

FINAL TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Support for Older Victorians from Migrant and Refugee Backgrounds

Coburg—Tuesday, 1 March 2022

MEMBERS

Ms Natalie Suleyman—Chair

Mr Brad Battin—Deputy Chair

Mr Neil Angus

Ms Christine Couzens

Ms Emma Kealy

Ms Michaela Settle

Mr Meng Heang Tak

WITNESSES

Ms Serap Yildiz, Vice-President,

Mrs Katibe Yesilyurt, community member (*via Turkish interpreter*),

Mrs Guzide Suluk, community member (*via Turkish interpreter*), and

Mr Huseyin Duman, community member (*via Turkish interpreter*), Alevi Community Council of Australia.

The CHAIR: Good afternoon to you all, and welcome to the Inquiry into Support for Older Victorians from Migrant and Refugee Backgrounds, the community sessions.

I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting, and I pay my respects to their elders past and present and any other Aboriginal elders of other communities who may be here today.

My name is Natalie Suleyman. I am the Member for St Albans and the Chair of this committee. To my right is Michaela Settle MP, the Member for Buninyong. To my left is Meng Heang Tak MP, the Member for Clarinda. All mobile phones should be turned to silent at this point.

All evidence taken by this committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected in relation to anything you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by this privilege.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check, and once that is done transcripts will be made public and posted on the committee's website.

I now invite you to make an opening statement, which will be then followed by questions. I welcome here today the Alevi Community Council of Australia. We have first Ms Serap Yildiz, the Vice-President; Mrs Katibe Yesilyurt, a community member, who will be interpreted by Mr Hakan Tokgoz; Mrs Guzide Suluk, a community member, interpreted by Mr Hakan Tokgoz; and Mr Huseyin Duman, a community member, interpreted by Mr Hakan Tokgoz. Thank you very much. We will begin with Serap. Thank you.

Ms YILDIZ: I am just going to read it instead of talking—it is going to be much quicker—so we can ask some more questions at the end. Hi, my name is Serap Yildiz. I am a member of ACCA on the management team and a support person for the seniors group. I would like to give some brief information about the Alevi community and the Alevi Community Council of Australia.

Alevis from Turkey migrated to Australia in the late 1960s to seek a better economic and social future. The majority of Alevi people in Australia are from Turkey. Alevis are from diverse backgrounds, like Turkish, Kurdish, Zaza, Albanian, Macedonian, Bosnian, Arabic and Cypriot.

The Alevi Community Council of Australia was established in 1992. The Alevi Community Council of Australia is a non-profit voluntary organisation. The aim of ACCA is to facilitate the Alevi community's full participation in Australian society, to address social, cultural and welfare issues within the community, to meet the needs of the Alevi community in Victoria and to support the community by developing and delivering programs.

ACCA's management has a number of subcommittees and working groups, like the senior citizen management committee, women's committee, community development and education committee, event working committee, art and culture working group, social/cultural activity committee and COVID-19 social support team. Programs and services: capacity building, leadership training, parenting, family education programs, general community education programs, skill development training, collaboration on projects like health, social and other organisations, and the COVID-19 community support program.

Challenges for ACCA in Turkish-speaking ageing communities: meeting the needs of ageing communities—ageing communities have multiple issues such as language, isolation, health, lack of knowledge about resources, connection and generational and cultural problems; difficulties reaching and engaging communities; difficulties in providing support for more vulnerable seniors; financial difficulties; limitation of personal and skilful human and other resources; relying on volunteers; coordinating and providing opportunities for volunteers; and limitations of bicultural professional staff in health and welfare services. Now I would like to hand over to Mrs Suluk. She is going to talk about the elder abuse problem.

Mrs SULUK (via interpreter): Hi, my name is Guzide Suluk. I have been in this community for 35 years. We came here in the 70s with just one suitcase. With our kids we came to this new country, Australia. We did not know the language, we did not know the culture. It was not easy to get used to this country with our kids. We worked in factories and we worked long hours. We did not know the language, we did not know the rules,

so we worked very long hours. Years went past so quickly. We got older and our health deteriorated. Our kids are busy with their own lives. They do not understand us and we do not understand them.

There are so many elderly whose physical health and mental health have deteriorated and they cannot communicate with the younger ones. Well, most of them were uneducated when they came to this country. They had difficulty getting around, but now they have more difficulty getting around because they are becoming very forgetful and having remembering issues. A lot of them, when they had issues, did not know they could get services from certain places, so they had no knowledge in that area, plus they did not have the courage. With most of our elderly it is like they have stopped doing everything and are waiting for the day to die. Previously in councils and health centres they used to have Turkish staff and they used to get us all together, but at the moment we do not have that either. There are groups that do speak English, but somehow those people cannot adapt to those groups. Most of the elderly do not even leave the house because they cannot use public transport, and they cannot drive because they would not know their way around—they would not know how to get there. Most of the elderly when they can get together and the ones do have means to get together we get together. But then there are the ones that cannot leave home because they do not have any means to actually get to those meetings because they cannot use public transport and there is no other transport or any means to bring them there.

If we can have a person that can look after our group that can speak Turkish and English, I think our elderly would be a lot more comfortable, a lot better off. The women actually get together and they have their groups, but the men do not. Some of them we try to actually get together. During the pandemic we tried, but it was very hard. If Huseyin could explain that in more depth, that would be great.

Mr DUMAN (via interpreter): Hi. My name is Huseyin Duman. I am a member of the Alevi elderly council. I help the group in different ways. I am a very active person. For many years now, with women and men all mixed together, we get together at the Cem Evi. Most of them are women. The men that come, there will not be more than 30 or 40. The men are more lonely and they cannot do as much as what women do with the housework. Even technology—they use technology less than what the women do. We started a course for people on how to use Facebook, and most of that was women. Especially the men that do not have partners—they have difficulty looking after themselves, especially cooking. They do not look after their health, and then during their daily life they expect everything from women. As their partners get older things get forgotten and then they start arguing and fighting. Then the psychological issues mount up and they do not accept going to a psychologist. Usually the men drive, and as they get older they cannot drive anymore, and the wife has never gotten her licence, so their living standards deteriorate. Social places for the men to go—we can just say there are hardly any. The ones that are healthy and can move around get to go to places, but the ones that are not healthy enough and that cannot go anywhere have hardly any luck to go anywhere. Most of the men that come to our group are the ones that can come there. They do not have any transport issues, but the elderly, they cannot come at all. And the authority within the family changes. It is very hard for them to explain this to each other, and then they start having issues with their children.

Men seem to just pull away from everything a lot quicker. They break away from life, and their expectations from other people build up. They have no motive in life, so that makes them even worse. In general in life they have got no part. They do not know how to get certain support from certain places. They have no idea, especially the elderly. And they have hardly any English. Between the generations within the men, certain generations, there is a big gap between the two generations.

Mrs YESILYURT (via interpreter): My name is Katibe Yesilyurt, and I am part of Alevi elderly council as well. Our elderly group has got more than 150 members. And it is not only Turkish; we have the Alevis, the Sunnis and the Albanians and Assyrians, and some of them speak Turkish. On Tuesdays usually we give dinner, and we actually cook these foods at home and then bring them there. They are all from different ethnic groups. Especially for the elderly, it is very hard for them to come, and even if they come there, sometimes they have problems with going back home because they cannot remember how to get back, and so they need transport. There is no need to lie, but some of them that live close by we actually transport over, but there are ones that live very far which we cannot. They have got physical issues. Some of them have got mental issues. We cannot actually get doctors for them. We have difficulties actually providing doctors for them.

We sometimes have people that come over. We ask my daughter or someone to come and speak there or help out, but it would be great if we could have someone to support that can speak both languages. We started off as

five members after I retired, but now we have got 150 members there. We do as much as we can. We cook. Even our tea, coffee, everything, we bring from home, and we do everything. Anywhere that we can support these people, we support them. If we could get someone to do a seminar, a meeting or a group exercise or something just to, moral-wise, give the elderly a bit of a boost.

We talk to most of the elderly. We try to support them. We actually put them in different small groups and maybe take them to do sport or to do other things, maybe play music, but just try to support them in every way. We hire a bus and we actually take them on picnics, people that are sort of within. They get very happy when we are going some places, because they are usually on their own and they are very frustrated. So they are very happy when we take them out.

Again, even just to get a bus or organise something we need somebody to actually organise this, somebody that can speaking English.

Mrs YESILYURT: Turkish.

Mr TOKGOZ (interpreter): You said English.

Mrs YESILYURT (via interpreter): English and Turkish. Yes, English and Turkish. Yes, so we need someone to actually do it—even when we give a dinner and things like that, someone to organise the tables and maybe the chairs and sort of pack it up, someone to just look after the whole organising and cleaning, because we are all elderly there. It is only our group anyway. There is no other group that comes there. That is all I have got to say: we need more support for the elderly here.

The CHAIR: We might move to questions now, and I will start with one question. And I thank our speakers for your contributions and your experiences. What would you like government to do to better support multicultural community groups?

Mrs YESILYURT (via interpreter): Somebody that can speak Turkish and English.

The CHAIR: That is the most important.

Mrs YESILYURT (via interpreter): To organise things, yes.

The CHAIR: And you see that as being very important, having staff that can speak Turkish and English?

Mrs YESILYURT (via interpreter): Yes, if someone is there that can speak their language and they can ask questions if they have got any queries. It is like going to a doctor and getting medication from the doctor.

Ms YILDIZ: I would just like to say a few things about these things. Our communities have more than 300 members, but naturally we have thousands of people who are neutral members. And of course mostly we are talking about the elderly people here, because the younger people who are born here already know English and they do not have the language barrier, but with our elderly the biggest issue is the language barrier. Even for me—I just came here like 15 years ago—this is my second language too. Even as a young person, when I came out from Turkey, I sometimes had problems. But I can research it from social media or the internet. I can search, but they do not have these things.

As ACCA we do everything voluntarily. We do not earn money from somewhere else; it is only the members' donations. So with those donations we try to look after our communities—for almost 20 years now—but it is getting harder each time now because we have very big communities and we have lots of different things to spend on. We try to look after our elderly. For example, we like to have a person in there and help them with that, but we need very big financial support. That is our biggest issue now. If we get enough financial support from the government, we can give lots of different services to our elderly people. We can make plans for how we can help them with the English barrier. But the younger generation already have work where they have to go, and they are working like five days, six days. They have to earn money and they have to look after their families. So we have very, very few of the young generation voluntarily working. For example, I have been working almost three years voluntarily, but even I have full-time work. So it is hard for the young generation too. But if we get enough financial help from the government, we can just get the people who can work—those professional people. It would be very helpful for our elderly people.

The CHAIR: Does your organisation receive any government funding?

Ms YILDIZ: Yes, we do get funding, especially with COVID-19. We get some funding too. We try to help the elderly people—all about COVID-19. But before then we got a very small amount of financial funding. It was not helpful enough to get a person, a professional, to help them—for example, psychologically, like they say they need sometimes. A person used to come and talk about their psychological problems. For example, once a week we could hire someone and call the groups in, and they could have a group talk—‘How is life going?’ and talks like this. So giving the services, as you know, to the big communities needs lots of financial help.

The CHAIR: Okay. That makes sense. There being no further questions, we will conclude here. Can I take the opportunity on behalf of the committee to thank the Alevi Community Council of Australia, in particular the community members that are here today that have expressed themselves.

The next steps will be that we will prepare a report that will deliberate your evidence today and provide that to the government. Hopefully we get a good outcome for our older Victorians. So thank you for all the work that you do.

Mrs YESILYURT (via interpreter): One last thing: transport for the elderly, just so we can take them places.

The CHAIR: I mean, we could suggest some organisations and some grant opportunities. There is funding for these sorts of activities. So we will be able, through Marianna, to provide that to you.

Ms YILDIZ: Can I say—sorry about that, if it is not too much—a last few words? As members and the younger generations we like to do lots of different programs for the elderly. We just want to work with the professionals and get help from the government to help them. I think I can find a few more people if we can get funding, and if we get professional help, we will be very happy. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Excellent. Thank you.

Committee adjourned.