



**Submission to inform the Legal and Social Issues  
Standing Committee's Inquiry into Support for Older  
Victorians from Migrant and Refugee Backgrounds  
February 2022**

**To:**

Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee  
Parliament of Victoria  
Parliament House, Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002  
Via email to: [lsic.assembly@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:lsic.assembly@parliament.vic.gov.au)

**Prepared by:**

██████████  
Policy Officer  
Council on the Ageing Victoria  
Phone: ██████████  
Email: ██████████

## Table of Contents

<b>About us</b> .....	3
<b>1. Introductory comments</b> .....	3
<b>2. How we've informed this submission</b> .....	4
<b>3. Summary of recommendations</b> .....	5
<b>4. Key issues impacting upon older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds</b> .....	8
<b>4.1. Digital inclusion</b> .....	8
<b>4.2. Access to information</b> .....	9
<b>4.3. Wellbeing and community connection</b> .....	11
<b>4.4. Transport</b> .....	13
<b>4.5. Health</b> .....	14
<b>4.6. Employment</b> .....	16
<b>4.7. Aged care</b> .....	17
<b>5. Concluding comments</b> .....	18

## About us

Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria is the leading not-for-profit organisation representing the interests and rights of people aged over 50 in Victoria. For 70 years in Victoria, we have led government, corporate and community thinking about the positive aspects of ageing.

Today our focus is on promoting opportunities for and protecting the rights of people 50+. We see an ageing population as a time of opportunities for personal growth, contribution and self-expression. We believe there are National, State, community, family and individual benefits from this approach. We focus on the protection of the rights of people aged 50+.

COTA Victoria is a not-for-profit, member-based organisation run by, for and with Victorians aged 50+. We fund our activities and services through the support of government, members, philanthropic trusts, businesses and the public.

COTA Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work. We pay respect to elders past and present and those who continue the journey. We recognise the rich Indigenous heritage and culture of this country.

### 1. Introductory comments

Thank you for providing COTA Victoria with an opportunity to submit evidence to inform the Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee's Inquiry into Support for Older Victorians from Migrant and Refugee Backgrounds.

The subject of this inquiry is of great relevance to our work, particularly given:

- 1 in 3 Victorians over the age of 65 was born overseas, and 1 in 5 was born in a non-English-speaking country;
- almost 40% of migrants from non-English speaking countries are over the age of 50;
- 18% of households speak a language other than English at home.<sup>1 2</sup>

The diversity of Victoria's population is something that should be celebrated. Regrettably, however, many older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds still experience higher levels of disadvantage than their Anglo-Australian counterparts. It is our hope that this Inquiry will help to address this gap and ensure that the state of Victoria provides equal opportunities for everyone to age well into the future, regardless of culture or background. To this end, this submission will address each of the terms of reference for this inquiry as set out below:

*(a) adequacy of services for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds;*

*(b) unique challenges faced by this cohort, including, but not limited to, social isolation, civic participation, digital literacy, elder abuse and access to culturally appropriate aged care and home care services; and*

*(c) ideas to advance the physical and mental health and wellbeing of Victoria's multicultural seniors including global best practices.*

Our Community Legal Service, Seniors Rights Victoria (SRV) provided an earlier submission to this inquiry which focused exclusively on issues relating to elder abuse. This document will expand on SRV's submission by highlighting a range of other issues impacting upon the health, inclusion and quality of life of older Victorians. While all of these issues are relevant to older people as a broader population group, they are often experienced by older migrants and refugees in a more complex or acute way. Individually, most of the issues raised in this submission also represent known risk factors for elder abuse.

Note: There are a range of additional factors impacting upon older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds that are not documented in this submission. We have chosen to focus only on those areas where we are able to offer the most input. As such, the range of issues covered in this submission is not intended to be exhaustive.

## **2. How we've informed this submission**

We have not had an opportunity to undertake targeted consultation with older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to inform our response to this inquiry. Our submission has, however, been informed by:

- Feedback from a consultation forum COTA Victoria conducted with older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in May 2019. This session focused primarily on issues pertaining to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.
- The Ageing Well in a Changing World report, published by the Commissioner for Senior Victorians, Gerard Mansour in October 2020.
- Victorian-specific data from the 2021 State of the Older Nation Survey which was commissioned by the Federation of nine Councils on the Ageing (COTA) across Australia.
- Data from a survey that was undertaken by COTA Victoria in July-August 2020 to capture the experience of older Victorians during COVID-19.
- Feedback from a pre-budget focus group we conducted with a diverse group of older Victorians and the Commissioner for Senior Victorians, Gerard Mansour, on 30 September 2021.

### 3. Summary of recommendations

#### **Recommendation 1:**

The Victorian Government take urgent steps to strengthen digital access among interested older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. This means ensuring people:

- Have affordable access to high-quality internet;
- Own a device that will enable them to use the internet;
- Are able to use the internet in an accessible way, whether they have a disability or have other needs;
- Have the skills to engage with digital platforms such as online banking, MyGov, telehealth and social media;
- Have the confidence to use the internet safely.

#### **Recommendation 2:**

The Victorian Government invest in a range of well-coordinated services to facilitate digital inclusion and access to information, including:

- Ongoing funding for a dedicated telephone line that provides information, support and referrals for older Victorians.
- Additional funding to enable local libraries and neighbourhood centres to facilitate access to information and online services.
- Dedicated funding to enable community groups to enhance digital confidence among older constituents, with a focus on the needs of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

#### **Recommendation 3:**

The Victorian Government continue to fund and work collaboratively with multicultural and multifaith organisations to coordinate the timely dissemination of information in formats that are culturally appropriate.

#### **Recommendation 4:**

All Government Departments and statutory authorities commit to producing information in plain or easy English to the greatest extent possible.

#### **Recommendation 5:**

The Victorian Government mandate the development of communication strategies across all Government Departments and statutory authorities. These strategies must outline how each entity will provide equitable access to information and services to:

- People who are digitally excluded;
- People with low levels of English literacy;
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

**Recommendation 6:**

The Victorian Government provide dedicated funding to facilitate the increased use of translating and interpreting services across the health, ageing and community services sectors.

**Recommendation 7:**

The Victorian Government provide funding for a diverse range of services to facilitate social connection and peer support for older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, including:

- Additional funding to enable local councils to facilitate social activities for older residents. These activities must be available to older Victorians living in residential care as well as those living in the community.
- Expanded funding for mainstream and ethno-specific community groups and clubs that facilitate social activities, ongoing learning and volunteering opportunities for older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

**Recommendation 8:**

The Victorian Government establish a dedicated function within The Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions to support the administration and sustainability of volunteer-led community groups and clubs that support older people, including those from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

**Recommendation 9:**

The Victorian Government fund the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to establish a thoroughly costed, community-based transport program to support older Victorians experiencing transport disadvantage. This program must:

- Be properly funded to ensure effective resourcing and coordination and must not rely solely on existing infrastructure;
- Be available to older people living in residential care as well as those living in the community;
- Establish consistent eligibility criteria and service fees for older people across all geographic regions;
- Effectively service older people living in regional and rural areas and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

**Recommendation 10:**

The Victorian Government expand the Multi Purpose Taxi Program to provide support to Victorian seniors who:

- have failed a fitness-to-drive test or have surrendered their driver's license to VicRoads, and
- possess a Centrelink issued concession card or health care card.

**Recommendation 11:**

The Victorian Government work with multi-faith and multicultural organisations to provide culturally appropriate information about existing transport subsidies.

**Recommendation 12:**

The Victorian Government work with multi-faith and multicultural organisations to explore options to help older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds re-engage in physical activities, such as:

- Awareness raising activities that inform people about the process of accessing subsidised Exercise Physiology or Physiotherapy appointments under the Enhanced Primary Care Program.
- Financial support to help older Victorians on low incomes to cover gap payments when accessing Exercise Physiology or physiotherapy services under the Enhanced Primary Care Program.
- Free clinics within locally based community health services to provide advice on how to safely re-engage in physical activity. These clinics should be staffed by exercise physiologists, physiotherapists and/or personal trainers with expertise in the needs of older people, such as those who have completed training through COTA Victoria's Living Longer Living Stronger program.
- Free or subsidised travel to assist older people on low incomes to attend appointments with an exercise physiologist, physiotherapist or personal trainer.

**Recommendation 13:**

The Victorian Government improve access to oral health care for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds by:

- Increasing funding to Dental Health Services Victoria to reduce wait times and improve access to free and low-cost dental care for older people living in the community.
- Funding multi-faith and multicultural organisations to disseminate culturally appropriate information about free or low cost dental care.
- Funding a mobile dental service to provide oral health care to older Victorians living in residential aged care until such time that recommendation 60 of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety has been fully implemented.<sup>3</sup>

**Recommendation 14:**

Jobs Victoria work collaboratively with multi-faith and multicultural organisations to promote existing employment programs and address any barriers that may affect access for older jobseekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

### **Recommendation 15:**

The Victorian Government play a proactive role in the redesign of Australia's aged care system by actively consulting with older Victorians, including those from diverse backgrounds, and representing their needs and preferences to the Commonwealth Government.

## **4. Key issues impacting upon older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds**

### **4.1. Digital inclusion**

- As more information and services move online, internet access is increasingly being regarded as an essential service. The concept of digital inclusion is based on the premise that everyone should be able to make full use of digital technologies – to manage their health and wellbeing, access education and services, organise their finances, and connect with friends, family, and the wider community.<sup>4</sup>
- Older people as a broad cohort are at greatest risk of being marginalised and disempowered by the ever-increasing provision of digital information and services. Older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, however, can face even higher rates of digital exclusion. This may be due to language barriers, a lack of culturally appropriate training and/or financial challenges.<sup>5</sup> We already know, for example, that people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have lower rates of internet connection at home than older Anglo-Australians.<sup>6</sup>
- At COTA Victoria, we have observed the impact this digital divide has had on peoples' lives since the emergence of COVID-19. Many older people:
  - Have become isolated due to having limited opportunities to connect with friends and family;
  - Have found it difficult to access timely and relevant health information and advice;
  - Could not access vital relief packages such as the Rent Relief Grant, which could only be obtained by completing an online form
  - Have had difficulty checking into public venues as a result of not being provided with appropriate assistance;
  - Have experienced a heightened risk of elder abuse due to relying on other people to access information and services.
- We are concerned that many older Victorians from non-English-speaking backgrounds will be left behind as an increasing number of services transition to a digital-only environment. Greater support is needed to ensure all older Victorians, including those from migrant and refugee backgrounds, can gain the maximum benefit from digital technology into the future. It is critical, however, that there is also an ongoing investment in a range of low-tech options to facilitate access for those who are digitally excluded.

**Recommendation 1:**

The Victorian Government take urgent steps to strengthen digital access among interested older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. This means ensuring people:

- Have affordable access to high-quality internet;
- Own a device that will enable them to use the internet;
- Are able to use the internet in an accessible way, whether they have a disability or have other needs;
- Have the skills to engage with digital platforms such as online banking, MyGov, telehealth and social media;
- Have the confidence to use the internet safely.

**Recommendation 2:**

The Victorian Government invest in a range of well-coordinated services to facilitate digital inclusion and access to information, including:

- Ongoing funding for a dedicated telephone line that provides information, support and referrals for older Victorians.
- Additional funding to enable local libraries and neighbourhood centres to facilitate access to information and online services.
- Dedicated funding to enable community groups to enhance digital confidence among older constituents, with a focus on the needs of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

**4.2. Access to information**

- 17.5% of respondents to Commissioner Mansour's Ageing Well in a Changing World survey reported language and cultural barriers as key factors compromising their quality of life. As such, the Victorian Government must take proactive steps to ensure people from migrant and refugee backgrounds have access to oral and printed information in formats that are culturally appropriate.
- In 2016, around 12.6% of Australians born overseas either couldn't speak English well or couldn't speak English at all.<sup>7</sup> This highlights the need for translating and interpreting services to facilitate access for this cohort. During a recent focus group, however, older people told us that the availability of interpreters in hospitals and other health-related environments was lacking.
- Many older migrant and refugees who speak English fluently still have low levels of English literacy.<sup>8</sup> In fact, around 14% of Victorian adults have a low level of English literacy which may make it difficult for them to read or interpret complex information.<sup>9</sup> It is also common for people who were once proficient in English to revert back to their first language as they age, often as a result of Dementia.<sup>10</sup> Some migrants or refugees can experience additional barriers to learning how to read and write English due to the fact that they are also illiterate in their first language.<sup>11</sup>
- Documents that are written in plain or easy English have been shown to be more accessible to people with low levels of literacy, including people from non-English

speaking backgrounds.<sup>12</sup> Plain English documents are also far easier to translate into other community languages – thus saving time and resources. Unfortunately, however, many Government departments and essential services still provide public-facing information that is very technical and jargonistic without taking the need for plain English into account.

- Adopting other universal design principles will also help ensure services are accessible to a greater number of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Captioning on videos, for example, has been shown to benefit people from non-English speaking backgrounds as well as people who are Deaf or hard of hearing. It offers significant benefits for learners who are more practiced in spoken than written language as it can help them improve their literacy skills, grammar and spelling.<sup>13</sup>
- The emergence of COVID-19 has shone a light on the many challenges associated with providing timely, accurate and accessible language translation to people from non-English speaking backgrounds. At the beginning of the pandemic, the Government relied heavily on digital content as a vehicle for disseminating information in other languages. This approach failed to acknowledge the digital divide that exists for many older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. The task of disseminating information was further complicated by the fact that some people may not view the Government as a trusted source of information due to past experiences of conflict or persecution.
- Over time, the Victorian Government has worked towards addressing these gaps by providing additional funding to, and working collaboratively with, multicultural and multifaith organisations. These partnerships have facilitated the dissemination of information that is accessible and culturally appropriate. While this approach has proven effective, however, these organisations must be adequately and sustainably resourced into the future.

**Recommendation 3:**

The Victorian Government continue to fund and work collaboratively with multicultural and multifaith organisations to coordinate the timely dissemination of information in formats that are culturally appropriate.

**Recommendation 4:**

All Government Departments and statutory authorities commit to producing information in plain or easy English to the greatest extent possible.

**Recommendation 5:**

The Victorian Government mandate the development of communication strategies across all Government Departments and statutory authorities. These strategies must outline how each entity will provide equitable access to information and services to:

- People who are digitally excluded;
- People with low levels of English literacy;
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

### **Recommendation 6:**

The Victorian Government provide dedicated funding to facilitate the increased use of translating and interpreting services across the health, ageing and community services sectors

- **Social** Around 10 per cent of people over 60 in Victoria were already experiencing chronic loneliness prior to the emergence of COVID-19.<sup>14</sup>
- Many older people have been isolated for a longer period of time than others as a result of receiving strong advice to stay at home.
- The likelihood of someone living alone increases with age. More than one in five men and one in three women over 65 years live alone.<sup>15</sup><sup>16</sup>
- Older people often experience loneliness due to the death of friends or family resulting from ageing or illness.

#### **4.3. Wellbeing and community connection**

- Investing in measures to reduce rates of social isolation and loneliness among older Victorians may result in significant downstream savings for Government. This is because social isolation and loneliness have been linked to a range of health problems including mental illness, emotional distress, suicide, dementia, high blood pressure, lowered immunity and premature death.<sup>17</sup>
- People of all ages have been more susceptible to social isolation and loneliness since the emergence of COVID-19. The situation for older people, however, has been exacerbated by a number of additional factors. For example:
- Older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds can experience any of the above risk factors for social isolation and loneliness, but may also experience additional risk factors. For example:
  - Social isolation and loneliness can remain hidden in some migrant communities, as there is an assumption that an individual's social and emotional needs will be sufficiently met by their family.
  - People who do not speak fluent English often report higher rates of social isolation and loneliness due to the difficulty they can experience with forming new social connections.
  - Some people will revert back to their first language as they get older, which can make it difficult for them to engage in social activities outside of their immediate cultural group.
  - The effects of trauma can further magnify experiences of social isolation and loneliness among older people who entered Australia as refugees.<sup>18</sup>
- Issues of intersectionality must also be considered – particularly in light of the fact that the prevalence of disability increases with age.<sup>19</sup> Research demonstrates that it is common for people with disability from migrant and refugee backgrounds to experience stigmatisation and increased rates of isolation. Language and cultural barriers can also make it difficult for this cohort to identify, understand and access supports that could help increase their inclusion and participation in community activities.<sup>20</sup>

- Older migrants and refugees of diverse gender identity or sexual orientation are also at greater risk of social isolation and loneliness – particularly those who have immigrated from countries where LGBTIQ+ people are still subjected to violence, imprisonment or even death. This can result in layered forms of discrimination. For example, an individual might experience stigma and exclusion from their own family or cultural group, as well as racial discrimination within mainstream or LGBTIQ+-specific environments.<sup>21</sup>
- At COTA Victoria, we have found that the most effective approaches to addressing isolation and loneliness among older people more generally are group interventions that target specific population groups, enable participant input, and are embedded within existing communities.<sup>22</sup> These structures also facilitate important peer support opportunities that can help people to deal with age-related challenges as they arise. People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, however, often have unique needs; requiring meaningful connections within their own cultural groups as well as the wider community.<sup>23</sup>
- There are many existing organisations and groups that offer important social interactions for older Victorians, including those from migrant or refugee backgrounds. Right now, however, many of these groups are facing challenges to their operation, struggling to remain viable with declining membership or failing to secure suitable facilities to accommodate growing or changing demands. These groups will face additional challenges as they continue to navigate evolving restrictions relating to COVID-19.
- As noted in the Municipal Association of Victoria’s submission to this inquiry, many Local Councils also play a key role in coordinating seniors groups and centres that support the needs of older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Councils have historically supported the operation of these clubs and activities through funding they received under the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP). Recent changes to the program have significantly affected this funding stream, which will make it difficult for many Councils to continue providing these services into the future.<sup>24</sup>

**Recommendation 7:**

The Victorian Government provide funding for a diverse range of services to facilitate social connection and peer support for older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, including:

- Additional funding to enable local councils to facilitate social activities for older residents. These activities must be available to older Victorians living in residential care as well as those living in the community.
- Expanded funding for mainstream and ethno-specific community groups and clubs that facilitate social activities, ongoing learning and volunteering opportunities for older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

**Recommendation 8:**

The Victorian Government establish a dedicated function within The Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions to support the administration and sustainability of volunteer-led

community groups and clubs that support older people, including those from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

#### **4.4. Transport**

- In a consultation forum we conducted with a group of older migrants and refugees back in 2020, participants told us that there was a lack of assistance to help people travel to and from social activities and medical appointments.
- Public transport is not always an effective solution for older people. Barriers include:
  - Transport not always being accessible to older people with restricted mobility or other special needs;
  - Limited transport availability in regional and rural areas;
  - Long waiting times when changing modes of transport;
  - Inability to walk long distances;
  - Difficulty navigating multiple modes of transport to travel to a particular destination;
  - Fear of navigating between transport centres and hospitals.<sup>25</sup>
- Some older people are now experiencing additional barriers due to factors relating to COVID-19. For example, some older people:
  - May have lost the confidence to navigate the public transport and road system safely and independently;
  - May be experiencing high levels of anxiety about using public transport due to the increased risk of being exposed to COVID-19.
- Transport disadvantage is a known risk factor for social isolation and loneliness – the dangers of which have already been outlined in this submission. Its impact on peoples’ ability to manage their health more generally, however, is a matter of growing concern.
- Many chronic health conditions and associated disabilities become more common as people age. It is therefore unsurprising that older people generally access health care services at higher rates than younger people.<sup>26</sup> According to information that has been provided by older people and frontline health services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, however, many older people have not been presenting for medical appointments since the emergence of COVID-19. This has also been the case for preventative or maintenance-based allied health services such as physio, remedial massage, dental and podiatry.
- The Victorian Government must address the above challenges by increasing investment in culturally appropriate, door-to-door transport solutions to help people to safely reengage with their communities.

#### **Recommendation 9:**

The Victorian Government fund the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to establish a thoroughly costed, community-based transport program to support older Victorians experiencing transport disadvantage. This program must:

- Be properly funded to ensure effective resourcing and coordination and must not rely solely on existing infrastructure;
- Be available to older people living in residential care as well as those living in the community;
- Establish consistent eligibility criteria and service fees for older people across all geographic regions;
- Effectively service older people living in regional and rural areas and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

**Recommendation 10:**

The Victorian Government expand the Multi-Purpose Taxi Program to provide support to Victorian seniors who:

- have failed a fitness-to-drive test or have surrendered their driver’s license to VicRoads, and
- possess a Centrelink issued concession card or health care card.

**Recommendation 11:**

The Victorian Government work with multi-faith and multicultural organisations to provide culturally appropriate information about existing transport subsidies.

**4.5. Health**

- While there are many factors impacting upon health outcomes for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, we have chosen to focus on 2 key issues which we feel are particularly critical in light of the situation we currently find ourselves in with COVID-19. These are physical mobility and dental care.
- Physical activity plays a critical role in reducing the risk of falls, minimising the impact of age-related health conditions and enabling people to maintain their mobility and independence as they grow older.<sup>27</sup>
- Unfortunately, COVID-related restrictions have prevented many older people from engaging in their usual physical activities over the past 18 months. People who have been unable to maintain their physical exercise have reported a range of impacts, including:
  - A decline in physical strength;
  - A decline in balance;
  - A loss of confidence;
  - An increased fear of falls;
  - A decline in mental health and wellbeing.
- It may not be possible for some older people to safely resume the activities they had been involved in prior to the pandemic due to the above factors. As such, some older people will require tailored, culturally appropriate support and advice to help them safely re-engage in physical activity as they learn to live with COVID-19.

- Oral health represents another significant area of unmet need that must be prioritised. Many older Victorians continue to experience pain and discomfort, the onset of secondary health conditions and poor nutrition as a result of not having timely access to affordable dental care.<sup>28</sup>
- While some older people can access free or low-cost care through Dental Health Services Victoria, they may currently wait up to 30 months to access this support.<sup>29,30</sup> Older Victorians living in residential aged care have little or no dental care other than what their families arrange. These challenges have been further exacerbated during COVID-19 as preventative procedures have not been permitted.

**Recommendation 12:**

The Victorian Government work with multi-faith and multicultural organisations to explore options to help older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds re-engage in physical activities, such as:

- Awareness raising activities that inform people about the process of accessing subsidised Exercise Physiology or Physiotherapy appointments under the Enhanced Primary Care Program.
- Financial support to help older Victorians on low incomes to cover gap payments when accessing Exercise Physiology or physiotherapy services under the Enhanced Primary Care Program.
- Free clinics within locally based community health services to provide advice on how to safely re-engage in physical activity. These clinics should be staffed by exercise physiologists, physiotherapists and/or personal trainers with expertise in the needs of older people, such as those who have completed training through COTA Victoria’s Living Longer Living Stronger program.
- Free or subsidised travel to assist older people on low incomes to attend appointments with an exercise physiologist, physiotherapist or personal trainer.

**Recommendation 13:**

The Victorian Government improve access to oral health care for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds by:

- Increasing funding to Dental Health Services Victoria to reduce wait times and improve access to free and low-cost dental care for older people living in the community.
- Funding multi-faith and multicultural organisations to disseminate culturally appropriate information about free or low cost dental care.
- Funding a mobile dental service to provide oral health care to older Victorians living in residential aged care until such time that recommendation 60 of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety has been fully implemented.<sup>31</sup>

#### 4.6. Employment

- Prior to COVID-19, the number of people aged 55-64 on Newstart had increased by more than 55,000 people in under five years.<sup>32</sup> Many older workers have been further affected by job losses and reduced hours since the emergence of the pandemic.<sup>33</sup><sup>34</sup>
- Improving employment outcomes for older people has been shown to:
  - Enhance mental health, wellbeing and quality of life.
  - Reduce reliance on government services.
  - Improve living standards in retirement.<sup>35</sup>
- Ageism is one of the key factors resulting in older people being unfairly excluded from employment. Almost half of Australian businesses say they are reluctant to recruit older workers. People over 50, on average, also spend twice as long looking for work.<sup>36</sup>
- For older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, the experience of ageism can be further compounded by racial discrimination or bias. They can also face the additional challenge of some businesses not recognising experience or qualifications that have been obtained overseas.
- Older jobseekers as a broader cohort may also face any of the following barriers to securing or retaining work:
  - Those working in more physically demanding roles may need to retrain to find alternative employment options if their physical health declines as they age.
  - Those with caring responsibilities, illness or injury may require reasonable adjustments or flexible hours which some employers can be reluctant to accommodate.
  - Some people have large gaps in their employment history.
  - Those who need to upskill or retrain can sometimes find it difficult to return to study.
  - Those who lack digital confidence may need additional support.
- Through our [Reach, Train, Employ](#) project, we have found that older jobseekers as a broader population group benefit from localised, wrap-around supports, including:
  - Support to return to education
  - career guidance, mentoring and peer support
  - Assistance with resume writing, interview techniques and understanding the employment market
  - Specialised training to enhance digital literacy
  - Assistance with student and employment placements
  - Financial counselling
  - Mental health and wellbeing support
- Jobs Victoria currently funds a range of programs which would have the capacity to provide much of this support to older jobseekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Anecdotally though, we know that these services are not very well marketed to older people as a broader cohort – let alone older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.<sup>37</sup> It is also important to remember that older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds can be more vulnerable to experiences of discrimination in the workplace. This may be because they are unfamiliar with their rights under Australian

law and/or they don't know about the services or complaint mechanisms that are available to support them.<sup>38</sup>

#### **Recommendation 14:**

Jobs Victoria work collaboratively with multi-faith and multicultural organisations to promote existing employment programs and address any barriers that may affect access for older jobseekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

#### **4.7. Aged care**

- In 2020, COTA Victoria partnered with the Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre to conduct a targeted consultation session with a group of older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. We used the feedback gained during this session to inform Council on the Ageing's response to the Royal Commission. Key issues raised during this session included:
  - Confusion about how to navigate the system and access services, which often leads people to rely on family for assistance;
  - Those without family support or close social networks are more vulnerable to not getting the care they need;
  - A lot of information relating to aged care is presented in a digital format which cannot be accessed by all older people;
  - There is not enough support for people who speak different languages;
  - There is a lack of cultural awareness within mainstream organisations;
  - There is a lack of funding for culturally specific and general social support groups;
  - There is a lack of understanding about individual rights and self-advocacy;
  - There is a failure to acknowledge elder abuse.
- The final report from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety was handed down in March 2021. It includes a number of recommendations that seek to improve the aged care system and imbed a human rights based approach to service delivery across the aged care sector. It is critical for the Victorian Government to play a proactive role in the redesign of Australia's aged care system by actively consulting with older Victorians, including those from migrant and refugee backgrounds, and representing their needs and preferences to the Commonwealth Government.
- Many older people also report feeling as though the Victorian Government has absolved itself of responsibility to people living in residential aged care because it is funded by the Commonwealth. We remind the Victorian Government that these people are still citizens who have legislated rights under the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. Despite this fact, Victorian aged care residents are currently locked out of a range of services including council-run programs, community transport and allied health. This places them at increased risk of experiencing social isolation and/or loneliness and can lead to a range of negative health outcomes.

### Recommendation 15:

- The Victorian Government play a proactive role in the redesign of Australia’s aged care system by actively consulting with older Victorians, including those from diverse backgrounds, and representing their needs and preferences to the Commonwealth Government.

## 5. Concluding comments

Thank you once again for providing COTA Victoria with an opportunity to submit evidence to inform this inquiry. We hope the insights and recommendations outlined throughout this submission will help the Committee to understand the range of measures that are needed to adequately uphold, promote and protect the rights of older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds into the future. Should you require further information in relation to any of the issues raised throughout this submission, please contact COTA Victoria’s [REDACTED] [REDACTED] can be contacted on [REDACTED], or at [REDACTED]

---

<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021) 'Older Australians', accessed 31 January 2022, retrieved from <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/older-people/older-australia-at-a-glance/contents/demographics-of-older-australians/culturally-linguistically-diverse-people>>.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2017), 'Will You Still Need Me?', accessed 28 January 2022, retrieved from <<https://humanrights.gov.au/about/news/speeches/will-you-still-need-me>>.

<sup>3 3</sup> Recommendation 60: Establish a Senior Dental Benefits Scheme

The Australian Government should establish a new Senior Dental Benefits Scheme, commencing no later than 1 January 2023, which will:

- a. fund dental services to people who:
  - i. live in residential aged care, or
  - ii. live in the community and receive the age pension or qualify for the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card
- b. include benefits set at a level that minimises gap payments, and includes additional subsidies for outreach services provided to people who are unable to travel, with weightings for travel in remote areas
- c. provide benefits for services limited to treatment required to maintain a functional dentition (as

<sup>4</sup> Australian Digital Inclusion Index (2021) 'What is Digital Inclusion?', accessed 25 January 2022, retrieved from <<https://www.digitalinclusionindex.org.au/what-is-digital-inclusion/>>.

<sup>5</sup> Good Things Foundation (2021) 'Digital inclusion for CALD communities', accessed 31 January 2022, retrieved from <<https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org.au/the-digital-divide/cald-communities/>>.

<sup>6</sup> Federation of Ethnic Councils of Social Services (2015) 'Review of Australian Research on Older People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds', accessed 25 January 2022, retrieved from <<http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Review-of-Australian-Research-on-Older-People-from-Culturally-and-Linguistically-Diverse-Backgrounds-March-20151.pdf>>.

<sup>7</sup> McDonald, P., Moyle, H., & Temple, J. (2019). English proficiency in Australia, 1981 to 2016. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 54(2), 112–134.

<sup>8</sup> AMES Australia (2021) 'Adult literacy and its importance - Response to the Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training', P2.

- 
- <sup>9</sup> State Library Victoria (2016) 'Reading and Literacy for All: Adult literacy - Victorian libraries in action', accessed 25 January 2022, retrieved from <[https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/Reading-and-literacy-for-all-adult-literacy-libraries\\_0.pdf](https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/Reading-and-literacy-for-all-adult-literacy-libraries_0.pdf)>.
- <sup>10</sup> Aged Care Guide (2015) 'Passage of time: why people with dementia switch back to the past', accessed 1 February 2022, retrieved from <<https://www.agedcareguide.com.au/talking-aged-care/passage-of-time-why-people-with-dementia-switch-back-to-the-past>>.
- <sup>11</sup> Parliament of Australia (2021) '3. Education and language', accessed 1 February 2022, retrieved from <[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Joint/Migration/settlementoutcomes/Report/section?id=committees%2Freportjnt%2F024098%2F25143](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Migration/settlementoutcomes/Report/section?id=committees%2Freportjnt%2F024098%2F25143)>.
- <sup>12</sup> Ethnolink (2020) 'What is CALD? Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communications?', accessed 31 January 2022, retrieved from <<https://www.ethnolink.com.au/blog/cald-culturally-and-linguistically-diverse/>>.
- <sup>13</sup> Automatic Sync Technologies (2017) 'How Closed Captions can Benefit ESL Learners in More than One Way', accessed 25 January 2022, retrieved from <<https://www.automaticsync.com/captionsync/captioning-benefits-esl-learners/>>.
- <sup>14</sup> Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (2020) 'Ageing', accessed 2 August 2020, retrieved from <<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/ageing>>.
- <sup>15</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) 'Ageing Population', accessed 27 June 2019, retrieved from <<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0~2016~Main%20Features~Ageing%20Population~14>>.
- <sup>16</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) 'Ageing Population', accessed 27 June 2019, retrieved from <<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0~2016~Main%20Features~Ageing%20Population~14>>.
- <sup>17</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019) 'Social isolation and loneliness', accessed 16 September 2021, retrieved from <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/social-isolation-and-loneliness>>.
- <sup>18</sup> Council on the Ageing Victoria (2014) 'Social Isolation: Its impact on the mental health and wellbeing of older Victorians', accessed 25 January 2022, Retrieved from <<https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/6775634?>>.
- <sup>19</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2020) 'People with disability in Australia, Prevalence of disability', accessed 25 January 2022, retrieved from <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/contents/people-with-disability/prevalence-of-disability>>.
- <sup>20</sup> Cultural Perspectives and Multicultural Development Australia (2017) 'Thinking About Stigma, Disability and CALD Communities', accessed 25 January 2022, retrieved from <<https://www.dsdsatsip.qld.gov.au/resources/dsdsatsip/disability/ndis/cald/ep-stigma-disability.pdf>>.
- <sup>21</sup> Dementia Centre for Research Collaboration (2015) 'LGBTI Fact Sheet: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Groups', accessed 27 January 2022, retrieved from <[https://dementiaresearch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Fact\\_sheet\\_8b\\_CALD\\_groups.pdf](https://dementiaresearch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Fact_sheet_8b_CALD_groups.pdf)>.
- <sup>22</sup> Council on the Ageing Victoria (2014) 'Working Paper NO. 1: Social Isolation - Its impact on the mental health and wellbeing of older Victorians', accessed 27 June 2019, retrieved from <[https://www.cotavic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/05/Working-Paper\\_Socialisolation.pdf](https://www.cotavic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/05/Working-Paper_Socialisolation.pdf)>.
- <sup>23</sup> Commissioner for Senior Victorians (2020) 'Ageing Well in A Changing World', accessed 26 October 2021, retrieved from <<https://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/-/media/seniors/files/commissioner-for-senior-victorians/report-ageing-well-in-a-changing-world-2020.pdf?la=en&hash=5E937926E554413FB59249427FBF8BD0B84F13E0>>.
- <sup>24</sup> Municipal Association of Victoria (2021) 'Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Needs of Older People from Migrant and Refugee Backgrounds', accessed 25 January 2022, retrieved from <[https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/lsc-LA/Inquiry\\_into\\_support\\_for\\_older\\_Victorians\\_from\\_migrant\\_and\\_refugee\\_backgrounds/Submissions/033\\_2021.11.30\\_-\\_Municipal\\_Association\\_of\\_Victoria.pdf](https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/lsc-LA/Inquiry_into_support_for_older_Victorians_from_migrant_and_refugee_backgrounds/Submissions/033_2021.11.30_-_Municipal_Association_of_Victoria.pdf)>.
- <sup>25</sup> COTA Victoria (2018) 'COTA Victoria Listening Posts: The Voice of Older Rural Victorians'.
- <sup>26</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2016) 'Health care use by older Australians', accessed 7 August 2020, retrieved from <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/0b26353f-94fb-4349-b950-7948ace76960/ah16-6-17-health-care-use-older-australians.pdf.aspx>>.
- <sup>27</sup> Healthdirect (2021) 'Physical activity guidelines for older adults', accessed 4 November 2021, retrieved from <[www.healthdirect.gov.au/physical-activity-guidelines-for-older-adults](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au/physical-activity-guidelines-for-older-adults)>.
- <sup>28</sup> COTA Victoria (2018) 'Improving support for older Victorian's dental health', accessed 21 September 2021, retrieved from <<https://www.cotavic.org.au/news-items/improving-support-for-older-victorians-dental-health/>>.

---

<sup>29</sup> Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (2021) 'Dental services', accessed 21 September 2021, retrieved from <<https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/dental-services>>.

<sup>30</sup> Victorian Oral Health Alliance (2021) 'Data', accessed 24 September 2021, retrieved from <<https://voha.org.au/data/>>.

<sup>31</sup> <sup>31</sup> Recommendation 60: Establish a Senior Dental Benefits Scheme

The Australian Government should establish a new Senior Dental Benefits Scheme, commencing no later than 1 January 2023, which will:

- a. fund dental services to people who:
  - i. live in residential aged care, or
  - ii. live in the community and receive the age pension or qualify for the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card

- b. include benefits set at a level that minimises gap payments, and includes additional subsidies for outreach services provided to people who are unable to travel, with weightings for travel in remote areas

- c. provide benefits for services limited to treatment required to maintain a functional dentition (as

<sup>32</sup> Donnellan, A., written for *ABC News* (2018) 'Number of older Australians on Newstart growing by 10,000 a year', accessed 8 December 2019 <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-25/mature-workers-on-newstart/10195296>>.

<sup>33</sup> The Guardian (2020) 'Covid-19 recession causing job losses in older workers and housing stress in young', accessed 16 September 2021, retrieved from <<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/jun/30/covid-19-recession-causing-job-losses-in-older-workers-and-housing-stress-in-young>>.

<sup>34</sup> Brotherhood of St Laurence and Nous Group (2020) 'Hidden in plain sight: the impact of the COVID-19 response on mature-age low-income people in Australia', accessed 16 September 2021, retrieved from <[http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/12062/1/BSL+Nous\\_Hidden\\_in\\_plain\\_sight\\_Jun2020.pdf](http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/12062/1/BSL+Nous_Hidden_in_plain_sight_Jun2020.pdf)>.

<sup>35</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2021) '6 Economic and social benefits of employing older Australians', accessed 27 October 2021, retrieved from <<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/6-economic-and-social-benefits-employing-older-australians>>.

<sup>36</sup> Australian Human Resources Institute and the Australian Human Rights Commission (2021) 'Employing and Retaining Older Workers', accessed 16 September 2021, retrieved from <[https://www.ahri.com.au/media/c4nj0cnk/ahri\\_employingolderworkers\\_april\\_2021.pdf](https://www.ahri.com.au/media/c4nj0cnk/ahri_employingolderworkers_april_2021.pdf)>.

<sup>37</sup> Refugee Council of Australia (2019) 'Settling in Australia: The challenges', accessed 1 February 2022, retrieved from <<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/settlement-challenges/5/>>.

<sup>38</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2021) '6 Economic and social benefits of employing older Australians', accessed 27 October 2021, retrieved from <<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/6-economic-and-social-benefits-employing-older-australians>>.