

## **SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGEING ON LONG-TERM STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THE ANTICIPATED AGEING OF THE AUSTRALIAN POPULATION**

The Council for Multicultural Australia (CMA) is an advisory body that aims to support the Commonwealth Government in its policy and programs affecting Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Council believes that there should be improved provision of services and programs for older Australians, many of whom have special needs regarding health and aged care.

This submission focuses on the needs of aged Australians from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, especially in relation to health and aged care issues.

The submission also suggests potential areas for future improvements through a series of recommendations. Council requests that the Standing Committee address these recommendations in its deliberations and final report.

### **Background**

Older Australians from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds are an important component of the older Australian population. According to recent research (*Projections for older immigrants*, AIHW 2001), this demographic group is projected to increase substantially over the 30-years from 1996 to 2026. At 30 June 2002, one in five older Australians were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (*Older Australia at a Glance*, AIHW, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition).

There will also be changes in the ethnic composition of this group. While the larger communities such as Italians will remain dominant, there are new emerging groups, such as the Croatian, Vietnamese, Lebanese and Maltese communities, whose numbers are growing in significance.

Broadly speaking, the Council for Multicultural Australia supports the objectives of the *National Strategy for an Ageing Australia* (Department of Health and Ageing, 2001), including the objective that “older Australians should have services that are appropriate to their diverse needs”.

Mainstream services and programs need to have the capacity and flexibility to provide services in all geographic regions to a culturally and linguistically diverse older population to address their specific health and cultural needs. This will require service delivery arrangements that are flexible, innovative and involve local ethnic communities.

### Recommendations:

- There is a need for the appropriate provision of information to all ethnic groups to ensure that people are well placed to make informed decisions about their care needs and the range of options available.
- There is documented need for improving access to assessment of eligibility for aged and community care through Aged Care Assessment Teams. Support is needed for older Australians from culturally diverse backgrounds to ensure that access to aged care remains equitable and that no group is disadvantaged.
- There is a need for developing an appropriately sized, distributed and trained workforce to meet the diverse care needs of an ageing population.
- Further research is required to improve our understanding of the cultural dimensions of ageing, including special needs that relate to the process of ageing, as well as barriers to and opportunities for healthy ageing.
- Data collection by all reporting bodies in the area of aged care should be carried out in accordance with the Australian Bureau of Statistics *Standards on Cultural and Linguistic Diversity* so that there is an adequate source of information on the characteristics of older overseas-born Australians to make informed policy decisions.
- Service delivery should follow the access and equity principles laid down in the Commonwealth Government’s *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society* (the Charter). In particular, it is imperative to consult a wide range of older Australians, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, regularly about the adequacy, design and standard of government services in accordance with the Charter’s principle of communication.

Strategies developed by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Ageing should recognise that Government services for the aged must be both inclusive and sensitive to the needs and requirements of clients from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. They should be responsive, as far as

practicable, to the particular circumstances of individuals in accordance with the Charter's principle of responsiveness. For instance, options such as clustering or co-placement of clients with the same first language or similar cultural background, within mainstream aged care facilities, should be made available, where possible, to meet the diverse needs of older Australians.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Chow', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Benjamin Chow  
Chairman  
29 November 2002