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Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
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Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

**Submission to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee's
Inquiry on the *Impact on Service Quality, Efficiency and Sustainability
of Recent Commonwealth Community Tendering Processes by the
Department of Social Services***

*Prepared by the Secretariat of the Federation of Ethnic Communities'
Councils of Australia*

About FECCA

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is the national peak body representing Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and their organisations. FECCA provides advocacy, develops policy and promotes issues on behalf of its constituency to Government and the broader community. FECCA supports multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice and the rejection of all forms of discrimination and racism so as to build a productive and culturally rich Australian society. FECCA's policies are developed around the concepts of empowerment and inclusion and are formulated with the common good of all Australians in mind.

Introduction

Ethno-specific and multicultural organisations, which no longer receive funding for their programs and projects, will need to significantly reduce their staff and services and some are at risk of having to close. A number of organisations have been funded previously by the Community Partners Program (CPP) of the former Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) and amongst them some have been providing services to the community for more than 20 years. The loss in funding impacts on the capacity of these multicultural agencies to deliver services and adversely affects clients' health and wellbeing.

FECCA sought feedback on the outcomes of the DSS grants rounds from its members and stakeholders representing grass-root and community organisations. They included ethno-specific and multicultural service

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providers and organisations which raised concerns over the lack of funding allocations in recent DSS grants rounds, such as the Aged Care Service Improvement and Healthy Ageing Grants (ACSIHAG) and the Families and Communities Programme (FCP).

The following organisations provided written feedback to FECCA:

- Australian Korean Welfare Association;
- Australian Nursing Home Foundation;
- Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria;
- Macarthur Diversity Services;
- Macedonian Australian Welfare Association of Sydney;
- Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory;
- Partners in Culturally Appropriate Care (PICAC) NSW/ACT;
- Serbian Community Association of Australia; and
- Sri Om Care New South Wales.

The importance of directing Government funding to culturally appropriate services

The migration experience places immense pressures on families and parenting with added complexity of new and unfamiliar environments. The extent to which recently arrived migrants and refugees can adjust to life in Australia and interact successfully with host communities depends largely on housing affordability, employment opportunities and the size and nature of established communities. Service providers and multicultural community groups have told FECCA that recently arrived migrants and communities continue to experience challenges with successful settlement, inclusion and integration many years after arrival.

People from CALD backgrounds encounter access and equity issues relating to health and aged care services. One ethno-specific organisation highlighted the migration experience of its community who mainly arrived in Australia during the 1960s and 1970s from rural regions in Europe. Equipped with little or no formal education, these migrants mostly entered the manual labour workforce upon arrival in Australia. People developed very limited language skills during their working years as many found jobs in manufacturing industries where they typically worked with people from their country of origin. Now in their retirement years and removed from workplace and social interaction, many of them are facing inactivity and isolation, withdrawing from social life, neglecting their physical and mental health and thus overall wellbeing. The narrative of this particular ethnic group reflects the migration experience of many other CALD communities.

Ethno-specific and multicultural agencies have significant expertise in providing culturally appropriate services, including but not limited to aged and health care, disability services, settlement and family services. It is important

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to fully utilise their expertise. The Department of Social Services (DSS) grants have been essential in funding programs of ethno-specific and multicultural agencies that help promote the health and wellbeing of CALD communities.

With discontinued funding to programs and projects of ethno-specific and multicultural organisations, communities will increasingly rely on mainstream service providers. These providers may not have appropriate cultural understanding or language services, and possibly not the capacity to help more clients.

The impact on service quality, efficiency and sustainability of recent Commonwealth community service tendering processes by DSS, with particular regard to the potential and likely impacts on service users concerning service delivery, continuity, quality and reliability

Organisations highlighted that their capacity to provide services to multicultural communities has been reduced due to the loss in funding. Funding cuts will affect services, and in some cases have already caused the cessation of services to multicultural communities.

This is a critical time in the process of aged care reform and it is disappointing that organisations with demonstrated effectiveness and expertise in supporting the system do not continue to receive funding.

One multicultural service provider emphasised that intensive engagement and interaction from initial settlement with individuals, families and CALD communities, develops long lasting and trusting relationships and also creates expectations of continued support. The defunding of the organisation's program has caused a loss in confidence from clients and a degradation of the organisation's relationship with its constituency.

Another ethno-specific organisation stated that it will have to substantially scale back its services to the community. The organisation will be able to offer only a few minor services and group activities that are delivered on a part-time basis. Its services will be left with no one to manage, coordinate, and oversee which may impact both on services and the quality of outcomes. With no full-time employee, the central point of contact for the community will be lost. The options will be to continue any services still viable, even if they can only be on a part-time basis, or to eventually wind up the organisation after 21 years of providing valuable services to the community and being an advocate on its behalf.

Many ethno-specific and multicultural organisations are also the first point of contact for generalist or mainstream services, who might need to consult about matters in relation to a specific community.

One organisation operating in a regional area highlighted that defunding will result in the loss of representation on behalf of the local CALD communities. The loss in funding comes at a time when there is a high need to educate and inform CALD consumers and communities on the changes currently underway in aged care. Without knowledge of which organisations (if any) were successful in receiving funding under the recent grants round, in some areas it is difficult to know what the impact will be on CALD communities.

FECCA has been informed that services that are either being scaled back or are at risk of being discontinued include:

- information sessions on how to access Centrelink;
- assistance to older people in writing applications for government housing;
- counselling for people experiencing depression and loneliness;
- assistance to older people with enabling them to remain living in the community;
- facilitation of access to aged care related information in community languages;
- assistance to older people with navigate the health and aged care system;
- development of multilingual resources;
- information to older people in regional and rural areas on the changes in the aged care system;
- support to local councils and other agencies in assisting their residents from CALD backgrounds;
- family focused and child centred activities for vulnerable migrant and refugee families; and
- culturally appropriate and accessible support services for families and referrals to mainstream agencies.

**The impact on service quality, efficiency and sustainability of recent Commonwealth community service tendering processes by DSS, with particular regard to any other related matters:
Sustainability of ethno-specific and multicultural service providers**

FECCA's constituency stated that ethno-specific and multicultural organisations are encountering major challenges in terms of sustaining their services due to loss in funding.

One multicultural service provider highlighted that the loss in funding has impacted on the future delivery of frontline services for a spectrum of CALD clients in its geographic area. Further, the forced redundancy of the project officer has resulted in the irreversible loss of acquired skills and corporate knowledge, as well as loss of organisational capacity and capability.

Another provider stated that with the strong focus on outputs and unit costing under the Commonwealth Home Support Programme, Consumer Directed Care, and the Home Care Packages, multicultural and ethno-specific organisations are no longer able to provide the additional support to the communities. Therefore, specialist projects need to be funded to address the current gaps and build capacity in the communities.

Other comments received included feedback relating to the sustainability and capacity of ethno-specific and multicultural service providers:

- a significant decrease of essential services to an increasing number of people from CALD backgrounds is expected;
- organisations which already depend heavily on volunteers will need to do so further with the decrease in paid staff;
- there will be a loss of acquired skills and corporate knowledge, as well as organisational capacity, due to redundancies;
- defunding will have a negative impact on morale of work teams and forward planning, as well as adverse impacts on financial viability of the organisations, leading to the risk of having to close.

At Attachment A is a case study, from the Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory, highlighting the extensive losses that will be experienced by different sectors of the Darwin community as a result of MCNT not being successful in receiving funding under the DSS grants round.

Conclusion

A significant number of ethno-specific and multicultural organisations have not been successful in securing DSS grants. This has resulted in reduced capacity to deliver highly needed services to multicultural clients and communities. As programs are being discontinued, some organisations are at risk of having to close. This will have a significant and far reaching negative impact on CALD communities in Australia.

For further information please contact the FECCA Office on 02 6282 5755 and at admin@fecca.org.au.

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Attachment A: Case study from the Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory

Background

The Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory (MCNT), based in Darwin, is the local peak body for multiculturalism and provides activities and services for vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals and families in Darwin from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, particularly recently arrived migrants and refugees.

MCNT received advice from the Department of Social Services in late December 2014 that it had not been successful in receiving funding under the grants round. This decision effectively defunded MCNT's long-running *Multicultural Solutions Project*, which had been funded continuously since March 2005 by the Department of Families, Housing, Communities Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), and then the Department of Social Services (DSS) under the Family Support Program (FSP).

The *Multicultural Solutions Project* was unique to the Northern Territory, as it was CALD-specific and delivered an integrated suite of popular, successful and productive family focused and child centred activities and services for all migrant and refugee families—not just those who were recently arrived and eligible under the Settlement Grants Program (SPG). The *Multicultural Solutions Project* was complementary to, and extended the outreach of, MCNT's settlement services funded under the SPG.

The *Multicultural Solutions Project* had evolved during its nearly 10 years of operation to meet the changing needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged CALD families.

The impact of defunding on the MCNT's innovative activities and outreach

The *Multicultural Solutions Project* over many years provided for CALD families a range of culturally appropriate social interaction activities, support services and referrals to mainstream agencies. The project aimed to identify and meet client's needs, contributed to positive family relationships, facilitated social inclusion, encouraged self-reliance and integration with the mainstream, and increased effective participation in community life.

The advice that MCNT was unsuccessful in the grants rounds resulted in the cessation of many activities under the project:

- **“Cooking with Culture”**, which was a food and nutrition program designed to assist CALD seniors, and operating since March 2010 as a collaborative partnership with Anglicare NT. This activity met fortnightly,

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and the clients, usually from established migrant backgrounds and often from socially isolated circumstances, came together to prepare, cook and share their traditional cultural cuisine and to socialise with other group members in a supportive and safe meeting place. With regular invited expert guest presenters—including nutritionists from the Australian Red Cross and Nutrition NT—“Cooking with Culture” provided older CALD clients with increased awareness and education of healthy ageing.

- **“Parent Support Group”**, which commenced as a multicultural women’s group in May 2010 upon consultation with CALD community leaders about the need to address health issues for CALD community women. From March 2011, this activity broadened its scope to provide support and information to CALD community men and women as parents. This activity was most recently presented monthly, and had been a long-term collaborative partnership with Relationships Australia NT with the aim of improving knowledge and skills in parenting and ensuring that parents and children have the opportunity to connect with other families of CALD background. At each session, invited expert guest presenters provided information on topics related to health, nutrition, positive parenting and child safety. In addition, an independent program was provided for children aged 0 to 12 years accompanying their parents with age appropriate activities designed to enhance skills and confidence through active involvement in arts, craft and sport.

In addition, the lack of funding advised in December 2014 caused major dislocation to a unique partnership with Serco Immigration Services, through which it was arranged for asylum seekers in detention to attend regular activities at MCNT:

- **“Families, Food and Fun”** was a successful cooking activity with asylum seeker families in nationality groups on excursion from detention which was initiated in August 2011. This was a weekly activity and was based on cooking authentic cultural cuisine. An indoor playgroup with cultural and age appropriate activities was provided for young children aged 0 to 5 years accompanying their parents. Successful outcomes from this activity have included parents interacting through play with their children; children socially interacting with their peers; and parents and other adults enjoying the experience of cultural expression and hospitality through the preparation, cooking and sharing of traditional food.
- **“Parenting in a New Culture”** was a weekly group discussion session with asylum seeker families on excursion from detention initiated in August 2013. In partnership with mainstream agencies including CatholicCare NT, this activity provided support and training, with invited expert guest presenters sharing information about positive parenting in a new culture. The sessions included culturally inclusive outdoor play activities for children aged 0 to 5 years with their parents in the park

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opposite MCNT office, designed to improve the mental health of participants.

The impact on the defunding decision on the MCNT and MCNT's clients

MCNT has a strong commitment to community development and empowerment to identify and address barriers to cultural inclusion and social and economic participation for our new settlers. Because of our central suburban geographical location, the historical focus of MCNT's activities and services has been the migrant and refugee communities residing in Darwin's northern suburbs. MCNT has a whole of community and family focus, with many recently arrived clients who are welfare recipients or otherwise engaged in study and/or lower paid employment, and aligned with lower socio-economic status.

As part of the *Multicultural Solutions Project*, MCNT has maintained or introduced specialised and accessible regular activities and services—not available elsewhere in Darwin—for the defined target group: vulnerable and socially and economically disadvantaged children, parents, families CALD communities. MCNT has a history of implementing complementary integrated suites of activities and services for CALD clients funded contemporaneously by separate Federal Government agencies. The *Multicultural Solutions Project* was associated with productive outcomes for CALD clients with an outreach to people of all ages and demographic backgrounds within MCNT's multicultural constituency. Through this project, MCNT provided a safe, welcoming, non-threatening environment for CALD families and communities to engage effectively with mainstream service providers and government agencies.

Over many years of experience in community development, MCNT has become aware of the need to ensure longevity and sustainability of its funded programs and projects. Project Officers invest a lot of time, effort and emotion to gain the acceptance, trust, respect and loyalty of clients from CALD communities. It is MCNT's experience that intensive engagement and interaction from initial settlement with individuals and families from CALD communities develops long-lasting and trusting relationships, and also creates expectations of continued support. CALD community expectations result in frustration and disappointment when successful programs and projects are abruptly discontinued. A case in point is the confirmation of the defunding of the *Multicultural Solutions Project* in December 2014, which caused a loss in confidence from MCNT's clients and degradation of our relationship with our constituency, which will take time to repair.

The complexity of CALD clients' needs is not amenable to short-term funding. Empowering CALD communities and promoting self-reliance takes time and does not yield results easily or promptly. MCNT is always aware of not over-promising, and deploys strategies wherever possible to ensure sustainability

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for successful CALD-specific initiatives and ventures beyond the funded period. MCNT's clients generally become conditioned to continued assistance, with seamless service delivery from one year to the next without disruption. CALD clients are not familiar with the intricacies of short-term funding cycles and changes in government policies and priorities.

In the current context, the ongoing uncertainty of continued DSS funding for the past six months has had adverse impacts on the morale of MCNT team and the lack of incentive for professional development and training. It has also effectively inhibited forward planning and the continuity of operations for 2015, and has exposed our agency to financial risk. More specifically, the confirmed loss of the *Multicultural Solutions Project* has seriously impacted on the future delivery of frontline services for a spectrum of CALD clients in Darwin, who are not eligible for services elsewhere. The forced redundancy of the associated Project Officer position has resulted in the irreversible loss of acquired skills and corporate knowledge, as well as organisational capacity and capability.

The impact on the defunding decision on Darwin's community services sector

Darwin has a high proportion of migrants and refugees in its population and this is increasing each year. Analysis of the data from the 2011 Census revealed that about a quarter of the population of Darwin was born overseas and of these people about a third arrived in the past 5 years. MCNT, through its diversified funding base, its extensive outreach and well-established networks, operates at a unique position as a key liaison agency at the interface between migrant and refugee communities, the government and the wider community.

The migration experience places immense pressures on families and parenting is often more difficult in new and unfamiliar environments. The degree with which recently-arrived migrants and refugees can adjust to life in Australia and interact successfully with host communities (such as Darwin) depends to a large extent on these three factors: housing affordability, employment opportunities, and the size and nature of pre-existing communities. It is the experience of local service providers and ethnic community groups that recently-arrived migrant and refugee communities in Darwin continue to experience challenges with successful settlement, inclusion and integration many years after arrival.

During the years of operation of the *Multicultural Solutions Project*, MCNT developed close working relationships with like-minded organisations and mainstream service providers in the community services sector, including Darwin Community Arts, Melaleuca Refugee Centre, Anglicare NT, the Australian Red Cross, and Relationships Australia NT. MCNT consults regularly with stakeholders (including current DSS funded service providers)

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at interagency meetings to avoid overlap and duplication in activities and the over-servicing of its DSS-funded clients and effectively streamlines a more effective referrals process for clients between the various DSS funded agencies in Darwin.

Darwin's settlement and mainstream service providers work closely together—often in collaboration—and synergise targeted activities and programs to meet the evolving and emerging needs of Darwin's CALD community through efficient referral systems. There is the recognition that a coordinated and integrated multi-agency approach is needed to adequately address the complex settlement need for CALD clients. MCNT develops active inter-agency partnerships and synergies for client-focused service delivery efficiencies with joint activities and sharing of human and physical resources. Inter-agency collaboration and service integration to reduce service complexity is an important cost-effective consideration for Darwin where community sector services a relatively small number of CALD clients compared to the larger states and territories.

MCNT expended a lot of energy, time and resources into preparing the DSS funding proposal for the Family, Parent and Children Support Program based on its successful *Multicultural Solutions Project* for the DSS Children and Parenting Support Services stream. There were a number of elements to our proposal—comprised primarily of proven activities with partner agencies and a track record for up to 5 years—that targeted, and were designed to appeal to a broad spectrum of the local CALD constituency. We ensured that the proposal was evidence-based, aligned with the DSS Children and Parenting Support Services funding guidelines, and with the demonstrated capability to deliver.

It was the aim of MCNT to identify and address barriers to social and economic participation; it was intended that DSS funded activities would provide the opportunity for self-reliance and social interaction. MCNT's proposed DSS-funded activities and services were designed for the target group to address the advice, services and information gaps and a range of settlement needs for CALD community clients within the community services sector, and reduce their reliance on the social service system.

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