



**ethnic
communities'
council of
victoria**

4 July 2007

ECCV Submission to the Victorian Parliament Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee Inquiry into the Misuse/Abuse of Benzodiazepines and Other Forms of Pharmaceutical Drugs in Victoria

1. Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) welcomes the opportunity to present a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Misuse/Abuse of Benzodiazepines and Other Forms of Pharmaceutical Drugs in Victoria.
2. 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.
3. ECCV commends the committee's decision to establish a forum discussing issues surrounding culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. ECCV supports a harm minimisation approach to drug issues. The ECCV Drugs Taskforce which works with a range of ethnic and mainstream organisations has been integral to the formation of this approach.
4. ECCV would like to refer the committee to the Department of Human Services report, *Drugs in a Multicultural Community: an assessment of improvement*, published in September 2000. Research findings stated in the report include:
 - All CALD groups considered the misuse of drugs and the consumption of drugs a problem in their communities
 - Communities perceived drug services and information to be poorly coordinated and ineffective, particularly as directed to CALD communities
 - Insufficient media coverage on ethnic newspapers and radio
 - Communities that were consulted stated that they had little or no knowledge of the effects and the existence of specialist drug treatment services

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5. Victoria is a multicultural society populated by people of hundreds of languages and faiths. The term 'CALD' encompasses a range of diverse cultures and people with varied experiences of drug consumption. Drug use is prevalent in many CALD communities but services are less responsive to them. ECCV believes that the lack of knowledge and denial, shame and zero tolerance approach are barriers in responding effectively to these issues

6. In addition, there must be consideration of the barriers encountered by new and emerging communities which affect their access to drug related services. These include language, literacy and physical and psychological problems.

7. ECCV would like to bring to the committee's attention to Victoria's new and emerging communities. Victoria is home to a significant number of humanitarian arrivals from the Horn of Africa, Sudan, Myanmar, Iraq and Afghanistan. Many community members have never dealt with a systematic medical structure, which creates difficulties when accessing the correct pharmaceutical drug.

8. ECCV recommends developing positive strategies to address CALD drug misuse issues as a policy priority. ECCV is of the strong opinion that referral protocols between ethno-specific agencies and mainstream providers be strengthened. Bring ethno-specific agencies into the planning framework fosters a direct connection with CALD communities.

9. Successful steps include identifying an ethno-specific agency that has good links with their community to ensure stronger involvement and communication with CALD communities. ECCV calls on the committee to recommend that ethno-specific agencies be funded to enhance communication with CALD drug users.

10. CALD representatives should be integrated into Government decision making processes and also be placed on mainstream drug service providers' board and committees. This would ensure more effective interactions and consultation processes between mainstream providers and CALD communities.

11. Bilingual workers can be useful for communicating with users with low English language proficiency. Bilingual staff has proven to be extremely effective in a number of organisations and their roles include case management with a focus on people from the same ethnic background; secondary consultation to other staff; family education and support; and community education.

12. ECCV recommends that all drug service providers to develop a cultural awareness training program for new and existing workers. Courses and training should involve case studies, group work and visits to community groups. Cross cultural training of drug workers would increase cultural sensitivity and knowledge of cultural issues and attitudes.

13. The document *Drugs in a Multicultural Community: an assessment of improvement* stated that many communities mentioned that the Government should be more creative and flexible with their approaches to drug consumption and misuse and that they should be trying multiple solutions because of the complexity of the problem.

14. An effective communication strategy would utilise ethnic radio stations, newspapers, channel SBS and 31 to publicise the effects, treatment and harms of benzodiazepines and the misuse of other pharmaceutical drugs and to advertise early prevention and other educational campaigns. ECCV recommends that the committee support a CALD communication strategy as a future priority.

15. Many users that come from CALD backgrounds may have difficulties expressing themselves in English. They still consider ethnic newspapers and media to be a more important source of information than mainstream media service providers.

16. ECCV recommends that the following be implemented into an education campaign and be presented in a number of community languages:

- The effects of benzodiazepines
- Treatment options
- Preventing and reducing harms
- Used by dates
- The negative effects of passing on pharmaceutical drugs to family and friends without prescription
- The process of obtaining prescribed pharmaceutical drugs

17. The document *Drugs in a Multicultural Community: an assessment of improvement* stated that research based on the country of birth can be misleading if used as a measure of ethnicity. The document recommended that self-identified ethnicity is considered to be a more valid measure as it takes into consideration the shifting dynamics of ethnic identification. ECCV believes having accurate statistical information would enable effective program and policy development and ensure that funding goes where it is needed.

18. Adequate funding and the provision of cross cultural counselling for individuals and families are extremely important. ECCV recommends that any funding includes targeted initiatives for CALD communities.