

Research Paper



Engaging Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities in Parliamentary Inquiries

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Executive Summary

Victoria is home to one of the most multicultural societies in the world and is among the fastest-growing and most culturally and linguistically diverse states in Australia.¹ Close to half of all Victorians were born overseas or had at least one parent born overseas. About a quarter of Victorians speak a language other than English at home.² Nationwide, nearly half of all Australians were born overseas, and these numbers have increased over time.³

Despite increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in Victoria and in Australia, it is widely recognised that people of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds experience barriers such as limited or lack of English language skills, and institutional barriers that can prevent people of CALD backgrounds participating in the civic and political processes that shape the society we live in. Not all people of CALD backgrounds face barriers when it comes to participating in civic and political processes, but some people of CALD backgrounds experience barriers that affect their ability to fully participate. The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) has shown, for example, that the rates of informal votes (blank or incorrectly filled out ballot papers) are higher in places where there are more CALD residents.⁴

Voting is compulsory in Australia for all citizens aged 18 and above. It is one of the fundamental ways that citizens can influence government decision-making in a democracy. Less tangible to many people, including people of CALD backgrounds, is the work of parliamentary committees and their role in shaping the policy and legislative outcomes that affect our society. Like other parliaments established in the Westminster tradition, Australia's Federal Parliament and the parliaments of its states and territories each operate an extensive committee system, which conduct parliamentary inquiries that investigate specific matters of policy, government administration or government performance.⁵

Parliamentary committees often rely on input from relevant individuals and organisations to strengthen the knowledge of committee Members and their capacity to make recommendations on matters of public importance. Furthermore, a key part of committee activity is public engagement, and consultation with the community.⁶ Yet, as recent studies on parliamentary committees and their community engagement have shown, there is room for improvement in the way parliamentary committees engage with, and represent, traditionally underrepresented communities including CALD communities.⁷ In a society that has been and continues to be shaped by greater mobility and migration,

¹ Victorian Multicultural Commission (date unknown) '[2016 Census: a snapshot of our diversity](#)', VMC website.

² *ibid.*

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017) '[Census reveals a fast changing, culturally diverse nation](#)', media release, 27 June.

⁴ Victorian Electoral Commission (2012) '[Position paper: In language electoral information](#)', Melbourne, VEC, p. 2. The VEC has commissioned some research to understand the barriers, for example see: Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA) (2009) '[Victorian Electoral Commission: barriers to enrolment and voting within the Chinese and Vietnamese communities, qualitative and quantitative research, final report](#)', Leichardt, CIRCA, p. 27; CIRCA (2012) '[Victorian Electoral Commission: barriers to enrolment and voting, and electronic voting, among Arabic-speaking and Turkish communities](#)', Leichardt, CIRCA.

⁵ Parliament of Australia (date unknown) '[Infosheet 4 – Committees](#)', Parliament of Australia website.

⁶ Parliament of Victoria (2018) '[About Committees](#)', Parliament of Victoria website.

⁷ See, for example, H. H. Pedersen, D. Halpin and A. Rasmussen (2015) 'Who gives evidence to parliamentary committees? A comparative investigation of parliamentary committees and their constituencies', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 21(3), pp. 408–427; C. M. Hendriks and A. Kay (2017) 'From "opening up" to democratic renewal: deepening public engagement in legislative committees', *Government and Opposition*, pp. 1–27, doi:10.1017/gov.2017.20; M. Geddes (2018) 'Committee hearings of the UK Parliament: who gives evidence and does this matter?', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 71(2), pp. 283–304; C. M. Hendriks, S. Regan and A. Kay (2018)

it is important to ensure that CALD perspectives are not only included but that they become part of the evidence that parliamentary committees receive. It means that policies, legislation and services are being inclusively designed and implemented, and everyone has an opportunity to participate in shaping the society we live in.

This research paper surveys other Australian Parliaments on how they engage (or do not engage) CALD communities, discusses the specific barriers for CALD communities, and looks at best and good community consultation and engagement of CALD communities. The overall aim was to inform parliaments, and in particular parliamentary committees, of the strategies that could be developed to better engage CALD communities in the work of parliamentary inquiries in future.

'Participatory adaptation in contemporary parliamentary committees in Australia', *Parliamentary Affairs*, gsy005, pp. 1–23, doi:10.1093/pa/gsy005.

1. Who gives evidence to parliamentary committees?

According to Carolyn Hendriks and Adrian Kay in the Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University (2017), parliamentary committees ‘represent an overlooked yet important site for democratic renewal because of their capacity to engage citizens and listen to their concerns’.⁸ They argued that the ability of parliamentary committees to ‘broaden’ and ‘deepen’ their community engagement is critical for renewing and strengthening democracy in an era of significant political and digital change that has been characterised by decreasing trust in formal political institutions, and citizens engaging in alternative public forums (such as social media) to express their political preferences and voice their views.⁹

In this context, who gives evidence to parliamentary committees and whether the evidence is ‘dominated by professional articulate voices’ at the expense of other voices that committees should or could be hearing from, has been a key concern for political scientists studying parliamentary committees as sites of democratic renewal.¹⁰ The research in this area has had a focus on gender biases in parliamentary evidence, discussed below. There is a lack of research on engaging CALD communities which this paper seeks to address.

Gender biases in parliamentary evidence

In the UK, Richard Berry and Sean Kippin (2014) gathered demographic statistics on the types of witnesses that appeared before parliamentary committees and described the biases inherent in this pool of witnesses. They wanted to explore how representative committee witnesses are, and what types of organisations tend to have access to parliament in this way. They compiled and analysed a database of all witnesses who appeared at a select committee (including in the House of Commons, House of Lords and in joint committees) over a period of two months. Notably, they found a ‘stark’ gender disparity among the witnesses that committees in the UK heard from. For example, in their survey of committee witnesses they found that 83 per cent of witnesses who were classified as experts were male.¹¹

Rebecca Rumbul (2016) similarly described in her study the male-dominated nature of evidence-giving in the Welsh parliament. Of the committees surveyed, Rumbul found that ‘the only committee’ approaching gender parity in its pool of witnesses was the committee ‘concerned with education, and children and young people’.¹² Rumbul also noted that very few women made repeat visits to the committees in the 12-year period she studied.¹³ Observing committee sessions, Rumbul noted that the female witnesses who were present were more often in deferential positions to their male colleagues, and female witnesses often only spoke when their male colleagues had finished their points, to provide additional figures or clarification of details. During interviews, Rumbul found that many of these women while possessing significant expertise and seniority in their respective fields did not consider themselves expert enough to assert their opinions outside of direct questioning.¹⁴ Rumbul’s study

⁸ C. M. Hendriks and A. Kay (2017) op. cit., cited in C. M. Hendriks, S. Regan and A. Kay (2018) op. cit., p. 3.

⁹ C. M. Hendriks and A. Kay (2017) op. cit., p. 1.

¹⁰ See for example, Martin Drum, ‘How well do parliamentary committees connect with the public?’, *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2016, pp. 44, 47.

¹¹ Berry and Kippin acknowledged that gender biases among committee witnesses are likely to reflect the gender discrimination which exists in society. Democratic Audit UK (2014) *Parliamentary Select Committees: who gives evidence?*, report prepared by R. Berry and S. Kippin, England, pp. 10-11.

¹² R. Rumbul (2016) ‘Gender inequality in democratic participation: examining oral evidence to the National Assembly for Wales’, *Politics*, 36(1), p. 73.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

described the gendered nature of giving evidence to parliamentary committees, which is stacked in favour of male voices and views.

While it is easy to attribute gender biases to broader inequalities, Berry and Kippen had found, for example, that the greatest gender disparities existed among witnesses over whom committees had more control, such as those classified as ‘independent experts and researchers’ rather than company directors, suggesting that ‘committees are contributing to this problem as well as being subject to its effects’.¹⁵ Subsequent studies have built on these findings. Marc Geddes (2018) in the UK also found that the pool of witnesses, which parliamentary committees in the UK House of Commons hear from, ‘arguably does not reflect the UK population’.¹⁶ Geddes collected data on the witnesses that gave evidence over one parliamentary session (2013–14) and found there were significant gender and geographical disparities in the identities of those who gave evidence to UK parliamentary committees during this period.

This is not a new concept. In a global review of good practice and the creation of gender-sensitive parliaments published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in 2011, political scientist, Sonia Palmieri surveyed parliaments internationally to uncover barriers for women in parliament, focusing on female parliamentarians. In relation to parliamentary committees, Palmieri wrote that the process of appointing women to committees is dominated by the political parties and that change ‘would require a more transparent method for matching Members’ diverse abilities, work experience and preferences with committee assignments’.¹⁷

Selecting witnesses

While there are actions that could be taken within political parties to be more inclusive, existing studies have also focused on how committee practices influence the types of witnesses they hear from. Helene Helboe Pedersen, Darren Halpin and Anne Rasmussen (2015) gathered information on the witnesses who appeared before parliamentary committees in the UK, Denmark and the Netherlands in a year. They found that committee invitation methods influenced the types of organisations and individuals who appeared before committees. They stated that ‘open procedures’ for inviting evidence (such as public calls for submissions) made room for many voices but the overall evidence was dominated by ‘political professionals’. On the other hand, ‘closed procedures’ (for example, invitations to experts and affected groups) led to the engagement of traditionally less politically active witnesses; however, the number of contacts were reduced, indicating the tension between quantity and quality, as well as the need to reach out to witnesses who would not normally appear before a committee.¹⁸

Researchers who have interviewed committee Members, chairs and parliamentary staff have written about how committee practices and procedures affect the depth and reach of parliamentary public engagement strategies. For example, Geddes (2018) was employed at the UK House of Commons’ Committees Office. He found that the imperative to ensure that evidence sessions run smoothly and are easy to understand for committee Members, often meant that ‘committees are risk averse’ when it comes to selecting witnesses.¹⁹ Martin Drum (2016) surveyed committees at the Parliament of Western Australia (WA) on their evidence-gathering strategies and found they were diversifying their methods beyond the standard calls for written submissions and public hearings to include briefings

¹⁵ Democratic Audit UK (2014) op. cit., p. 15.

¹⁶ M. Geddes (2018) ‘Committee hearings of the UK Parliament: who gives evidence and does this matter?’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 71(2), p. 283.

¹⁷ Dr S. Palmieri (2011) *Gender-sensitive parliaments: a global review of good practice*, report for the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva, p. 108. The IPU is a global organisation of parliaments which works to ‘promote, protect and strengthen democracy’ worldwide, of which Australia is a member. See Inter-Parliamentary Union (2018) ‘Our work’, IPU website.

¹⁸ H. H. Pedersen, D. Halpin and A. Rasmussen (2015) op. cit., pp. 408–427.

¹⁹ M. Geddes (2018) op. cit., p. 299.

from departments, conferences, site visits and research by parliamentary staff. However, Drum reported that none of the committees he had surveyed at the time held public meetings or forums, which, 'whilst expensive and time-consuming', might 'broaden the input received'.²⁰

Use of technology in evidence gathering

Committees, and their public engagement, have been the subject of two parliamentary inquiries at the Parliament of Australia over the past 20 years. The Australian House of Representatives report, *It's Your House* (1999), recommended that parliaments raise awareness about inquiries in the community, and encouraged parliamentary committees to use technology to increase community participation.²¹ Ten years on, the *Building a modern committee system* (2010) report called for committees to adopt more 'innovative' evidence-gathering methods to reach diverse demographics.²² How parliamentary committees are continuing the work of adapting their public engagement practices to extend their reach in the community, has been an equally important question in this context.

In 2017, the theme at the annual conference of the Australasian Study of Parliament Group (ASPG) was 'Engaging Parliament: Fostering Parliament's relationship with its stakeholders'.²³ In a paper presented at the conference, Peggy Danaee from the Department of the House of Representatives at the Parliament of Australia reviewed the opportunities and the risks involved when committees adopt digital technologies to gather evidence for their inquiries. According to Danaee, a method that has been trialled with success at the Parliament of Australia is online questionnaires or surveys. Online questionnaires are low-cost, relatively quick to create and they can support committees to reach underrepresented groups.²⁴ However, there are new issues with adopting such practices. For example, there is less capacity for committees 'to probe or verify the accuracy or completeness of the information provided' or to verify the identities of those who have submitted evidence.²⁵ This has implications for parliamentary privilege, as committees may not be able to exercise the same caution in accepting such evidence.²⁶ Danaee concluded by stating that parliaments now need to work on appropriately incorporating these new methods of interacting with the public into the formal work of committees.²⁷

In 2018, Michelle Kurrle from the Parliament of Victoria and Jeff Norris from the Parliament of Australia discussed the opportunities and options for committees to use technology to improve their processes.²⁸ Kurrle and Norris canvassed a range of media for various aspects of committee work including the use of social media for evidence-gathering. According to Kurrle and Norris, social media 'may be the least threatening way to be involved in a committee inquiry for some people' and it can

²⁰ M. Drum (2016) op. cit., p. 48.

²¹ Parliament of Australia, House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Procedure (1999) *It's your house: community involvement in the procedures and practices of the House of Representatives and its committees*, October, pp. xi–xviii, cited in J. Forkert (2017) 'Parliamentary committees: improving public engagement', paper presented at Australasian Parliament Study Group Conference, Hobart, 27–30 September, pp. 3–4.

²² Parliament of Australia, House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Procedure (2010) *Building a modern committee system: an inquiry into the effectiveness of the House committee system*, June, p. 46, cited in J. Forkert (2017) op. cit., p. 4.

²³ Australasian Study of Parliament Group (2017), '2017 (Tasmania)', ASPG website.

²⁴ P. Danaee (2017) 'Evidence gathering processes and emerging technologies', paper presented at the ASPG Conference, Hobart, 27–30 September, pp. 12–14.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁸ M. Kurrle and J. Norris (2018) 'Improving committee processes with technology', paper presented at the ANZACATT Professional Development Seminar, Wellington, p. 10. ANZACATT is the Australia and New Zealand Association of Clerks-At-The-Table.

help by building an ‘engaged platform of community users’.²⁹ They noted that the Scottish Parliament has had positive developments in the use of social media to gather evidence during inquiries and extend their reach in communities.³⁰ Pauline Painter in the NSW Legislative Assembly has examined the changing face of technology and new forms of participatory democracy. She noted however, that while the rise of social media platforms provide new opportunities to engage, they can also pose a risk for committees. One of the negative sides of collective submissions gathered by social media may be that ‘people are being told what they should say’ — for example, online petitions that people can sign on to, do not necessarily generate the types of evidence committees need for their inquiries.³¹

Political scientists Carolyn Hendriks, Susan Regan and Adrian Kay (2018) at the Australian National University recently interviewed parliamentary staff (Assistant Clerks, Executive Officers and Secretaries) at six Australian parliaments about their public engagement practices. Hendriks et al. found that parliamentary committees remain reliant on standard practices, such as written submissions and public hearings.³² However, some committees adapt their processes to better connect with and represent diverse populations. For example, committees are increasingly using social media and inquiry-specific websites to collect and manage public input.³³ While Australian parliaments are adapting their standard participatory procedures, Hendriks et al. found that ‘change is modest, highly variable by issue, and undertaken in a cautious and ad hoc fashion’.³⁴ They argued that committee systems in Australia need to adopt a ‘more strategic and coordinated approach, if they are to remain relevant’ in an era of significant political and digital change.³⁵ These studies have informed this research paper, which considers some of the cultural and institutional barriers that affect people of CALD backgrounds in this context.

The methods used

A brief survey was sent out to all parliaments in Australia on how they engage (or do not engage) with CALD communities for parliamentary inquiries through the e-CATT Info-share list system for ANZACATT – the Australia and New Zealand Association of Clerks-At-The-Table. This is an online message board for Clerks and Assistant Clerks seeking information about procedural and operational matters. It was an effective means to make initial contact with parliaments across Australia. Almost all Australian Parliaments responded to the survey and provided relevant policy documents where they exist.

During the research period, the authors also conducted research on what constitutes best practice CALD community engagement by contacting several peak government and non-government organisations with expertise in engaging CALD communities to gather insights on good and best practice CALD community engagement and consultation. These organisations were invited to respond to a brief set of questions about what the Parliament of Victoria could do to engage CALD communities and individuals during inquiries. The final section draws on these responses to describe some of the principles of good and best practice CALD community inclusion and engagement, which could inform any potential next stage developments at the Parliament of Victoria.

Where possible, the authors also wanted to hear directly from CALD participants. During the research period, one of the authors visited a group of diverse community leaders in the City of Melton, in Melbourne’s west, and gathered first-hand views on possible barriers, and the strategies that could

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *ibid.* See also, M. Drum (2016) *op. cit.*, p. 53.

³¹ P. Painter (2016) ‘New kids on the block or the usual suspects? Is public engagement with committees changing or is participation in committee inquiries still dominated by a handful of organisations and academics?’, *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, 31(2), p. 83.

³² C. M. Hendriks, S. Regan and A. Kay (2018) *op. cit.*, p. 1.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 1.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 3.

support CALD communities and individuals to overcome them. This visit was facilitated by the Community Engagement and Education Team at the Parliament of Victoria and followed a visit the community leaders had made to Parliament earlier in the year.

Who are CALD communities?

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) is a term often used to describe people living in Australia who were born overseas, or people living in Australia who have parent(s) or grandparent(s) born overseas, and are predominately from non-English speaking or non-Western countries.

Broadly speaking, some people of CALD backgrounds are more likely to experience language, literacy and social barriers. According to the latest census in 2016, 11 per cent of people born overseas who made their home in Australia in the past 25 years did not speak English well or at all, in 2016.³⁶ Literacy scores also indicate challenges in this area for some people of CALD backgrounds born overseas and for whom English is not a first language.³⁷ This can be the result of a wide range of life experiences, for example, people resettled through humanitarian channels may have experienced disruptions during their school years. Social and economic integration in Australia also differs — sometimes quite starkly across different cultural and linguistic communities. For example, the ABS has shown that higher proportions of people who speak Vietnamese or Arabic live in socio-economically disadvantaged areas in Australia.³⁸

CALD communities are diverse and not all people of CALD backgrounds experience barriers to their participation. The term also includes people seeking asylum in Australia, international students and their partners, temporary workers and their families, among other descriptions and categories.³⁹ Further, it is important to appreciate that for some people of CALD backgrounds, their immigration experience or immigrant identity may not be as important in their lives as other dimensions of their identities.⁴⁰

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

This paper also describes some of the barriers experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and individuals given that some of the key issues are similar for CALD and Aboriginal communities. The responses from other parliaments in Australia indicated that there have already been some effective strategies developed to engage Aboriginal communities during inquiries. This will be discussed in more detail below.

³⁶ ABS (2017) 'Cultural Diversity in Australia, 2016: 2016 census article', Canberra, ABS.

³⁷ ABS (2013) '4228.0 – Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia, 2011-12: Selected Characteristics – Language First Spoken', Canberra, ABS. See also, Mr Warwick Gately AM, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission (2017) *Submission to Victorian Parliament Inquiry into civics and electoral participation*, Attachment 1, submission to the Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee Inquiry into civics and electoral participation in Victorian state parliamentary elections, p. 32.

³⁸ ABS (2018) 'Census of Population and Housing: reflecting Australia – stories from the Census, 2016 – Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage', Canberra, ABS.

³⁹ This explanation drew from Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH) (2017) *Intersectionality matters: a guide to engaging immigrant and refugee communities to prevent violence against women*, guide prepared by J. Chen, Melbourne, p. 8.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 9.

2. Responses from Australian parliaments

The following section summarises responses received from other Australian parliaments. As noted above, a brief survey was sent out through the e-CATT list system to all parliaments in Australia on how they engage with CALD communities for parliamentary inquiries. Where parliaments had a bicameral legislature, responses were often received from both chambers, with some providing relevant policy documents where they existed, as well as related papers presented at ANZACATT conferences.

The questions in the survey were as follows:

- What do you see as the main barriers to participating in committee inquiries for people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities?
- Is there anything that your parliamentary committees do to engage people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities? For example, have you translated any material on committee websites in languages other than English and/or used interpreters at public hearings?
- What do you think could be done to better engage people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities?
- In your view, what are the benefits for parliamentary committees in engaging with CALD communities? And what kinds of issues arise for parliamentary committees that are interested in developing strategies in this area?
- Have your committees developed ways to facilitate the participation of other underrepresented groups during the Inquiry process (for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the LGBTI community, people living with disabilities and people residing in lower socio-economic areas)? If so, in your view, what made a particular strategy successful?

The survey responses provided a wealth of information about the barriers experienced by CALD communities, the benefits to be gained by enhanced representation and illuminated strategies to increase engagement. The following section will detail thematically the main findings in the surveys with noteworthy strategies, case studies or observations from Australian parliaments throughout.

Benefits of engaging CALD communities

Overwhelmingly, parliaments in Australia recognise the value in engaging with CALD communities and they cited numerous benefits for parliamentary committees in engaging CALD communities. The main benefit identified by these parliaments was that committee inquiries benefit from a more representative response, which in turn supports parliamentarians in acting on behalf of those they represent.

These communities often experience multiple layers of disadvantage and can experience social isolation from the broader community. Seeking the views of CALD communities will hopefully enable parliaments and governments to be more responsive to these communities and result in better outcomes for them. Furthermore, as the survey response from the Northern Territory Department of the Legislative Assembly noted with regard to how diverse and multicultural their territory is: 'not engaging is not an option'.⁴¹

Parliaments also noted that committees would benefit from raising their profile with a wider range of individuals and agencies, and through hearing from different perspectives and diverse views. In its response to the survey, the New South Wales (NSW) Legislative Assembly stated:

⁴¹ Northern Territory Department of the Legislative Assembly (2018), e-CATT survey response.

The contribution of people with a different life experience and culture can bring a new or different perspective compared to that of the general community. This can lead to a more in-depth analysis of issues and the formulation of opinion and recommendations that are more inclusive.⁴²

The NSW Legislative Assembly also noted in its response that there are also likely to be personal benefits for staff in engaging with CALD communities:

Staff communication and engagement skills can be enhanced as part of engaging with CALD communities and becoming more culturally aware. This can benefit and inform not only their future work but also impact how they interact and communicate in their daily lives outside of work.⁴³

Despite numerous benefits to parliaments and those they represent, there are many obstacles to engaging CALD communities.

Barriers to engagement for CALD communities

CALD communities face many barriers including language and literacy barriers, which can make it difficult to participate in parliamentary processes. They may be concerned about their command of English and worry about being misunderstood or publicly embarrassed, or how their evidence may be interpreted within a different cultural worldview. They may have low levels of literacy, not only in English, but also in their native language.

While some CALD communities are highly literate in political and civic processes, some members of CALD communities are often not aware of political processes and their ability to engage with, and contribute to, parliamentary processes is limited. Parliamentary language and concepts, such as parliamentary privilege, are often confusing and obscure to the general population, as well as CALD communities, and these communities may be exposed to political apathy and low levels of civic literacy within the broader community. They may also not have the time and resources to contribute as the process of arrival, settlement, establishing themselves in their new environment, learning a new language and adapting to a new culture takes priority. In its response to the survey, the NSW Legislative Assembly raised many of these issues and also stated:

A strong emphasis on the family and a focus on establishing themselves in a new country – finding employment etc. – can mean CALD communities don't see the relevance of participating in committee activities. Even after many years of residency, there may be feelings of isolation and of not feeling a part of the wider community.⁴⁴

These communities may also have experienced trauma related to political processes in their country of origin and have a fear of governments and a fear of engaging with authorities and public services, particularly if they have fled political persecution or been subject to displacement caused by conflict and civil unrest. Asylum seekers and refugees may also be concerned about their visa status and may be reluctant or unwilling to make formal social comment about their views and experiences. There may also be cultural or gender barriers and they may see the committee process as an inappropriate forum to talk about personal issues.

These communities may also feel disenfranchised, disengaged or that their opinions do not count. The response from the Northern Territory Department of the Legislative Assembly noted that there may also be misconceptions about 'the degree of agency of committees to "fix issues" raised as part of an inquiry'.⁴⁵ This could create disillusionment in political processes at the time it takes for committees to

⁴² Parliament of New South Wales, Legislative Assembly (2018) e-CATT survey response.

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Northern Territory Department of the Legislative Assembly (2018) e-CATT survey response.

make recommendations to the government and for the government to address issues raised in inquiries, which may involve legislative change and the development of departmental programs and policies. These communities may become frustrated at the time it may take for change to be implemented. The response noted that it was important to manage expectations so that CALD communities understand the inquiry process, its ambit and its limitations.⁴⁶

CALD communities may also have no access to technology, poor computing skills or experience accessibility issues which may prevent them from hearing about inquiries and making online submissions. Other barriers include the physical set-up of the room and parliamentary buildings, which several parliaments noted could be intimidating, in addition to the style of questioning in public hearings. Several parliaments also referred to the time pressure in public hearings which demand immediate answers as a barrier to engagement, noting that certain communities, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, may want time to reflect and discuss (or ‘yarn’) about the issues raised within their community, before providing a thoughtful and considered answer.

Case study: Inquiry into perinatal services

The catalyst for this research paper came from a recent inquiry conducted by a Victorian parliamentary committee on perinatal services. The Family and Community Development Committee, which conducted the inquiry, was keen to hear from women and families from CALD backgrounds after learning that these women and their babies faced disparities in health and wellbeing outcomes, and often struggled to receive the support and services they need.⁴⁷ The Committee also heard that health professionals were often inexperienced in working with families from CALD backgrounds, interpreters were not used often enough to support women, and that these women may also have difficulty communicating and navigating health and social services. The Committee allocated a chapter in its report to addressing the disadvantages and barriers women from CALD communities face in accessing perinatal services. However, the formalised way of collecting submissions and the physicality of the hearing room set-up were felt to be intimidating to women from CALD communities, restricting their ability to participate.

It was described to committee staff by representatives of CALD groups that committee public hearings were not felt to be a ‘safe space’ for women to talk about their experiences of perinatal services in Victoria and that it is an environment ‘laden with power dynamics’.⁴⁸ Representatives of these groups expressed a wish for committee Members to meet women from CALD backgrounds in their space, away from the formality of committee proceedings. In response to questions on how parliamentary inquiries could accommodate people of CALD backgrounds, Ms Rebecca Bartlett, a Registered Nurse-Midwife, PhD Candidate and the creator of “Shifra” — a multilingual, online, perinatal resource — appeared before the Committee representing CALD women, and reflected on her experience of giving evidence:

Whilst I found all of the Inquiry panel members very approachable and warm, I have agency and confidence to approach them and language skills to make my case. To sit across a room of mostly white, predominantly male strangers and answer questions in front of a public audience is an intimidating experience for anyone, especially a woman who may not feel very comfortable with a) the topic b) speaking out c) speaking in English and d) combining all these things together.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Parliament of Victoria, Family and Community Development Committee (2018) *Inquiry into perinatal services*, East Melbourne, Parliament of Victoria.

⁴⁸ R. Bartlett, personal communication with R. Macreadie and Dr G. Gardiner, 6 September 2017.

⁴⁹ R. Bartlett, personal communication with R. Macreadie, 10 August 2018, p. 1.

Representatives from CALD groups expressed the hope that evidence could be taken in a less formalised and more flexible manner.

Barriers to engagement for parliamentary committees

Barriers to engagement were not one-sided. Survey responses indicated that many parliamentary committees struggle to engage with CALD communities for a range of reasons, including time constraints, a lack of resources, a lack of knowledge or cultural awareness among committee secretariat staff and Members, and unconscious bias. Some Parliaments also noted that committee Members may not always be willing to adopt strategies that would enhance engagement with CALD communities. Furthermore, targeted engagement with CALD communities and building trust within these communities often takes time, resulting in greater workloads for the committee secretariat. It also requires staff that are 'culturally competent' and can manage complex stakeholder relationships.

Many committees that engaged with CALD communities did so only for inquiries that related specifically to a CALD 'issue', rather than taking a broader approach and seeking input from CALD communities more generally. Furthermore, short inquiries often meant that committees did not have time to build relationships with CALD communities and had to rely on their contact with peak bodies to reach out to the communities they represent. According to some of the survey respondents, however, these peak bodies often have limited resources and may struggle to relay messages from parliamentary committees to all relevant members of CALD communities.

There are also procedural limitations inherent in the evidence-gathering process. For example, in Victoria, evidence gained at site visits is not admissible. This was a problem identified in other jurisdictions as well. For example, the Northern Territory Department of the Legislative Assembly noted in its response to the survey:

Parliamentary privilege guides the collection of evidence imposing a formality on the processes of its collection. Sources need to be identifiable (attributable to the writer or speaker) and it needs to be able to be published (e.g. submission or transcript) as part of the parliamentary record.⁵⁰

Strategies to increase engagement with CALD communities

Many parliaments noted that where their parliamentary committees did consciously and deliberately attempt to engage people from CALD communities, this was done in an *ad hoc* manner and there were often no formal strategies in place. Several parliaments noted that they had used interpreters at hearings and translated submissions in foreign languages into English via translation services. In its response, the House of Representatives noted that it had used flyers and pamphlets as a tool to engage CALD communities and to convey information in a concise way, using plain English and images to make it easier for CALD communities to read and understand information.⁵¹ Hard copies of these pamphlets and flyers have also been distributed to areas where computer literacy and usage is low.

Many parliaments mentioned that they were currently updating information on their websites and examining the accessibility of information for a range of groups, including CALD communities. Recently, several parliaments have also used surveys and questionnaires to hear from people who may not otherwise make a submission. These surveys used plain English and are designed to be easy to use and navigate. Parliaments have also made use of social media sites, such as Facebook and Instagram, to connect with communities online.

Several parliaments sought to engage directly with CALD communities for certain inquiries. For example, in an inquiry into the taxi industry, the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly's Public

⁵⁰ Northern Territory Department of the Legislative Assembly (2018) e-CATT survey response.

⁵¹ Parliament of Australia, Department of the House of Representatives (2018) e-CATT survey response.

Accounts Committee made a deliberate effort to seek input from taxi drivers from CALD backgrounds and sent out over 1,000 letters to taxi drivers, which resulted in many email submissions.⁵² A group of taxi drivers who spoke English as a second language attended together to give oral submissions which were recorded and transcribed. The secretariat also provided these drivers with a plain language flow chart of the inquiry process, which increased their understanding of the committee process.

The Parliament of Victoria has held community forums with CALD communities, co-sponsored by the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria for previous inquiries, which allowed the Law Reform Committee to hear from members of a diverse range of communities, including Indian, Congolese, Polish, Zambian, Filipino, Greek and Arabic communities.⁵³ During the Parliament of Victoria's *Inquiry into Portability of Long Service Leave Entitlements*, the Economics, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee heard from a Vietnamese-Australian worker in the textile industry who gave evidence at a public hearing through a Vietnamese interpreter, arranged by committee staff.⁵⁴ However, these are not common practices at the Parliament of Victoria.

The New South Wales Legislative Council regularly run half-day workshops in conjunction with the National Council of Social Services (NCOSS) where staff from non-government organisations come to Parliament and learn about committees, the inquiry process, how to write effective submissions and what to expect as a witness. In their response to the survey, they noted that a similar workshop could potentially be tailored to people from CALD communities.

Regarding what could be done to better engage people from CALD communities, parliaments had many suggestions, which included:

- providing training for committee staff and Members on how to engage CALD communities;
- advertising inquiries through CALD community associations, foreign language newspapers and foreign language radio;
- creating an outreach position within parliaments for a Diversity Officer or CALD Liaison Officer who could work with parliamentary committees, the community engagement team and other parliamentary business units at engaging CALD communities and creating culturally appropriate and accessible information;
- providing media releases and terms of reference in different languages;
- utilising social media to reach younger CALD groups;
- developing best practice guidelines for committees;
- increasing the use of visual information to explain instructions;
- using more plain English;
- creating videos to convey information verbally and explain the inquiry process with subtitles;
- using interpreters at public hearings;
- holding community forums, co-sponsored by CALD community representative groups;
- running workshops for CALD communities on the inquiry process, how to make a submission and how to give evidence at public hearings;

⁵² Northern Territory Department of the Legislative Assembly (2018) e-CATT survey response.

⁵³ Parliament of Victoria, Law Reform Committee (2009) *Inquiry into alternative dispute resolution and restorative justice*, East Melbourne, Parliament of Victoria, May. Parliament of Victoria, Law Reform Committee (2010) *Inquiry into powers of attorney*, East Melbourne, Parliament of Victoria, August. For example, in the *Inquiry into alternative dispute resolution and restorative justice*, the Committee heard from the Horn-Afrik Employment and Training Advocacy Project, the Congolese Association of Victoria, the Polish Community Council of Australia, and the Zambian community. In the *Inquiry into powers of attorney*, the Committee heard from the Filipino Community Council of Victoria Inc., the Australian Greek Welfare Society, the Northern Region Indian Seniors Association of Victoria, and Victoria Arabic Social Service.

⁵⁴ Parliament of Victoria, Economics, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee (2016) *Inquiry into portability of long service leave entitlements*, East Melbourne, Parliament of Victoria, p. 49.

- holding public hearings in areas with high populations of CALD communities;
- conducting site visits where CALD communities are located;
- translating foreign language submissions into English;
- obtaining evidence through surveys and questionnaires; and
- having a ‘champion’ in CALD communities that can ‘encourage people to participate and explain the inquiry process’ (a similar project run by the Victorian Electoral Commission, discussed below).

Many of these suggestions were reiterated by the peak multicultural organisations consulted for this research paper and CALD participants at a community leadership program, discussed below.

Many parliaments identified that there was a need for training of committee staff and parliamentarians to highlight the barriers these groups face, which might include the issues of unconscious bias and substantive equality.⁵⁵ Parliaments also identified that it was important to develop and build relationships with key stakeholder organisations that represented CALD communities and gain the trust of those communities. It was also noted that targeted engagement with CALD communities could be undertaken by consulting these communities directly about how they would like to participate and what they see as the main barriers to participation.

Importantly, as noted in the NSW Legislative Assembly’s response to the survey, any strategies need to be culturally appropriate and recognise that CALD communities are diverse:

Strategies to engage CALD communities should be aware and respectful of different cultural and religious beliefs and practices. They may need to recognise that individual CALD communities are not homogenous and there may be different cultural or ethnic groupings within that community. There may also be a need to understand gender roles and responsibilities within communities and some of these issues may need to be treated with great sensitivity. There may be a social hierarchy where there is a deferment to community elders or leaders to speak on behalf of the community.⁵⁶

Many of the strategies outlined above build on existing strategies used to increase engagement with other underrepresented groups.

Strategies to increase engagement with other groups

Parliaments were generally more confident in engaging with other communities, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and people with disabilities, and had employed a diverse range of strategies to include these communities in committee processes and increase participation from these groups. More generally, the Parliament of Australia uses a live closed captioning service to improve the accessibility of its televised coverage of proceedings.

Parliamentary committees conducting inquiries on disability issues have found ways to include these communities by addressing sensory needs and accessibility issues. For example, in its response, the NSW Legislative Council noted that it had helped facilitate the participation of people with disabilities for an inquiry into services provided or funded by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, which included providing Auslan interpreters at all public hearings and providing community documents in Braille and MP3 formats.⁵⁷ Committees have also created videos to convey information verbally to the public via their homepages and YouTube channels. Some committees have also

⁵⁵ Substantive equality recognises the need for targeted measures to address ‘the practical effects of disadvantage and discrimination’; see: Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) (date unknown) ‘[Special measures](#)’, VEOHRC website.

⁵⁶ Parliament of New South Wales, Legislative Assembly (2018) e-CATT survey response.

⁵⁷ Parliament of New South Wales, Legislative Council (2018) e-CATT survey response.

accepted video submissions from people signing in Auslan. Other committees have created easy English guides with visual information and plain language flowcharts of the inquiry process.

In another example, prior to gathering evidence for the Victorian Parliament's Family and Community Development Committee's *Inquiry into services for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder*, committee Members and staff were briefed by Amaze, the peak body representing people with autism spectrum disorder. This enabled the Committee to be aware of sensory needs and resulted in creating quiet rooms adjacent to public hearing spaces, easy read guides to making a submission with visual material, and ensuring rooms had dimmed lighting and hearing loops.⁵⁸

The Parliament of Australia Senate committees noted that in a recent inquiry into Indigenous health issues, they engaged with community representatives early, used a variety of public hearing formats (for example, round tables and multiple witnesses appearing together), and they included a Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country. They also used local interpreters and an Auslan interpreter and ensured that there was a hearing loop available.

Regarding strategies for improving engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the Parliament of Australia Senate committees gave the following response to the survey:

During an inquiry focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, a committee tried to facilitate the involvement of individuals who could not read or write English by using a transcription service to allow potential submitters to lodge submissions in an audio or video file which would be transcribed later. Although arrangements were in place, the offer was never actually taken up. One of the barriers to offering this service is that the committee had to rely on third parties to make contact and facilitate the recording and transmittal of the audio/video files to the secretariat.⁵⁹

Several parliamentary committees in the Northern Territory, Queensland and New South Wales visited Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities prior to taking formal evidence. In its response, the Northern Territory Department of the Legislative Assembly stated that for one committee's remote consultations, an Indigenous Officer visited communities prior to the Committee conducting consultations to make connections and advise the community of the purpose of the upcoming consultations.⁶⁰

In its response, the Parliament of Queensland reported that it also has an Indigenous Liaison Officer whose role includes conducting educational activities, such as visiting regional areas and meeting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, to increase awareness of the Parliament and its committees. The Parliament of Queensland said the following in relation to their Indigenous Liaison Officer:

Where Committees seek assistance with respect to engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities as part of an inquiry, [the Indigenous Liaison Officer] will spend time engaging with indigenous communities at the start of the commencement of a particular inquiry in order to discuss the role of the committee, the inquiry and how they can participate in the process. [The Indigenous Liaison Officer] also provides advice to committees on protocol for engaging with communities and any location/community specific information to assist the committee.

⁵⁸ Parliament of Victoria, Family and Community Development Committee (2017) *Inquiry into services for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder*, East Melbourne, Parliament of Victoria. See also: Parliament of Victoria, Family and Community Development Committee (2016) *Inquiry into abuse in disability services*, East Melbourne, Parliament of Victoria.

⁵⁹ Parliament of Australia, Department of the Senate (2018) e-CATT survey response.

⁶⁰ Northern Territory Department of the Legislative Assembly (2018) e-CATT survey response.

Depending on the timeframe for a particular inquiry, [the Indigenous Liaison Officer] may travel to the community and conduct the ground work before the committee travels to the community. It is certainly an effective strategy in order to clarify expectations and enhance understanding of the committee's role prior to the committee arriving.⁶¹

The Parliament of Queensland also runs an annual Indigenous Youth Parliament to increase awareness of Parliament and encourage pathways to engage with parliamentary processes.

Case study: Aboriginal cultural awareness training

In its response to the survey, the NSW Legislative Council noted that during an inquiry into the Bowraville murders, the Standing Committee on Law and Justice travelled to Bowraville for an informal 'meet and greet' with community members in order to begin building rapport with them. They also produced a plain English handout about the committee and the inquiry with photos and casual biographies of the committee Members and the secretariat.⁶²

The process of engagement began shortly after the inquiry was established with academics, including Dr Diana Eades, a consultant sociolinguist who specialised in Aboriginal English, meeting with the Committee and secretariat to 'suggest consultation methods the committee may wish to adopt for the inquiry'.⁶³ In her ANZACATT paper, Ms Teresa McMichael, Assistant Clerk of Upper House Committees at the Parliament of New South Wales, wrote:

[I]t was strongly recommended that the family members be heard 'on country' in Bowraville, rather than in Sydney. It was also recommended that the hearing setting be as informal as possible, and not feel like a court room with the associated connotations.

To help build rapport, Dr Eades recommended that the committee travel to Bowraville to meet with the families at least twice. She suggested that there be an initial informal visit where the committee could listen to the families and answer questions about the inquiry, followed by a second visit (to be held at least one month later) where the committee could then take formal evidence. Dr Eades cautioned that if the committee only travelled to Bowraville on one day and conducted a formal hearing it would be viewed as superficial and rushed and the families would be less likely to open up.⁶⁴

An Aboriginal English workshop was organised for committee Members, the secretariat and other staff, which included how to engage in a culturally appropriate manner, how to avoid common miscommunications, and how to facilitate an environment in which Aboriginal people would feel they could 'freely and fully tell their story'.⁶⁵ The workshop detailed some of the nuances and subtle differences in accent, grammar, meaning, non-verbal communication, silence and language functions which can affect communication between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and result in miscommunication.

The workshop provided parliamentarians and the secretariat with greater understanding of the community they would seek evidence from, better equipped the Committee to engage with Aboriginal stakeholders more generally, and enabled the Committee to 'gather important evidence for the inquiry

⁶¹ Legislative Assembly of Queensland (2018) e-CATT survey response.

⁶² Parliament of New South Wales, Legislative Council (2018) e-CATT survey response. For example, see Parliament of New South Wales, Legislative Council Standing Committee on Law and Justice (2014) *The family response to the murders in Bowraville*. See also: T. McMichael (2015) 'Engaging outside expertise: Aboriginal cultural awareness training. A case study: Inquiry into the family response to the murders in Bowraville', paper presented at ANZACATT conference.

⁶³ T. McMichael (2015) op. cit., pp. 2–3.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 3. See also: Parliament of New South Wales, Legislative Council Standing Committee on Law and Justice (2014) *The family response to the murders in Bowraville*, pp. 54–60.

which otherwise may not have been obtained'.⁶⁶ In its report, the Committee recommended that the NSW Government provide funding to the Parliament of New South Wales to develop a training module for Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff on Aboriginal cultural awareness.⁶⁷

Summary

The responses from parliaments around Australia illustrate that the benefits of engaging with CALD communities are numerous; however, more needs to be done to engage CALD communities. Some suggestions made by other parliaments included having direct invitations to contribute, liaison officers, the use of interpreters, and cultural awareness training for committee Members and staff. A concerted effort to involve these communities is likely to take imagination, flexibility and patience, and challenge existing ways of evidence-gathering.

⁶⁶ T. McMichael (2015) *op. cit.*, pp. 5, 7.

⁶⁷ Parliament of New South Wales, Legislative Council Standing Committee on Law and Justice (2014) *The family response to the murders in Bowraville*, recommendation 6.

3. Supporting CALD communities

This section describes the views of some CALD community leaders, stakeholders and CALD representative groups on how parliaments can best engage CALD communities, whom the authors were able to contact during the research for this paper. The authors acknowledge that further research building on this initial work is required to understand the barriers to engaging with parliamentary inquiries by contacting a larger cohort of CALD and multicultural groups and organisations in Victoria.

Engaging community leaders in Melton

On 16 July 2018, one of the authors visited the City of Melton in Melbourne's west to meet a group of participants undertaking an enhanced community leadership-training program. The program was run by the City of Melton and participants were selected for their 'demonstrated commitment to developing their own, and other peoples' leadership in the community'.⁶⁸

The group of about 18 community leaders present were predominately of CALD backgrounds. The community leaders had all recently visited the Parliament of Victoria as part of their leadership program. During the open forum discussion, some of the leaders pointed out that there is limited knowledge and awareness about the work of parliamentary committees among all Australians, not just for people of CALD backgrounds. Lack of awareness about the work of committees, limited English-language abilities, and low literacy among some people born overseas in non-English-speaking countries were also identified as barriers.⁶⁹ One community leader considered that a lack of knowledge or interest about parliamentary inquiries is not due to lack of interest in the community, but may instead be due to barriers such as a lack of material about inquiries that have been translated into community languages.

During the session, one of the community leaders noted that people of CALD backgrounds may also feel intimidated by formalised processes of giving evidence, some might have trouble presenting their thoughts on paper, and others may be reluctant to engage for reasons associated with the politicised portrayals of their country of origin in the media.⁷⁰ Another community leader expressed concerns for those resettled through humanitarian channels. The community leader explained that many humanitarian arrivals who have experienced repressive governments will be concerned that writing a submission and/or having an opinion about an issue could have repercussions for themselves and their families. He highlighted risks for smaller refugee communities such as the fact that in these communities, individuals may be more easily identified in their evidence.⁷¹

Some of the community leaders suggested several strategies that could improve CALD communities and individuals' access to parliamentary inquiries, which were similar to those outlined by parliamentary staff in the survey. These included the potential for 'open door' sessions of evidence-gathering where community members give evidence in a supported environment, workshops for CALD community members about the inquiry process and how to make a submission, and the greater use of social media and online forums to gather evidence from CALD communities. These leaders also suggested training volunteer CALD leaders who can assist members of their communities and networks to participate.

While acknowledging that change can take time, the community leaders who spoke at the session also expressed the hope that their contributions would be valued by parliamentarians and lead to improved

⁶⁸ City of Melton (2018) 'Community leadership program', City of Melton website.

⁶⁹ P. Fung (2018) field notes and photograph taken of responses on whiteboard on-site at Melton Library and Learning Hub, 16 July.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ *ibid.*

policies, and more inclusive legislation and services. Engaging CALD communities is not a one-way process. Expectations about parliamentary inquiries and their outcomes will also need to be managed by Members and staff to ensure long-term engagement of CALD community perspectives. This could be improved by understanding how to support CALD communities and representatives to become familiar with the work of inquiries.

At the session, the author observed that there may also be moments when committee Members and secretariat staff will need to manage the expectations of community members, who consider contact with Members and staff as a means to gain assistance or support on a personal or community-related matter. This is a task not specific to CALD communities alone. However, some CALD leaders and groups have had none or limited contact with representatives from government and the parliament. Committee Members and staff could benefit from a greater awareness of their position of authority when engaging with some CALD groups. The task would also be aided by understanding cultural, generational and gendered assistance seeking for CALD communities, and how to help manage community expectations in the process.

Stakeholder views on engaging CALD communities

The authors also approached several external organisations. With the exception of the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) and the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC), which fulfil statutory functions on behalf of the Victorian state government, other organisations contacted were not-for-profit research and policy organisations that represent CALD communities.⁷² They included:

- The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV), which has been a peak advocate for multicultural and ethnic organisations for over 40 years and it represents eight regional ethnic community councils and over 200 members, including ethnic and multicultural organisations in Victoria.⁷³
- The Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH), which is a national not-for-profit organisation 'run for and by women from immigrant and refugee communities' to support the rights and wellbeing of migrant and refugee women in Australia. It has 40 years of experience working with migrant and refugee women.⁷⁴
- The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY), which provides CALD youths (aged 12-25) with specialist support services and training programs. The CMY regularly shares expert knowledge on the settlement issues affecting young people of migrant and refugee backgrounds in Australia. It has had over 25 years' experience working with young people of CALD backgrounds.⁷⁵

A brief questionnaire was sent out by the authors and the following features of good practice CALD community engagement were drawn out from their responses, which are elaborated on further in this section:

- Make inquiries accessible;

⁷² On the functions of the VEC, see: Victorian Electoral Commission (2018) 'About', VEC website. On the functions of the VMC, see: *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011 (Vic) s 7(a)*. See also: Victorian Multicultural Commission (date unknown) 'About us', VMC website.

⁷³ Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (2017) *ECCV Submission to the Victorian Electoral Matters Committee on the Inquiry into civics and electoral participation*, submission to the Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee Inquiry into civics and electoral participation in Victorian state parliamentary elections, p. 1.

⁷⁴ Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (2018) 'About us', MCWH website.

⁷⁵ Centre for Multicultural Youth (2014) 'About us', CMY website.

- Facilitate meaningful participation;
- Recognise diversity within CALD communities and intersectionality;
- Work with CALD communities and co-design engagement strategies;
- Build capacity in CALD communities to participate;
- Develop trust and confidence between CALD communities and individuals in interacting with parliaments; and
- Build capacity in parliamentary committees with Members and staff trained in cultural awareness.

The views from these external organisations indicated that peak multicultural organisations could assist in developing best practice for parliaments in this area. Further, peak multicultural organisations are often consulted but parliaments could do more to engage directly with CALD individuals and groups.

Make inquiries accessible

Accessibility of information about the inquiry process for CALD communities was one of the primary issues identified by the organisations consulted. In their response, the ECCV wrote that CALD community leaders and individuals are often unaware of parliamentary inquiries or other government consultations taking place, as they can be ‘isolated from mainstream professional and social networks and media’.⁷⁶ They stated that there might not even be ‘an appreciation of the fact that input is often solicited by government or parliamentary bodies’.⁷⁷ Advertising in the ethnic media — print, online and radio — was considered standard practice across the organisations.

Ensuring accessibility is important at all stages of an inquiry. According to the MCWH, including and engaging people of non-English speaking backgrounds requires, at minimum, plain English versions of all materials explaining an inquiry’s purpose and process.⁷⁸ Ensuring physical accessibility and financial accessibility for people to access and participate in inquiries were also noted. The MCWH also stated that translated materials about inquiries need to be offered, and funding and time allocated to providing interpreter services. Interpreters should also be briefed about the process and the purpose of a parliamentary inquiry.⁷⁹ The CMY stated that young people of CALD backgrounds would benefit from information in plain English and in youth-friendly language to ‘demystify’ some of the issues raised by committees, as well as an investment in digital outreach strategies.⁸⁰ The ECCV noted that allowing evidence to be submitted in community languages would assist in making inquiries more accessible.⁸¹

Facilitate meaningful participation

Not all people of CALD backgrounds struggle to understand civic cultures and political systems in Australia, but there are some CALD groups that will require support to understand an inquiry’s purpose, its relevance, and to articulate their views. In these cases, the organisations considered it good practice for parliaments to consult recognised peak bodies with expert staff and practitioners who can facilitate meaningful participation for these groups.

⁷⁶ ECCV, response to questions, 9 August 2018.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ MCWH, response to questions, 22 August 2018.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ CMY, response to questions, 22 August 2018. See also: G. Caluya, T. Borovica and A. Yue (2018) *Culturally and Linguistically Diverse young people and digital citizenship*, report for the Centre for Multicultural Youth, Melbourne.

⁸¹ ECCV, response to questions, 9 August 2018.

In its response, the ECCV wrote that ‘all matters of public policy are of interest to people of non-English speaking backgrounds’.⁸² However, inquiries often focus on specific legislation or policy issues and small ethnic organisations ‘often have limited capacity or specific expertise (for example, legal knowledge) to participate in state and federal inquiries’ that are of potential interest and relevance.⁸³ The ECCV added that these organisations often do not have funded positions for policy or project officers who can engage with the public policy process.⁸⁴ The ECCV noted that practices such as government representatives visiting community organisations in their own locations, with consultations being recorded and written into reports by support staff, could assist in facilitating meaningful participation for some CALD groups.⁸⁵

The MCWH likewise noted similar strategies for the parliament to further engage and include CALD communities. Good practice would include, for example, holding language-specific community consultations facilitated by bilingual staff from peak organisations.⁸⁶

Recognise diversity within CALD communities and intersectionality

Organisations such as the MCWH highlighted how best-practice CALD community engagement means being mindful of the diversity of experiences and opinions within communities.⁸⁷ Most of the organisations consulted have represented CALD communities at state and federal parliamentary inquiries and at government meetings and forums. Despite this, the ECCV stated that, given the diversity of views and other potential divisions such as generational differences, peak bodies often ‘face the challenge of ensuring that the views of all community members are accurately received and represented’.⁸⁸

The peak organisations also advised of the need to be mindful of inequalities within communities. For example, women, seniors and young people are less likely to be in positions of authority and are less likely to be heard. The ECCV wrote that ‘individuals should be encouraged to provide input to consultations and inquiries if they feel that community leaders are not accurately reflecting their views’.⁸⁹ By identifying the barriers and challenges facing those made most vulnerable in our population, parliamentary committees could ‘identify the potential barriers and challenges facing everyone’.⁹⁰

The MCWH further advised that one of the features of best practice inclusion and engagement means taking an ‘intersectional approach’ to understanding the barriers experienced by migrant and refugee communities. An intersectional approach is about ‘going beyond explanations or solutions that use single categories to describe people or issues and acknowledging that we are shaped by many factors interacting together’.⁹¹ It emphasises that social inequality is not the result of a single factor (such as race or culture, or gender) but an outcome ‘of different social locations, power relations and

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ MCWH, response to questions, 22 August 2018.

⁸⁷ In their response, the MCWH drew attention to their recently published guide: Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health (2017) *Intersectionality matters: a guide to engaging immigrant and refugee communities to prevent violence against women*, guide prepared by J. Chen, Melbourne, p. 19.

⁸⁸ ECCV, response to questions, 9 August 2018.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ MCWH, response to questions, 22 August 2018.

⁹¹ Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health (2017) *Intersectionality matters: a guide to engaging immigrant and refugee communities to prevent violence against women*, op. cit., p. 6. See also: O. Hankivsky (2014) *Intersectionality 101*, The Institute for Intersectionality Research and Policy, SFU.

experiences'.⁹² Being aware of these concepts would assist committees in better engaging CALD communities including the more vulnerable groups in these communities.

Work with CALD communities and co-design engagement strategies

All of the organisations emphasised that working with CALD communities, including the recognised peak organisations, is vital to the long-term success of inclusion and engagement strategies. As the MCWH has written, it is important to 'respect the expertise and experience of the community itself in all stages of planning, implementation and evaluation'.⁹³

In its response, the VEC wrote that it has consulted relevant groups and formed partnerships within the community in order to develop its outreach and engagement strategies.⁹⁴ The VEC provided information about its range of community outreach services to reach CALD communities. For example, the VEC convenes a CALD Advisory Group consisting of government and non-government CALD workers and a number of individual community members, which meets twice yearly for direct input into the VEC's CALD education and inclusion program.⁹⁵ In their response, the VEC highlighted other recent examples of co-designed programs and resources, such as a CALD youth leadership project they have developed with the CMY and their Talking Democracy resource to support teachers of English-as-a-second-language, developed in partnership with Carringbush Adult Education.⁹⁶ The VEC also commissions research to understand the barriers for priority communities and identify other groups who need targeted assistance.⁹⁷

Build capability in CALD communities to participate

The organisations also stated that best practice inclusion and engagement strategies fundamentally aim to build capacity and capability in communities to participate independently. In their response, the CMY wrote that the young people they worked with, 'have, time and time again, articulated a desire to "have a say" in matters that affect their lives'.⁹⁸ The CMY's report on young people of CALD backgrounds and their participation in community life found that CALD young people who are actively involved in community life 'overwhelmingly' value opportunities to be heard, friendships with like-minded people, and developing leadership skills as well as gaining experiences that will help them in the future.⁹⁹ The report recommended that 'inclusive and relevant opportunities' are needed at the local level for CALD young people to interact with, and gain a deeper understanding of, formal politics in Australia.¹⁰⁰ The organisations noted that experiences of discrimination are also likely to be a barrier for many people of CALD backgrounds in taking on leadership roles and opportunities in the community.

Creating opportunities and roles that enable learning through participation could support CALD communities to become more involved in civic processes, such as parliamentary inquiries. A primary example of this can be found in the VEC's education and inclusion services including its Democracy

⁹² O. Hankivsky, (2014), op. cit., cited in Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH) (2017) *Intersectionality matters: a guide to engaging immigrant and refugee communities to prevent violence against women*, guide prepared by Jasmin Chen, Melbourne, p. 5.

⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 12.

⁹⁴ VEC, response to questions, 21 August 2018.

⁹⁵ Victorian Electoral Commission (2018) '[Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities](#)', VEC website.

⁹⁶ VEC, response to questions, 21 August 2018.

⁹⁷ See, for example: N. Despott (2017) *Electoral Inclusion: Rights, Barriers and Global Campaign Strategies for Voters with Intellectual Disability*, Inclusion Melbourne. This paper is available at: VEC (2018) '[Research and position papers](#)', VEC website.

⁹⁸ CMY, response to questions, 22 August 2018.

⁹⁹ Centre for Multicultural Youth (2014) *Active citizenship, participation and belonging: young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in Victoria*, Melbourne, CMY, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 5.

Ambassador Program, aimed at building capability in CALD communities by training individuals in those communities to assist people in their communities to understand the electoral system and vote. This program has been found to improve political literacy and reduce informal votes in CALD communities.¹⁰¹

Develop trust and confidence

In their response, the MCWH stated that sometimes the greatest barriers for CALD communities when it comes to working with or participating in parliamentary inquiries and government consultation are ‘insufficiently developed relationships and trust between parliament and communities’, which can lead to ‘uncertainty about the purpose or outcomes of the inquiries’ for communities.¹⁰² The common result, according to the MCWH, are ‘repercussions for people contributing information to the inquiries’ due to ‘unclear or poorly managed expectations about the process and/or results from participating’.¹⁰³

The need to build trust and confidence in the community to contribute to and participate in inquiries, and other government consultation meetings and forums, was also reiterated by the staff of the Office of the Victorian Multicultural Commission (OVMC). The VMC functions as the ‘main link’ between culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse communities in Victoria and government.¹⁰⁴ Staff of the OVMC advised that building and maintaining trust in the community, through the VMC’s community engagement, has been vital for their work and capacity to meet the VMC’s functions and objectives. One staff member explained: ‘they [CALD community representatives] trust us to take the information that they’re giving us to Government’ and to feed outcomes back to community.¹⁰⁵ Another staff member stated that the VMC is in many ways a ‘trusted brand’ in Victoria’s multicultural community and across Victoria generally.¹⁰⁶

Build capability and cultural awareness in committees

The ECCV noted that some CALD groups will have had negative experiences when engaging with public authorities, and that parliamentarians and staff may not be cognisant of this fact.¹⁰⁷ The ECCV recommended that parliamentarians and staff could receive cultural competency training in order to effectively engage these communities.¹⁰⁸ Besides receiving rich and varied perspectives, which can strengthen the work of committees, improving and deepening engagement with CALD communities and individuals can assist an organisation to develop greater awareness of issues around inclusion and cultural diversity, which can benefit the organisation on the whole.

Summary

Working collaboratively with CALD communities, and providing access to cultural awareness training for parliamentarians and staff, can support CALD engagement and inclusion strategies in committee work. Communicating outcomes and acknowledging input are also important features of engaging

¹⁰¹ VEC (2018) ‘[Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities](#)’, op. cit.; W. Gately AM, Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission (2017) *Submission to Victorian Parliament Inquiry into civics and electoral participation*, Attachment 1, submission to the Parliament of Victoria, Electoral Matters Committee Inquiry into civics and electoral participation in Victorian state parliamentary elections, p. 34.

¹⁰² MCWH, response to questions 22 August 2018.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Victorian Multicultural Commission (2018) ‘[About us](#)’, VMC website.

¹⁰⁵ E. Blades-Hamilton, cited in T. O’Hea, Manager of Research and Policy & E. Blades-Hamilton, Senior Research and Policy Officer, Victorian Multicultural Commission (2018), interview with Pamie Fung, Melbourne, 11 July, transcript, p. 10.

¹⁰⁶ T. O’Hea, cited in *ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁷ ECCV, response to questions, 9 August 2018.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

CALD communities for parliamentary committees.¹⁰⁹ The organisations consulted further noted that engaging in follow-up consultation with stakeholders after an inquiry is over and evaluating the effectiveness of any new strategies would underpin best practice engagement strategies.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Drawn from: Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health (MCWH) (2017) *Intersectionality matters: a guide to engaging immigrant and refugee communities to prevent violence against women*, op. cit., p. 13.

¹¹⁰ J. Houghton, Policy Officer, Ethnic Communities’ Council of Victoria (2018), correspondence with Pamie Fung, 15 August.

Conclusion and future directions

There are many benefits for parliaments, as well as for CALD communities and society, when parliamentary committees are able to include diverse voices and perspectives. Many Australian parliaments have begun the work of engaging diverse and underrepresented communities, but there is room to develop more comprehensive guidelines and strategies. While there has been more development in engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and people living with disabilities, during inquiries — largely due to the inquiry topics themselves — the responsiveness and creativity displayed by parliamentary committees and their staff have been exemplary in some instances.

CALD communities are intrinsically diverse and it is likely that a range of strategies will be required to effectively engage CALD community organisations and individuals on the work of parliamentary committees, moving forward. Some of the suggestions proposed by other parliaments and stakeholders include:

- Develop translated information about the work of parliamentary committees in languages other than English that are accessible and relevant to CALD communities, and engage CALD and multicultural communities to ensure access to this information.
- Fund and develop the option to employ qualified interpreters and translators to support CALD communities and individuals during inquiries and ensure that best practice interpreting and translating guidelines are met.
- Develop and publish best practice guidelines for committee Members and staff engaging CALD communities and individuals during parliamentary inquiries, following consultation with recognised peak multicultural organisations and CALD community leaders.
- Investigate options for cultural awareness training and cultural competency training that are delivered to parliamentary staff and Members of Parliament on committees.
- Investigate the potential to design and deliver education sessions for CALD community representatives and groups about parliamentary inquiries (this includes developing visual material illustrating the key stages of an inquiry, the potential of inviting CALD members to attend ‘mock’ public hearings, as well as workshops for CALD communities and relevant peak and ethnic organisations to learn how to write effective submissions).
- Share developments across parliaments in Australia. Establishing an inter-parliamentary working group on CALD inclusion to share good practices and innovative ideas would benefit all parliaments. The responses to the survey sent out to Australian parliaments indicated that there is deep interest in learning from each other.

There is much work to do to engage underrepresented communities during parliamentary inquiries. Establishing clear stages, actions and outcomes, as well as managing community expectations and maintaining flexibility, will be vital for parliaments. Ensuring that CALD communities who are experiencing the barriers outlined in this paper can access parliaments and participate during parliamentary inquiries supports democratic decision-making. By implementing strategies to engage CALD communities, parliaments can also help make the work of committees more accessible and better understood in the wider community.

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