language skills and who come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, addressing and receiving mental health care can be a bewildering experience. CALD consumers may often be unable to appropriately give informed consent in their care and treatment, share information with service providers and participate in an active manner on committees or boards for planning delivery monitoring and evaluation.

ECCV's submission focuses on providing better access to public mental health services to people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and new and emerging communities. It includes recommendations on strategies to effectively engage them in the process of consumer participation. The Action Plan should develop and address strategies to respond to the diversity within Victorian communities. ECCV supports the maximisation of opportunities for participation in mental health services from people from CALD backgrounds.

2. Barriers to participation and service provision

There are a number of consumers that come from CALD backgrounds that may have difficulties expressing themselves in English. The Action Plan must recognise the fact that many CALD people do not have a good understanding

of English and do not fully understand the mental health sector and its services.

Barriers to participation that have been identified by ECCV include:

- Mental health stigma preventing discussion and access to services
- People from CALD and new and emerging communities often feel disempowered and uninformed
- Lack of knowledge of relevant services
- Lack of knowledge and/or understanding of mental illnesses such as schizophrenia
- Lack of mental health information in relevant community languages
- Lack of bilingual and bicultural mental health professionals
- Lack of culturally and linguistically relevant services
- Lack of community education in respect to mental illness
- Past experiences and/or trauma in respect to the mental health system in country of birth or elsewhere
- Expectation and/or pressures within families to deal with mental health problems within the family and not seek assistance

The document provides a detailed explanation of consumer participation for consumers with a high level of English and understanding of the mental health system. However, in order to increase consumer participation from CALD communities, the consultation document should be discussed with CALD communities and simplified so that its content may be more clearly understood by people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

3. Education and engagement

An education campaign which includes CALD community leaders to promote mental health education and further inform CALD communities of the Action Plan and its relation to the mental health sector is recommended. ECCV recommends the education campaign should use interpreters and hold additional consultations with ethno-specific workers and agencies.

Inviting ethno-specific agencies into the service framework provides a direct connection with CALD communities. ECCV recommends that ethno-specific workers be assisted to communicate directly with CALD mental health consumers. Successful steps include finding a consumer who has good links with their community and ensure that he or she is supported through a mentoring program to develop their knowledge of the nature of the mental health system.

Ongoing ethno-specific based community education to raise awareness and understanding of mental health issues is needed.

4. Recommended Strategies

ECCV support's the Action Plan's focus on developing strategies to improve consumer access to mental health provision of information and increasing access to consumer support services. ECCV recommends that the Action Plan develop a series of information pamphlets in community languages on mental health and the services available.

The Action Plan needs to ensure that it addresses the diversity within and between communities. Options such as focus groups with bilingual facilitators, peer education, one-off forums, in-language surveys and community committees are a few recommendations for engaging adequately with CALD and new and emerging communities.

ECCV recommends that the Action Plan develop a specific focus group to invite CALD consumers to share their views and experiences on mental health. This would create a platform to discuss a topic that might be sensitive for some cultures and allows the action plan to explore cultural understanding. The Action Plan may decide to hold more than one group to cater for different cultural backgrounds, age and gender. ECCV suggests that research should be undertaken to ensure that subjects for discussion and translations are culturally appropriate.

ECCV recommends in section 3.2 under '*future priorities*' of the Action Plan to include consideration and improvement of consumer participation from CALD communities as a priority.

Other recommended strategies developed by ECCV include:

- Establishment of ethno-specific carer support groups at a local level
- Establishment of a reference group comprising (where possible) bilingual, bicultural representatives from the mental health sector including health professionals, community and other workers, carers and consumers to share their respective knowledge and experiences, discuss issues affecting CALD communities and recommend appropriate responses.
- Ensure bilingual bicultural workers in the mental health and general health care system (including hospitals, aged care, community health centres and other settings)
- Provision of ongoing education of health professionals on cultural issues
- Increased funding for mental health, hospital, community and other relevant settings
- Provision of culturally and linguistically relevant support services and resources for CALD and new and emerging mental health careers and care recipients
- Cross cultural training of health workers to increase sensitivity and knowledge of cultural issues and attitudes

- Utilise different publicity formats as platforms for information sharing and awareness to the CALD patients through Channel 31 and ethnic radio stations

5. Conclusion:

In conclusion, ECCV supports the Action Plan and its objective to promote stronger consumer participation in mental health. ECCV encourages the Action Plan to consult widely and properly with Victoria's CALD communities and include strategies to ensure CALD communities have equal access to mental health services.