



**ethnic
communities'
council of
victoria**

Second eccv Response to Productivity Commission Draft Report *Caring for Older Australians* and Public Hearing March 2011

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (eccv) appreciated the opportunity to present at the Productivity Commission's public hearing regarding the draft report *Caring for Older Australians* on 21 March in Melbourne.

This is an additional response submitted upon the request of the Productivity Commission to provide further insights into the aged care reforms and solutions that focus on cultural diversity such as:

1. Diversity versus special needs
2. Pilots versus sustainable reforms
3. Provider choice in market based model
4. Getting it right at the entry point
5. Embedding cultural competency in aged care reforms

About eccv

The eccv is a state wide peak advocacy body that lobbies all levels of government on behalf of multicultural communities in a range of areas such as aged care. For over 30 years eccv has remained the principal liaison point between ethnic communities, government and the wider community in Victoria. The eccv has been a key player in building Victoria as a successful, harmonious and multicultural society.

1. Diversity versus special needs

Australia is a multicultural nation. Australia's 2011 policy states that 'multiculturalism is about all Australians and for all Australians.' Older people from non-English speaking backgrounds have choices and preferences that require providers to cater to their additional cultural diversity needs, rather than 'special needs'.

A special needs approach prolongs 'them and us' thinking that went out of fashion with the demise of assimilationist thinking. In the last four decades the conversations about 'let's all be the same' were replaced with a human rights and multicultural approach that focuses on respect for differences.

Our challenge is to provide multicultural aged care reforms where diversity thinking is automatic. Providing genuine choices to frail, older people from non-English speaking backgrounds needs to be considered as a common sense approach, rather than a special needs approach that has extra costs attached. Interpreting and translating services need to be an automatic, in-built practical response to diverse aged care choices that lead to wellbeing and equity. Any extra time

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and costs involved, need to be perceived, both at the policy and practice levels, as a logical, commonsense 'diversity' response rather than an additional burden.

1.1 Recommendation

- That Australia's aged care reforms focus on cultural diversity as mainstream business.

2. Pilots versus sustainability

For about thirty years ethnic and multicultural not for profit (NFP) organisations have been providing culturally responsive aged care to older people from non-English speaking backgrounds. Ethnic aged care providers have been catering to diverse choices, preferences and cultural expectations.

Ethnic NFP organisations are well placed to offer greater choice of provider as well as culturally diverse aged care services. The eccv believes aged care reforms should recognise and build on their well-established expertise.

NFP organisations in the ethnic sector have worked tirelessly, creatively and innovatively to harness pilot funding and resources from various state and commonwealth sources to provide culturally responsive aged care services to older people from culturally diverse backgrounds. These include ethno-specific:

- HACC (Home and Community Care) social support
- Home-based respite programs
- Bilingual Supported Access and navigation support
- Friendly Visiting Program Coordination
- Commonwealth aged care packages
- Volunteer visits to residential aged care facilities for same-language and culture contact and preferred meals provision to lonely isolated non-English speaking residents
- CPP (Community Partners Programs) aged care information sessions
- Cultural awareness training and advice to generic residential aged care facilities

Outcomes of these diversity programs have been positive and far-reaching and include better informed choices made by older people from non-English speaking backgrounds, their families and carers. Other impacts have been improved partnerships across the ethnic and mainstream sectors as well as improved wellbeing and quality of life for older people from culturally diverse backgrounds. Sporadic, one-off programs have resulted

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in insufficient follow-through; a lack of sustainability and uncertainty of tenure for staff who receive skill building and then move on.

2.1 Recommendation

- That Australia's aged care reforms create opportunities for ethnic and multicultural organisations to become more substantial, recognised aged care providers based on a review of their varying capacity.

3. Provider choice in market based model

As aged care reforms broaden to a market based model it is important that the selection process of providers takes into account the population demographics and reflects the high proportion of older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Ethnic and multicultural NFP organisations consist of large, medium and small agencies and in Victoria over 60 of them have extensive experience in ethnic aged care provision. They have developed good working partnerships with about 79 local government HACC providers. A hybrid system that extends aged care provision beyond local government and allied health HACC providers to ethnic and multicultural aged care providers would better serve the diverse community needs.

In an open market situation for aged care provision several larger ethnic organisations should be providers of a broad continuum of aged care. Some of these organisations have successfully extended their services to various multicultural communities beyond their ethno-specific clients.

To maximise the benefits of existing culturally responsive expertise within medium and smaller ethnic agencies, eccv would like to see some capacity building and support for partnership creation with generic aged care providers to better serve ageing ethnic communities.

Ethnic and multicultural organisations should be enabled to provide a broader range of aged care services that include:

- Assessment
- Domestic services
- Personal care
- Care coordination
- Care coordination review
- Low and high care
- Dementia related support services

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3.1 Recommendations

- That the government works with organisations such as larger multicultural and ethnic agencies as well as Ethnic Communities' Councils to develop capacity within medium and smaller ethnic agencies to enable a choice of diverse aged care providers.
- That the market based model ensure an adequate number of ethnic and multicultural NFP organisations receive a fair share of provider allocation in the market based model.

4. Getting it right at the entry point

A commonsense approach is about getting it right at the entry point for the non-English speaking client in aged care and then all the benefits will follow. When ethnic NFP organisations work with government providers the impact is a more preventative care, better access and early intervention for older people from culturally diverse backgrounds.

The Gateway Agency has an important role in community education on healthy ageing and services information. We believe that requires a cultural competency approach. NFPs have a strong role to play. It is also crucial that the Gateway keeps a bilingual face-to-face component such as home visits for assessment, health and wellbeing promotion, and the eccv SAPP (Supported Access Pilot Program) model for initial contact with non-English speaking clients.

The bilingual/bicultural SAP in Victoria assists people with non-English speaking backgrounds to overcome system barriers to access and navigate the complexities of the aged care system at the entry point. The bilingual SAP workers are culturally responsive aged care promoters that provide a cultural bridge to services. This model is effective as it is staffed from within the community-based organisations and work for the ethnic communities.

4.1 Recommendations

- That Australia's aged care reforms focus on partnerships and interagency alliances that link mainstream and cultural diversity providers.
- That Australia's aged care reforms ensure that ethnic and multicultural agencies are actively involved at the front end/entry level of aged care services.

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5. Embedding culturally competent reforms

Whilst ethnic and multicultural NFP organisations are well placed to provide diversity in aged care, the mainstream aged care providers require culturally competent training, resources, tools and alliances to enable them to effectively deliver diversity services.

The biggest hurdle is embedding diversity thinking and gaining commitment at the level of senior management, policy makers and practitioners. The challenge is to create programs that are appealing to diverse communities through meaningful collaboration with community members and ethnic community agencies. There is a need to establish a trusting relationship with the ethnic sector.

Organisational barriers to diversity planning and practice within generic aged care providers are:

- Additional cost
- Lack of culturally competent capacity
- Lack of confidence with cultural issues.

Gaining mainstream commitment to incorporate diversity thinking requires:

- Hands-on practical examples and evidence-based information demonstrating the impact of cultural responses on the wellbeing of older non-English speakers.
- Mentoring and practice appraisal by cultural competency experts.

5.1 Recommendations

- That Australia's aged care reforms focus on embedding cultural competency training in the mainstream aged care providers on various levels that include:
 - Change of attitude cultural awareness training
 - Re-writing and embedding cultural diversity policy
 - Cultural awareness training for staff and management.
- That Australia's aged care reforms encourage further research into aspects of culturally diverse preferences in aged care.

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