

# Victorian Multicultural Commission

The Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) welcomes the opportunity to present to the Parliamentary Inquiry into support for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

The VMC is an independent statutory body that strengthens cultural diversity in Victoria through consultation, advocacy, celebration and promotion. It is one of the main conduits between Victoria's multicultural communities and government.

Apart from 12 Commissioners, the Commission also includes

- 8 Regional Advisory Councils with approximately 200 community representatives
- the Multifaith Advisory Group with representation from 27 faiths and organisations
- the Multicultural Chambers of Commerce Group

**Parliamentary Inquiry into support for older  
Victorians from migrant & refugee backgrounds**



VICTORIAN  
multicultural  
commission  
strengthening our community



# Introduction

- Acknowledge that the Committee has received many submissions including from:
  - the ECCV and a range of ethno-specific and multicultural community organisations
  - the joint submission from the National Ageing Research Institute, Carers Victoria, Senior Rights Victoria and the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health
  - the Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing
  - the Municipal Association of Victoria
  - the Commissioner for Senior Victorians
  - the Victorian Government
- The VMC commends these submissions and the range of issues and recommendations raised for your consideration.
- Acknowledge that the Commonwealth has carriage for critical areas of aged care related policies, programs and services.
- Acknowledge the range of services provided by the Victorian Government in support of Older Victorians more broadly as well as through targeted supports for Older Victorians of migrant and refugee backgrounds.
- Critical issue is ensuring that such engagement, coordination and support are maintained to ensure equitable access.



# Context

1. Victoria is one of the most multicultural societies in the world
2. Older Victorians from migrant & refugee backgrounds are a large and increasing proportion of Victorians aged 65+, and they have special language and cultural needs that affect their wellbeing and ability to access services.
3. Community feedback:
  - The ageing of multicultural communities identified as a priority issue by community leaders and service providers
  - Ethno-specific and multicultural senior citizens clubs are critically important in terms of social engagement and active living as well as providing opportunities for raising awareness about programs and supports that may be available
4. COVID had a disproportionate impact on older Victorians – in terms of medical vulnerability, digital capacity and access to support
5. COVID exacerbated pre-existing issues of access and equity, noting that it also led to some well needed programs and supports being better targeted, including:
  - The establishment of the CALD Communities Taskforce to address the challenges created by the pandemic including through improving engagement and communication, coordinating across government and delivering targeted supports was welcomed
  - Direct funding supports to senior organisations
  - There was/is an acknowledgement that we needed to do better in engaging, communicating and tailoring needs-based supports both as part of the COVID recovery phase but also in the longer term if we are to improve the lives of all Victorians



# Demographics - 65+ Age cohort

1. Increasing in numbers and as a proportion of the population and diversity
2. By 2056, 8.5 million people in Australia will be 65+ (20.9% of the total population; up from 15.2% in 2016)
3. 1996 to 2016 – proportion of 65+ population who were born overseas increased from 30.9% to 37.6% (nationally)
4. The proportions for Victoria are higher with for example 37.2% of 65+ age demographic were born in non-English-speaking countries. The highest growth rate is by those born overseas
5. Some variation in projected growth for various communities (with European-born decreasing as a proportion and Asia-born increasing)

Given these demographics, government policies, programs, direct services and funded services need to be responsive and accessible to our cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.

Wilson, T., McDonald, P., Temple, J. *et al.* Past and projected growth of Australia's older migrant populations. *Genus* **76**, 20 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41118-020-00091-6>



# Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality & Safety

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety's final report's (February 2021) Executive Summary identified:

- *“The existing aged care system is not well equipped to provide care that is non-discriminatory and appropriate for people’s identity and experience. We heard about aged care providers that do not provide culturally safe care, that is, care that acknowledges, respects and values people’s diverse needs. Across the aged care system, staff are often poorly trained in culturally safe practices, with little understanding of the additional needs of people from diverse backgrounds.”...“The aged care system should be equally welcoming and supportive of everyone needing care. But we heard there can be a lack of understanding and respect for people’s culture, background and life experiences.”*
- The Royal Commission’s findings included the need for the aged care system is designed for diversity and that cultural safety and trauma-informed training should be core requirement for all workers.
- Critical need for a needs-based approach that encapsulates a mix of:
  - ethno-specific and multicultural residential care;
  - genuine partnerships between ethnic communities and residential care providers in developing facilities with dedicated beds for specific communities;
  - generalist residential care services better catering to diversity



# Going Forward #1 – Our view

## 1. **Multicultural Policies &/or Diversity Plans need to recognise the needs of:**

- Victorian population's substantive and increasing multicultural, linguistic and religious diversity
- larger and more established communities
- emerging older communities, particularly those of refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds and the impact of a range of traumas experienced, including in inter-generational terms

## 2. **Community capacity and capability:**

- Recognise and include ethno-specific, faith and multicultural community organisations & service providers as complementary parts of the service delivery and support system
- Build the capability of multicultural community organisations including the more than 900 multicultural senior citizens clubs as well supporting the establishment of new clubs given projected growth in population and diversity

## 3. **Education, awareness and engagement** - Improving awareness and support on:

- health literacy
- mental health & wellbeing information and support
- digital literacy and capability
- elder abuse and support
- palliative care and bereavement services

Importantly, Information must be made available in relevant forms including in community languages and accessible formats (audio / video) and via trusted community leaders and influencers, social media, community organisations and multicultural media



# Going Forward #2 – Our view Cont'd

## 4. Systems change

- The voice of community and lived experience must be included at the decision-making levels and co-designing of policies, programs and services
- Data collection, outcome measures, service use analysis, research and service planning including improving accountability through funding agreements
- Discrimination and racism

## 5. Workforce diversity:

- Must reflect the community it serves including proper pay structures
- Building the cultural competency and capacity in the health, aged care and community care sector
- Specific supports including availability, capability and engagement of appropriately trained interpreters as essential services

## 6. Representation

- Representation on government and service provider boards, decision making and advisory bodies to be reflective of community demographics, noting also the importance of an intersectional lens and lived experience



# Conclusion

1. The VMC acknowledges that there are a range of services and programs that support the needs of older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds
2. The VMC strongly advocates for the need to do more to ensure equitable access, particularly given the projected growth in population and the cultural, religious and linguistic diversity within the 65+ aged cohort.
3. Older Victorians have helped develop our State – culturally, socially and economically.
4. It is incumbent upon us to ensure that we provide the appropriate support for their physical, psychological and financial wellbeing
5. The VMC thanks the Parliamentary Committee for undertaking this important work and acknowledges the work of the Commissioner for Senior Victorians and Ambassador for Elder Abuse Prevention

Thank you

