4 March 2016

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
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**Inquiry into the future of Australia’s aged care workforce**

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.

FECCA has had a longstanding presence in policy and systemic advocacy on ageing and aged care issues for CALD Australians. FECCA is the leading stakeholder in CALD ageing and aged care policy, and has been a significant contributor to a range of collaborations, including the National Aged Care Alliance, and partnerships with other peak bodies, to achieve the inclusion and empowerment of older CALD Australians, their carers, and CALD people who work in the aged care industry. FECCA undertook the consultations to inform the *National Ageing and Aged Care Strategy for People from CALD backgrounds* and is a member of a working group to support its implementation.

FECCA is pleased to have this opportunity to submit to the Senate inquiry our views in relation to aged care workforce issues. It should be noted that while the focus is on a culturally competent aged care workforce, comments are relevant also more broadly to social care in Australia.

This submission is informed by FECCA’s Healthy Ageing Reference Network, including members such as the Ethnic Communities’ Council NSW (ECC NSW), and the Multicultural

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1 FECCA’s 2020 Vision for Older CALD Australians, 2015
2 Commonwealth of Australia, *National Ageing and Aged Care Strategy for People from CALD backgrounds*, 2015
Communities’ Council of the Illawarra (MCCI), and Partners In Culturally Appropriate Care (PICAC) NSW/ACT.

Recommendation

FECCA recommends the development of an Aged Care Workforce Cultural Diversity Management Strategy, to develop and support an aged care workforce that is culturally competent and responsive to the needs of older people from CALD backgrounds. The Strategy must address, as a minimum:

- ways to attract CALD workers to employment in aged care services;
- methods for improving the retention of culturally competent aged care workers, including but not limited to workers from CALD backgrounds;
- attracting aged care workers to rural and regional areas;
- implications for interface between the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and aged care system; and
- strategies to enhance cultural competency of the aged care workforce, as part of increasing the capability of the sector to meet the needs of older people from CALD backgrounds.

FECCA endorses the submission and recommendations made by the National Foundation of Australian Women.

Older CALD population in Australia and its impact on the aged care workforce

While older Australians are making up an increasing proportion of our population overall, significantly, migrant communities are ageing at a much faster rate than the population at large. The 2011 Census indicated 20.1% of Australians over the age of 65 were born in non-English speaking countries. On current projections, in 2030 30% of the population aged over 65 will be from CALD backgrounds. A large increase of those aged 85 and over (such as post-war migrants) is predicted, which adds an extra dimension of diversity to the future of aged care in Australia.3

The nature of the aged care workforce is that it is predominantly female, and increasingly multicultural.4 It is estimated that 23% of direct care workers in residential aged care speak a language other than English, and 16% of direct care workers working in the community. The number of multicultural workers in the aged care workforce is under-reported as workers in positions other than registered nurses, enrolled nurses, and personal care attendants are not counted. Aged care service provision is a highly diverse industry with a range of staff groups, many of which are not captured in this data.5

With such a large percentage of people receiving ageing and aged care services being of a CALD background, the aged care workforce must be appropriately trained to ensure a high level of cultural competency. This applies to all aged care workers.

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4 Aged and Community Services Australia, The Aged Care Workforce in Australia, Position Paper, February 2015
Future aged care workforce requirements for the delivery of culturally appropriate care in the context of aged care reform, such consumer directed care, and the freeing of the market

Government reforms in aged care over the last several years have been significant, and the next major impact of the reforms will be consumer directed care (CDC) becoming compulsory in residential aged care (following on from the introduction of compulsory CDC arrangements in home care packages from July 2015), as well as a free market where services will need to be attractive to CALD older people to ensure their future success.

Aged care is now characterised by the emergence of the market that is required to respond to a growing demand from users of services for flexibility, control, choice and terms of receiving services they need, and when they need them. A free market creates consumer choice and competition that subsequently drive the minimum standard of practice. At the same time, consumers are encouraged to raise their expectations for services.

Consumers should be the driving force in their care. This is a positive time for CALD older people, with the increased focus on consumer choice, but also a challenging time, with the complex nature of aged care services compounded by barriers CALD people may face. These can include barriers such as lack of knowledge of, or mistrust of, government services, low English literacy, and a lack of access to equipment needed for online access to services. A multicultural workforce can be one, and important, way to help to alleviate these barriers.

For example, cognitive impairment in CALD people with dementia can lead to people reverting to their first language, and/or losing the ability to speak in English which they might have once had. Care services from a bilingual worker can help to alleviate some of the frustration and isolation experienced by the CALD person with dementia.

Making culturally appropriate care core business will open up new avenues for an organisation and may include benefits such as developing and steering a modern business culture embedded in Australia’s multicultural society, reaching diverse clients more effectively, and strengthening market position as a service provider. A culturally competent workforce can help older CALD people to fulfil their own aspirations, and help them to receive the services they need, in the time, place and way that they want.

NDIS and aged care workforces

There is a risk that the increased demand and limited supply of specific language and cultural skills will result in older CALD people not getting the level of choice and control needed to meet their individual needs.

It is essential that older CALD people are fully informed of the potential impact of change when transitioning from the NDIS to aged care services. Once a person decides to move from the NDIS to aged care, they cannot move back to the NDIS. If aged care service

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6 FECCA, Multicultural Access and Equity: Building a cohesive society through responsive services, 2014-2015
7 Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing, Working with Bilingual Staff in Aged Care, 2011, and Royal District Nursing Service (RDNS), Diversity Framework, Policy, Planning and Practice, 2012-2017, January 2012
providers give less choice and control for a person in their area, then this is a risk for the older CALD person if they do not fully understand the implications of a move.

It is essential that the workforce supports equal outcomes for people over 65 who enter the aged care system directly and not from the NDIS.

These issues must be taken into account in any Workforce Cultural Diversity Management Strategy, as they may impact on the attraction and retention of CALD workers to aged care.

**Challenges in attracting, creating and retaining culturally diverse and competent aged care workers**

Some key factors that may impact negatively on recruiting and retaining aged care workers include: remuneration, working environment, staffing ratios, education, training, skills development, and a lack of career paths. Casualisation of the workforce may make it less attractive for some people, looking for permanent or long term work. It is possible that employment opportunities under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) will attract aged care workers away from the aged care sector.8

Recruiting, training and retaining bilingual and bicultural workers can be time and resource intensive, particularly if an employer is looking for potential employees from particular CALD communities. There may not be workers available from particular CALD backgrounds.

CALD workers benefit all organisations, and all clients, not just those with whom they share a CALD background. Working in a culturally diverse environment also creates cultural competency for an organisation through direct personal interactions. This in turn benefits an organisation’s dealings with clients and stakeholders.9

When recruiting staff, employers need to be aware that standard job application and interviewing techniques might be unfamiliar to people who have obtained skills and experience through a different work culture, in another country. It may be of benefit to employers to be more flexible in their recruitment processes so that such applicants can be considered.10 It is the responsibility of employers to take a culturally competent approach to recruitment; developing a positive workplace that embraces cultural diversity is a step to having a workplace that is inclusive and responsive to the needs of all employees.11

There may be assumptions made about CALD workers. A simple example is the incorrect assumption that a worker from the same country as a client can speak the same language, or is culturally the same. Using bilingual workers can have benefits but can also present challenges.12 These workers need to be trained in the sector and possess the cultural sensitivities that exist in religious and cultural diversity. Just because someone speaks another language does not necessarily mean they are the most appropriate person for that cultural group. For instance, there is a misconception that speakers of Arabic can cater for all Arabic clients, whereas Arabic has some 7 language groups with over 40 dialects within those groups.

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8 Submission to FECCA from the Partners in Culturally Appropriate Care (PICAC) NSW/ACT.
10 Submission to FECCA from the Ethnic Communities’ Council NSW (ECC NSW).
12 Submission to FECCA from ECC NSW.
All organisations need to continually work towards cultural competency, and staff from all backgrounds should be trained in cultural competency.

Other negative reports include stories of:

- poor workplace culture and attitudes towards CALD workers, and lack of support mechanisms to facilitate integration into the workplace. For example, orientation for new CALD workers is often ad hoc and inadequate;\(^{13}\)
- a lack of career path in the aged care industry, particularly for CALD workers, who make up a large part of the workforce but are generally not in management or leadership roles. A leadership program tailored to multicultural staff may be a way to empower lower level aged care workers with the confidence and knowledge to move into management positions.

Retaining staff in aged care can be difficult because of low wages, particularly for retaining mature-age workers. Low wages are considered to show a lack of social recognition for the contribution aged care workers make to society. Other negative impacts on retention of staff include the physical demands of aged care work, and poor management, where the organisational responses to the increased number of high-need clients, are not adequately addressing issues around work and staff ratios.\(^{14}\)

**Case study: Fronditha Care**

Fronditha Care is a not-for-profit community based organisation providing care and support to Greek elders and other cultural backgrounds in Victoria and NSW. Fronditha Care aims to ensure that Greek speaking elderly are able to live in a residential facility or remain at home and be supported by an agency which shares their language, history, religious values, attitudes, rituals, celebrations, music and food. To meet this need, Fronditha Care applied for and obtained a Labour Agreement between the Australian Government and Fronditha Care. This enables Fronditha care to nominate Greek-speaking people to work for the organisation as a Personal Care worker on a 457 visa. Fronditha Care can nominate and sponsor, every year, 20 vocationally trained PCWs who meet certain criteria. This allows Fronditha care to nurture cultural identity in a supportive environment, as an integral part of maintaining wellbeing into older age.\(^{15}\)

From the employee/worker perspective, migrants may not be familiar with recruitment processes, and may find that lower English literacy is a barrier to employment. Overseas qualifications and experience may not be recognised, and extra training in Australia may need to be undertaken. Training pathways that recognise qualifications are needed. Some CALD workers may need extra support for workplace reading and writing.

Often CALD workers are expected to provide language services/interpreting and cultural advice for clients, in addition to their usual duties, and this is rarely recognised financially. Some workers say they do not feel competent or confident in both languages but feel they are expected to provide a level of bilingual support. There may also be issues for a CALD

\(^{13}\) Submission to FECCA from PICAC NSW/ACT
\(^{15}\) Fronditha Care Labour Agreement Information booklet, see www.frondithacare.org
worker when working within their own community, such as potential for conflicts of interest in smaller communities, which can add a level of stress to CALD workers not experienced by other workers.\textsuperscript{16}

**Whether the quality and consistency of registered training organisations and qualifications are suitable for meeting the aged care workforce requirements**

There are significant issues with private RTOs offering aged care training and qualifications with substandard and questionable results. Arguably, RTOs lack the necessary cultural competence to support bilingual students to complete training – a high number of participants leave the courses prior to completion, and lose funds as they are unable to recoup the fees paid.\textsuperscript{17}

**The National Ageing and Aged Care Strategy** for people from CALD backgrounds supports principles in relation to workforce (for example: *CALD community capacity is strengthened to develop a workforce with the skills and knowledge to deliver culturally, linguistically and faith-appropriate aged care services*) - Whether Australian Government policies are working to meet these principles.

The Strategy specifically states as an Action area under Goal 4 that the Department will work with other government departments and agencies to develop appropriate education and training to enhance CALD aged care workforce skills (4.7). To some extent this is assisted by the Aged Care Workforce Fund. Greater collaboration between government, agencies, multicultural organisations and aged care sector will improve the implementation of the Strategy.

Other relevant action areas are:
- 5.4: in partnership with the CALD sector, develop targeted communications to encourage members of CALD communities to consider employment, volunteering and training in the aged care sector; and
- 5.5: Develop structured pathways to facilitate the employment of appropriate bilingual staff in the aged care system.

Although there have been communications campaigns aimed at consumers (such as the *My Aged Care* communications campaigns), FECCA is not aware of any such campaigns aimed at potential workers in aged care, nor government-developed pathways to facilitate employment.

**Particular additional aged care workforce challenges in regional towns and remote communities, and whether CDC can be fully implemented in regional towns and remote communities where there may be limited choice or availability of services**

Geographical barriers have always created challenges in regional areas and cultural needs are often not identified as a priority. Regional areas are often leaders in innovation in the

\textsuperscript{16} Submission to FECCA from ECC NSW
\textsuperscript{17} Submission to FECCA from PICAC NSW/ACT
way they deliver services. There needs to be flexibility in CDC guidelines in regional and rural areas to help make up any shortfall in services, with appropriate safeguards.¹⁸

Employers located in rural and regional areas may need to offer incentives to attract CALD workers, as the CALD workforce tends to migrate to metropolitan areas, where they are more likely to find the support they need as CALD workers.¹⁹

FECCA’s research with communities in regional and rural areas has stressed the importance of consumers receiving information and services in their own language, to ensure equitable access to services and information.²⁰ A lack of CALD workers in regional and rural areas of Australia makes meeting these needs more challenging.

**Using the Aged Care Workforce Fund to address the aged care needs of CALD older people**

To ensure the Aged Care Workforce Fund is used most effectively, it must include as a minimum, compulsory cultural competency training modules for people undertaking study in the program provided by the Fund. Further suggestions include targeted training and education programs for those delivering services to older CALD people, with support mechanisms in workplaces (such as diversity strategies being translated into actions by leaders) would assist in improving the outcomes under the Fund.²¹

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¹⁸ Submission to FECCA from PICAC NSW/ACT
¹⁹ Submission to FECCA from ECC NSW
²¹ Submission to FECCA from PICAC NSW/ACT