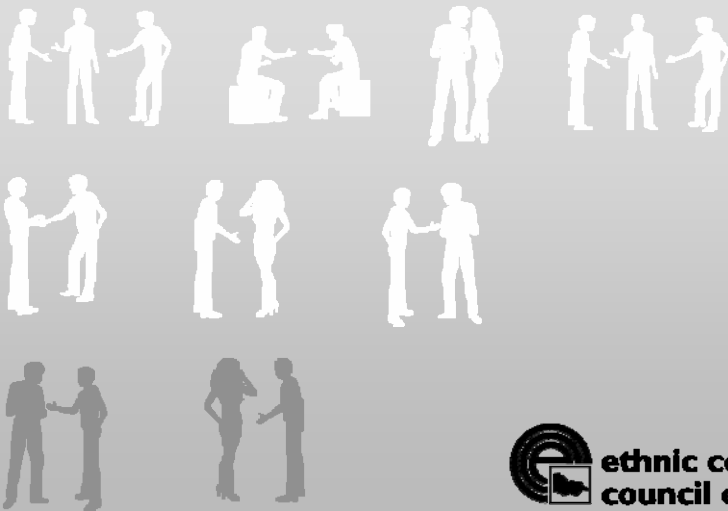


# *Networking Coordinating Cooperating Collaborating?*

## *Practising Positive Partnerships in the Ethnic and Multicultural Community*

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### *Executive Summary*



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The authors would like to acknowledge the contribution of the people interviewed for this research and the invaluable support and guidance offered by the project steering committee. We would also like to thank Nicci Grace who assisted with managing the survey data and writing the report.

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### **This project was part funded by:**

Victorian Department of Health

This report summarises the first stage of the Practising Positive Partnerships (PPP) project which seeks to deepen understanding of inter-organisational partnerships in the multicultural community aged care sector. The full report is available at [www.eccv.org.au](http://www.eccv.org.au).

Prepared by the

Healthy Ageing Research Unit (HARU) Monash University

in collaboration with

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) and

Southern Metropolitan Region HACC Cultural Diversity Network (SCDN)

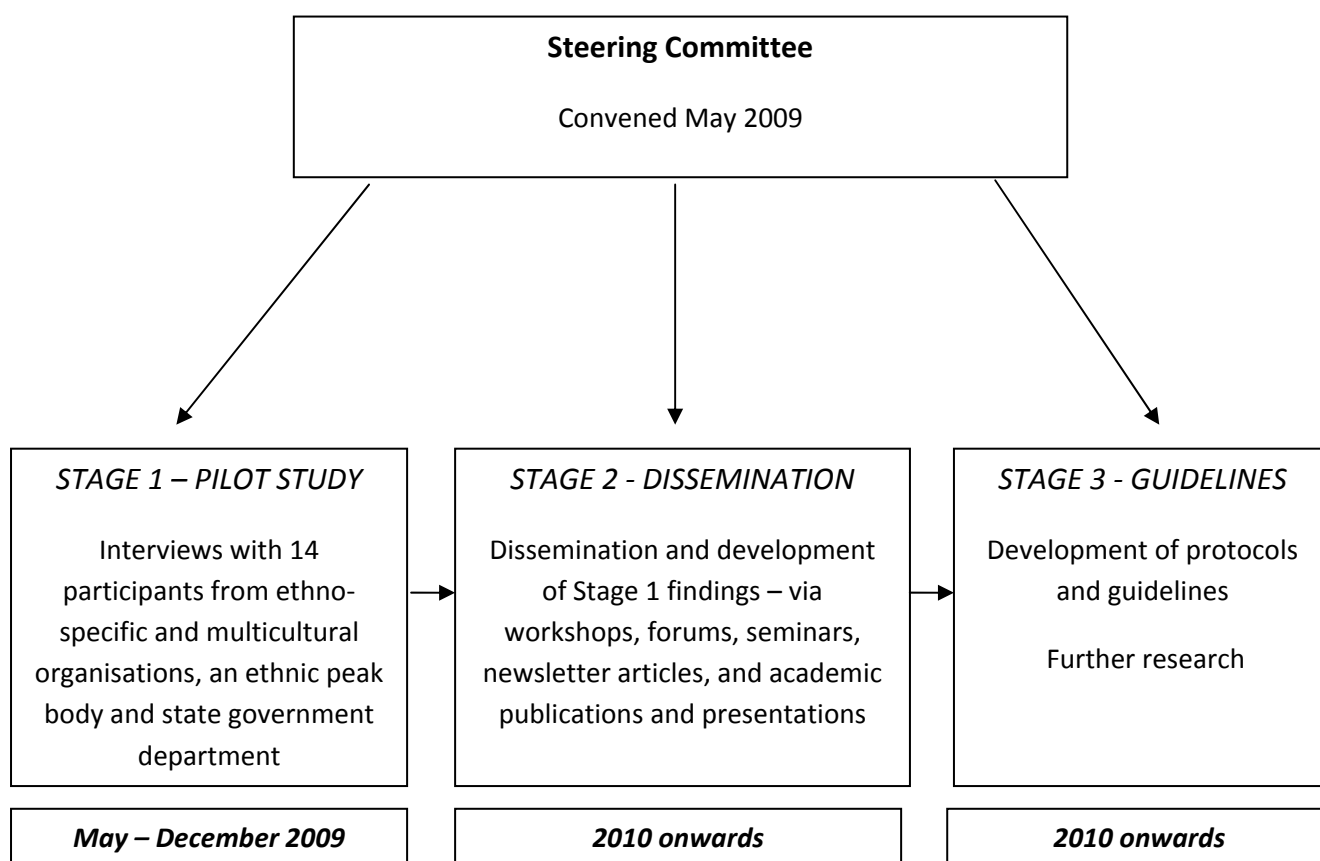
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### ***What is the PPP project?***

The Practising Positive Partnerships (PPP) project is a multi-stage project which seeks to deepen understanding of the nature of inter-organisational partnerships within the ethnic and multicultural aged care sector (herein, EMCAC Sector). This work is important in the light of anecdotal evidence that suggests organisations within the EMCAC sector are missing out on partnership opportunities, which in turn may be detrimentally impacting the health of, and access to services for, older people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. It is anticipated that a more comprehensive understanding of the issues will be able to inform strategies and assist organisations within the EMCAC sector to practise positive partnerships in the future.



**Figure 1. PPP project structure and timeline**

### ***What is this report?***

This report summarises the first stage of the PPP project. This initial stage consists of a pilot study to explore the experiences of partnerships within the EMCAC Sector. The aim is to generate some empirical data which will inform and guide the subsequent project stages. The full report is available to download from [www.eccv.org.au](http://www.eccv.org.au).

### ***What is the aim of the study?***

The primary aim of this research is to explore the role and experiences of partnerships within the EMCAC sector.

For the purpose of this research, partnership is defined as:

*“a relationship where two or more organisations with compatible goals, have a formal or informal agreement to work together in order to strengthen service delivery for older CALD community members”*

In this definition, working together incorporates networking, coordinating, cooperating and /or collaborating with other organisation/s.

### ***What does the pilot study consist of?***

A steering committee was convened in May 2009 to oversee and guide the development of the PPP project. The following activities were undertaken as part of the pilot study:

1. Literature review
2. Recruitment and semi-structured interviews with 14 participants
3. Data analysis and report writing
4. Synthesis of key points for future consideration

### ***Who are the participants?***

Fourteen people participated in this study (10 women and 4 men). Participants represented 9 organisations. For the purpose of this report, these organisations are categorised into three groups of organisations: ethno-specific (ESO: 4 participants representing 4 organisations), multi-cultural (MCO: 8 participants representing 4 organisations), and state government (DH: 2 participants representing 1 organisation).

### **What are the key findings?**

*..perhaps if we think a little bit more like-mindedly across community groups in the multicultural sector then we can be a bit more effective in working together. (MCO)*

Participants overwhelmingly spoke of the need for organisations within the EMCAC sector to work together. This provides the context for the presentation of the main themes that were identified in the data, which are organised in three parts:

Part 1, **definition and benefits of partnerships**, sets the scene for the main body of the findings (part two) and comprises two themes:

1. Defining partnership
2. The benefit of partnering

Despite providing a definition, it was clear that participants held different opinions about what constitutes a partnership. Networking was not always seen as a form of partnership, but rather an important step or precursor for initiating partnerships. There was a general consensus amongst participants that 'you can't do it by yourself' and that organisations need to work together in partnership to address the needs of the aged CALD population in Victoria. The key benefits of partnering included facilitating access to greater resources and enabling an organisation to move forward and grow.

*Working alone in this vast area, either it's the geography or the limited funds or a lot of work to do. You can't do it by yourself. So you have to do it with others. (MCO)*

Part 2 describes the **influences on partnerships** and forms the main body of the findings (see Figure 2) comprising themes at four levels:

1. External influences
2. Organisational capacity and unequal power
3. Trusting relationships
4. Professional capacity

Government allocation and structure of resources within the EMCAC sector was identified as an important consideration when working in partnerships. As indicated by some participants, government policies restrict the flexibility and the natural formation of partnerships, which limits the organisation from achieving the best possible outcome for the service users. Often the issues that are experienced within partnerships originate from the interaction between the external and internal environment created by the policy approach of the government and the impact of funding regimes.

*I've just been invited to participate, after all these years, in one of the PCPs [primary care partnerships] and even there's a spot on the governance committee for a small ethno specific community organisation...And it's basically never been filled, I was told, well it's filled for a while and then the amount that that person needs to dedicate is just too great, so it becomes vacant again.*

Perhaps the most significant theme identified in this study relates to the organisation's capacity to engage and sustain partnership work. Financial and human resources of an organisation were found to determine the extent to which an organisation can promote and encourage development of partnerships. In this study, for example, lack of financial and human resources severely restricts the ability of staff to participate in discussions and attend network meetings, as they have to juggle between meeting the demands of service delivery and doing administrative tasks. Another issue of concern was the perceived inequality found to occur between partner organisations, where smaller organisations are often disadvantaged particularly in relation to decision-making power and subsequent benefits of the partnership.

*What was a negative is that they [mainstream partner] had the final say about what we can do or where we can go... there was a bit of consultation. They would take the advice but the final say is for them. It wasn't [ours]. Like who do we meet, where to go, what time and how much we spent." (ESO)*

The interpersonal relationships between individuals involved in the partnership were also identified as an important factor in determining the strength of the partnership. In particular, trust was a key ingredient in successful partnerships, where once established it is easier to progress with subsequent partnership work.

Finally, whilst this study sought to investigate partnerships between organisations, the individuals involved in the partnerships were seen to be critical to their success. Specifically it was the individual's professionalism, passion, values, commitment and enthusiasm that was noted to be an important driver in promoting and maintaining partnerships in this study.

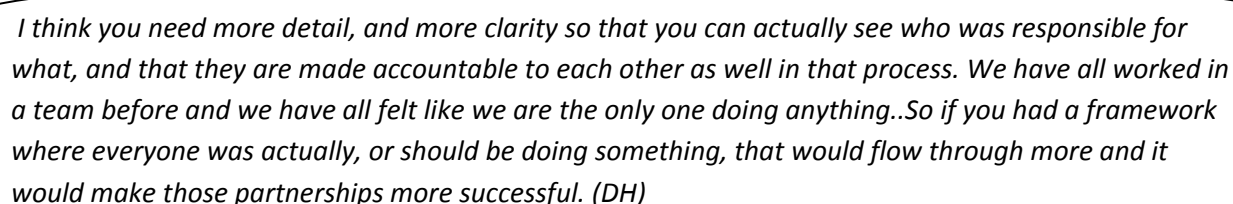


**Figure 2. Practising Positive Partnerships Model**

Part 3 brings together a vision for the **future of partnerships**, and comprises two themes:

1. Strategies for more successful partnerships
2. Towards equality

During the interviews, participants talked about a range of strategies that might promote more effective partnerships. These strategies ranged from using protocols and procedures to better define roles and responsibilities within a partnership to having a liaison person to represent smaller community based organisations in their networking and partnership work.



*I think you need more detail, and more clarity so that you can actually see who was responsible for what, and that they are made accountable to each other as well in that process. We have all worked in a team before and we have all felt like we are the only one doing anything..So if you had a framework where everyone was actually, or should be doing something, that would flow through more and it would make those partnerships more successful. (DH)*

Clearly articulating the roles and responsibilities of partners to clarify who will manage the funding, who will be in charge of decision making etc, is likely to help address some of the concerns and expectations that arise during partnership work. This study also identified a need to educate organisations, in particular ethno-specific, on how and who they need to be working with and provide opportunities for members of these organisations to further develop their skills relating to leadership and writing funding submissions.

Even though the term 'partnership' implies an equal reciprocity between partners, this was not always the case as evident from participant responses. Power in partnerships exists at an individual and collective level. As reflected in participant comments and the literature, partners who have greater allocation of resources and funding are likely to have a greater influence in determining outcomes, setting time frames and agendas with little consultation and communication from organisations with lesser capacity. Therefore, acknowledging and addressing the perceptions of power differences during the initial stages of the partnership is likely to enhance subsequent partnership work.

### ***What are the key considerations for the future?***

- Overall, the findings from this study indicate that there is need (and associated benefits) for organisations to work in partnership in the EMCAC sector.
- There is evidence to indicate that organisations in the sector may need assistance to increase their capacity to do partnership work. This may be in the form of training for individuals and organisations within sector to develop skills and leadership to do partnership work more effectively (including awareness about recruitment practices, self-promotion, developing and following protocols, time management etc).
- Strategies are required to address the perceived inequality that exists between partner organisations.
- Ethnic and generic mainstream aged care providers may benefit from increased awareness as to the value, nature and need for partnerships.
- The role of networking is vital in the development of partnerships (e.g. it provides opportunities to make connections with others, identify commonalities, and build trust). Innovative strategies may be required to minimise token representation of ethno-specific organisations in networks.
- There may be an important role for multicultural peak bodies to lobby government for more resources and advocate for skills and expertise of their constituent organisations.
- Partnerships may be more successful via more flexible funding conditions that are less geographically determined and more focused on client outcomes.

### ***Where to now?***

Integral to the project is the dissemination and translation of the pilot study findings to various key stakeholders. This will be achieved through community forums, workshops, debriefings and discussions. This engagement with stakeholders will inform the development of a future collaborative work plan, directed by the steering committee. This may include the development of practice guidelines or extending the empirical data collection to other geographic regions.