



# MULTICULTURAL ACCESS AND EQUITY REPORT

2020





FECCA IS THE PEAK, NATIONAL MULTICULTURAL BODY REPRESENTING AUSTRALIANS FROM CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS. FECCA'S ROLE IS TO ADVOCATE AND PROMOTE ISSUES ON BEHALF OF ITS CONSTITUENCY TO GOVERNMENT, BUSINESS, AND THE BROADER COMMUNITY.

FECCA STRIVES TO ENSURE THAT THE NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS OF AUSTRALIANS FROM DIVERSE CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC BACKGROUNDS ARE GIVEN PROPER RECOGNITION IN PUBLIC POLICY.

WE WORK TO PROMOTE FAIRNESS AND RESPONSIVENESS TO OUR CONSTITUENCY IN THE DELIVERY AND DESIGN OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS. WE PROMOTE MULTICULTURALISM AS A CORE VALUE THAT DEFINES WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AUSTRALIAN IN THE 21ST CENTURY.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2020 Access and Equity Report of the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) gives an update on the experiences of people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds on accessing government services. Community voices are essential in improving services for all Australians and even more important for people from CALD backgrounds who may experience additional challenges in accessing services.

The Commonwealth Government's Multicultural Access and Equity Policy recognises these challenges and seeks to address them through six core commitments—Leadership, Engagement, Responsiveness, Performance, Capability and Openness. The community input collected and analysed by FECCA has been structured around these six commitments.

This report is divided into two sections. The first section compiles community perspectives on access and equity in relation to the six commitments. The second section looks in more detail into two areas identified during FECCA consultations as important for CALD communities across Australia—accessing employment and pathways to permanency.

Two themes emerged from analysing the 2020 Access and Equity findings:

1. The importance of government coordinating with multicultural peak bodies and multicultural and ethnic community organisations.
2. The importance of cultural competency at all levels of government departments and agencies, including in outsourced services.

Throughout the report, there is a crosscutting theme of CALD communities' experiences of government services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As with all crises, the pandemic has exacerbated and highlighted existing gaps and weaknesses in government systems. This provides an opportunity for all of us to better understand what these issues are and how to fix them—both for future crises and everyday life for all Australians.

FECCA wishes to thank our members in Northern Territory, Queensland, Western Australia, Victoria and Tasmania for their assistance, advice and support in writing this report:

- Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory (MCNT)
- Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (ECCQ)
- Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia (ECCWA)
- Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV)
- Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District
- Multicultural Council of Tasmania (MCoT)

FECCA is also grateful to everyone who took the time to answer the Access and Equity survey and the people across Australia who attended consultations and shared their stories and experiences with FECCA staff.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Multicultural Access and Equity policy should better articulate the expected outcomes that each of the core commitments and themes should deliver for people from CALD backgrounds.
2. Ensure the production of FECCA Multicultural Access and Equity reports is adequately funded to allow for a broad reach and inclusion of all CALD communities in Australia.

## Leadership

3. Implement effective mechanisms to ensure collaboration and referrals/links between government services.
4. Value the 'navigator role' of multicultural organisations and individual advocates by ensuring adequate support.
5. Establish a CALD Taskforce to assess the Government's COVID-19 response to inform community planning and service implementation as part of the response to and recovery from COVID-19. (Note: In December 2020 a National CALD COVID-19 Health Advisory Group was established)

## Engagement

6. Ensure a two-way engagement strategy to make sure communication is effective and understood as intended.
7. Develop and maintain relationships with multicultural/community organisations to facilitate connections with communities and community leaders.

## Responsiveness

8. Adapt to the diversity of clients by devoting time to a person-centred approach including face-to-face services and promote inclusion.
9. Ensure translations suit all clients and are tested with a group of community members (community testing) that are relevant to the target group who speak the language to ensure that the level of language is appropriate and cultural factors have been considered.
10. Ensure appropriate interpreting services allowing for suitable understanding of complex issues, anonymity and language nuance.
11. Introduce TIS information to new migrants and refugees through AMEP, settlement services and other sources.
12. To be responsive, the Government must fund:
  - engagement with communities to understand barriers and gaps
  - community and multicultural/ethnic organisations
  - face-to-face interaction
  - bilingual workers
  - data collection
  - inter-department/agency coordination
  - appropriate and community tested translations
  - appropriate interpreting services allowing for suitable understanding and anonymity.
13. The Government should learn from users of JobActive services and develop flexible programs responding to the diversity within CALD communities.

14. Appropriate procedures must be in place to ensure multicultural access and equity principles at all levels of outsourced services, including proper reporting mechanisms to measure impact.
15. Ensure the Government has a clear overview on who it has employed to do the job.

### **Performance**

16. Ensure FECCA's checklist (see figure 1) for CALD friendly feedback and complaints mechanisms is followed and promoted to all government departments and agencies.
17. Encourage co-designing key performance indicators with the target groups.
18. Involve communities in the design, implementation and measuring of performance during business as usual (BAU) as well as during crisis.
19. The Government must seek to collaborate and engage with ethnic and multicultural organisations when consulting with smaller community groups to avoid over consultations and facilitate feedback from the Government to said community groups and when appropriate, consider remuneration for consultations according to the Remuneration Tribunal (<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2020C00847>).
20. Continue to incorporate representative bodies as advisory to departments.

### **Capability**

21. CALD data standards should be revised to better capture the complexity of multiculturalism in Australia and the revised data standards should be consistently used by all Commonwealth, state and territory government departments and agencies.
22. These disaggregated data collected by agencies must be available externally for the purposes of analysis and research.
23. General population surveys must ensure that sampling methodologies and collected data are inclusive of people from CALD backgrounds in order to be representative of the Australian population as a whole.
24. Cultural competency training for all staff, including leadership and proper reporting mechanisms, to ensure multicultural access and equity principles are found at all levels of service delivery.

### **Openness**

25. Reinvigorate the access and equity policy with a stronger emphasis on expected outcomes ensuring that people from CALD backgrounds and organisations are included at each stage of the process.
26. Ensure openness by making access and equity policies and reporting publicly available.

### **Employment**

27. Commit to and fund culturally appropriate services for migrants and refugees seeking employment including resume information, support and guidance.
28. Develop information for employers to better understand what diverse experience and skills are and how they can add to their business.

### **Pathway to Permanency**

29. The Government must ensure open, clear, consistent and timely information to applicants for permanent residency and family reunion.
30. The Government must process applications within a reasonable timeframe to ensure people are given fair treatment and an opportunity to plan a future.
31. The Department of Home Affairs must provide a response to the recommendations in this report.







# INTRODUCTION

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is the peak body representing people living in Australia from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. FECCA works to ensure the needs and aspirations of people from CALD backgrounds are given proper recognition in public policy, and to promote fairness and responsiveness to our constituency in the delivery and design of government policies and programs.

The 2016 Census<sup>1</sup> revealed that 49 per cent of Australians had either been born overseas or had one or both parents born overseas, with over 300 ancestries separately identified. Three hundred separately identified languages were recorded as being spoken in Australian homes, with 21 per cent of Australians speaking a language other than English at home.

For a successful multicultural nation to thrive and develop, it is essential that access to and equity of government services is independent of cultural or linguistic background. In the context of Australia's increasing diversity, access and equity is more important than ever in ensuring that individuals can actively and equally participate in and contribute to their communities, and are able to fully engage in a fair and inclusive society.

In compiling this report, FECCA held consultations with CALD community members, conducted interviews with FECCA's member organisations and collected further input through a public, online survey. As well as these specific information sources, this report is informed by FECCA's recent research and ongoing day-to-day work alongside Australia's multicultural communities.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0-2016-Main%20Features-Cultural%20Diversity%20Data%20Summary-30>

# PART 1: COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES ON THE CORE COMMITMENTS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S MULTICULTURAL ACCESS AND EQUITY POLICY

FECCA has deep ties to multicultural Australia through its member organisations in each state and territory as well as several regional centres, and their extensive networks of local community organisation members. FECCA and its members represent and work alongside the millions of people who make up multicultural Australia—people from hundreds of different cultures, language groups and faiths; people still waiting to become Australians; and families who have now called Australia home for multiple generations. As such, FECCA is uniquely placed to provide feedback on CALD people's different experiences in accessing government services.

Although COVID-19 prevented FECCA from completing the full schedule of planned community consultations in 2020, the organisation has been able to capture substantial community perspectives, feedback and case studies from multicultural Australia.

In 2019, FECCA conducted regular consultations directly with communities across Australia, and in the first half of 2020 FECCA held in-depth interviews with our members and other stakeholders working in the areas of settlement, migration and refugee support. FECCA also undertook its annual online survey on access and equity to government services.

This community feedback has been compiled and analysed against the six core multicultural access and equity commitments outlined by the Australian Government for all departments and agencies. Where possible, FECCA has also included case studies to better illustrate and personalise the key themes raised by multicultural Australia.

It should be noted that most of the themes relate to internal government processes and are therefore difficult to directly monitor or assess through community experiences of services. Linking the commitments and themes to outcomes for people from CALD backgrounds in Australia would improve the

usefulness of this report and, more importantly, could also enhance the overall effectiveness of the Multicultural Access and Equity Policy.

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**RECOMMENDATION 1:**  
The Multicultural Access and Equity policy should better articulate the expected outcomes that each of the core commitments and themes should deliver for people from CALD backgrounds.

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Embedded in each section is information about the CALD experiences of government services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given that the pandemic is both recent and ongoing, it is not possible to provide a complete picture of the impacts and learnings from COVID-19. However, FECCA hopes that the information and stories collected help to improve the Government's crisis response and highlight some gaps that need to be addressed regardless of the current crisis.

It is important to acknowledge that as well as the constraints due to COVID-19, the ability of FECCA to capture a wide and deep range of responses has been limited by the resources required for community consultations, including translations and interpreters. Most consultations, interviews and the survey were only able to be conducted in English and as such the voices of new and emerging communities do not feature as strongly as more established communities.

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**RECOMMENDATION 2:**  
Ensure the production of FECCA Multicultural Access and Equity report is adequately funded to allow for a broad reach and inclusion of all CALD communities in Australia.

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## 1.1. Leadership

### KEY THEMES

Commit to forward planning on how to achieve multicultural access and equity objectives across the organisation—for example through a distinct multicultural access and equity planning tool.

Establish internal governance processes to monitor delivery of multicultural access and equity objectives—for example a reference group or steering committee.

Create an internal network of contact officers to help identify and respond to multicultural access and equity concerns

The Government's ability to perform well and deliver appropriate services for people from CALD backgrounds relies on leadership at all levels in departments and agencies. Strong leadership ensures access and equity objectives are genuinely embraced throughout the internal and external systems of agencies and departments—including from top-level decision making to online services and face-to-face ground staff.

As such, leadership on access and equity can be considered the underlying determinant to every positive or negative outcome experienced by CALD people interacting with government services.

Although it is difficult to identify specific CALD experiences that relate directly to quality of leadership, FECCA has decided to focus on people's experiences of inter-agency communication and coordination as this was a recurring theme through all consultations. Additionally, this section will look at what effective leadership and decision-making means when responding to a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has meant that leadership and coordination was tested. While the FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey did not include questions on experiences of government services during the COVID-19 pandemic, survey responses, consultations with FECCA members, extensive media attention, as well as an increase in emails to FECCA from people representing CALD communities calling for support in understanding messages from government, demonstrated a need for a true analysis of leadership and coordination during BAU in order to be prepared for times of crisis. FECCA can report heightened levels of stress, misunderstandings and confusion during the COVID-19 pandemic among Australia's diverse communities—much of which can be attributed to a lack of coordination.



### 1.1.1. Coordination Across Government Agencies

Leadership through effective coordination across government departments and agencies is essential in ensuring successful service delivery. Effective coordination can guarantee clients are aware of all services available and where/how to access them. It also means that departments and agencies are aware of the nature of their clients and how to best accommodate the diverse needs that exist in communities.

Over the past decade, through FECCA's reporting on access and equity, there has been a consistent call for less confusing service delivery and a stronger coordination between departments. Respondents to the FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey commented on government departments working in silos and not necessarily collaborating or 'talking to each other'. Respondents called for streamlined services where they could go and get the answers they needed or be referred to the appropriate service. Collaboration between departments and agencies is particularly important for people who have been through traumatic experiences in the past. As mentioned by one survey respondent, having to tell their stories multiple times to a variety of departments and/or agencies only exacerbates people's trauma.

**Departments don't talk to another—people are retraumatized by retelling their stories...there are valuable networks who genuinely work for their communities—government agencies should engage and help those people.**

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

**Services are not user friendly, there are silos in government. Particularly in disability services there is a culture that if they refer you elsewhere, you will go off in a tangent and give up in frustration. Quality of coordination and advice needs to be measured. There needs to be accountability of quality of services and control.**

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

FECCA heard during consultations that people were confused about which services and benefits exist and what is available to them, including finding the information they needed. FECCA also heard that constant changes in programs and names of Departments made it even more confusing, such as the change from Department of Human Services to Services Australia and NewStart to JobSeeker. People noted how this brings even more confusion and that it was 'irresponsible of the Government' to keep changing the names of services. People were often left confused as to which services offered what and how to access the correct services according to their needs.

**Not easy [to access information], there is a lack of information available in other languages, there is a mixed up of information, there is no one place to find information and officers usually have no consistent information, no cultural awareness, needs proper staff training.**

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

Previous FECCA access and equity reports have also reported on confusion and lack of clarity regarding service provision and what responsibilities were delegated to various departments (FECCA 2014 Access and Equity Report). The 2014 report noted a level of stress among participants related to services that seemed to 'handball people through the system, leaving them confused, or even forcing them to give up'. An overriding theme in the 2015 Access and Equity Report was the need for stronger coordination between government agencies to streamline and improve the delivery of services government-wide.

Following on with the same concerns in the 2020 survey, one respondent noted how provision of information could be better facilitated if the coordination between departments and agencies was improved. Several respondents offered similar solutions relating to streamlining services and simplified avenues to services. While the MyGov Portal (as a one-stop portal) was not discussed in detail, respondents were asking for a physical place to go to get information face-to-face rather than online. As noted in both the

2014 and 2015 Access and Equity Reports, despite positive feedback regarding the MyGov system, people explained a need to improve its accessibility, noting the need for skills and technology, access to translated information, clear advertising of translating and interpreting services, as well as comments on MyGov being complex and time consuming, and concerns regarding what data was collected and used by MyGov.

**Simplify avenues to access services; have a one-stop shop with trained and respectful staff to answer and help people through their enquiries; perhaps need trained interpreters on call.**

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

FECCA heard that many people from CALD backgrounds, in particular newer arrivals, depend on family and friends to learn about available services. Yet it is important to remember that many arrivals to Australia do not have established networks or connections to the community and are reliant on open, clear and appropriate service provision to avoid missing out on services or receiving the wrong information.

As will be noted throughout this report, accessible, simplified, and streamlined services were highlighted both among those who had been in Australia over extended periods of time as well as newer arrivals. Additionally, a general result from the 2020 survey and all previous FECCA Access and Equity Reports was that while government coordination and leadership is important to avoid confusion and feelings of hopelessness, much of this confusion can be solved by experiences of respect and friendliness when interacting with frontline staff. This is explored further in the Capability section.

**Often the bureaucratic confusion can be simplified by knowing there's a supportive person at hand to assist.**

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

Coordination across government services was, for both survey respondents and community organisations, essential to ensure appropriate and effective service provision to CALD communities.

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### **RECOMMENDATION 3:**

**Implement effective mechanisms to ensure collaboration and referrals/ links between government services.**

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#### **1.1.2. Effective Leadership and Collaboration with Multicultural Stakeholders**

Effective leadership must recognise the importance of high-level collaboration with stakeholders who can represent diverse communities in policy development and programs.

This engagement is always important, but crucial when the diversity of Australian society is not reflected within the leadership structures of a department or agency. Important efforts by government departments and agencies to hold consultations with multicultural/ethnic community groups and community outreach can become tokenistic and ineffective if multicultural priorities and perspectives are not embedded in decision making and planning structures. To facilitate effective engagement and provide this ongoing voice to government, multicultural organisations must be adequately funded.

FECCA's member in Darwin, the Multicultural Council of Northern Territory (MCNT), demonstrates the ineffectiveness of their job when coordination between government, multicultural organisations and other stakeholders is missing.

## CASE STUDY

A client was in contact with the Multicultural Council of Northern Territory (MCNT) via the Passport to Drive Program MCNT runs for migrants and refugees in Darwin. The client's hands are impaired due to being attacked during the war in her home country. While the impairment is not visible, she struggles with extensive pain when using her hands over a period of time. Despite this, she managed to pass the practical test and received her L-plate from the Motor Vehicle Registry (MVR). She then came to attend the Passport to Drive classes where MCNT staff quickly realised the client would be eligible for modified car and extra assistance when driving. MCNT noted various degrees of miscommunication—or limited information—to the client with regards to her eligibility which led to confusion and stress for the client. The lack of information about the clients' needs and disability to MCNT together with the levels of stress for the client also led to extra work for MCNT staff. It was a time-consuming process trying to find more information about the client and her rights related to assistance during driving. The client was very eager to get started with her driving to start her life in Australia. Living in a regional area means that you are dependent on being able to drive to access services, see friends, visit the doctor and other essential activities to connect with the community.

The client was also eligible to see an occupational therapist—which would be a big cost for the client without support. The lack of awareness of these services and her rights to them caused unnecessary stress and workload. MCNT never received any information about the client from any of the other services she had been involved with. They also did not know what information had been provided to the client about her rights. The MVR does not seem to have an obligation to chase up the matter and had also not received the necessary information.

While MCNT needed to spend time chasing up information, the client had to wait and was unable to gain her independence and be part of the community in Darwin. MCNT staff noted how refugees arriving in Australia have dreams and aspirations but they often do not know what options they have in a new country. Things are often not clearly explained to them to make the process of settlement and starting their new lives easy. This woman was very anxious and determined to get started with driving to become more independent while confused about available services. Early in her settlement, she was not asked whether her plan was to one day drive and therefore did not think of that becoming an issue. According to MCNT, there is a failure somewhere but with limited information it is impossible to say where exactly the missing link is.

'It would be nice if the path was easier. It would be nice if there was better coordination and if, for example, MCNT could get information about their clients from the Department of Health or other departments that are involved with the client since arrival. Currently there is no information available and MCNT staff rely on their own work to find any information about the client.'

There were multiple organisations involved with the settlement of this client, but no coordination between them—no information-flow between the different organisations or from the department. This should have been essential for new arrivals who must interact with several organisations and departments, especially for a woman with interwoven health issues. MCNT did not know whether the client had ever had a medical assessment and these are issues that make it difficult to help the client.



FECCA's own experience, as well as the experiences of member organisations during COVID-19, has highlighted the need for departments and agencies to prioritise strategic engagement with representative multicultural organisations.

The second wave of COVID-19 that emerged in Victoria brought attention to the importance of engaging with multicultural communities. However, FECCA was told that even when attempting to correct the gaps, more mistakes were made. There was a focus and over reliance by government agencies and departments on 'community volunteers', and an insufficient increase in genuine collaboration with established multicultural organisations. This suggests a continued lack of understanding within government of what meaningful coordination with multicultural Australia entails. Ad hoc discussions with individual CALD Australians or even with individual community leaders and the utilisation of these as volunteers (when there are few CALD staff within an organisation) cannot replace incorporating CALD perspectives, including representative bodies, into all levels of government decision making.



## CASE STUDY

Following the COVID-related lockdown of the towers in Melbourne, community agencies were contracted by the government to provide support and material assistance to tower residents. However, established specialised multicultural service providers were overlooked and instead the contracts were given to larger service providers whose focus is on mainstream Australia. These service providers have very limited cultural competency and almost no existing links to the communities affected.

This meant they had to rely heavily on 'community volunteers' from the towers. This approach quickly became tokenistic and ineffective as the volunteers were not able to meaningfully input into the planning of the service providers at an early enough stage. Further, this placed the volunteers in an uncomfortable, unfair and potentially dangerous position of having to be the community face of government policies and services that they had no control over. As volunteers, not only were they not being fairly compensated for this work but there were no organisational support and structures in place to help them navigate the complex situation they had been placed in.

As a result of the failings of this approach, much of the support and service delivery to the residents of the towers continued to be provided by small community organisations and volunteer groups who are not funded by the government but are much better placed to know exactly what is needed.

During a crisis, multicultural, ethnic and community organisations are the natural place for CALD people to go, a place where they already have trust, and often a place where there are bilingual workers and people who know the community well. These organisations can mobilise staff and community members quickly to engage the community.

**There needs to be better investment in supporting people to navigate the system, rather than putting up barriers to reduce engagement/disenfranchise citizens.**

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

Currently, as demonstrated in this section, there is limited collaboration and coordination between government departments and agencies, and between government and multicultural community organisations. Instead, people rely on their community, advocates or navigators to get the required information.

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#### **RECOMMENDATION 4:**

**Value the 'navigator' role of multicultural organisations and individual advocates by ensuring adequate support.**

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Developing effective coordination mechanisms during business as usual becomes essential when a crisis happens. When a crisis occurs, without appropriate coordination and collaboration, issues can turn into emergencies. Examples of leadership and coordination during times of crisis must be considered and incorporated into practice.

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#### **RECOMMENDATION 5:**

**Establish a CALD Taskforce to assess Government COVID-19 response to inform community planning and service implementation as part of Government's response and recovery from COVID-19 (Note: In December 2020 a National CALD COVID-19 Health Advisory Group was established)**

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## 1.2. Engagement

### KEY THEMES

Consider a range of communication techniques to engage with clients from different backgrounds, including the use of information in language other than English and plain English.

Clear guidelines for when and how staff should use translating and interpreting services.

Consult with CALD communities at all stages in policy design, planning, delivery and evaluation.

Establish a forum for engaging with multicultural access and equity target groups, including peak bodies and/or community leaders—also use to disseminate information to the wider community.

Use consultative networks and communication channels other departments and agencies may have already.

Where appropriate, include people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds on advisory and review bodies.

Engagement is about ensuring effective communication and interaction between government departments and agencies and diverse community groups and other stakeholders. Engagement must be two way to create an understanding of how service delivery processes impact on accessibility. It is about developing programs through co-design, about consultations and representation through appropriate programs and outreach, including in languages other than English and in plain English when needed. Engagement is also about ensuring appropriate decision making in policy as well as input in program development based on feedback from communities and stakeholders.

An understanding of people's experiences with service provision and their interaction with frontline staff can aid in developing effective communication techniques. Effective communication implies a deep knowledge and understanding of clients to decide on the best possible way to communicate programs and services. This includes engaging with community members, leaders, community organisations and other stakeholders involved with CALD communities daily.

Clients from diverse backgrounds can face a range of challenges in accessing information about services if these mainstream services are not suitable for a diverse population. A complicated system without links between siloed services will hinder easily accessible services and information. If information provision does not cater for those with languages other than English, a large group of the Australian population will miss out on important information concerning their rights to necessary services. New arrivals to Australia can also experience low levels of trust towards the Government, limited access to digital services and possibly low literacy levels, which makes the Government's ability to listen to and understand diverse communities and their challenges essential.

This section explores community experiences through survey responses as well as FECCA consultations with CALD communities and FECCA members relating to people's knowledge of and access to information about services.



Information provision to all communities in Australia has been of particular importance during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Again, while there were no specific questions on this crisis in the 2020 survey due to timing, FECCA received a number of requests, messages and information during the pandemic to understand better how Australia's CALD communities accessed and experienced the information provision during this difficult time. FECCA has also heard from members and other stakeholders and presents some of the findings from these discussions at the end of this section.

### 1.2.1. Communicating government information

A large part of the feedback to the 2020 Access and Equity Survey noted how personalised engagement with staff increased people's experiences of departments and agencies, and their understanding of the information given. Positive engagement between community groups and agencies is essential to ensure diverse community groups build a positive relationship with government. While information in language and plain English is important to reach CALD communities, so is the use of a wider range of communication platforms.

FECCA heard a range of different views on the accessibility of information about government services. Analysis of the responses collected through consultations, interviews and survey shows an unsurprising link between English language proficiency and time spent in Australia with how accessible respondents found government information.

**To be able to live, you need to be able to have information which can be understood and easy to access.**

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

Many CALD people, especially new arrivals, are overwhelmed by the need to absorb large amounts of information and navigate multiple government processes simultaneously to live in Australia.

FECCA 2020 survey respondents noted a range of factors that impacted on their efforts in accessing government information:

**You tend to stumble across information. You encounter a challenge and someone might point you in the right direction. It is quite confusing.**

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

**Clearer, more consistent and more effective communication. Messages and information are still quite confusing.**

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

**You must know how and where to access information about services from, which is a problem**

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

There is a myriad of factors that make this process more difficult. These include:

- information is only available online
- information is only available within an English-only government website
- there are multiple sources of official information that provide conflicting instructions
- official information conflicts with community messages or cultural practices.

Other factors can help in making the process of accessing and understanding the amount of information less difficult:

- information in plain English
- translated information that uses the correct dialect, accent, tone and cultural nuance
- information that is understandable by people with low levels of education or who are illiterate including using symbols when relevant
- available information in trusted places that people from CALD backgrounds already use

- culturally appropriate channels for people to ask questions or seek clarifications about official information
- information provided either in language and/or by culturally competent staff.

FECCA understands that appropriately translated information is an essential first step, however it is only the beginning of effectively communicating and engaging with CALD communities. A much greater challenge is ensuring that communication and engagement frameworks are built that offer multiple points of connection between government and people from CALD backgrounds. These frameworks must be designed alongside people from CALD backgrounds and organisations, and they must be designed to offer a two-way relationship.

Overall, the current approach by government to communicating with people from CALD backgrounds in Australia shows a lack of understanding of the diversity within these communities, and the various ways that people find, process and respond to information.

This deficit has been dramatically highlighted through the COVID-19 response. Although hundreds of documents containing government information about COVID-19 have been translated, it has become apparent through community reporting to FECCA that many CALD people in Australia have not been able to properly access that information. The COVID-19 response has highlighted the tendency for government agencies and departments to consider that their role in communicating with CALD communities begins and ends with translated materials.

During this crisis, FECCA members across Australia have played an integral role of information provision to CALD communities in their regions. FECCA members know their communities, their needs and how to reach them. These trusted relationships have been built over decades allowing FECCA members to support their communities during such crises.

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**RECOMMENDATION 6:**  
 Ensure a two-way engagement strategy to make sure communication is effective and understood as intended.

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## 1.2.2 Engagement with Community Stakeholders

Community organisations play a role that cannot be replicated by government. Community organisations have trust, respect and a cultural understanding of their clients—these are important elements to use and strengthen.

Factors that emerged in the 2019-2020 survey and consultations with community groups across Australia included the important role of trust, familiarity, experiences of welcome and positive responses to their concerns. Many of the respondents mentioned migrant resource centres and other community organisations as a focal point where they could learn about necessary and available services and receive assistance and support. It was noted among many of the 2020 survey respondents that use of local community organisations should be encouraged as this would be the 'natural' place for many to go and seek information and support. Successful government leadership must recognise the value of collaborating with migrant resource centres, ethnic/multicultural community organisations and other community organisations to ensure vital information reaches the communities. Communication has not been achieved unless the information has reached the entire community and been understood as intended.

In engaging and communicating with people and communities from CALD backgrounds, governments must value the hard work and genuine engagement by community organisations with community leaders over time. With the current limited coordination across government services, ethnic (multicultural/ethnic) community organisations are often the ones assisting clients to navigate and engage.

## CASE STUDY

A client, her husband and two female children migrated to Australia on a refugee visa (Subclass 201) in 2015. They had lived in a refugee camp in Zambia for 16 years after fleeing civil war in their original country, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In 2019, the client accessed the service of the Citizenship Education and Employment Program, one of a range of services provided by Multicultural Council of the NT (MCNT) to people from multicultural backgrounds residing in the NT.

The program assists clients who have limited English literacy and computer skills to complete their Australian citizenship application electronically through 'ImmiAccount' on the Department of Home Affairs website. The client and her family encountered a slight difficulty during the process of completing their citizenship application form because their visa documentation was missing the 13-digit visa grant number required to complete a valid application. To resolve this issue, a MCNT citizenship program officer called the Immigration Helpline (131 881) and connected the client to a consultant in the citizenship helpline section. She identified herself correctly and was given her 13 digit visa grant number which enabled the application process to be completed.

After the client's citizenship application process was completed, she expressed her gratitude for the assistance rendered to her stating that she and her family would not ordinarily have the capacity to complete this process without this service. The phone assistance she received through the Immigration Helpline was swiftly facilitated which saved her the time and the hassle of finding out her 13-digit visa grant number by herself.

Despite finding her experience of MCNT's citizenship program and the Immigration Helpline very useful, she observed that the processing time for citizenship applications was a long process and recommended a shorter processing time of less than a year instead of 18 to 27 months.

People will seek information in a place they already know, where they know the staff, where they know they can get support in their language, where they have received support previously and know someone is there to help them. This is particularly important for new arrivals whose English skills and community contacts may be limited. Those who had lived in Australia for longer also noted how they benefited from receiving information from their local settlement services, multicultural/ethnic community organisations, or other community

organisations, community leaders and family/friends. People's easy access to community organisations and familiarity with their services highlighted the need for government to utilise these important information hubs for effective coordination and information sharing targeting CALD populations. Local community groups are also experienced as less threatening for many and a place where staff already know the challenges and issues people from CALD backgrounds face.





## CASE STUDY

A client was referred to MCNT by Catholic Care with an enquiry on behalf of a client. The client's parents were Australian citizens but have been living outside of Australia for an extended period. They had returned to Australia to take care of their daughter post partnership breakup and post birth complications. The client wanted assistance about reinstating her mother's pension. The young lady had just had a baby and suffered complications, so was in and out of hospital.

The client did not know where to get help and her parents were not mobile due to old age and lack of driving skills. They relied solely upon their daughter to take them to appointments. This was a great burden to the daughter and in her present state she was struggling to accommodate all their needs.

MCNT referred her to the Centrelink Multicultural Services Officer. The Centrelink Multicultural Services Officer contacted the woman and provided her with detailed insights about her parents' issue and advised her accordingly.

Catholic Care and the client concerned contacted MCNT and stated that they were delighted with the service that the Centrelink Multicultural Services Officer had provided and how convenient it was for the client as it took her situation into consideration. Prior to contacting MCNT both Catholic Care and the client were unaware that this service was available to them.

Centrelink in this case had provided valuable insights and tailored the delivery of information according to the client's circumstances. It was a positive outcome for all sides.

FECCA 2020 survey respondents highlighted their use of multicultural organisations in accessing information about government services.

It [receiving information] is easy because I can ask my local service provider to help me with information.

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

It is better when I use migrant services, as they understand my needs better.

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

FECCA heard from community organisations that COVID-19 had greatly added to the work they already do in assisting CALD people to navigate government information and systems. COVID-19 also showed how this vital work is usually invisible—unacknowledged and unfunded by the government services that community organisations navigate on behalf of their clients.

Recognising the work of community organisations through increased engagement with the organisations, including small grassroots ethnic/cultural organisations and community leaders, is encouraged to increase the Government's knowledge and awareness of the diversity in the communities and challenges they face. This can lead to improved services and engagement with CALD communities.

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**RECOMMENDATION 7:**  
Develop and maintain relationships with multicultural/community organisations to facilitate connections with communities and community leaders.

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## 1.3. Responsiveness

### KEY THEMES

Consider the needs of clients from CALD backgrounds in all aspects of departmental or agency work.

Allow for the cost associated with delivering culturally responsive and accessible policies, programs and services.

Ensure that any whole-of-government standards or guidelines address multicultural access and equity considerations.

If the delivery of programs is outsourced, specify multicultural access and equity accountability in funding partnerships, contracts, grant agreements and related guidance material.

Where appropriate, assist contracted services with advice and guidance on meeting their multicultural access and equity requirements.

A client-centred approach must be at the centre of all departments and agencies planning and delivering services. Given the diversity of clients in Australia, this approach must be flexible and adaptable to the different needs of people in Australia—including for people from CALD backgrounds.

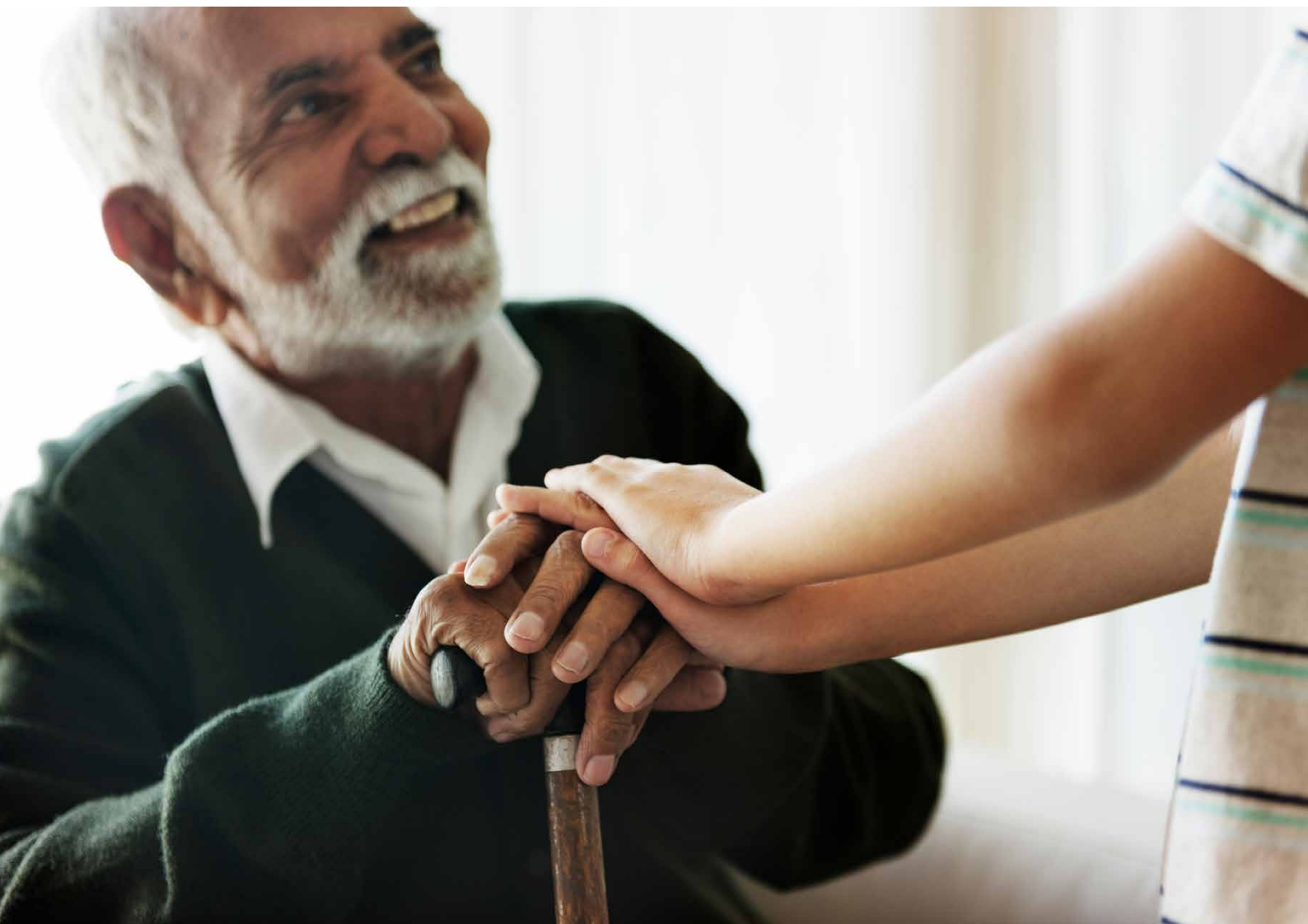
Responsiveness is about ensuring that policies, programs, community interactions and service delivery (in-house or outsourced) are effective for culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Responsiveness must follow and respond to what has been learnt through engaging with CALD communities, community leaders and stakeholders.

Flexibility and tailored approaches are necessary tools for responsive services that allow for understanding and consideration of diversity.

This section looks at how CALD communities interact with government services and what people find most helpful when dealing with staff on the ground. Respondents in both survey and consultations highlighted the importance of support in accessing and interacting with services in ways that allow for flexibility, understanding and consideration for diversity.

With the Government's increased use of digital platforms for people to access their services, FECCA explores people's experiences of and access to information via digital channels and other platforms of communication. This section looks at the strengths and challenges with this way of communicating and disseminating information while comparing this year's findings with previous years experiences for CALD communities.

This section also looks at the resources needed to ensure appropriate responsiveness such as information provided in languages other than English, people's knowledge of translated information, as well as the importance of this. Responding to clients' needs either through translated documents and information or in plain English has been, and continues to be, a main call for FECCA on behalf of CALD communities in Australia. Related to translating of information is access to interpreting services for CALD communities when interacting with government services.



Finally, some government services are outsourced to agencies outside government. This section explores people's experiences with JobActive as an outsourced employment services network. The general experience among the respondents to the 2020 survey was that the access and equity principles are missing when dealing with these services, leaving people frustrated and overwhelmed with the service they were offered. This section also briefly looks at the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) as another outsourced service.

### **1.3.1. Flexibility and Responding to Clients' Needs**

It is imperative that all government agencies and departments invest the necessary time and resources to ensure their services are accessible and equitable for all Australians. Although translations and interpreting are essential and will be discussed further below,

FECCA heard repeatedly that another key determinant of a responsive agency is flexibility in service delivery to suit each individual.

Flexibility was considered key in several of the 2020 survey responses. This flexibility included the option of speaking to people face-to-face when needed. Face-to-face interaction was highlighted by several respondents as the preferred way to gain information and access services.

If you are lucky to find someone who takes the time to understand your questions and help you, face-to-face is always easier. But very often you just get a piece of paper with the address of a website to go to find the answer.

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

Being able to see people and communicate face-to-face allowing for body language and further explanation when needed was for many the best way to communicate to avoid frustration and confusion. Accessing information about services on the phone was considered a difficult and time-consuming process.

To facilitate flexibility, face-to-face interaction and positive experiences for clients, respondents called for more CALD centered services where focus is on simplified language, flexibility and with staff trained appropriately to deal with people from diverse backgrounds.

There is no flexible approach, if the staff you get is not willing to help you, your work will not get done...but, sometimes people you approach are amazing and willing to help.

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

Flexibility is also about government services having the ability and appropriate processes to differentiate between cases and see each case 'as a person rather than a number' and adapting accordingly.

Migrants and refugees may feel threatened by the Government as FECCA heard from their member in Perth, the Ethnic Community Council of Western Australia (ECCWA): many arrive in Australia after previous negative experiences in their country of origin. Many may have a fear of challenging the Government believing there might be a consequence for them if they do so. Often people prefer to stay quiet and not complain with complicated and difficult processes causing them to give up rather than keep trying.

Due to the challenges accessing the support they need and the worry clients might have trusting the government, it is essential that community organisations working as advocates can accompany their clients when there are issues of concern.

## CASE STUDY:

A client was eligible for the age pension. She did some part-time work but was not earning very much. The client went to Centrelink but was told to go online or call the multicultural services line. The client called and waited 1.5 hours to be connected but the issue was not solved. The client then visited multiple agencies before she was referred to the ECCWA. ECCW called the multicultural services line, they got through, but the services line demanded to speak to the client. With limited English skills for the client, they allowed for an interpreter, but not for the ECCWA advocate to attend the meeting. ECCWA therefore decided to apply online but as this did not work they contacted Centrelink again where they were told the client needed to visit the office—here she had been twice before without receiving any assistance. ECCWA then used private networks and contacted the IT department directly. They explained the situation and IT fixed the issue on the spot. The client then was required to go back to the office with all her identification papers where she got the issue resolved with a full pension—this was, however, after months of trying to navigate the system.



## Digital Access

The need for multiple communication channels has been highlighted in all of FECCA's access and equity reports. In the 2020 survey, 77 per cent reported that they get information about government services by visiting a government department website and 59 per cent said they get information about government services by speaking to someone face-to-face. The 2016 FECCA Access and Equity Report found that about 85 per cent of the respondents use websites to find information about government services. However, for only 41 per cent, online was the preferred method of obtaining information. Further, 57 per cent of the 2016 respondents did not believe that information on government agencies' websites was easy to find. In 2015, only 31 per cent reported they accessed information about government services by visiting the department online.

Unless you have access to Multicultural Advocacy Services to assist you...Government agencies don't and they expect you to find information online. If you are not IT literate it is almost impossible to get information. CALD service providers are critical for information to be spread within the community.

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

While these data are relatively positive when it comes to CALD access to digital services, it also amplifies the need to understand the diversity within the CALD population. FECCA has heard from stakeholders and community consultation that the digital divide is real and must be considered when disseminating information about government services. FECCA has heard how segments of the community have no internet access at all, some have no smart phone and others have limited data on their phone due to cost, making accessing information online difficult, if not impossible.

To get a detailed insight into digital inclusion for people from CALD backgrounds, more research is needed including collection of disaggregated data looking at gender, age, employment, education and other factors that may impact on people's access to digital devices and online tools. The 2016 Access and Equity report focused on access to digital services exclusively and noted how different cohorts of people from CALD backgrounds have varying experiences when accessing services digitally. The three main challenges faced by people in times of increased digitalisation were language literacy, digital literacy and digital access. Additionally, security was of concern for some, particularly related to the MyGov service. Safety and security concerns relating to accessing digital services and providing information to government can be detrimental and departments must consider the perceived risk for people on various visas in Australia—this relates to people's concerns relating to family reunion, employment and future permanent residency.

Understanding the fear of inserting personal information into websites must be viewed in a context where these are the realities for people in the communities and must not be underestimated.

Flexibility is key to ensuring all government agencies and departments are accessible and equitable for all people in Australia. Taking a person-centred approach to service delivery and information provision will ensure all services are responsive to the entire community.

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### RECOMMENDATION 8:

**Adapt to the diversity of clients by devoting time to a person-centred approach including face-to-face services and advocate inclusion.**

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### 1.3.2. Translating, Interpreting and Appropriate Language

The FECCA 2020 survey respondents continued to call for the use of plain English in government services and translated information into community languages to facilitate the process of gaining information about services for all communities.

This includes a focus on translated and plain English on websites and in written communication about services. An online search finds that on many government department websites translated information is hidden and not easy to find through navigation of the department's home page. In addition, staff in direct contact with clients should use plain English and avoid jargon.

The 2020 survey asked whether there was enough information in languages other than English about government services and, while the demography of the respondents to the 2020 survey shows a relatively long time in Australia and a moderate understanding of what services are on offer, over half of the respondents noted a lack of translated information.

Simplify information, the language is very complex and a lot of jargon, make it available in LOTE [Languages Other Than English].

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

I have grown up in Australia and English was my first language, it is easy for me to search for government services online, that's how I get most of my information. I have accompanied my mum to a job seeker appointment once, and it was a terrible experience for her. Even though she's grown up speaking English, her case worker went out of his way to try to confuse her with jargon and explaining too many processes at once. She ended up never using their services again.

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, FECCA and its members observed numerous translated documents about COVID-19 that used overly formal language, mixed different languages that use the same alphabet, were designed incorrectly (i.e. Arabic reading left to right), used unnecessarily complicated wording and included simple errors. The frequency of these poor translations points to a lack of community testing.

Communication with and information provision to CALD communities during times of emergency is of particular importance. The restrictions put in place to slow the spread of COVID-19 and the push for service delivery, work, socialising and school to be delivered online has magnified the digital divide that exists throughout Australia. Communication from the Government relied heavily on online methods and assumed that all people have regular and reliable access to the internet. When information is only provided online with the assumption everybody has access, critical health information is missed, and the safety of the whole community is compromised.

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#### RECOMMENDATION 9:

Translations must suit all clients and be tested with a group of community members (community testing) that are relevant to the target group who speak the language to ensure that the level of language is appropriate and cultural factors have been considered.

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#### Translating and Interpreting Services (TIS)

FECCA has heard in consultations with stakeholders that women from smaller ethnic communities are often reluctant to ask for interpreters as they are afraid the interpreter might come from their community. For example, for most women domestic violence is a deeply private matter and confidentiality is crucial. It is recognised as difficult for women to open up to doctors and case workers, and hence involving a third-party interpreter becomes very problematic. When anonymity or confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, women

who are struggling with English language in the first place are extremely reluctant to put themselves in situations where they need to explain to someone that they don't speak the language and need assistance. Women would rather go to people they trust to ask for assistance with specific services. The solution to this must be to have competent, high quality interpreters who are appropriately trained with necessary understanding of complex situations and cultural competency. Additionally, the availability of TIS interpreting via the phone must be explained to all clients as there is often a lack of an awareness of this option.

**In Swahili, you may be given an interpreter who speaks Swahili but there are many different variations of Swahili and I still not understand the interpreter. It is difficult and often cause confusion when we have to speak on the phone with interpreters using a different kind of Swahili.**

*FECCA community consultation, Shepparton 2020*

Many of the 2020 respondents reported how they used their friends to get information about government services. The use of friends and/or family can, however, be complicated when it comes to interpreting in direct communication with services. While this may feel safe for many, it is important to consider issues of confidentiality as well as the difficulties this may lead to for example for children if they are translating for parents with doctors or other services that are complex and there is a risk to expose the child to sensitive information. Other issues include difficulties for community members/family to translate correctly when complex words related to health are used, and concerns about speaking of issues due to fear of stigma in the community. Additionally, having someone from the community or a family member present during a conversation with a service can make it difficult to speak of sensitive matters such as mental health.

**A good interpreter is worth their weight in gold. I do not need an interpreter myself, but I am in health services industry and find that interpreters need to have some good health literacy training as mistakes related to diagnosis are made which often creates huge problems. I am aware that NAATI [National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters] trains interpreters who work in health, but getting the accreditation from NAATI in that area is expensive and most interpreters cannot afford it. There is a need to create a subsidy for every health service to train their interpreters in appropriate health literacy.**

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

The importance of professional interpreters was also highlighted during a mental health consultation conducted by FECCA staff in Darwin. Feeling safe enough to speak of mental health issues is a challenge and the need for professional interpreters is essential when it comes to sensitive issues.

While interpreters should have the necessary knowledge about health issues, finding the right person to interpret is complicated. Many of the new and emerging communities in Australia are small and people fear 'the word will get out' if they speak of mental health issues, for example, and are worried about stigma in the community. At the same time there might be some concerns about the person who interprets if they are unfamiliar with TIS and have not been introduced to this. Possible solutions to these issues could be to:

- introduce TIS information to new migrants through English language schools and the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)
- introduce TIS information to new migrant through settlement services organisations (using different means of communication and in different languages)
- use various communication channels to promote the service
- promote telephone interpreting in addition to face-to-face.





TIS, as an essential service for people from CALD backgrounds, must continue to use qualified interpreters allowing for appropriate interpretation of important information. The use of family and community members to interpret for individuals is inappropriate and should be avoided.

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### RECOMMENDATIONS 10 AND 11:

- Appropriate interpreting services allowing for suitable understanding of complex issues, anonymity and language nuance.
  - Introduce TIS information to new migrants through AMEP, settlement services and other trusted sources.
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#### 1.3.3. Funding and Resources

Adequate funding to demonstrate a commitment to flexibility and responding to clients' needs is essential. While there is always a need for more resources and funding for programs due to need in the community, FECCA emphasises the need to engage with community organisations and service providers to ensure funding is targeted and responds to community needs.

FECCA has heard in consultations that community organisations are experiencing funding being taken away from important projects or government positions that work for the community, such as bilingual employment support workers who could offer face-to-face advice and support for community members in the Hunter Valley.

According to FECCA's member in Brisbane, ECCQ, the issue is often not about greater investment or increased resources from government, but rather an evaluation of what works, which could lead to more flexible and ongoing funding for existing projects. ECCQ's CEO recommended government collaborates with and links to community organisations to ensure targeted and coordinated funding. Funding peak bodies can ensure community programs are efficient and programs reach the intended communities.

One example, called for by numerous respondents to the 2020 Access and Equity survey, was funding for bilingual workers to support clients who struggle with certain services such as health or increased resources to simplify bureaucratic language and allow for face-to-face interactions.

More bilingual staff that know the system and can connect me with services I need.

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

More face to face staff availability, more resources for interpreter services (as an incentive to be able to recruit more interpreters to meet demand), more good quality community tested translations that take into account health literacy considerations.

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

By allowing adequate resources for bilingual workers and face-to-face interactions Governments can ensure they respond appropriately to clients from CALD to make sure people feel welcomed, supported and safe.

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### RECOMMENDATION 12:

To be responsive the Government must fund

- engagement with communities to understand barriers and gaps
  - community and multicultural/ethnic organisations
  - face-to-face interaction
  - bilingual workers
  - data collection (more in section 1.5.1)
  - inter-department/agency coordination
  - appropriate and community tested translations
  - appropriate interpreting services allowing for suitable understanding and anonymity.
-

### 1.3.4. CALD Experiences of Outsourced Services

At an increasing rate, many government services are outsourced to providers across the country. It is essential that a multicultural access and equity policy is a requirement across all levels of these outsourced services.

One example of an outsourced service is JobActive. As noted by most of the respondents in the 2020 Access and Equity Survey, people's experiences with JobActive demonstrates the service still requires work to ensure the principles of multicultural access and equity is followed through and implemented on all levels of the outsourced service.

Several respondents to the FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey noted a poor experience with the outsourced JobActive:

- I am now on my third Job Seeker provider service. Max Employment and Sarina Russo were absolutely useless. I am now with HELP and they are proactive and good with their services and staff.
- Quality of support workers is quite poor. This sets a tone for low expectations.
- Not enough staff to assist with long-term unemployment and barriers to employment.
- Difficult because the providers often aren't compassionate or understanding and don't believe you when you say you can't do something.
- Not giving the right support needed and not connecting jobseekers with the right jobs based on job seekers' abilities.
- There is no understanding of cultural awareness, not awareness of mental health issues.
- They only care about getting money from the government and not what I need to get a job. They focus more on compliance that helping me find a job. I hate them. GET RID OF COMPLIANCE. IT WAS VERY DISTRESSING.

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

These negative experiences were noted among all the respondents to the 2020 survey who also presented solutions on how to improve JobActive. It is imperative that the Government considers feedback from the people using the services to improve and develop outsourced services based on experiences from people from CALD backgrounds.

Suggestions on how JobActive could be improved ranged from skills matching to culturally competent staff. Additionally, FECCA heard that 'job providers do not understand about refugees and migrants' backgrounds and continue to put everyone into just one box'. By listening to and learning from the experiences of people using the JobActive service, the Government can ensure a service that takes into account the diversity of the JobActive clients.

Recommendations from 2020 survey respondents include:

- Matching my skills with a Master of International Tourism & Hotel Management and a Bachelor of Business with the many roles I can fulfill.
- Identify people's strengths and match employment to people's strengths, don't just look at people as a means to increase an organisations income or as a charity case or entertainment for the support worker.
- Get someone who has experienced unemployment and have used the system to guide the applicant through the process.
- Have staff trained to be more knowledgeable about different cultures and disabilities and diversity in general, and have their goal to be to help you build the skills you want as opposed to putting you into something you don't want to do because the providers get money for it.
- Treat people with respect and not as numbers in achieving company quotas.
- Help clients in right direction instead of asking to apply for any job available monthly.

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

The survey results together with community consultations demonstrate a need for stronger leadership with regards to employment services providers as well as improved collaboration between employment agencies and employers. Hiring more culturally diverse staff and ensuring cultural competency training for all staff and leadership could prevent discriminatory attitudes towards people from CALD backgrounds, as well as assist in identifying solutions for improving support for people from CALD backgrounds.

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### **RECOMMENDATIONS 13 AND 14:**

**Government should learn from users of JobActive services and develop flexible programs responding to the diversity within CALD communities.**

**Appropriate procedures must be in place to ensure multicultural access and equity principles are put in place at all levels of outsourced services, including proper reporting mechanisms to measure procedures.**

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Another example of outsourced services is the Government's Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) for migrants and refugees. FECCA conducted research into community English language programs in 2018 and interviewed people on the reasons why they attended community programs rather than, or as well as, the AMEP. While overall feedback on the Adult Migrant English Programs was positive, there were some respondents who noted the limited flexibility and need for more targeted classes, as well as limited understanding of the background of the students.

Other stakeholders looking into AMEP programs have noted an overall lack of flexibility within them. The Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) highlighted, after numerous community consultations, that while the AMEP is highly welcomed and an important program serving the diverse needs of students, 'it is limited by the current funding and reporting requirements'.<sup>2</sup> This highlights the need to

allocate appropriate resources to allow for flexibility and responding to clients' needs in program development and execution. SCoA also reports that 'if people are working or studying or have caring responsibility, the availability of classes in rural or regional areas, in particular, often isn't flexible enough'.<sup>3</sup>

A report by the Scanlon Foundation looking into the effectiveness of the AMEP noted that the economic and social changes of our time require new, flexible approaches to English language learning, 'yet according to one participant [in the Scanlon Foundation survey], such flexibility seemed to be reducing, both in the AMEP and across language programs more broadly'.<sup>4</sup>

Flexibility and client-focused services emerged as essential for both the Government's outsourced services as well as for government services in general to ensure multicultural access and equity—the Government must ensure a client-centred approach, flexibility, be considerate of individual needs, and use flexible platforms for communication to comply with principles of the Multicultural Access and Equity Policy.

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### **RECOMMENDATION 15:**

**Access and equity principles be applied to all outsourced services and the Government must have a clear overview on who they have employed to do their job.**

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<sup>2</sup> Settlement Council of Australia, Maximising AMEP and English Language Learning Consultation Report, 2020, <http://scoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/SCOA-AMEP-Consultations-Report-2020-PDF.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, Australia's English Problem: How to renew our once celebrated Adult Migrant English Program, June 2019.

## 1.4. Performance

### KEY THEMES

Use CALD client data to measure the effectiveness of multicultural access and equity initiatives.

Have in place feedback, compliments and complaints mechanisms that are accessible to all clients, including those from CALD backgrounds.

Engage directly with CALD communities to obtain their perception of policies, programmes and services through targeted face-to-face consultations, online forms or other alternative survey method.

Develop key performance indicators relating to engagement with, or outcomes of services, to CALD clients.

Performance is about understanding clients and ensuring positive outcomes for each individual. Measuring performance is essential to confirming intervening programs are effective and ensure access and equity for all.

Key performance indicators that truly measure access and equity, together with data collection that captures disaggregated data, are essential to adequately measuring the performance of the Multicultural Access and Equity Policy. To measure performance, feedback and complaint mechanisms and engagement with CALD communities is essential.

This section looks at the need for robust feedback and complaints mechanisms that meet the needs of CALD people in Australia and engagement with CALD communities to ensure that services are responsive to their client's needs.

Performance cannot be measured without accurate CALD data. Currently across most government departments and agencies there is no collection of statistics based on CALD indicators. This gap ensures that the many issues facing CALD people in Australia with regards to access and equity of government services remain under-documented, under-researched and easily ignored. Although some quantitative research is undertaken to highlight problems and solutions, without better data collection and analysis these efforts will only ever reveal a small section of the problem (more in 1.5.1).

#### 1.4.1. Feedback and Complaints Mechanisms

Robust feedback and complaint mechanisms that meet the needs of CALD people in Australia are essential to ensure that government services continue to adjust and adapt to the needs of their clients with diverse needs.

Feedback and complaints mechanisms can help government services to better understand the practical implications of their policies and practices for CALD people. Accessibility of feedback and complaints mechanisms must include the ability for people to input in their own language, but this should not be the only step. These mechanisms should also consider





the additional barriers CALD people in Australia have towards complaining.<sup>5</sup>

FECCA heard during its consultations that these barriers include:

- cultural pressure not to complain
- a lack of awareness of the right to complain
- people not wanting to appear ungrateful
- fear of negative consequences of complaining
- general distrust of government due to bad experiences in the past—both in Australia and other countries.

To help overcome these barriers, government departments and agencies must prioritise communicating with CALD communities about the right that all people in Australia have to complain and provide feedback about government services, and possibly reframe complaints and feedback mechanisms as a positive way of helping the Australian Government.

There should also be greater transparency and accountability within complaints and feedback mechanisms. FECCA heard from people who had complained that they did not receive a response, much less an outcome, from their complaint. This not only increases individual anxiety about possible repercussions because of complaining but also reinforces existing negative cultural and community beliefs about complaining.

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**RECOMMENDATION 16:**  
Ensure FECCA's checklist (see figure 1) for CALD friendly feedback and complaints mechanisms is followed and promoted to all government departments and agencies.

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<sup>5</sup> For more information about CALD communities and feedback and complaints mechanism see FECCA 2017 Access and Equity Report <http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/FECCA-Access-and-Equity-Report-Final.pdf>

Figure 1: FECCA checklist for CALD-friendly feedback and complaints mechanisms

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- 1. Is information about how to make complaints and provide feedback available in plain English, other languages and in a variety of formats?
  - 2. Can feedback and complaints be provided through multiple *methods* (voice, private and/or third party)?
  - 3. Can feedback and complaints be provided through multiple *channels* (online, in person, by phone, in writing)?
  - 4. Are staff trained to assist CALD consumers to make complaints / provide feedback?
  - 5. Does your organisation have bilingual or bi-cultural staff who can assist CALD Australians in providing feedback or making complaints?
  - 6. Are staff aware of the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) and trained to deal with complaints made with the assistance of TIS interpreters?
  - 7. Does your organisation provide a safe, anonymous means for providing feedback and complaints?
  - 8. Does your organisation engage with advocacy groups representing CALD Australians?
  - 9. Does your organisation provide clear information on available remedies for service failure (and the limitations of those remedies) to consumers?
  - 10. Do you capture data on CALD consumers providing feedback or complaints? Is this data used to better understand and improve performance?
  - 11. Can you provide examples of where feedback and / or complaints from CALD consumers has improved service provision?
  - 12. Does your organisation have a policy or framework in place for supporting CALD consumers that references inclusive feedback and complaints mechanism?

Source: FECCA Access and Equity to Feedback and Complaints Mechanisms for Multicultural Communities, 2017

## 1.4.2 Engagement with CALD Communities

The importance of engaging with CALD communities and community leaders, as well as community and ethnic or cultural organisations is well established. As noted in section 1.1.2., collaboration with ethnic and multicultural organisations is imperative towards monitoring access and equity performance and making valuable improvements. FECCA heard from member organisations that the amount of direct consultation is growing slowly across service providers, although providers are not compensated or staffed for the additional time required. Consultations must be carefully coordinated in order to avoid over-consultation of target communities. For example, FECCA heard from ECCQ that a small African community service with two volunteer staff and no funding or support had been contacted numerous times by government departments wanting to consult to learn about their work, gaps and community. This consultation took the two volunteers away from their important work, without compensation or tangible results.

Consultations must be carefully considered before they commence with CALD community members as they may be conducted in ways that are not a positive experience for the individuals involved. Consultations are often held not during the implementation of a program but as part of an evaluation and often long after a program or service has ended. Furthermore, FECCA heard there is rarely feedback provided to the individuals consulted about the outcome or impact of their involvement. Some groups reported 'consultation fatigue', with there being seemingly little effort by government agencies to properly coordinate and avoid duplication of consultations.

FECCA heard that consultations often seem tokenistic and not part of a genuine desire by government to meaningfully integrate the experiences and ideas of CALD people into the service design, delivery and evaluation cycle.

Few departments or agencies appear to have deep relationships with a diverse range of multicultural communities and/or the capacity to seek out the most marginalised groups. As such, it is often the more established and well-resourced communities and individuals that are included.

Finally, FECCA heard that an increase in consultations have meant that FECCA member organisations are being approached from all directions to set up these consultations, often with little acknowledgement or compensation for the time and resources this work takes.

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### RECOMMENDATIONS 17, 18 AND 19:

Encourage co-designing key performance indicators with the target groups.

Involve communities in the design, implementation and in measuring performance during BAU as well as during crisis.

The Government must seek to collaborate and engage with ethnic and multicultural community organisations when consulting with smaller community groups to avoid over consultations and facilitate feedback from Government to said community groups and when appropriate, consider remuneration for consultations according to the Remuneration Tribunal (<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2020C00847>).

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As well as consulting directly with communities, there are clear benefits to government actors setting up advisory groups with peak bodies and other civil society actors. Using these channels to seek both ad hoc and systematic feedback on access and equity outcomes appears to work well and ensure that a broad range of multicultural perspectives can be included in policy and program priorities and planning.

Good examples of this approach include the Department of Home Affairs' National Multicultural Advisory Group and the Department of Social Services' Community Services Advisory Group.

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### RECOMMENDATION 20:

Continue to incorporate representative bodies as advisory to departments.

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## 1.5. Capability

### KEY THEMES

Use CALD data sources to better understand the multicultural nature of client group.

Collect data for programs and services—key indicators include county of birth, ancestry and/or language preferences.

Implement training and development measures to ensure staff at all levels understand their multicultural access and equity responsibilities and are equipped with cultural awareness and competency skills.

Conduct a cultural capability audit to identify cultural diversity skills within the workforce.

Consider a community language allowance for staff who can communicate in languages other than English and who work in roles where their language skills can be used to help clients.

Set policies to increase recruitment and retention of staff from CALD backgrounds.

The capability of government departments and agencies to cater to the diverse communities and their needs depends on an understanding of the complex cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic differences of multicultural Australians.

For government actors to be able to achieve this understanding, there is an urgent need to collect reliable, consistent and comparable data on CALD communities in Australia. These data should include more than country of birth and language spoken at home. FECCA has, over many years and via different avenues, lobbied for an overhaul of CALD data collection in both policy and research to ensure appropriate and true representation of all communities in Australia.

This section also looks at the importance of cultural competency at every level of every department and agency. FECCA heard repeatedly through the 2020 survey, consultations and interviews with community workers that respectful and friendly treatment by staff was an essential and often missing element in service delivery.

#### 1.5.1. CALD Data Collection

Current Australian data collection and reporting on cultural and linguistic diversity, particularly in relation to human services planning and delivery (including health, mental health, aged care and disability) is inadequate. This is true of administrative and survey data, as well as social and medical research.

FECCA suggests that in order for the Government and its services to appropriately respond to clients effectively and consider the diversity of clients and the challenges faced by their client base, they must understand the communities they serve through accurate and consistent administrative data. This is essential for evidence-based policy, resource allocation and service planning. Only with disaggregated, consistent and comparable CALD data can government ensure that services are accessible, inclusive and responsive to the needs of all people in Australia.



They [Government] could help me find suitable services by first understanding my needs and then ensuring services are set up to meet them. Targeting information would be much easier if they knew who they were trying to communicate with.

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

Relying on country of birth and language spoken at home as the main and sole measures of diversity in policy and research is an inadequate measure of ethnicity in certain individuals including ethnic Chinese born in countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, ethnic Indians born in countries such as Fiji, the United Kingdom and Uganda, or people born in refugee camps and the growing population in Australia who are Australian-born but whose parents are migrants from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Country of birth also does not capture other factors that can have important impacts on inequalities to access to and quality of health services such as English language proficiency and discrimination based on race/ethnicity.

They [Government] could understand and respond to my needs more specifically, starting by collecting relevant data. I am amazed that government departments don't even ask about your heritage, outside of whether you speak a different language and where you were born. My needs are very different of those of a white middle-class British family. But the Government here would not know that from the data they collect. I worry that they don't understand the specific health needs and different health trajectories of people from different ethnicities. And I worry that government services do not understand the psychological and socio-economic impacts on us living in a majority white ethnic community.

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

Respondents to the FECCA 2020 survey mentioned the need for government services to gather more detailed information about the many challenges faced by CALD communities. 'Knowing the clients' was felt necessary to be able to respond appropriately and offer the variety of services needed.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS: 21, 22 AND 23

CALD data standards should be revised to better capture the complexity of multiculturalism in Australia and the revised data standards should be consistently used by all Commonwealth and State/Territory Government departments and agencies.

These disaggregated data collected by agencies must be available externally for the purposes of analysis and research.

General population surveys must ensure that that sampling methodologies and collected data are inclusive of people from CALD backgrounds in order to be representative of the Australian population as a whole.

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### 1.5.2. Cultural Competency

Cultural competency is the ability to understand, communicate and effectively interact across cultures. Cultural competency includes an awareness that individuals have different needs because of their cultural and linguistic background and ensures more effective communication and better outcomes. Organisations with high levels of cultural competence foster successful, diverse workforces, using cultural difference as a strength for more effective decision-making, innovation and adaptability. They also understand the needs and preferences of a diverse range of consumers and provide products and services that are appropriate, accessible and inclusive.

The 2014, 2015 and 2017 FECCA Access and Equity Reports stated that cultural competency was an essential and often missing element of effective communication with culturally and linguistically diverse clients. Cultural competency was also highlighted as the starting point to building positive relationships between government agencies and the communities they service.

Many of the people FECCA consulted in 2020 reiterated that improving individual and organisational cultural competency was crucial for CALD people to be treated with respect, compassion and understanding when accessing services.

**Approachable and culturally safe people to support me is more helpful than exact translation service.**

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

Respondents to the FECCA 2020 survey noted how interactions with staff were often experienced as unfriendly, confusing and with a lack of true understanding of the various circumstances for the clients. Across FECCA's consultations, a common theme emerged around 'friendliness' of staff often determining whether a person would receive the service to which they were entitled. FECCA heard from individuals as well as community organisations that a lack of friendliness towards CALD people



seeking services made it exponentially harder for people to overcome the many barriers they faced in accessing services.

Also, during FECCA consultations, people explained that while communication might be confusing and in English, friendly and respectful staff made up for misunderstandings and extended wait times. People noted how, most of the time, something as simple as a friendly face and staff going the extra mile to support, help and find answers was what impacted their experiences of dealing with government departments and agencies.

In the FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey, friendly and helpful staff was highlighted as essential to feeling welcome and safe, and as such clients were encouraged to ask necessary questions:

Having friendly staff makes you feel relaxed to talk about the issues at hand.

It makes a big difference when dealing with staff who are kind and respectful. We would prefer that over someone who can speak the language.

If the staff have racial prejudice or elements of racism it is hard to navigate the government services.

When being treated in a helpful and respectful manner, it is much easier for me to understand and explain to my parents why certain services they are expecting to receive cannot always be provided in a timely manner, if they have trouble understanding this. It also makes them less prone to be agitated.

When you find a respectful and friendly person, makes it easier to communicate and get what information you require.

If they're friendly [and] here to help, I won't be afraid to ask, and ask more questions.

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

This plea for 'friendliness' shows a need for significant improvements in the cultural competency framework of many government departments and agencies, especially client-facing ones. FECCA acknowledges that there have been strong improvements over the years in implementing rigorous cultural competency training. However, while training for all staff is essential, it is not enough on its own to generate individual or organisational cultural competency. More needs to be done to achieve cultural competency for staff on all levels—from setting an example at leadership level, in decisions around policy and programs, to a broad awareness and understanding of cultural differences, and appropriate responses at ground level.

FECCA heard during the consultation with its member in Western Australia, ECCWA, how the manager running the regional office set the scene for a client-focused environment. This is something that must come from the leadership and be enforced throughout the office—'regional management level is incredibly important as Centrelink is the face of the Government for so many people,' according to the ECCWA CEO. The same sentiment was also expressed by some of the survey respondents as demonstrated in the quotes above.

As noted in other sections of this report, the behaviour of frontline staff is a strong reflection of what degree a department or agency has embedded the principles of multicultural access and equity. FECCA heard that a key way to meet the needs of CALD communities was increasing the recruitment of bilingual and bicultural workers. Not only would this help to support individual clients from diverse backgrounds, if these workers were provided with appropriate organisational support, they would significantly help cultural competency across whole workplaces.

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#### **RECOMMENDATION 24:**

**Cultural competency training for all staff, including leadership and proper reporting mechanisms to ensure multicultural access and equity principles are found on all levels of service delivery.**

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## 1.6. Openness

### KEY THEMES

Incorporate outcomes of multicultural of multicultural access and equity activities into corporate reporting.

Provide information on multicultural access and equity performance to the Department for an annual whole-of government snapshot and a triennial review report to the Government for tabling in Parliament.

Share multicultural access and equity resources and experience with other departments and agencies, and the public as appropriate. This can include CALD data, CALD consultative networks, and example of best practice in the design and delivery of policies, programmes and services.

Transparency and accountability around progress towards achieving access and equity for CALD people in Australia is essential to multicultural Australia.

The mechanisms for reporting on this progress have changed since inception and FECCA now finds the process unclear and difficult to navigate, while the principals have been diluted. Without openness in the reporting process there is no accessibility. Without a stronger and more open framework for delivering the access and equity policy, including a robust mechanism for accountability, it is likely that positive progress will remain disjointed, and access and equity will be stunted overall. The access and equity framework should be a prominent and celebrated part of all government agencies and departments for Australia and Australians to continue to benefit from successful multiculturalism.

For the public, organisations, departments and agencies to engage with the Access and Equity Policy, the policy must be transparent and open. For the Government to have suitable accountability to the six principles, reporting must be publicly available each year and especially each third year.

Each year the Government is required to report on multicultural access and equity actions and outcomes in an annual snapshot of the policy's implementation prepared by the department and presented to the Australian Multicultural Council (AMC). This preparation and presentation cannot be considered open and transparent.

The Multicultural Access and Equity in Government Services Report 2013-15 can be found online, but no subsequent report can be found published (as of July 2020). This delay between reports or lack of availability of subsequent reporting cannot be considered open and transparent. Likewise, when searching online for the updated access and equity policies of each department and agency, very few can be found.

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### RECOMMENDATIONS 25 AND 26:

Reinvigorate the access and equity policy with a stronger emphasis on expected outcomes for CALD people in Australia, ensuring that people from CALD backgrounds and organisations are at each stage of the process. Ensure openness by making access and equity policies and reporting publicly available.

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# PART 2: GOVERNMENT SERVICES AND SOCIAL COHESION

As part of Australia's multicultural policy, the Government focuses on social cohesion where the goal is to help all communities become actively part of, and benefit from, Australia's economic and social development<sup>6</sup>. To allow this to happen, it is essential that services are accessible, flexible and made available for people to participate and contribute to Australian society.

According to the Scanlon Foundation, the indicators for social cohesion are:<sup>7</sup>

- Belonging: shared values, identification with Australia, trust
- Social justice and equity: evaluation of national policies
- Participation: voluntary work, political and cooperative involvement
- Acceptance and rejection, legitimacy: experiences of discrimination, attitudes towards minorities and newcomers
- Worth: life satisfaction and happiness, future expectation.

The ability to access government services and experience equitable services independent of cultural, ethnic, religious or linguistic background form an essential part of people's experiences of acceptance, recognition and respect when settling in a new country. Further, people's experiences of belonging in a new country and their ability to participate and contribute, as demonstrated by the Scanlon Foundation, form part of the development of social cohesion.

In FECCA consultations during 2019<sup>8</sup>, two main concerns stood out as incredibly important for people in the process of developing a sense of belonging in Australia. These were access to employment, and migration issues such as access to permanent residency, citizenship and family reunion.

## 2.1. Employment

The opportunity to participate and contribute to Australian society through appropriate and meaningful employment has been raised during FECCA consultations numerous times. With regards to social cohesion and multicultural access and equity, the Australian Government notes it 'recognise[s] the importance of mutual respect and mutual responsibility'.<sup>9</sup> This mutuality, however, must be based on fair and accessible services allowing people to participate and contribute through accessing employment opportunities.

In Australia, 47 per cent of highly skilled migrants are underemployed, compared to 23 per cent of similarly skilled Australian-born workers, and after five years in Australia, 40 per cent of skilled migrants still work in lower skilled jobs.<sup>10</sup> Barriers in recruitment can be attributed to this. FECCA consultations during 2019 heard that it is difficult to find employment in general and, further, employment suiting their background and skills. This was a concern for both skilled migrants and other arrivals to Australia such as humanitarian entrants.

There are numerous barriers faced by people from CALD backgrounds in accessing employment. These barriers include:

- lack of local referees and Australian work experience
- skills recognition
- bias, conscious and unconscious
- unfamiliarity with the 'Australian way' of writing a CV
- limited networks and connections to the community
- limited computer literacy or limited access to digital tools to apply for jobs.

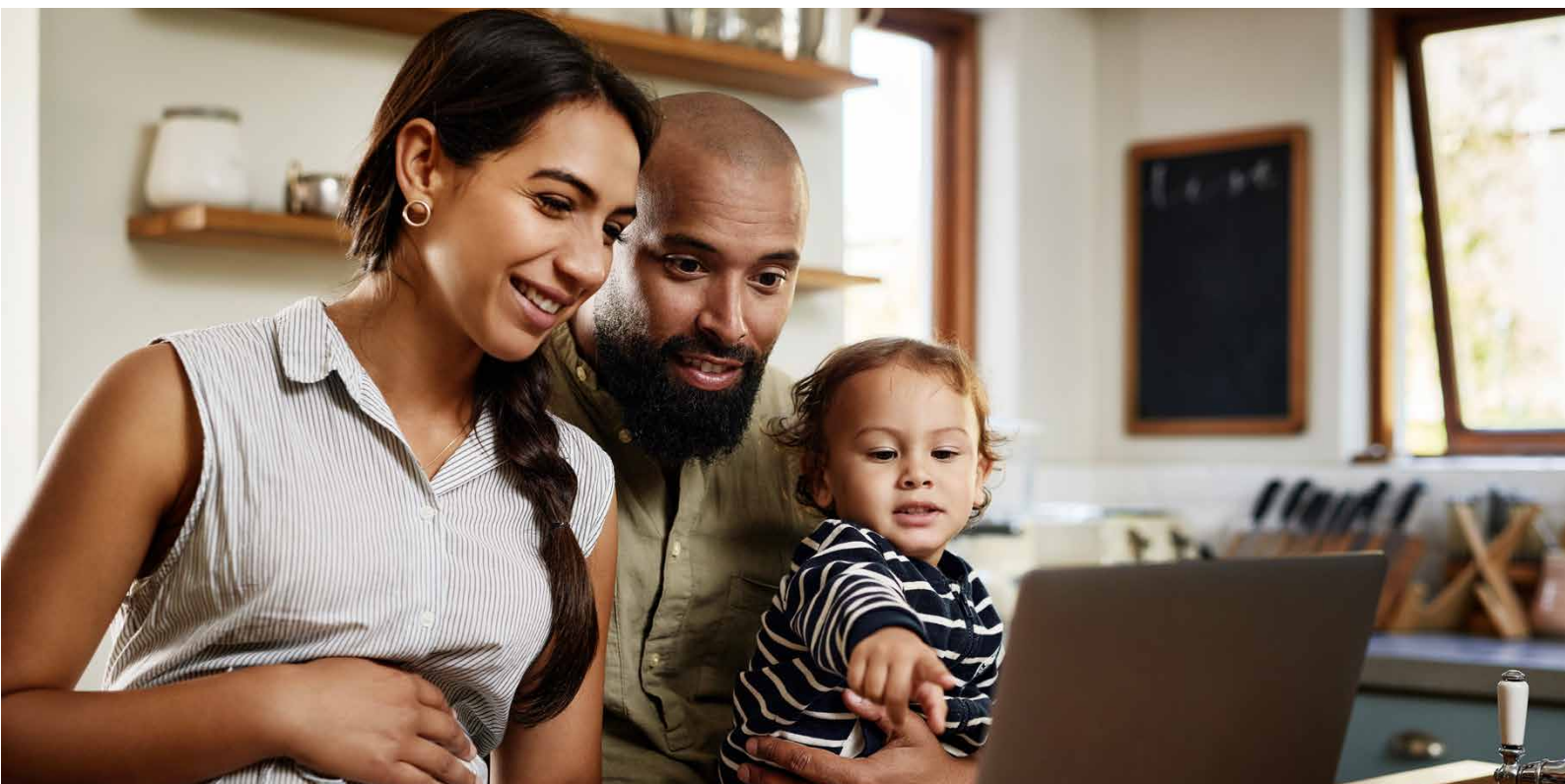
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/multicultural-affairs>

<sup>7</sup> <https://scanlonfoundation.org.au/social-cohesion-pillars/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/FECCA-Consultation-Report-2019.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/multicultural-affairs>

<sup>10</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet Victoria, Centre for Ethical Leadership, University of Melbourne, "Recruit Smarter: Report of Findings," accessed May 13, 2020, 18. <https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-01/Recruit-Smarter-Report-of-Findings.pdf>.



As noted in this report, employment services such as JobActive are not always helpful in finding appropriate employment, or employment at all. The lack of understanding of people's background and experience among job agencies was a problem for many. FECCA heard during consultations in Darwin that 'they [JobActive] don't do anything to help and they don't provide interpreters'. In Darwin FECCA also heard that a person's neighbour was more reliable in helping them find employment than JobActive providers.

While employment agencies may lack the understanding of their diverse clients, during national FECCA consultations many communities suggested employers also need to gain a better understanding of diversity to solve the problem. FECCA heard that unlike many other countries, Australia has a strong focus on 'pieces of paper' equaling experience. For example, FECCA met a woman who had worked in a bank in her country of origin but in Australia needed to complete a course to do the same job.

Many people explained to FECCA that experience from overseas does not help them get a job in Australia saying, 'how can I get local experience if you don't give me a job?' FECCA heard that lack of social networks and local references created barriers to finding a job.

Identified by some was the expectation of how a resume should look in Australia, which differed widely from expectations elsewhere in the world. A person from Pakistan told FECCA that once they understood and changed their resume to the 'Australian way', they more easily found a job. They also suggested that everyone should receive this information on arrival.

FECCA met with an informal interpreter helping the Burmese community in Darwin. She believed the Government should focus on skills when addressing unemployment. She reported that her community are skillful in gardening, cooking and carpentry and that being active in these skills makes them happy and physically active.

FECCA also heard in consultations how limited computer literacy or lack of tools such as smart phones and computers was for some women a challenge to finding a job or accessing general information. This indicates a need to re-think how job searches happen and what support people need.

### 2.1.1 COVID-19 and Employment

The COVID-19 pandemic added to the challenges of accessing appropriate and meaningful employment for new arrivals and established migrants in Australia. For temporary migrants who had been working in Australia, it was a 'slap in the face' to learn that they were not eligible for JobKeeper. After years of having paid taxes to Australia—of having contributed and participated in the society at the same level as others in Australia—they were told they were not eligible for any support from the Government during the pandemic. This decision to 'draw the line somewhere' has left taxpayers in Australia without access to support during this global pandemic. This decision has also arbitrarily discriminated against businesses in Australia who employ people on temporary visas who have therefore been ineligible for

government support. FECCA heard many stories from the community during this difficult time:

- 'I've been stood down from my permanent part-time contract at work and my company is eligible for JobKeeper but I'm not because I'm a temporary resident.'
- 'My wife and I were both laid off from our jobs. Since our visa is temporary, we haven't received any help from the government or the companies we worked for despite we've been working for almost four years in the case of my wife and over one in mine.'
- 'Two days before I lost my full-time job. A main reason for losing the job could be they can't hold us as they might not get JobKeeper payment as we are not Australian citizen or permanent resident. What else can we do in this situation apart from encouraging us to find new job and getting more tense about how to deal with financial situation?'

The Government's decisions around eligibility for JobKeeper has resulted in destitution for many. Charities are being overwhelmed by a huge amount of people who hold temporary visas seeking help for basics such as food and shelter. For those now falling into poverty, this health crisis will be even more difficult to bounce back from. Many people have reached out to FECCA expressing that they are 'feeling so rejected and lost my hope'.

This decision by the Government to exclude temporary migrants went against the dual obligations component of its multicultural policy. This will have an impact on future decisions by many migrants to arrive in Australia for employment.

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS 27 AND 28:**

**Commit to and fund cultural appropriate services for migrants and refugees seeking employment including resume information, support and guidance.**

**Develop information for employers to better understand what diverse experience and skills are and how they can add to their business.**

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## **2.2. Pathways to Permanency**

The exclusion of people on a temporary visa during the COVID-19 pandemic was an added challenge for people in Australia living on temporary visas. Already they face numerous challenges to achieving their aspirations of settling in Australia including extended wait times of permanency applications, separation from family due to ineligibility in applying for family reunion, and other challenges depending on visa type.

The development of a sense of belonging and social cohesion is dependent on a persons' feeling of safety and the ability to plan a secure future in a new country and, as explored by the Scanlon Foundation, ones' feeling of worth in the new society through life satisfaction, happiness and future expectations.

The lack of transparency from the Department of Home Affairs, limited communication, as well as the extended waiting times have led to the coining of a new phrase by FECCA's member in Shepparton, namely visa anxiety. This visa anxiety is linked to both the waiting period for permanent residency and to family reunion as it explains people's stress about their lives in Australia, worry about their family and the inability to plan a secure future. The mental health implications linked to visa anxiety must be considered when processing applications for permanent residency (PR) as a matter of humanity.

The temporary nature of their visa is a consequence of the complicated and everchanging pathway to permanency that those wanting to call Australia home must navigate. The number of people waiting for their application for PR has not been published by the Department of Home Affairs. FECCA has been contacted by numerous PR applicants for whom, during a 3 year period, the wait time has increased from 3 months to now 29 months from the time of application. To apply for PR these people have already fulfilled all requirements during their two or three year temporary visa.



In consultations FECCA has heard:

- 'I had lost the job and no welfare are given to us being a visa holder whereas we had applied for permanent residency 887 Visa since July 2018 and still waiting due to government increasing the processing time.' (applied for PR 21 months ago)
- 'Yes, the processing time for our permanent residency 887 visa is increased to 26 to 29 months by DOHA. Earlier when I applied last year it was waiting period of 9 to 10 months.' (applied for PR 14 months ago)
- 'Been waiting for permanent residency under subclass 887 near about two years only contacted once by home affair and been asked about my newborn's medical which we have done in 5 days, now it's been 6 months and we haven't heard back. The whole family is struggling because of this never-ending processing in this crisis.' (applied for PR 23 months ago).

The situation for people on temporary visas was made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic causing previously employed people to lose their income simply due to their visa type. During the shutdown period communities assisted each other with essential food provision to ensure that nobody went hungry as reported by many FECCA members. For those communities with many people stood down or employment terminated on temporary visas this support can only reach so far:

- 'Either they can give me PR or give JobKeeper payment so that I can survive here' (applied for PR 10 months ago)
- 'Extremely long processing time (26-29 months) for 887 visa after fulfilling requirements for 4 years on a 489 visa. People like us are stuck in a limbo, deprioritised and unable to move forward with our lives. The virus has put us in a difficult position and we feel unwanted.' (applied for PR 12 months ago).





During the COVID-19 recovery, until these people have their PR applications processed, they will not be able to 'bounce back' and will need ongoing support. A plan must be put in place for the wellbeing of those left behind during COVID-19 to ensure Australia recovers with a whole of society approach. This must include the future of migration, the role of temporary migration and a review of the consistent increase in PR application wait times.

Temporary migrants form part of the Australian community, they pay taxes, and many prepare to become permanent residents of Australia in the future. Yet the pathway to permanency has become increasingly more difficult in the past years, making people feel unwelcome.

**I didn't always feel welcome. I have contributed to the welfare of Australians citizens through health care and aged care services, however, in current times of need from COVID-19, my needs feel disregarded.**

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

The current Government's focus on social cohesion and comments from the FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey play an important role in understanding how a sense of belonging develops and how this impact on social cohesion. Feeling unwelcome, being treated differently because of one's background and having to prove oneself constantly does not lead to a cohesive society in which people feel part of the same future and where they feel their contribution is appreciated.

**I am a permanent resident and the process made me not feel welcomes, have been treated as suspicious and someone who is 'taking advantage of the system'.**

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

**The process was 'very difficult and complicated'.**

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

**It was a very 'long process, requires huge flux of money and patience'**

*FECCA 2020 Access and Equity Survey*

**It's not fair that I can't get any subsidy from the government after I paid nearly \$8000 for a visa that will allow me to stay permanently in Australia with my defacto Australian partner and I've been paying taxes for 6 years. Moreover, one of bridging visa A conditions is that you're not allowed to leave the country. It's appalling how the government completely forgot about us.**

*FECCA Survey on COVID-19 Response*

**All temporary visa workers have dream to become Australian citizen, we have invested money, effort and time to obtain our visas and we are ready to contribute in the Australian community. We are not looking for financial support. We are looking for visa extension as a waiver to recover our visas validity.**

*FECCA Survey on COVID-19 Response*

During consultations FECCA staff heard many stories on the devastating and mentally challenging impact from lack of appropriate and accessible pathways to permanency.

## CASE STUDY:

Abed<sup>11</sup> arrived on a boat from Afghanistan to Australia 11 years ago. He has applied for citizenship a few times with no success due to complications in the process time. His main concern is his family back in Pakistan and the fact that he can't visit them, especially his mum who is getting older. Abed is a refugee and had to leave Afghanistan because it was no longer safe. His family is in Pakistan. Abed has applied for Australian citizenship three times. There were different reasons for why previous applications have failed, including he once failed because he accidentally missed an email, another time filled in a form for an unaccompanied minor by mistake. When he arrived, he had been an unaccompanied minor. He has applied again and now Abed waits knowing that people in his community who applied long before him still have not received a response.

Abed works very hard and proudly owns and works in his food shop. He dreams of growing his business as a family business, but he cannot because he has no Australian citizenship.

Abed's thoughts quickly return to his family saying, 'Ten years is a long time'. It has been a long time for him not knowing and unable to plan for the future because without citizenship he has no stability. Still, every quarter Ali pays taxes on his business, contributing to the economy.

Abed cannot leave Australia as he has no passport. He explained that: 'Every moment you are thinking about your family, thinking about what happened. Ten years I have been alone—my life is wasted here'. Speaking about the Government, Abed said, 'They give us visa and we appreciate that, but now they are going to torture us. Why? This Government makes it harder for us.' Abed is contributing to the community by running his business for the past 7 years. He has no help and works every day. Exasperated, Abed said, 'Okay, we came by boat, we accept this. But they accepted us, now why are they torturing us?'

And still his thoughts remain with his family. They lost their homes and all that they had. His mum is sick and she is alone. She worries every single day. Abed wishes to bring her to Australia but the wait for family visas is too long and he can only sponsor entry if he is a citizen.

FECCA staff asked how this was affecting him. Abed responded saying, 'If you go through all those things it makes you sick mentally. If you can't help yourself how can you help the society.' When asked whether he had experienced discrimination or racism in Darwin, he said, 'People said there was no discrimination in Australia. They told me Australia had human rights. But I'm suffering every day. I go through this every day and the discrimination is only from the Government.'

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<sup>11</sup> Not his real name

The stress, worry and mental illness caused by government policy and slow processing times that FECCA heard of during consultations is a national issue. Processes must be put in place to ensure open, appropriate and clear information provision on people's applications and speedy processes to avoid a national crisis of visa anxiety.

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### RECOMMENDATIONS 29 AND 30:

Government must ensure open, clear, consistent and timely information to applicants for permanent residency and family reunion.

The Government must process applications within a reasonable timeframe to ensure people are given fair treatment and an opportunity to plan a future.

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# APPENDIX 1: SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

This study was part of FECCA's core funding from the Department of Home Affairs. It discusses findings based on a 2020 online Multicultural Access and Equity survey. The survey was based on questions asked for previous FECCA access and equity reports and focused on people's experiences in accessing a range of Government services. The research comprised:

1. Review of background information and previous FECCA Access and Equity Reports
2. Development of online survey questionnaire for the CALD population in Australia
3. Consultations with community groups and service providers across Australia
4. Interviews/consultations with FECCA members
5. Analysis of all data and final report.

The first stage of this research included reading previous FECCA access and equity reports to get a broad understanding of previous issues, trends and developments. At the same time, FECCA conducted consultations across Australia on issues of importance for CALD communities living in both metropolitan and regional areas. Aspects of access and equity were brought up by the consultations participants as part of the general themes discussed.

In 2019, FECCA met with the listed communities in the following locations:

Newcastle – Group consultation	Tonga, Eritrea, Poland, China and the Philippines
<b>Sydney</b>	Cook Island community
	South Sudanese
	Afghanistan (Hazara)
Western Sydney (Mt Druitt) – Group consultation	Iraqi, Nepal, Bangladesh and Egypt
<b>Darwin</b>	Myanmar (Rohingya)
	Syria x 2
	Afghanistan x 2
	Pakistan
	Iraq
	Sudan
	Burma/Myanmar
	Congo
	Philippines
	Fiji (Indian Fijian)
	Nepal
	Tonga
	Bangladesh

Each individual or organisation informed FECCA of different priorities and challenges faced in their community or personally. These issues ranged from English learning to employment. While a range of issues were heard, the greatest importance was placed by all on the inequality caused by the Australian visa system and pathway to permanency.

FECCA planned further consultations during 2020, with specific focus on access and equity to government services but had to change plans, priorities and schedule due to the COVID-19 pandemic leading to travel restrictions and limited access to communities.

In addition to the 2019 consultations, FECCA developed and published an online survey with specific questions related to multicultural access and equity to government services. The survey was accessible at FECCA's website, was shared with stakeholders and members, and promoted via FECCA Facebook, Twitter and in our monthly e-news. The survey received a total of 75 responses.

### **Summary of online survey respondents**

The survey for this research was accessible online for approximately 3 months, giving members from the CALD community in Australia ample time to hear about and respond to the survey.

Most of the respondents were women at an overwhelming 70 per cent. The age of the respondents was more equally spread, with the fewest respondents from the 18-24 age group. The majority of the respondents reported they live in a major city or state capital with only 21 per cent reporting they live in a regional or rural area. While 80 per cent of the respondents were born outside Australia, 65 per cent had been in Australia for ten years or longer. There was a significant

lack of newer arrivals to Australia with only 15 per cent had been in the country for 5 years or less. There may be many reasons for this discrepancy, but important to take notice of is the fact that the survey was only provided in English. It is imperative that future research on access and equity are provided with the necessary resources needed to translate the survey and to account for interpreters during consultations. Also, the number of consultations must increase to allow for people who may not access online surveys, who may not have digital tools or literacy to reply to an online survey and who may have fears about writing personal stories and information on a website and opportunity to talk about their experiences with government services.

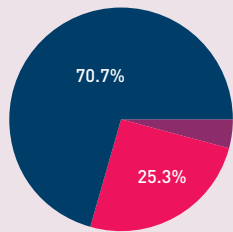
To compliment the information received from the online survey and the 2019 consultations, FECCA conducted interviews with FECCA members across the country to learn from them and their clients' experiences of access and equity. FECCA conducted interviews with members in Darwin, Brisbane, Perth, Melbourne, Shepparton and Hobart:

- Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory (MCNT)
- Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (ECCQ)
- Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia (ECCWA)
- Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV)
- Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District
- Multicultural Council of Tasmania (MCoT)

FECCA is grateful for the very insightful information received from members and for case studies provided to explain some of the challenges people from CALD backgrounds face in accessing government services.



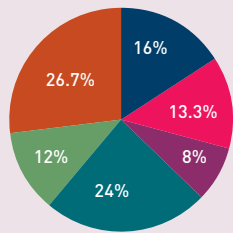
Figure 2: Survey results demographics



**What is your gender?**

75 responses

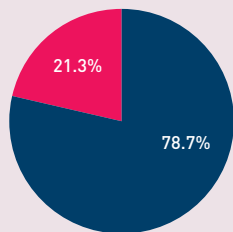
- Male
- Female
- Other



**What is your age?**

75 responses

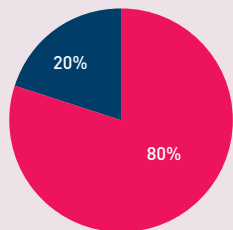
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- over 64



**Where do you live**

75 responses

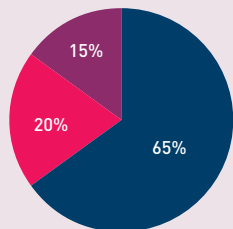
- Major city and surroundings or state capital (for example Sydney or Parramatta)
- Regional or rural area



**Where you born in Australia?**

75 responses

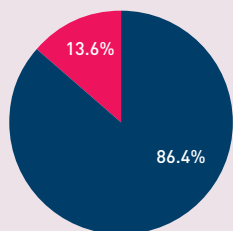
- Yes
- No



**How long have you been in Australia?**

60 responses

- Less than 5 years
- Between 5 and ten years
- More than 10 years



**Did you arrive in Australia as a refugee or Asylum seeker? (optional)**

59 responses

- Yes
- No

## BECOME INVOLVED



VISIT OUR WEBSITE  
[WWW.FECCA.ORG.AU](http://WWW.FECCA.ORG.AU)



COMMENT ON OUR POLICY  
RECOMMENDATIONS



FIND OUT WHAT WE DO, READ OUR  
SUBMISSIONS, LET US KNOW ABOUT  
ISSUES THAT CONCERN YOU



SUBSCRIBE TO  
AUSTRALIAN MOSAIC MAGAZINE



SUBSCRIBE TO  
FECCA E-NEWS



SHARE INFORMATION ON YOUR OWN  
ORGANISATION'S WORK RELEVANT TO  
CALD COMMUNITIES



FIND US ON TWITTER AND FACEBOOK AND KNOW MORE  
ABOUT OUR ACTIVITIES, TOPICAL ISSUES, COMMUNITY INITIATIVES,  
CURRENT GOVERNMENT INQUIRIES, LEARN ABOUT THE WORK OF  
OUR POLICY COMMITTEES, FIND OUT ABOUT CONFERENCES THAT ARE COMING AND  
SHARE TO THE COMMUNITY!



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