

# Inquiry into support for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds

Whole of Victorian Government Submission

**OFFICIAL**



Families,  
Fairness  
and Housing

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# Introduction

The Victorian Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Legislative Assembly inquiry into supports for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds. The submission is a Victorian whole-of-government response developed by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) with input from the Department of Health (DH), the Department of Education and Training (DET), the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) and the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR). The submission outlines the broader context of service delivery for older people in Victoria (people aged 60 and above), and current policies, services and supports provided for older migrants and refugees by the Victorian Government.

## Victoria: Australia's most multicultural state

Victoria has a long history of multiculturalism. Our cultural diversity is one of Victoria's greatest assets and by sharing and celebrating these cultural differences, our communities work together to foster a stronger, richer, and more inclusive Victoria.

Victorians come from more than 200 countries, follow over 135 different faiths, and speak over 260 languages, with more than 1.5 million Victorians speaking a language other than English. Among Victorians aged 60 and over, 27 per cent are from non-English speaking backgrounds, compared to 21 per cent of Victorians under 60 years of age.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Commonwealth Government's Settlement Data, Victoria welcomed approximately 30 per cent of humanitarian arrivals (6,000 people) from the national 2019-20 Humanitarian Program intake of 18,750 people. Victoria also hosts the largest cohort of asylum seekers in the country at approximately 34 per cent of the 32,000 people arriving nationally.

Needs vary significantly across and within multicultural communities, including language and literacy; digital access and literacy; temporary visa status; barriers accessing basic safety net supports; impacts to health, mental health conditions and/or trauma related to pre-migration experiences or disrupted access to care along the migration pathway; and separation from family and community overseas.

As Victoria's coronavirus (COVID-19) response moves into social recovery, for many older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, the transition to recovery poses significant challenges. Older people living alone experience daily social and financial disadvantage exacerbated by the pandemic. In addition, extended periods at home have reduced their physical health, wellbeing, and general confidence to get back out and about and resume pre-pandemic activities.

For older people, ongoing vulnerability, and threat of infection of COVID-19, even when vaccinated, is causing apprehension, anxiety, and the curtailing of daily activities such as using public transport, shopping, participating in social activities and visiting medical centres.

Services and supports should be responsive to the needs and experiences of Victoria's diverse multicultural communities, including larger more established communities in Victoria (for example, Chinese, Italian, Greek and Vietnamese communities), as well as emerging older communities (for

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2016). *Cultural Diversity*. [Census TableBuilder]. Accessed 21 January 2022

example, a range of South Asian and Arabic speaking communities) and smaller, at risk refugee communities (for example, Syrian and Chaldean, Burmese, Afghan, and African communities).

Victoria is home to approximately 1,000 multicultural seniors' groups dedicated to supporting their members and communities. Victoria's multicultural seniors' groups play an important role in preserving cultural heritage, traditions, and faiths for future generations. Their ongoing contribution and wisdom will be important in supporting Victorian communities adapt to and recover from the significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

### Multicultural Affairs

The Multicultural Affairs portfolio supports the Victorian Government to deliver its multicultural vision and priorities. The portfolio works in partnership with Victoria's diverse multicultural communities, including through the Victorian Multicultural Commission, to drive the Victorian Government's multicultural policy agenda and commitment to fostering an inclusive, engaged and harmonious multicultural community.

The Multicultural Affairs portfolio delivers a range of priority initiatives, including settlement supports for newly arrived migrants and refugees and a range of programs to directly support multicultural and multifaith Victorians. The portfolio also currently provides dedicated support for multicultural communities to respond to, and recover from, the COVID-19 pandemic, including through a range of grant programs supporting emergency relief and targeted, in-language communications.

Since 2014, Multicultural Affairs grant programs have funded over 4,200 community organisations, representing over 210 multicultural and multifaith communities across Victoria. These grant programs provide multicultural communities with opportunities to express, share and practise their beliefs and traditions with the wider Victorian community and to fully participate in the social and economic life of our state. Dedicated support for older Victorians from multicultural communities is provided through a range of grant programs, highlighted below.

### Multicultural Seniors Support 2021-2025 program

Since 2002, the Victorian Government has provided more than 4,700 grants and over \$24 million in funding support to multicultural seniors' groups. The 2021-22 Victorian State Budget committed \$8 million over four years for the Multicultural Seniors Support 2021-2025 program.

The program opened in October 2021 and provides \$2,000 per organisation per year for four years to over 900 multicultural seniors' groups dedicated to supporting their members and communities. To qualify for funding support, applicants must be a multicultural seniors' group with a primary focus to support seniors from culturally, linguistically, and religiously diverse backgrounds.

The Multicultural Seniors Support 2021-25 program supports multicultural seniors' groups to:

- celebrate and honour multicultural seniors and seniors' groups unique contribution to Victoria
- reduce social isolation and foster social connections among multicultural senior citizens
- develop leadership and organisational capacity, skills and sustainability to continue supporting multicultural seniors

- provide multicultural senior citizens with information, skills, and assistance to support their health and wellbeing
- preserve and pass on a community's cultural heritage for future generations
- promote intergenerational connections and activities
- encourage cross-cultural interaction and understanding
- engage and communicate with their communities in response to the pandemic.

Funding can be used for the following purposes, subject to COVID-19 restrictions:

- engagement activities to enhance social cohesion of seniors' groups and cultural appreciation of their members:
  - cultural activities (for example, dancing, singing, arts and crafts, cooking) in person and/or online
  - outings to places of cultural significance
  - luncheons and regular gatherings of members
  - engagement of new members to grow and build sustainable seniors' groups
- running costs of the seniors group (for example, utilities, venue hire, refreshments, administration costs, other costs incurred while supporting their members)
- distribution of accurate information regarding COVID-19 restrictions, health advice and available supports for multicultural seniors, for example, translation of resources outlining current advice
  - printing and postage for hard copy resources
- purchase of resources or equipment to benefit group and members:
  - Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for members (for example, masks, hand sanitiser, etc)
  - sewing machines to create reusable masks
  - minor office equipment (for example, laptop, printers, mobile phones)
- delivery of practical supports to multicultural seniors (either directly or working with partner organisations to deliver), for example:
  - home deliveries of essential items to members unable to leave home (for example, care packages, medicines, PPE, etc)
  - social matching initiatives to decrease isolation (for example, pairing of members to engage regularly via phone or online)
  - culturally appropriate and regular 'check-ins' for those who are isolated
  - transport costs for multicultural seniors to attend medical appointments and pharmacies during the COVID-19 pandemic, including for COVID-19 testing and vaccinations
- advancing seniors' internet accessibility, digital literacy, and access to computers (including partnerships with peak bodies to deliver this service)
- establishment of digital or remote support networks and online communities to keep members connected:
  - software to support group members connect (for example, video conferencing platform membership to meet 'face-to-face' online)
  - necessary IT and digital support, technical skills and training sessions for example, how to use video conferencing and engage in online spaces)
  - IT literacy and safety on the internet.

More information can be found at: <https://www.vic.gov.au/multicultural-seniors-support-program>.

## Anti-Racism Initiatives

The Victorian Government is committed to developing a new state-wide Anti-Racism Strategy. The Strategy aims to address racism in all its forms, at both an interpersonal level, as well as at a systemic and structural level. The Strategy seeks to address racism in all the settings by, for example, increasing cultural safety in government services and increasing access to in-language and culturally appropriate information, which will positively impact the lives of Victorians, including senior Victorians.

The Victorian Government is also committed to implementing the recommendations of the Parliamentary Inquiry into anti-vilification protections. These recommendations will expand the personal attributes protected by anti-vilification provisions as well as improving access to reporting mechanisms to afford better protection to all Victorians including senior Victorians.

## Local Anti-Racism Initiatives Grants program

In March 2021, the Local Anti-Racism Initiatives Grants program was launched to support Victorians in preventing and responding to racism and discrimination, promote positive intercultural understanding and strengthen the evidence of the challenges faced by multicultural communities.

The program provided \$3.86 million in grants to 42 community organisations across the state to deliver activities and initiatives supporting local communities to tackle racism. The program focuses on initiatives to ensure every Victorian is respected and can belong, contribute, achieve and succeed, regardless of their age or background.

More information can be found at: <https://www.vic.gov.au/local-anti-racism-initiatives-grants-program>.

## Case study - Inclusive Ageing Free From Discrimination: African Australian Seniors Anti-Racism Project

African Think Tank Inc was awarded \$100,000 in June 2021 to deliver a project aimed at understanding the experiences of discrimination of African Australian seniors. Activities include consultation with African Australian seniors and mainstream organisations on racism experienced by African Australian seniors, feedback on successful existing strategies and best practice to reduce the incidents of racism towards African Australian seniors. Based on extensive research and the evidence collected, the organisation will then:

- develop a community education resource to help educate mainstream organisations to be more respectful of African Australian seniors, particularly in service delivery and care settings
- deliver community education and training sessions to community and service sector (for example, local government, service providers, aged care organisations, police) to raise awareness and provide ways to reduce racism
- launch a social media campaign (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter).

## COVID-19 related support for seniors

Victoria's multicultural and multifaith communities have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. To address the challenges created by the pandemic, the Victorian Government established the CALD Communities Taskforce (the Taskforce) in August 2020.<sup>2</sup>

The Taskforce has made significant progress in overcoming communication barriers to engage with multicultural communities and provide practical, targeted support effectively and sensitively. Taskforce funding has ensured multicultural Victorians, including multicultural seniors, have had access to emergency support and vital public health information during the pandemic.

As part of the Taskforce's Coronavirus Support for Multicultural Seniors program 2020-21, more than 900 multicultural seniors' groups received funding to provide culturally appropriate health information and support the wellbeing of their members throughout the pandemic. Grants were used by multicultural seniors' groups to support the following critical activities:

- distribution of accurate information regarding COVID-19 restrictions, health advice and available supports for multicultural seniors, for example:
  - translation of resources outlining current advice
  - printing and postage for hard copy resources
- purchase of resources or equipment to benefit group and members:
  - Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for members (for example, masks, hand sanitiser, etc)
  - sewing machines to make reusable masks
  - taxi vouchers to attend medical appointments and pharmacies during COVID-19 pandemic for this vulnerable health group
  - minor office equipment (for example, laptop, printers, mobile phones)
- organising volunteers to deliver practical support to multicultural seniors (either directly or working with partner organisations to deliver), for example:
  - home deliveries of essential items to members unable to leave home (for example, care packages, medicines, PPE)
  - social matching initiatives to decrease isolation (for example, pairing of members to engage regularly via phone or online)
  - culturally appropriate and regular 'check-ins' for those who are isolated
- advancing seniors' internet accessibility, digital literacy, and access to computers (including partnership with peak bodies to deliver this service)
- establishment of digital or remote support networks and online communities to keep members connected:
  - software to support group members connect (for example, video conferencing platform membership to meet 'face-to-face' online)
  - necessary IT and digital support, technical skills and training sessions (for example, how to use video conferencing and engage in online spaces)
  - IT literacy and safety on the internet

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<sup>2</sup> Victorian Government – Supporting multicultural communities through coronavirus (COVID-19) webpage. <https://www.vic.gov.au/supporting-multicultural-communities-through-coronavirus-covid-19>. accessed 6 January 2022

- running costs of the seniors group (for example, utilities, administration costs, other costs incurred while supporting their members during the pandemic).

Building on the success of the Taskforce in 2020-21, additional funding was provided in 2021-22 to expand and extend support for Victoria's multicultural communities during the pandemic.

In September 2021, the Taskforce launched phase three of the Priority Response for Multicultural Communities (PRMC) grants program. Funding of almost \$23 million across Phase One, Two and Three of the PRMC program has supported multicultural community members, including older Victorians, to isolate and stay safe through the provision of culturally tailored support, including emergency relief, food packages and outreach supports. Through PRMC grants and other programs, the Taskforce has partnered with more than 471 community organisations and assisted multicultural and multifaith communities throughout the pandemic by providing more than 440,000 meals and supporting more than 800,000 people in need of immediate assistance, including multicultural seniors.

Lessons learnt from the work of the Taskforce include the importance of partnering with local and trusted community organisations and community leaders to effectively reach and engage with CALD communities. These groups and leaders play a critical role in connecting government with CALD communities and in providing culturally safe and inclusive supports and information.

More information can be found at: <https://www.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-support-multicultural-seniors-20-21>.

### **Case study - Federazione Pensionati Italiani Del Victoria**

For 30 years, the **Federazione Pensionati Italiani Del Victoria (the Federation)** has supported a network of Italian seniors' groups and members. The group will receive State Government support of \$2,000 each year for four years through the Coronavirus Support for Multicultural Seniors program to provide a central platform for groups and members to come together, form friendships and social connections, share existing resources and understand local services available. This builds on the \$2000 payment provided in 2021, in recognition of the work our Multicultural Seniors Groups have been doing to support their communities during the pandemic.

When the pandemic started, the Federation knew it would be important to provide seniors with practical support, regular communication, accurate information and assistance to access and navigate technology. Groups and members of the Federation were especially concerned about the wellbeing of their most vulnerable and isolated members. The Federation supports around 300-400 seniors in Melbourne's northern and western suburbs. With the support of the grant and local business and donations, the Federation organised care packages including essential food and sanitiser to support members' safety and wellbeing, purchased new computer software and office equipment to support groups to keep in contact with members, and bought essential cleaning supplies to deliver COVID-Safe in-person activities

### **Case study - Welcome to Eltham**

**Welcome to Eltham** supports newly arrived refugees and people seeking asylum to settle into the local area and access practical support, events and programs. With the support of volunteers and the community, Welcome to Eltham assists refugees predominantly from Syrian and Iraqi backgrounds to access a range of initiatives, from subsidised driving lessons to conversation and social groups, walking clubs and material aid.

One of Welcome to Eltham's most successful programs is a home English tutoring and social connection program. Volunteer tutors often become good friends with participants and provide essential community connection and companionship for newly arrived senior refugees.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges for volunteers and participants. Social distancing restrictions meant face-to-face support was not possible, and low digital literacy and access to technology hindered the delivery of the program online. Volunteers tried to run the program over the phone, but communication became less effective as English skills declined without regular practice. Social isolation and language barriers impacted many newly arrived seniors participating in the program, who found it difficult to access information and advice about COVID-19 and to maintain social connections.

With the support of a grant through the Coronavirus Support for Multicultural Seniors (CSMS) program, Welcome to Eltham delivered in-language literacy training to build the skills and confidence of Syrian and Iraqi seniors to participate and engage online. Welcome to Eltham hosted workshops to teach participants how to use computers and online media and platforms, especially Zoom and WhatsApp, and engaged an Arabic speaking trainer to translate information during the workshops. The grant also enabled Welcome to Eltham to purchase a laptop for the group to assist with workshop delivery and similar events in the future.

Welcome to Eltham have been able to resume their English tutoring program and conversation groups online, as well as new online games events. They are also better placed to share COVID-19 information, answer questions and support people to understand the latest advice and restrictions. Equipped with greater technology skills and confidence, participants have been able to reconnect with their friends and their wider community, which has reduced isolation, increased their independence and restored a sense of normalcy and belonging for participants and volunteers.

## Multicultural Community Infrastructure Fund

The 2021-22 Multicultural Community Infrastructure Fund<sup>3</sup> offers grants of up to \$500,000 to support Victorian culturally diverse communities to upgrade, renovate and maintain their community facilities. Applications for the current round close on 31 January 2022.

Community facilities serve as a critical piece of social infrastructure for many of Victoria's multicultural and multifaith communities. They provide a physical space for communities to gather, to engage in recreational and social activities, and to hold celebrations, festivals or other gatherings. These sites are particularly important for old Victorians from culturally diverse communities where they can form the centrepiece of much of their social engagement.

### Case study - Trieste Social Club – Facility upgrade

The Trieste Social Club in Essendon has a membership base of more than 200 people, most of whom are elderly. The Trieste Social Club is used by members to share experiences with friends and family, and to address the isolation experienced by some ageing members of the community.

In 2019, the Victorian Government contributed \$35,000 towards the upgrade of the Trieste Social Club through the Multicultural Community Infrastructure Fund. The works included upgrading toilet

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<sup>3</sup> Victorian government- Multicultural Community Infrastructure Fund webpage. <https://www.vic.gov.au/multicultural-community-infrastructure-fund>. accessed 6 January 2022

facilities and other ground floor facilities to make them more accessible to older members and visitors to the facility.

## Targeted support for older Victorians from multicultural communities to get vaccinated

In October 2021, the Victorian Government announced the \$21.5 million Partnering with Priority Communities Vaccination Initiative to provide targeted support for a range of priority communities, including older migrants and refugees, to get vaccinated and receive their booster shots close to the places they live. This includes funding additional targeted case management capacity delivered through a range of trusted community organisations funded by the DFFH which hold existing relationships with priority communities.

The \$2 million Local Community Access Grants program supports community organisations and neighbourhood houses to deliver a range of activities to reduce vaccine misinformation and hesitancy and improve the ability of priority cohorts to access and use the technology they need. This includes funding to Volunteering Geelong Inc., to provide seniors and CALD community members with a range of supports along their vaccination journey, including safe transport to and from vaccination centres, as well as carers and translators. The Local Community Access Grants program remains open in 2022 until funding is fully expended.

Other key elements of the package provide targeted support for older migrants and refugees including:

- funding the extension of the Program for Refugee Monitoring and Education (PRIME), which is supporting five PRIME partner organisations to recruit for and deliver tailored, culturally sensitive COVID-19 vaccination services for people seeking asylum and other at-risk temporary migrants
- the COVID-19 Vaccinations Women's Health Engagement Program to address vaccine literacy, hesitancy and service navigation of culturally and diverse women, including older women, across Victoria.

## Targeted communications for CALD communities during the COVID-19 pandemic

During the pandemic, the Victorian Government has invested significantly in accessible resources to ensure as many people as possible have access to and understand what is happening during the pandemic, what they need to do and what support is available. Audio is the preference for many senior Victorians to receive information. A partnership was established between the Victorian Government and the National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council (NEMBC) to operate a regular multilingual news service in 19 languages, broadcasting across 15 community radio stations, including four regional radio stations and through online channels.

This format means translated information can be shared on the same day announcements are made, while written translated resources are being prepared. This content is not only accessible in its audio format but provides the context of why these changes are happening which there is not always space for in official translated materials. Special edition explainer episodes were created to help break down new requirements or complex information, such as how to get your proof of vaccination, vaccine safety, and supports available.

Visual content, such as posters and animations, were also created to support understanding of complex topics, including how to use QR codes when check-ins became a requirement, and work was undertaken with community and faith leaders to create videos to share important information through their community channels.

Senior Victorians from multicultural backgrounds are frequent users of the digital communications tool, WhatsApp.<sup>4</sup> A WhatsApp group for community leaders across the state was created in October 2020 to help disseminate critical COVID-19 related information to community leaders and Victoria's multicultural communities in a timely manner. This group has been active throughout the pandemic to make sure community leaders have the information they need to support their communities quickly, and to build connections with other community leaders to share insights and resources.

Additionally, in early 2021, the Office for Senior Victorians received a grant of \$0.2 million through the CALD Communities Taskforce to work with ECCV to develop in-language videos on the importance of vaccination for CALD seniors using community leaders from emerging communities to convey important messages.

With the assistance of some members of the Senior Victorians Advisory Group (SVAG)<sup>5</sup>, the Office for Senior Victorians developed specific messaging for seniors' community-based organisations on how to manage QR codes and social distancing requirements for community meetings and gatherings. This information was translated into 13 languages.

Advice to government on the needs of seniors continues to be informed by the Senior Victorians Advisory Group and ongoing engagement with and feedback from COTA Victoria and ECCV.

## Language services

Interpreters play an essential role in ensuring Victorians with limited English proficiency, or who use sign language, can access services, and understand and participate meaningfully in the care they receive. Accessible, professional translation and interpreting services are also critical to ensure older migrants who experience language reversion have equal access to services and supports. Language reversion occurs when older migrants lose their English proficiency with age. While English proficiency in migrants typically improves over time, bilingual migrants tend to revert to use their first language as they age. In addition, humanitarian migrants have lower English proficiency than other migrant groups, and in particular those aged 65 or older are 43 percent less likely to comprehend spoken English.

The DFFH language services policy supports the department and its funded services to respond to the needs of linguistically diverse people, including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and those who use sign language. The language services policy identifies when language services should be offered to clients based on legislative requirements and best-practice service delivery. Department-funded organisations and services are encouraged to develop their own language services policies and procedures consistent with this policy.

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<sup>4</sup> The University of Melbourne – Communicating COVID-19 to our older culturally diverse Australians webpage. <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/communicating-covid-19-to-our-older-culturally-diverse-australians>, accessed 1 December 2021

<sup>5</sup> The Senior Victorian Advisory Group (comprised of peak bodies, government representatives, community health, ethno-specific organisation and community members, chaired by Commissioner for Senior Victorians) provides an advisory, advocacy and leadership role to the Minister for Disability Ageing and Carers, government departments and other relevant stakeholders.

DFFH funds access to telephone interpreting, on-site interpreting, and translation. Eligible Victorian Government funded services or departmental staff and some eligible organisations in receipt of CHSP funding can access this support. VITS LanguageLoop is the current service provider.

Health services and professionals, and other services working with CALD communities, can use the health translations directory to find translated health information in a variety of languages. The directory provides web links to third party sites with translated resources. Those sites include government departments, peak health bodies, hospitals, and community health and welfare agencies. People can search by language and topic.

## Elder abuse prevention and response

Immigrant or refugee older peoples' experiences of abuse can be made worse by socioeconomic circumstances, such as financial disadvantage for those without savings, and a lack of access to appropriate social and health services for those living in rural and remote regions.<sup>6</sup>

Older people from diverse backgrounds are at higher risk of experiencing elder abuse in situations where there is:

- limited proficiency in English
- reduced access to information
- lack of awareness of elder abuse
- lack of awareness of rights (including legal)
- lack of awareness of services, or inability to access them
- social isolation
- greater dependency or complete dependency on family members
- unwillingness to disclose abuse because of stigma (linked to community factors)
- cross-generational differences that may result in tensions or misunderstandings
- inadequate promotional channels/methods for disseminating information.

Fear of being shamed by and excluded from their communities may prevent older people from accessing services and assistance.<sup>7</sup> A study of financial abuse found barriers experienced by older people of immigrant or refugee background in seeking assistance include language and communication difficulties, social isolation, and therefore ignorance of services available, and the older person's fear of reproach from their abusive family member if it is discovered they have sought or plan to seek help for the abuse.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, cultural expectations around family privacy may prevent older people from recognising, disclosing, and/or reporting abuse.<sup>9</sup> Based on the gaps acknowledged in the Elder Abuse

6 Warburton, J. et. Al. (2009). "Ageing and cultural diversity: Policy and practice issues". *Australian Social Work*, 62(2). pp.168-85

7 Bagshaw, D. et. al. (2007). *Our actions to prevent the abuse of older South Australians. Action plan (based on research)*. South Australia: Office for the Ageing, Department for Families and Communities.

8 Zannettino L. et. al. (2015). "The role of emotional vulnerability and abuse in the financial exploitation of older people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Australia". *Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect*, 27(1), pp.74-89.

9 Multicultural Centre for Women's Health – Gender and elder abuse: what's the connect? Webpage. <https://www.mcwh.com.au/gender-and-elder-abuse-whats-the-connection/>. accessed 1 December 2021

Community Action Plan for Victoria, key priorities for action were identified to address elder abuse.<sup>10</sup> These included:

- clarifying the relationship between family violence and elder abuse
- raising community awareness of elder abuse and promoting a positive regard of older people to reduce ageism
- timely responses
- increasing ways to help older people disclose elder abuse without fear
- providing education and training on elder abuse for all professionals in health and aged care services
- better communication between services to manage and follow up cases
- having an organisational policies on elder abuse.

## Risk and protective factors

Risk and protective factors vary across cultures, as well as by age and gender. Poverty, immigration, violence, racism and discrimination are some of the risk factors disproportionately affecting racial and multicultural minorities, especially refugees. Fundamentally, opportunities and access to the basic living requirements promoting wellbeing, such as accommodation, work, education and leisure activities, can be reduced for people from CALD backgrounds.<sup>11</sup>

Community-based risks <sup>12</sup>	Community-based opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geographic isolation.</li> <li>• Linguistic or cultural isolation.</li> <li>• Lack of awareness of 'elder abuse'.</li> <li>• Lack of knowledge of Australian laws and services.</li> <li>• Notions of shame, 'saving face', or social stigma relating to going 'outside' the family.</li> <li>• Preference for community rather than institutional care.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information about elder abuse and how to get help broadcast on multicultural radio.</li> <li>• Have community and/or faith raise the appropriate treatment of older people in their community engagements.</li> <li>• School programs including respect for older people or intergenerational opportunities.</li> <li>• Services developing cultural competency.</li> <li>• Information sessions where the community is involved in their design.</li> <li>• Collaborations with cultural organisations to raise awareness and address the issue of elder abuse in our community.</li> <li>• Coordination of resources and services among community organisations supporting older people.</li> </ul>

<sup>10</sup> National Ageing Research Institute Ltd. (2018). Elder Abuse Community Action Plan for Victoria. <https://www.nari.net.au/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=3852b806-76a1-4688-bba7-12beb35f6385>. accessed 1 December 2021

<sup>11</sup> <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-pubs-p-mono-toc-mental-pubs-p-mono-pop-mental-pubs-p-mono-pop-cul>. accessed 1 December 2021

<sup>12</sup> Bray, J. (2018). Scope of Current Elder Abuse Awareness / Prevention Strategies targeted to CALD Communities.

[https://jennybray.com.au/sites/default/files/resources/BRAY\\_CALD\\_Models\\_5th\\_National\\_Elder\\_Abuse\\_Conference.pdf](https://jennybray.com.au/sites/default/files/resources/BRAY_CALD_Models_5th_National_Elder_Abuse_Conference.pdf). accessed 1 December 2021

Societal risks	Societal opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ageism (negative stereotypes of ageing).</li> <li>• Gender inequality.</li> <li>• Social determinants of health.</li> <li>• Societal norms.</li> <li>• Social isolation.</li> <li>• Tolerance for, or acceptance of, aggressive or coercive behaviour.</li> <li>• Expectation that staff, guardians or other agents have greater decision-making power over the older person.</li> <li>• Family members expected to care for older people without seeking help from others.</li> <li>• Persons are encouraged to endure suffering or remain silent about their problems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive views of ageing and older people.</li> <li>• Valuing self-determination of older people.</li> <li>• Measures in place to safeguard vulnerable adults.</li> <li>• Involving the older person in decisions about their lives.</li> <li>• Insistence on the rights of all individuals to be upheld.</li> </ul>

Working in a transcultural context requires awareness, knowledge and skills.<sup>13</sup> This means, firstly, an explicit awareness of the cultural values involved in the relationship between the service provider and client. There is then the need to understand significant events and experiences impacting on wellbeing: a process especially relevant for those with experiences of torture, trauma, displacement and loss. Finally, there are specific skills required for working with people from CALD backgrounds, such as working with interpreters and being aware of verbal and non-verbal communication differences. While training in cultural competence is recognised as a necessity in many services, in others, and particularly in some of the support services sectors, training is limited.

Some of the key elder abuse initiatives funded by the Victorian Government include:

- Seniors Rights Victoria<sup>14</sup> (SRV) (a program of COTA) is a community legal centre specialising in elder abuse in Victoria and operates the statewide helpline, providing information, support, advice, advocacy, and education to help prevent elder abuse and safeguard the rights, dignity and independence of older people.
- the Raising Elder Abuse in Ethnic Communities project<sup>15</sup> is delivered by ECCV, working with SRV to train bilingual community educators so they may in turn raise awareness of elder abuse in their communities and provide information about available supports.
- the Elder Abuse Prevention Networks (EAPNs) deliver local action to raise awareness and prevent elder abuse from happening in the first place, using a primary prevention approach. The Elder Abuse Prevention Networks are in response to recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence. The Victorian Government funds eight elder abuse networks to collaborate at a community level and focus on the prevention of elder abuse.

<sup>13</sup> Gabb, D. (2000). Development of transcultural mental health education by the Victorian Transcultural Psychiatry Unit. *Synergy*, Summer.

<sup>14</sup> Seniors Rights Victoria website. <https://seniorsrights.org.au/>, accessed 6 January 2022

<sup>15</sup> Ethnic Communities Council Victoria – Elder Abuse Prevention webpage. <https://eccv.org.au/elder-abuse-prevention/>, accessed 6 January 2022

- the Integrated model of care for responding to suspected elder abuse<sup>16</sup> (The Integrated model of care) aims to strengthen elder abuse responses and support within Victorian health services. It creates multiple entry points for older people and their carers and families to access specialist support services to address suspected elder abuse. The model consists of four key components:
  1. workforce training (enabling staff to understand, identify and respond to elder abuse)
  2. Elder Abuse Liaison Officer (provides secondary consultation to staff working with older people who are experiencing or are at risk of elder abuse)
  3. counselling (including financial counselling) and mediation service (provides therapeutic interventions to older people at risk of or experiencing elder abuse)
  4. an Elder Abuse Prevention Network (see previous dot point for description).
- the Respect Older People: 'Call It Out' campaign led by Respect Victoria focussing on raising awareness of elder abuse included the development of multicultural resources explaining elder abuse and available supports.

These initiatives or services may be accessed by older people of migrant or refugee background or their support networks.

Collaborations between organisations such as ECCV, SRV and the EAPNs are building mutual expertise in culturally appropriate responses to elder abuse using primary prevention approaches to develop activities working towards the primary prevention of elder abuse in diverse communities. SRV has been supporting older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds with the assistance of interpreters or by working with culturally appropriate services in the community.

Information regarding elder abuse is also available via the SeniorsOnline website.<sup>17</sup> The 'Your Rights' section has a range of contact details for older people as well as fact sheets on elder abuse.<sup>18</sup> The COMPASS – Guiding Action on Elder Abuse website<sup>19</sup> also has information and a support directory for elder abuse, which was funded by the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department and created by Elder Abuse Action Australia.

## Seniors Participation

In 2020 and 2021 the Victorian Seniors Festival Reimagined<sup>20</sup> developed radio and online broadcasting and engaged 50 aged-care facilities to participate in the Recognising Senior Victorians program to bring Festival entertainment and participation to aged care residents, in recognition of their enforced isolation during COVID restrictions.

New performances were added every month, featuring programs from a range of cultures, bringing cultural leaders and emerging artists together in conversation and meeting artists and cultural practitioners in their studios and workplaces.

Through the Victorian Seniors Festival Aged Care performances program more than 80 live performances are taking place in aged-care facilities from December 2021 to April 2022. These free performances are taking place across Victoria, from Tallangatta to Omeo to Warrnambool and

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<sup>16</sup> Department of Health – Integrated model of care for responding to suspected elder abuse webpage. <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/wellbeing-and-participation/integrated-model-of-care-for-responding-to-suspected-elder-abuse>. accessed 6 January 2022

<sup>17</sup> SeniorsOnline website. <https://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/> accessed 6 December 2021

<sup>18</sup> SeniorsOnline – Elder abuse: What is it? webpage. <https://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/services-information/elder-abuse>. accessed 18 January 2022

<sup>19</sup> Compass Guiding Action on Elder Abuse website. <https://www.compass.info/>. accessed 18 January 2022

<sup>20</sup> SeniorsOnline - Victorian Seniors Festival Reimagined webpage. <https://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/festivalsandawards>. accessed 6 January 2022

Swan Hill, plus at many metropolitan facilities. Some of these facilities are ethno-specific, such as the Greek Cypriot residents entertained at Emerald Terrace in Templestowe, and many have a multicultural mix. Two performances have been presented for Multicultural Aged Care Services Geelong.

Through the [Recognising Senior Victorians](#) project (November 2020 to June 2022) 100 interviews and recordings are being undertaken by the Seniors Festival with residents of aged care facilities. Many participants in this project migrated to Australia as children or young adults and their stories reflect their life experiences, including [Ozdemir Ilgin](#) and [Emine Mehmet](#) from the Ottoman Village Aged Care Centre.

Festival and the Recognising Senior Victorians content is promoted via the Seniors Card e-news and through the distribution of an active PDF containing links to content to all Victorian councils and aged care facilities for their residents. A step-by-step guide to accessing the [online Festival performances was translated into six languages](#) (Arabic, Chinese, Greek, Italian, Spanish and Vietnamese) and shared with councils to distribute to their residents.

The [Victorian Senior of the Year Awards](#)<sup>21</sup> are presented annually as part of the Victorian Seniors Festival. These significant awards recognise the volunteer work and contributions to community life of older Victorians. It is a chance to say thank you, and to celebrate the many senior Victorians who have given and shared their skills, experience, time, and energy with our State. The Awards encompass six award categories:

- Premier's Award for Victorian Senior of the Year for an outstanding contribution by an individual to their local community and Victoria.
- Promotion of Multiculturalism Award to an individual for a significant contribution to promoting the benefits of cultural diversity in their local community or in the broader community.
- Healthy and Active Living Award to an individual for helping to create active and healthy communities through community involvement and as a role model.
- Veteran Community Award to an individual for an exceptional contribution to the veteran community. The recipient of the award does not need to be a veteran.
- Ageing Well Award to an individual who has worked to combat ageism, promote social justice and engaged with their community to support ageing well initiatives.
- COTA Victoria Senior Achiever Awards to up to 10 individuals for significant contributions to local communities and Victoria.

These Awards are conducted in a partnership between DFFH and COTA Victoria.

In 2022, the Promotion of Multiculturalism Award was presented to John Thuy, 69, from Ashburton. And two COTA Awardees were: Thi Thinh Nyugen, 66 from Avondale Heights Thoa Tran, 62 from Sunshine North.

The Seniors Card program<sup>22</sup> supports senior Victorians keep active and engaged in the community by providing discounts to a range of goods and services from participating business across Victoria. It also provides concessional and free public transport travel (via a Senior Myki Card and off-peak

21 SeniorsOnline – 2021 Victorian Senior of the Year Awards webpage. <https://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/festivalsandawards/seniors-awards>. accessed 16 December 2021

22 SeniorsOnline - Seniors Card webpage. <https://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/seniors-card>. accessed 16 December 2021

travel vouchers) to make it more affordable to get out and about. Seniors over the age of 60 who work less than 35 hours a week can receive a Seniors Card, while those working more than 35 hours per week receive a Seniors Business Discount Card. To be eligible for a Seniors Card the applicant must also be a permanent resident of Australia (defined as Australian citizens and all holders of Australian permanent visas) residing in Victoria.

The Seniors participation toolbox<sup>23</sup> details projects funded through Seniors' participation grants programs, including many targeting CALD seniors. Project descriptions and resources held in the toolbox showcase successful inclusive age-friendly and social participation projects that can be easily replicated by community organisations to improve quality of life and reduce social isolation and loneliness among senior Victorians.

The Community Participation for Seniors from Emerging Communities project<sup>24</sup> is one example of a grant project funded by the Office for Senior Victorians included in the Senior Participation toolbox. The project, delivered by Australian Unity, built capability of seniors from six target communities: Sudanese (Dinka), Ethiopian (Amharic), Somali (Somali), Burmese (Karen and Chin), Filipino (Tagalog) and Afghani (Dari) to apply for the Seniors Card.

The project engaged with these groups in the Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Wyndham and Greater Dandenong local government areas (LGA's) and surrounding areas to support them to access and participate in Victorian seniors' support programs and services.

The project included the development of culturally and linguistically appropriate training and information resources and a Victorian Seniors Card video translated into seven languages to build awareness of the Victorian Seniors Card and its benefits to older people in culturally and diverse emerging communities. These resources are available on Seniors Online.

The Social Seniors<sup>25</sup> program funded by the DFFH in partnership with Telstra and Public Libraries Victoria provides older Victorians with the opportunity to learn basic computer skills to keep in touch with family and friends online.

Council of the Ageing (COTA) Victoria is the peak body for older people in Victoria. The Office for Senior Victorians provides funding to COTA Victoria to deliver Seniors Information Service which provides information to older Victorians in local communities and to provide policy advice on the needs of older people to the Victorian government.

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) is the peak body for local councils in Victoria. The Office for Senior Victorians funds the Positive Ageing Policy Adviser position at MAV. This position assists councils through capacity-building initiatives to engage and work with older people to create better communities for people to grow old in, and coordinates the Positive Ageing Network, composed of representatives from most local councils.

Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) is a member driven peak body committed to empowering people from culturally diverse backgrounds, giving voice to multicultural Victoria. The Office of Senior Victorians provides funding to ECCV to provide policy advice on the needs of CALD seniors, support social inclusion, digital inclusion, and cultural connectedness of CALD seniors and

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23 SeniorsOnline - Seniors participation toolbox webpage. <https://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/Get-Involved/For-Organisations/Online-toolbox>. accessed 20 December

24 SeniorsOnline - Community participation for seniors from emerging communities webpage. <https://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/get-involved/for-organisations/online-toolbox/connecting-seniors/community-participation-for-seniors-from-emerging-communities>. accessed 20 December 2021

25 Social Seniors webpage, <https://www.plv.org.au/projects/social-seniors/>. accessed 9 December 2021

to build capacity of CALD seniors clubs. An example of this is the 'GOLDEN YEARS', a quarterly publication for CALD seniors and the multicultural aged care sector.<sup>26</sup>

## Victorian Carers

Unpaid carers provide care, by their own volition, for a family member, partner or friend with care needs due to disability, chronic or terminal illness, mental illness, or an older person with care needs. There are more than 700,000 carers in Victoria, and over 484,000 are primary carers, many of whom are older carers or carers from culturally diverse backgrounds. Being an unpaid carer can be highly rewarding but can also be challenging, and many carers may struggle to maintain their own health and wellbeing.<sup>27</sup>

Carers Victoria is the Victorian peak body for Carers. The Office for Senior Victorians funds Carers Victoria to provide information and support for carers and the Victorian carer support sector, through networking opportunities, resources, and education and training.

The Victorian Government's Carers Program, , funds 44 service providers across Victoria to deliver the Victorian Support for Carers Program. The program provides flexible support to unpaid carers of all ages and backgrounds, including carers from refugee and migrant backgrounds, to help meet their varied support needs. This includes providing counselling, respite for carers to have a break and other practical supports to enhance carers health and wellbeing, and to help them connect with other services and networks in their community.

Carers from diverse backgrounds, including refugees and migrants of all ages, are supported through Support for Carers Program including by the Southern Migrant Resource Centre and Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre, specialising in providing support to people from CALD backgrounds and are funded to deliver the Support for Carers Program.

The Office for Senior Victorians Carers Program oversees the Recognising and Supporting Victoria's Carers, the Victorian Carers Strategy 2018-22 (The Carer Strategy).<sup>28</sup> This Victorian whole-of-government strategy supports unpaid carers of all ages and backgrounds, including carers from diverse backgrounds, older carers, and those caring for older people with care needs. It recognises the valuable role unpaid carers provide for the person for whom they provide care, as well as the broader community. The Carer Strategy has five priorities:

1. carers have better health and wellbeing
2. carers are supported in school, study and work environments
3. carers can access support and services that meet their needs
4. carers have less financial stress
5. carers are recognised, acknowledged and respected.

<sup>26</sup> Ethnic Communities Council Victoria. (2021). *Golden Years – positive aging for multicultural communities*. Spring Edition. Issue 141. [https://eccv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Golden-Years\\_Spring-edition\\_ECCV-Oct21.pdf](https://eccv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Golden-Years_Spring-edition_ECCV-Oct21.pdf). accessed 5 January 2022

<sup>27</sup> State of Victoria. (2018). *Recognising and supporting Victoria's cares – Victorian carer strategy 2018-2022*. <https://content.health.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/migrated/files/collections/policies-and-guidelines/v/victorian-carer-strategy-2018-2022.pdf>. pp.7-9 & 24. accessed 12 January 2022

<sup>28</sup> State of Victoria. (2018). *Recognising and supporting Victoria's cares – Victorian carer strategy 2018-2022*. <https://content.health.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/migrated/files/collections/policies-and-guidelines/v/victorian-carer-strategy-2018-2022.pdf>. accessed 12 January 2022

Through the Victorian 2019 budget, \$49.5 million funding over four years was allocated under The Carer Strategy's election commitment. This funding has been allocated to deliver support for carers through Statewide Partnership Grants, Supporting Carers Locally Grants, discount public transport and additional respite for carers over four years.

The Statewide Partnership Grants facilitate partnerships between carer support organisations, and organisations that do not typically operate in the carer space, to deliver innovative, carer-focussed projects with statewide relevance.

In 2019-20, four Statewide projects were funded through the Carers Statewide Partnership grants, including:

- Carers Victoria in partnership with Neighbourhood Houses Victoria and MAV were funded to deliver the establishment of carer friendly hubs/resource centres available to carers of all ages and backgrounds – to be completed by 2022-23
- Financial Counselling Victoria in partnership with Carers Victoria implemented financial counselling and capability services for carers of all ages, with a focus on older carers – to support carers to manage and reduce financial stress and thereby improve carer wellbeing. This project is to be completed by 2022-23.

In 2021-22, five Statewide Partnership projects were funded through Round Two of the grants program. Two of the projects have a specific focus on supporting older carers from diverse backgrounds:

- ECCV was funded to deliver the Recognising and Respecting Victoria's Carers from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds project in partnership with Carers Victoria. The project supports carer relationships in families of culturally diverse backgrounds, focussing on prevention and awareness of elder abuse in care relationships amongst CALD communities.
- Financial Counselling Victoria Inc. were funded to deliver the Standing Strong – Financial Resilience for Older Carers in partnership with Alfred Carer Services and Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre. The project aims to promote financial independence and resilience to improve carers wellbeing in CALD communities.

In 2019-20 the Supporting Carers Locally Grants program funded 95 groups and projects to deliver a range of locally based supports for carers of all backgrounds and ages.

In 2021-22 a further 56 projects were funded in Round Two of the Supporting Carers Locally Grants Program 2021-22. Whilst most of these funded projects will support carers of all backgrounds, including those from migrant and refugee backgrounds, nine of the projects (16 per cent) will specifically support carers from culturally diverse backgrounds or communities, including older carers. Two examples are:

- Pronia (Australian Greek Welfare Society Ltd): The project "Imaste Mazi – We are Together" is a culturally responsive program for Greek speaking carers, aged over 65 years. It aims to provide opportunities for carers to enhance their health and wellbeing, strengthen their connection with other carers and to their community and enhance access to services. Activities include peer group telephone support, computer literacy programs, online workshops / information sessions on topics relating to carer health and wellbeing, articles and radio presentations related to carers needs.
- Vietnamese Families with Special Needs Incorporation: Be Active, Be Happy" support for carers in the Western-Metropolitan region with limited English who are experiencing social isolation and community stigmatisation because of their role in caring for a person with a disability. Group

activities aim to build carers physical and social skills, assist them to develop peer networks and increase their community participation and connection.

The additional carers respite funding 2021-22 round aimed to increase service delivery in rural and regional areas and increase access to respite for carers from diverse backgrounds. A broad range of organisations successfully applied and have been funded to deliver additional respite for carers, including in innovative ways, to increase service access in rural and regional areas and for carers in culturally diverse communities throughout 2021-22.

The Victorian Government has also provided funding to support the Career Pathways into Employment for Unpaid Carers initiative (Carers Employment initiative). The initiative will provide support and increased opportunities for carers of all ages and backgrounds, including older carers and those from diverse backgrounds, to enter employment and or vocational training, including in flexible ways. As part of the initiative, an application process for Carers Employment Support grants was undertaken in August 2021, to engage a range of providers to deliver the Carers Employment Support program 2021-22, delivering a range of tailored support for carers of all ages and backgrounds, including those from diverse communities, to enter or re-enter employment or vocational training to support their career/employment goals.

The Carer Strategy is the first whole-of-government strategy recognising and supporting the important role of Victorian carers.<sup>29</sup>

## Volunteering

Victorian Volunteers contribute their time and energy to a wide range of sectors. Organisations involved in sports and recreation, education and training, welfare/community, health care, disaster resilience, environmental management, and arts and culture continue to be dependent on volunteers.

In November 2021 Volunteering Victoria hosted a webinar in partnership with the Victorian Government to discuss the vaccine mandate and roadmap, providing a range of useful resources in response to COVID-19.<sup>30</sup> In 2020 Volunteering Victoria, in partnership with the Victorian Government produced the *State of Volunteering Report 2020*.<sup>31</sup> The report is a flagship initiative of the Victorian Volunteering Strategy, undergoing development. In 2020, the top five groups of volunteers typically represented in volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) include over 65s (78.9 per cent of VIOs), people with a disability (31.5 per cent), migrants/CALD people (30.2 per cent), under 18s (13.6 per cent), and people from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds (9.1 per cent).<sup>32</sup>

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30 Volunteering Victoria Useful Resources COVID-19 webpage. <https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/useful-resources-covid-19/>. accessed 5 January 2022

31 Volunteering Victoria. (2020). *State of Volunteering in Victoria 2020*. [https://stateofvolunteering.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/SOVR\\_21.10.2020\\_WEB.pdf](https://stateofvolunteering.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/SOVR_21.10.2020_WEB.pdf). accessed 6 January 2022

32 Volunteering Victoria. (2020). *State of Volunteering in Victoria 2020*. [https://stateofvolunteering.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/SOVR\\_21.10.2020\\_WEB.pdf](https://stateofvolunteering.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/SOVR_21.10.2020_WEB.pdf). p.34 .accessed 6 January 2022

# Department of Health

## Aged Care

### Commonwealth role and initiatives

The Commonwealth Government funds and regulates aged care services under the *Aged Care Act 1997*. This includes home care services funded under the Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) and Home Care Packages Program (HCP); residential aged care; residential respite and short-term restorative care.

The Commonwealth Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (Royal Commission) identified significant shortfalls in the current aged care system – being large, complex and difficult to navigate. It noted serious instances of substandard care and systemic problems related to inadequate funding, variable provider governance and inadequate systemic leadership. The final report to the federal government made 148 recommendations for system-wide change underpinned by a new Act and institutional governance arrangements.

The Royal Commission recognised and acknowledged the importance of meeting the needs of diverse and marginalised groups in a general sense, with specific recommendations made for some groups and limited or no reference made to others. Recommendation 30: Designing for diversity, difference, complexity, and individuality, is the only recommendation to specifically reference diversity. This recommendation was informed by the Victorian State Government's [Designing for Diversity tool kit](#).

The Commonwealth Government responded to the final report of the Royal Commission in May 2021, accepting, or accepting in principle, 126 of 148 recommendations, signalling significant reform to the aged care system over the next five years. While the Commonwealth Government is proceeding to rollout the reform agenda, much is still unknown about the implementation and impact of key reform areas including the future design and funding model for home care services.

The 2021/22 Commonwealth budget identified some funding measures aimed at better supporting access to aged care services for older people in Australia, including those from culturally diverse backgrounds, however, details of implementation of these initiatives is limited.

The Commonwealth has proposed that support to access Commonwealth Government funded culturally appropriate aged care services will be made available through establishment of a network of 500 Community Care Finders to provide targeted, specialist face-to-face support to those who may not have capacity to seek out services for themselves. This service is intended to support vulnerable senior Australians to access other supports at the local community level, such as health and social supports, where appropriate. Prior to the establishment of Community Care Finders, the Commonwealth Government committed to extend existing care navigator services. In Victoria, this is the Access and Support service (A&S) funded under the CHSP. The A&S is unique service offering a network of workers across Victoria who support people with diverse characteristics, including culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, and those experiencing financial disadvantage. Through an in-depth knowledge of local service systems, A&S assists people to understand and navigate the service system and connect them to required services. The future of A&S funded services is unclear under the reforms to home care services and the introduction of Community Care Finders. Agencies such

as Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) and Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria have raised significant concerns should A&S support be lost in Victoria.

The Commonwealth 2021/22 budget commitment for navigating services proposes a range and levels of support aimed at assisting consumers to select providers that meet their specific needs, however, it should be noted implementation details of these proposals is also limited.

The design and funding model of the new support at home program is also unknown and changes to the existing system may create viability issues for some smaller, not-for-profit providers, particularly ethno-specific service providers, with an expected move to a case mix funding model from grant funding to providers. The Commonwealth has already commenced implementing changes to the CHSP for the final year of grant funding to a payment in arrears arrangement which may impact small providers' ability to remain viable.

The Commonwealth Government has indicated the new support at home program design will include consideration of social isolation and loneliness supports, such as social support groups and transport with funding mechanism considerations forming part of this. On 7 Jan 2022, the Commonwealth Department of Health released a draft consultation plan overview and timelines for the design of the new support at home program. The overview includes a plan for consultation from February to May 2022 with consumers, carers, providers, peaks and aged care professionals. The consultation will look at program design elements including an assessment model, aged care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, care management, service lists, price lists, a funding model and evaluation framework with consumers, carers, providers, peaks and aged care professionals. However, no specific mention is made to meet the diverse needs of the multicultural community. Many multicultural community members welcome the opportunity to care for older family members at home. It is important the new support at home programs are responsive to diverse cultural and linguistic needs, including different needs across and within particular multicultural communities.

## Victorian Government role

The Victorian Government is a major provider of residential aged care services, with more than 179 Public Sector Residential Aged Care Services (PSRACS) across Victoria operating 5,615 places. The public sector accounts for roughly 10 per cent of state residential aged care supply. Whilst the Commonwealth Government is responsible for funding and regulating aged care, the Victorian Government remains committed to operating PSRACS given their vital role enabling older Victorians, with complex health and social needs, to receive the right care in the most appropriate setting.

Victoria's 5,615 PSRACS include 487 Aged Persons Mental Health places. These aged persons mental health residential services specialise in caring for older people, including those from migrant and refugee backgrounds, with a mental illness and/or persistent cognitive, emotional, or behavioural issues. These specialised services offer medium to long-term accommodation, ongoing assessment, treatment, and rehabilitation under the care of a psychiatrist.

Aged Care Assessment is a federally funded and regulated program under the *Aged Care Act 1997*. The Victorian Government currently manages the Aged Care Assessment Service (ACAS) and the Regional Assessment Service (RAS). Training is provided to support assessors engaging in a culturally appropriate way for CALD communities.

## Multicultural aged care budget commitment

The 2019-20 Victorian State Budget allocated \$27.1 million for multicultural aged care, including:

- \$5.35 million for residential aged care grants to seven not-for-profit residential aged care providers to assist with capital works and upgrades of facilities.
- \$21.75 million towards land acquisition for three multicultural residential aged care services.

## Specialist refugee health care

The Victorian Government commits more than \$10 million each year to specialist refugee health care, including the Refugee Health Program in Community Health which delivers on-arrival health screening, assessment and care to refugees arriving from overseas. A range of community engagement programs and access policies also ensure multicultural communities, refugees, and people seeking asylum access culturally responsive health services and health information. Since 2019-20, the Victorian Government has also committed more than \$3 million each year to address gaps in Commonwealth supports for people seeking asylum.

## Palliative care services for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds

The DH provides ongoing funding to Palliative Care Victoria — the peak body representing the palliative care sector in Victoria — for implementation of a culturally responsive palliative care strategy (the Strategy). The Strategy aims to improve understanding of, and access to, palliative care for people from migrant backgrounds. Palliative Care Victoria has so far engaged with more than 15 migrant communities to implement the Strategy specific to their cohort's cultural needs and beliefs and used peer education and ethnic media in support of its objectives.

Whilst the Strategy does not target older migrants per se, given it focuses on people with life limiting illnesses, it invariably addresses the needs of this demographic.

In broad terms, the Strategy:

- increases the capacity of publicly funded specialist palliative care services to provide culturally responsive palliative care to people from migrant backgrounds through the provision of training resources and education workshops for clinicians
- increases awareness and understanding of palliative care amongst migrant communities through the delivery of education in community languages by trained bilingual educators, thereby strengthening linkages between migrant communities and palliative care services so they can provide culturally responsive care
- trains ethnic community leaders to provide community information about palliative care
- publishes fact sheets in a host of community languages describing the practical benefits of palliative care services with facts sheets published in 21 language groups to date.

The Strategy has developed, via a participatory process, a suite of resources for use by migrant communities, including:

- peer education resources, tailored by and with specified migrant communities, which includes specific information about culturally sensitive issues

- bilingual information about palliative care, endorsed by a reference group from specified communities, and translated into community languages
- a communications toolkit for use by community organisations covering key messages, target audiences, media strategies, templates, and FAQs
- training handbooks and video clips used for the culturally responsive education program for the palliative care sector.

The Strategy was independently evaluated in 2015 and for the purposes of this Inquiry, its relevant key findings were:

- participatory and engagement strategies are necessary to improve awareness of palliative care amongst migrant communities; simply making print resources available will not achieve this objective
- participation of migrant communities in tailoring education and information to meet specific cultural, spiritual, and linguistic needs is essential
- participation of palliative care services in project activities is valued and strengthens relationships of trust and understanding.

These learnings continue to inform the ongoing implementation of the Strategy.

Research shows the overall use and awareness of palliative care services in migrant communities is low. There are several reasons why this may be the case, such as lack of access to and awareness of health services in general, lack of awareness about palliative care, and culturally specific factors including perceptions about death and illness, difficulties around discussions of dying, attitudes to receiving outside help and language and communication barriers.

To address the abovementioned issues, the education resources developed for the culturally responsive palliative care strategy have cultural perspectives embedded throughout the documents considering concerns people from migrant communities may have in relation to palliative care.

The resources raise awareness of palliative care in ethnic communities, particularly among older populations and those with life-limiting or chronic illness; raise awareness of issues around death and dying and how to promote quality of life; and normalise discussion about death as a natural part of life.

## Mental Health

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health system and the Commonwealth Royal Commission into aged care quality and safety, and each government's response, provides a strong foundation for systemic change to how services are delivered, funded and the supports required to assist people to understand and navigate mental health support systems.

The Mental Health Division is committed to implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health system to expand and reform services for older Victorians, including people from CALD and refugee backgrounds.

The 2021-2022 Victorian Budget invested a record \$3.8 billion in mental health and wellbeing service support.

This included responding to the recommendations of the Royal Commission by establishing a dedicated system to support the mental health and wellbeing of adults and older adults. Local Adult and Older Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Services will provide easy to access, high quality treatment, care and support to people 26 years and older experiencing mental illness or

psychological distress (including those with co-occurring substance use or addiction), whose needs cannot be met by primary and secondary mental health care providers alone but who do not require intensive episodic or ongoing care from tertiary area mental health and wellbeing services.

This new service stream will ensure people can access free treatment, care and support in their community, and closer to their support networks. This includes older people experiencing mental illness or psychological distress (for whatever reason) from CALD backgrounds, including migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

Service providers funded to deliver a Local Adult and Older Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Service are required to understand the needs of their local population and are responsive to these needs. This includes proactively promoting the service, creating referral pathways, and reducing barriers to access for population groups who historically experience relatively low access to mental health treatment, care, and support. This includes people living with a mental illness who identify as Aboriginal, CALD, LGBTIQ+ and older people.

Each Local Service is expected to provide culturally safe and responsive services meeting the needs of the local community including these population groups. To facilitate access and participation, providers of Local Services are expected to access and/or provide language support services.

The Department of Health also commissions a range of services from Foundation House to support improved health outcomes for individuals and families by providing culturally responsive and trauma-informed interventions.

## Department of Premier and Cabinet

The National Ageing Research Institute (NARI)<sup>33</sup> is the national leader in ageing research, that provides evidence, tools and resources to improve health and aged care systems. With funding from DPC, NARI, the Australian Multicultural Community Services, and the Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing, the NARI developed a culturally appropriate resource kit<sup>34</sup> for older CALD volunteers to support them in their voluntary roles and activities.

## Department of Education and Training

The Reconnect 2021 program<sup>35</sup> is designed to support Victorians experiencing disadvantage. The program assists participants aged between 17-64 to overcome the barriers preventing them from engaging in education, training and employment and provides support into further study or employment pathways. Currently, 52 per cent of Reconnect participants aged over 60 identify as CALD.

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<sup>33</sup> National Research Institute website. <https://www.nari.net.au/>. accessed 6 January 2022

<sup>34</sup> Australian Multicultural Community Services, *Seniors Committee Members & Volunteers Resource Kit*. <https://www.nari.net.au/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=88157b2c-9d88-4913-9332-e5cc81062f03>. accessed 6 January 2021

<sup>35</sup> Reconnect Program (2021) webpage. <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/reconnect-program.aspx#:~:text=Reconnect%20Program%20%282021%29%20Reconnect%202021%20is%20designed%20to,or%20employment%20pathways.%20Who%20can%20access%20Reconnect%202021%3F>. accessed 6 January 2022

The Victorian Government invested \$30 million across the 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 financial years and has invested a further \$47 million over the next four years for the Reconnect Program 2021.

## Department of Jobs Precincts and Regions

Jobs Victoria<sup>36</sup> services are available to Victorians who need support to find work, and this support is tailored to individual needs. Our services include support for older Victorians, including older Victorians from multicultural communities.

Relevant services include:

- Jobs Victoria Mentors support jobseekers facing barriers to employment to prepare for and connect to work. This includes 'specialist' services working with multicultural communities of all ages, including older Victorians. Two case studies of support to older jobseekers can be found via the following links: <https://jobs.vic.gov.au/about-jobs-victoria/case-studies/job-hunting-at-aged-74-leads-to-a-new-community-connection> and <https://jobs.vic.gov.au/about-jobs-victoria/case-studies/creating-a-platform-for-success.-at-any-stage-of-life>
- Jobs Victoria Career Counsellors provide personalised career guidance to Victorians who require support to understand, develop, and manage their career options of all ages, including older Victorians. The service is delivered by the Careers Education Association of Victoria and offers a valuable service to people who may want to change jobs or who have lost work and want to transition to new roles.
- Jobs Victoria Fund provides wage subsidies of up to \$20,000 to eligible employers who hire eligible jobseekers, including people aged over 45 years.

The Metropolitan Partnerships<sup>37</sup> and Regional Partnerships<sup>38</sup> bring together experts and leaders from all levels of government, business, and the community to identify and progress issues that matter in their region. Their collective advice provides government with rich insights to inform the delivery of projects, programs, and services to better meet the specific needs of their communities. The six Metropolitan Partnerships have engaged over 12,000 Melburnians to provide a voice directly from the suburbs to the government. The six Metropolitan Partnerships are: Inner Metropolitan, Inner South-East, Western, Northern, Eastern and Southern.

Regional Partnerships were established in 2016 recognising local communities are in the best position to understand the challenges and opportunities faced by their region. Through ongoing consultation, the Regional Partnerships ensure regional communities have a greater say about what matters to them, and the voices of these communities are heard directly at the heart of Government.

The nine Regional Partnerships are: Mallee, Wimmera Southern Mallee, Greater South Coast, Central Highlands, Loddon Campaspe, Barwon, Goulburn, Ovens Murray and Gippsland.

<sup>36</sup> Jobs Victoria website. <https://jobs.vic.gov.au/>. accessed 6 January 2022

<sup>37</sup> Jobs, Precincts and Regions – Metropolitan Partnerships webpage. <https://www.suburbandevlopment.vic.gov.au/partnerships/metropolitan-partnerships>. accessed 6 January 2022

<sup>38</sup> Jobs, Precincts and Regions – Regional Partnerships webpage. <https://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/regional-partnerships>. Accessed 21 January 2022

In 2016 Loddon Campaspe had the highest number of older migrants while Wimmera Southern Mallee and Great South Coast had the highest proportion of older residents born overseas.<sup>39</sup>

The Let's Stay Connected Fund<sup>40</sup> was an initiative of Regional and Metropolitan Partnerships that ran statewide helping communities stay connected during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Community organisations were invited to apply for grants of between \$5,000 and \$200,000 to support innovative, community-led initiatives to build connection, reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation. Grants were awarded to a range of community organisations including those representing multicultural and older Victorian groups.

In addition, Local Government and Suburban Development are currently involved in several cross-Government initiatives both in the digital literacy space and in relation to services for older Victorians, relating to public library services

### Chatty Café Case Study

The Inner South-east Metropolitan Partnership<sup>41</sup> identified social connection as a key priority area for the region which lies at the heart of their [Inner South-east Regional Framework](#). Across 2019-20, the Partnership commissioned research projects to further understand the lived experiences of those experiencing social isolation and loneliness, which included a focus on older adults including people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. The Partnership initiated the [Making Connections workshop](#) - a signature event in 2019, bring together a diverse range of stakeholders to hear from experts and explore loneliness and social isolation in the Inner South-east region. The Partnership's [Loneliness and Isolation Project Report 2019](#) was also presented at this engagement event. A key output was the development of a series of 'journey maps' which provided an insight into the lived experience of youths, first time mothers and older adults (including people from CALD backgrounds) and identified their key barriers and enablers to overcoming social isolation. In 2020, the pandemic led to an increase in social isolation across the region and the Partnership commissioned a report titled *Infrastructure for Social Connection*, highlighting the opportunity to create spaces for connection in local neighbourhoods.

During 2021, the Partnership endorsed project funding through the Metropolitan Partnership Development Fund to pilot the Chatty Café Australia Scheme across Bayside City Council in a bid to apply some of the key recommendations from the previous research reports. The [Chatty Café Scheme](#) aims to reduce social isolation and loneliness by creating opportunities for people to connect across up to 150 participating local hospitality and community centres in Bayside.<sup>42</sup> For customers, a 'Have a Chat' table helps keep communities connected and brings people together. Volunteers play an important role in facilitating 'Have a Chat' tables and there are also partnership opportunities for local hospitality businesses to get involved in the project by 'hosting' a table at their venue. A key benefit of the program is its accessibility, with 'Have a Chat' tables currently being rolled out across local neighbourhood house networks, libraries, local shopping strips and community activity centres. As a result of the COVID-19 restrictions, weekly Virtual Chatty Café

39 Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2018). Cultural Diversity. [Census TableBuilder]. accessed 21 January 2022

40 Regional Development Victoria – Let's Stay Connected Fund. <https://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/grants-and-programs/lets-stay-connected-fund>. accessed 18 January 2022

41 Jobs, Precincts and Regions – Inner South-east Metropolitan Partnership webpage. <https://www.suburbandedevelopment.vic.gov.au/partnerships/metropolitan-partnerships/inner-south-east-partnership>. accessed 11 January 2022

42 The Chatty Café Scheme website. <https://chattycafeaustralia.org.au/>. accessed 18 January 2022.

sessions have been introduced via Zoom. These Zoom sessions for anyone aged 18 and over last for 30-45 minutes with a maximum of around 10 people per Zoom and have facilitated an opportunity for people to connect virtually and hone their digital literacy skills. Additionally, guidelines to be developed from the program's evaluation, which will enable the Chatty Café scheme to be rolled out across Victoria. The Chatty Café program was initiated in response to Inner South East infrastructure report that identified social isolation and connection as a key priority to CALD and older people. Incidental and digital engagement was an area of focus. Cafes were identified as an easy access point for older people in particular who preferred to engage on a face to face basis. As the cafes are open to the public, the program welcomes people of all ages, including older CALD groups

### **Multicultural Digital Inclusion Project**

Social cohesion is a key priority for the Inner Metropolitan Partnership region. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted traditional ways of staying connected due to restrictions and the need for vulnerable cohorts such as older people to avoid going out unless necessary. Having access to technology, as well as the tools and knowledge to use it, became critically important to enable people to stay connected. The Partnership identified a gap in some of their cohorts, who either did not have the access to technology, or the skills to use it. Specifically, people from CALD communities needed access to digital connectivity and community-led service support. This included young people from a CALD background who were at risk of disengaging from education due to the lengthy period of school being delivered remotely or who had financial barriers to accessing technology, and some older people who did not have digital literacy skills but were highly incentivised to stay connected due to the isolation experienced by this cohort during restrictions.

Through the Metropolitan Partnership Development Fund, funding was provided to Neighbourhood Houses Victoria to address this gap. The project provides a practical and agile response to enabling digital inclusion for young and older people from CALD communities and other groups who experience financial barriers to digital access. The project is engaging with five Neighbourhood Houses to deliver short courses including focussing on mentoring and cultivating peer leaders.

The approach builds on the strength of Neighbourhood Houses' established relationships with community members and the place based local solutions of this sector which is founded in a community development approach. Providing funding to five houses across the Inner Metro region is enabling the development of local programs to meet the identified needs of specific local CALD communities and bridge the digital divide and towards digital inclusion for all.