

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100, Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600, Australia

28 July 2011

Dear Members of the Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs

The Board and Staff of Metro Migrant Resource Centre (MMRC) wish to bring to your attention an issue of grave importance to the culturally and linguistically diverse constituency of NSW and relevant to your Inquiry.

On the 6 January 2010 Metro MRC was invited by FACSIA, via email, to tender for funding under Round 4 of the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program. This round was specifically targeting special needs and vulnerable individuals and groups and covered specific geographical areas. Given the timing of the e-mail, sent during skeleton staffing and a downtime in most Australian industries, it was somehow overlooked by Metro MRC staff until the Executive Director returned from annual leave very late in January. When she contacted Canberra she was informed that the tender application was due 15 February and that no extensions could be permitted given 'someone at the MMRC opened the original e-mail therefore it was taken that the information was received'.

MMRC worked solidly and met the deadline, preparing two huge tenders in less than ten working days. It was informed in March 2010 that its tender was unsuccessful and I can make the letter offering feedback on the application available to you upon request. The successful agency is a mainstream service and has monopolized most of the funds across a number of regions. The track record reaching CALD clients is questionable (when funded in another area they called requesting assistance in developing strategies to access CALD communities which one would have thought they knew how to do given the awarding of tenders to them).

The CEO sought and was granted a face-to-face feedback session with a senior bureaucrat from FACSIA's Sydney office, who actually assessed and ranked the tender application. The feedback was very positive and MMRC was informed it only just missed out being successful by one or two points and that 'no doubt the MMRC could have successfully managed the PHAMS program however, the panel went with a "known provider" to provide special needs mental health services targeting refugees, humanitarian entrants and CALD communities.' The feedback from FACSIA focused on trivial comments such as 'an extra line here was needed re accessibility of venue to public transport'.

Since that time there has been no contact from the awarded organisation in requesting to promote their services to CALD communities, to discuss referral processes or to assess their effectiveness in reaching CALD communities.

Currently Metro MRC runs over 3.3 million dollars worth of programs to vulnerable communities and is part of a consortium that is providing immediate on arrival services to

refugees and humanitarian entrants through the Humanitarian Settlement Strategy a contract worth tens of millions of dollars.

Since 2006-2011, \$554.70 million dollars of funding was dedicated to 277 mental health services. Out of those 277 services, only two were ethno-specific or multicultural organisations.

It is our view that if FACSIA was serious about funding the best service to access CALD mental health sufferers and their carers they would embark on a tender process that gives weight to such considerations. FACSIA could use their discretion to negotiate with agencies that meet the criteria and have a special expertise in areas such as CALD and could 'mentor' such services for a 12 month period or write in certain precautionary clauses. Data suggests that large NGO's do not effectively reach special needs communities and so they miss out on services. It is the old access and equity argument.

We hope that this Inquiry will assist in redressing the shameful lack of funding reaching those who most need it and the flawed tender processes government utilises to assess providers. Unless structural and policy changes are made this problem will continue to grow. Unfortunately, this pattern is evident across other Federal Government departments such as DEWR. Our sector is increasingly alarmed with the 'whitewash trend in the allocation of funding.

Sincerely

Maria Cosmidis
Chairperson