



 **FECCA**  
Digital Access and Equity  
for Multicultural Communities  
Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia

# Digital Access and Equity for Multicultural Communities

Australian Government is investing in the digital transformation agenda to drive innovation and make it easier for individuals and businesses to access government services.

According to the Australian Government Digital Transformation Office (DTO), one in eight Australians aged 14 and over will look up government information and services online, totalling around 324 million transactions a year. The DTO reports that more than half of these people will experience a problem.

The move to digital government service delivery is of interest and concern to FECCA's constituency—Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The push to move government service delivery online and the speed of reforms require adequate consideration of, and tailored responses to, accessibility issues regarding the online information provision and service delivery, with a view to overcoming barriers to access and achieving equity of outcomes.

This brief seeks to assist government departments and agencies to meet their commitments and responsibilities under the *Multicultural Access and Equity Policy* as they transition to online service delivery.<sup>1</sup>

## Consultation

To gather views and experiences of digital service delivery, FECCA consulted with culturally and linguistically diverse community groups and a number of service providers in Darwin, Adelaide, and at the Gold Coast. These groups included newly arrived refugees, older migrants, and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. An online survey was also conducted, with 195 responses received through FECCA's networks and members. The majority of respondents to the survey reported feeling confident using a computer and the internet (84 per cent).

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<sup>1</sup> Digital Transformation Office, 'About Us', <https://www.dto.gov.au/about/>.

# The Commonwealth Digital Landscape

There are two aspects of the digital landscape—information provision and service delivery—and there are important distinctions between them. Digital information provision is a communication mechanism used to inform customers about government services and often complements other methods such as print media, radio, and targeted messages to customers. Digital service delivery utilises online platforms to provide government services; for example, a client may make a Medicare claim or complete their tax return online.

## Digital service delivery

Digital government services at the federal level are largely accessed through the *myGov* portal, which falls under the responsibility of the Australian Government Department of Human Services (DHS). However, each linked service is administered by the relevant department or agency.

Services that can be linked to a *myGov* account include:

- Medicare;
- Australian Taxation Office;
- Manage ABN Connections;
- Centrelink;
- Australian JobSearch;
- My Health Record;
- My Aged Care;
- Nanny Pilot Programme;
- Child Support;
- Department of Veterans' Affairs; and
- National Disability Insurance Scheme.

The Government recently reported that DHS is acting on feedback from the public to deliver improvements to *myGov*. A joint project team has been established to re-examine *myGov*, address frustrations with the user experience, and assess *myGov*'s consistency with the Digital Service Standard.<sup>2</sup>

DHS has a number of mobile apps that enable clients to do their business on their mobile device. These include:

- Express Plus Child Support mobile app;
- Express Plus Medicare mobile app;
- Express Plus Centrelink mobile app; and
- Express Plus Lite mobile app, which allows clients to report their employment income.  
*This app is available in Arabic, Chinese, Persian (Farsi) and Vietnamese.*

The *Express Plus* mobile apps had been downloaded more than 64 million times as at 31 December 2015. In 2014-15, over 61 million transactions were completed through the apps.<sup>3</sup>

The Australian Taxation Office (ATO) has the ATO app, which allows individual taxpayers, small business owners and self-managed super fund trustees to access relevant tax and super information and tools in one place. The app includes the *myDeductions* tool, which can be used to record and manage tax deductions throughout the year.

## Integrated services

My Aged Care is an integrated service consisting of both a website and a telephone contact centre. Together, they provide community members with information on aged care for themselves, a family member, a friend or

<sup>2</sup> Senator the Hon Fiona Nash, Budget 2016-17: Investing in Regional Growth 2016-17 (3 May 2016), 96.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 97.

someone that they are caring for. The Australian Government Department of Health (DoH) is responsible for My Aged Care, which is the main entry point to the aged care system.

The Carer Gateway is an integrated national service consisting of a website and a phone service for carers to access practical information and support. The Gateway provides a range of information that can help carers in their role, from practical advice and resources, to help finding support services in their local area. The Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) is responsible for the Carer Gateway, which is currently under development.

The Government has announced that a new Digital Mental Health Gateway will be developed.<sup>4</sup> The gateway will streamline access to existing evidence-based information, advice and digital mental health treatment, through a centralised telephone and web portal.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The Hon Sussan Ley MP, 'A new blueprint for mental health services' (26 November 2015), <https://www.health.gov.au/internet/ministers/publishing.nsf/Content/health-mediarel-yr2015-ley151126.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Commonwealth of Australia as represented by the Department of Health, Budget 2016-17, Portfolio Budget Statements 2016-17, Budget Related Paper No. 1.10, Health Portfolio, 60.

# Cultural and linguistic considerations in digital information provision and service delivery

Different cohorts of migrants have varying experiences when accessing services digitally. Some groups may have great difficulty due to limited digital literacy and English language proficiency, for example, older migrants and refugees. Other groups—for example, skilled migrants, young migrants, and those with good English language skills—will adapt more quickly to using digital services.

## Language literacy

Where webpages are available only in English, migrants who have no or limited literacy in English are unable to interact with them.

Translated webpages can be of use when they are easy to locate and the translation is accurate and culturally appropriate. However, some migrants may not be literate in their first language, and thus not be able to use translated webpages which are text intensive. This is particularly relevant for older migrants and refugees. Twenty per cent of participants in the *Building a New Life in Australia* longitudinal study (which studies more than 2,000 humanitarian entrants over a 5 year period) are illiterate in their own main spoken language.<sup>6</sup>

*The client group that I have are often illiterate in their first language let alone in English. Having clear apps on the phone / tablet which uses symbols and easily switch to translated languages may help – Online survey respondent*

## Digital literacy

Digital literacy varies depending on the cohort. Some people come with no experience using computers and the internet—for example, many refugees and older migrants who may not have acquired technological skills over time. However, other groups use computers, smart devices and the internet regularly.

Some new arrivals need a significant amount of training and support before developing computer literacy and functional knowledge of government systems. Developing digital literacy should be considered part of the settlement process, with recognition that this will take time.

## Digital access

The number of households with access to the internet is increasing. In 2014-15, 7.7 million households or 86 per cent of all households has access to the internet. Households with children aged under 15 years are most likely to have access to the internet (97 per cent). Internet access is more common in households located in major cities (88 per cent) than in remote or very remote parts of Australia (79 per cent).<sup>7</sup>

The reasons for a household not having internet access include:

- No need (63 per cent);
- Lack of confidence or knowledge (22 per cent); and
- Cost (16 per cent).

<sup>6</sup> K Cala and A Rowland, 'What are the findings from the Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA) study telling us?' Presentation at Settlement Council of Australia Conference (May 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 8146.9 – Household Use of Information Technology, Australia, 2014-15, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/ProductsbyCatalogue/ACC2D18CC958BC7B-CA2568A9001393AE?OpenDocument>

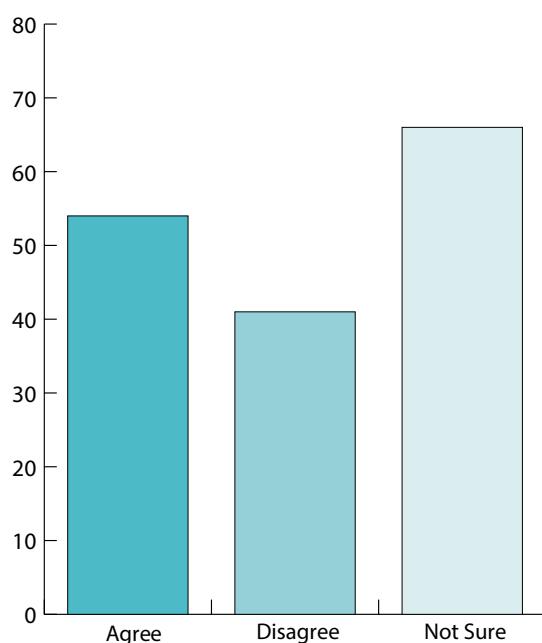
Cost was the most common reason that households with children under 15 years reported not having access to internet (43 per cent).<sup>8</sup>

Access to technology does not mean that an individual has the capacity to use online platforms. Household internet access is not an indication that all members of the household are internet users. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that the 15-17 years age group has the highest proportion of internet users (99 per cent), while the 65 years and older age group has the lowest proportion (51 per cent). Level of education also affects the likelihood that an individual is an internet user—96 per cent of people with a Bachelor degree or above use the internet, compared with 77 per cent of those educated to year 12 or below.<sup>9</sup>

## Security concerns

Privacy concerns with regards to accessing government services online have been raised particularly in the context of *myGov* where access to a number of services is available through one portal. Migrants and refugees may have lived in countries where government agencies are not trustworthy, and thus are wary of anything which puts all of their personal information in one place. Many are not aware of the security of online services.

I feel confident that my personal information is secure when using online Government services



Answer Choice	Responses
Agree	54
Disagree	41
Not Sure	66
Total	161

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Information about privacy and security of digital services, including who has access to an individual's data and how this data will be used, is not adequately communicated to the public.

## Users of digital service delivery

The recipient of a government service and the user of the digital delivery of the service are not necessarily the same person. Many individuals use digital services on behalf of others. They may be relatives of community workers. About 50 per cent of respondents to FECCA's survey had used online government services on behalf of someone else (largely a community service provider or a relative, with some respondents assisting friends or others). The most common identified reason for using online services on behalf of someone else was the service recipient not knowing how to utilise digital services.

Using nominees is the only option for those who cannot access services digitally themselves. Nominees are only available to clients who have family and community support, and some cohorts—for example, some newly arrived refugees—may not have those connections that can be used as nominees. In certain circumstances, the use of a nominee may breach individual's privacy or could represent a conflict of interest.

To design and deliver a person-centred service, it is important that data is collected about the utilisation of digital platforms to access services. This will allow agencies to understand whether digital delivery targets the actual service recipients or their nominees and, in case of the latter, what are the security and privacy issues for their services' clients and the impact on the integrity of the service delivery in terms of consumer-direction and empowerment.

### Utilising Data from Digital Service Delivery

Data analytics and research can tell a lot about the individuals using the services and how they use these services, which can then be utilised to improve the service delivery design. Adequate, disaggregated information collection can also provide insights into the social, economic and cultural considerations impacting on clients of a service. This data can assist to develop policy and responsive services for individuals.

Importantly, data collected through digital platforms must be able to identify when a user is being assisted to utilise the service and for what reasons, so that the evidence is clearer about who needs help and at what stages of the process.

This can be achieved through the development of data collection plans. Agencies should collaborate to agree on terminology, (for example, names of languages), and types of information that would be collected.

# Designing digital service delivery to meet the needs of users

Australian Government digital services must meet the Digital Service Standard criteria. The standard includes understanding user needs, designing and building a user-centred process, and making the service accessible to all users regardless of their ability and environment. The standard also includes a requirement for agencies to ensure that people who use the digital service can also use other available channels if needed, without repetition or confusion.<sup>10</sup>

Digital service delivery should be designed to be person-centric and have good user experience at its core, recognising the diversity of users and the ensuing gaps in capacity and access. It should be intuitive and easy to navigate. The use of simple and consistent icons and layout across all government websites will enable easier navigation of different agencies' websites by users.

## Written translations are not the only option

The Royal District Nursing Service has produced a series of Talking Books which provide information about health topics such as type 2 diabetes and dementia.<sup>11</sup> The Talking Books are written in English and a community language—which is particularly useful for family members and health professionals who do not speak the client's language—and also offer users the option of listening to the text in their language through use of audio recordings. They use clear and easily understandable language. The Books were developed in close consultation with communities, including seeking advice on the content that would be useful and whether the translations were culturally appropriate. They enhance accessibility of health related information which is provided in a format that suits the consumer.

The development of digital platforms and the overarching policies that take into account and respond to cultural and linguistic diversity consideration should be implemented in a coordinated manner—coordination will allow government agencies to share learnings and data from other platforms which can inform future processes. DSS, in view of its lead responsibility for coordination of the *Multicultural Access and Equity Policy*, jointly with the DTO, as it applies to meeting the Digital Service Standard, are well positioned to support agencies to meet their obligations under the policy as part of their digital reforms. Such support could be provided through, among other things, the development of relevant resources—for example, multicultural digital service design and delivery guidelines, and should be informed by community engagement.

Digital service delivery should be co-designed with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Engaging migrant and refugee clients—particularly those who do not speak English as their first language and/or with limited digital literacy or access—during the concept stage of designing digital service delivery ensures that linguistic and cultural factors are considered in advance (not as an afterthought), and eliminates the need for substantial changes at a later stage.

Provision of translated information will allow migrants with limited English language literacy to independently use services digitally in their own language. However, translation engines are not reliable, and qualified translators and editors should be used to ensure linguistically accurate and culturally appropriate translations. The availability of translated materials should be signalled with the use of a consistent symbol across all

10 For further information: <https://www.dto.gov.au/standard/>

11 For further information: <http://www.rdns.com.au/services-we-provide/information-in-other-languages/talking-books>

government websites, positioned prominently at the top of relevant websites.

Designers should consider utilising interactive technologies to improve the experience for non-English speakers such as the ability to hover over text and access an audio translation, which can be an effective way to make information and services available to people who are not literate in their first language.

Help functions must be designed with culturally and linguistically diverse users in mind—for example, offering the option of in-language click to chat, guidance documents produced in language, or high image and low text based help documents.

### Written translations are not the only option

ASIC will soon launch a Simple Money Manager aimed at CALD audiences on the MoneySmart website.<sup>12</sup> The tool incorporates easily recognisable icons and sound recordings, in language, to help users to easily interact with it. The Simple Money Manager has been professionally translated and will initially be available in English and eight community languages balanced between established communities and recently arrived groups, based on the most common language groups in Australia with relatively lower levels of English language proficiency. The user experience was at the centre of design for this resource, including by conducting consultations on a test version of the toolkit, seeking advice about which languages the toolkit would be most usefully translated into, and incorporating interactive elements.

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<sup>12</sup> For further information visit: <https://www.moneysmart.gov.au/tools-and-resources/calculators-and-apps/simple-money-manager>

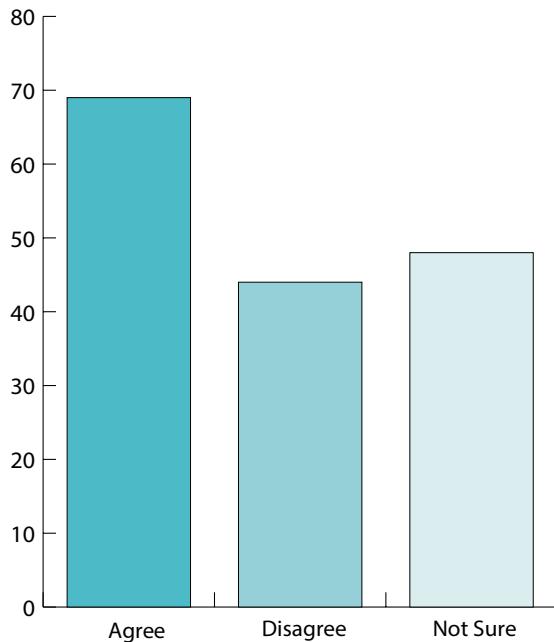
## Assisting consumers to transition to digital services

### Online information provision

About 85 per cent of respondents to FECCA's survey use websites to find information about government services. For 41 per cent of respondents, online is the preferred method of obtaining information about government services, followed by face to face (29 per cent) and phone (18 per cent). Social media is used less by respondents—only 22 per cent reported using social media to find information about government services, while 65 per cent reported that they do not.

Despite the high engagement with information online by respondents to FECCA's survey, 57 per cent of respondents do not believe that information on government agencies' websites is easy to find.

#### I know which Government Department website to look at when I want to know information about Government services



Answer Choice	Responses
Agree	69
Disagree	44
Not Sure	48
Total	161

Further work can be done to improve the user experience of government agencies' websites, including making information easy to find and ensuring that websites are intuitive for users.

## Existing support for individuals accessing services digitally

The **ATO Tax Help program** is a network of ATO-trained and accredited community volunteers who provide a free and confidential service to help people complete their tax returns online using *myTax*. Tax Help is available in all capital cities and many regional areas from July to October each year. Appointments can be made by phone for the Tax Help program. Tax Help volunteers help individuals lodge their tax return online with *MyTax*, or work out if the individual does not need to lodge a tax return and help them complete a non-lodgement advice.

Eligibility for Tax Help in 2014-15 was based on an income of around \$50,000 or less. Additionally, individuals must not work as a contractor, run a business, own a rental property, or receive foreign income other than a foreign pension or annuity.

The ATO Tax Help program has 300 bilingual or multilingual volunteers who speak 73 languages. In previous years, the program has been delivered at multicultural and migrant centres and local libraries to target migrants and refugees who may benefit from this assistance. Tax Help is an example of good practice and should be considered as a model to support clients who transition to digital service delivery.

**myGov shopfronts** have been established to offer an integrated service delivery approach, by DHS in partnership with the ATO. These shopfronts are located in Brisbane, Sydney, Adelaide, Perth and Albury. DHS is considering the future roll out of further *myGov* sites.

Features of *myGov* shopfronts include:

- self-service computers;
- dedicated learning hubs where customers can participate in tutorials and review learning guides about *myGov* and its member services; and
- trained staff who are available to support customers using the digital channel to access *myGov* and other government services.

FECCA's consultations have revealed limited community awareness about *myGov* shopfronts. Even in cities where there is a *myGov* storefront, community members and service providers are not aware of its existence or the services that are offered.

Some community members are supportive of the concept of *myGov* shopfronts. A total of 68 per cent of respondents to FECCA's survey believed that it would be useful to have a *myGov* storefront in their area, and 56 per cent reported that they would use it.

*A shopfront is the first point of contact to direct the customer to get a correct transaction and information – Online survey respondent*

*As long as the staff is knowledgeable, it will be beneficial to have face to face discussion so that people can be assisted to learn to use the interface – Online survey respondent*

*Having the opportunity to interact with this website and also being able to ask questions is very important and it could make a difference for many people – Online survey respondent*

Many of those consulted raised concerns about the availability of targeted and intensive support for older community members and those who do not speak English:

*Face-to-face contact is the best when English is not your first language. Please ensure interpreters and translations of documents are offered at these sites – Online survey respondent*

*I have seen the shopfront work and they are too busy to really teach a senior with limited English to access internet information – Online survey respondent*

An individual's first experience of the *myGov* gateway should be a positive experience. In many cases, individuals are using *myGov* for the first time because they are trying to access a service (for example, lodging a tax return) and cannot do it unless they have a *myGov* account. This creates the impression of unnecessary processes between the start point and the completion of the service, rather than a platform that improves the efficiency and accessibility of service for the users.

The engagement and outreach for the *myGov* shopfronts would significantly benefit from implementing specific strategies to target migrants and refugees, including appropriate provisions for interpreting services, as well as bicultural/bilingual staff in areas with high proportion of certain community groups. These strategies should include a particular focus on communicating with, and introducing *myGov* new users from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

## Training

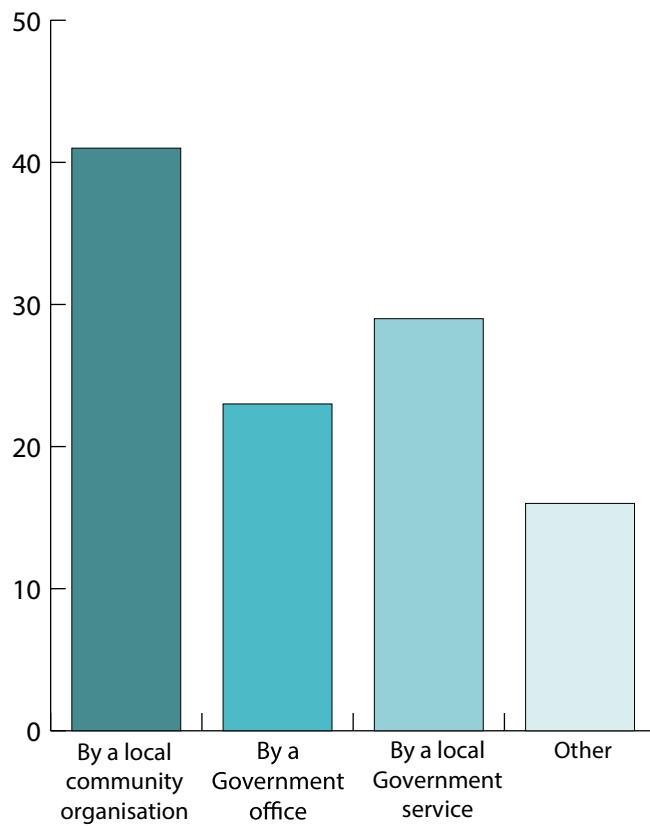
There must be targeted assistance for migrant and refugees, and particularly for groups within this cohort who may have difficulty in moving to digital services.

*People need digital literacy in general as a foundation... The government needs to partner with settlement services to engage new arrivals as a group with language support over a period of time... people won't just present to these shopfronts, but trust settlement services and will bring friends and learn together as a community group – Online survey respondent*

FECCA's consultations with the multicultural and settlement sector service providers have revealed an interest in providing training for individuals and communities on the use of digital service delivery platforms at their preferred locations due to convenience (for example, a community centre that they visit regularly). Service providers have also expressed an interest in detailed training materials about the use of digital service delivery platforms which they could utilise to provide training sessions to the communities that they work with.

About 54 per cent of respondents to FECCA's survey reported that they would like to receive training and support about how to access and use government services digitally.

If you would like to receive training and support on how to access and use digital services, how would you like it delivered?



Answer Choice	Responses
By a local community organisation	41
By a Government office in my area	23
By a local Government service	29
Other	16
Total	109

This can be achieved through funding assistance to multicultural and settlement service providers - for example, through DSS Settlement Grants- to build capacity and equitable participation of culturally and linguistically diverse communities in the digital transformation of government service delivery.

### Supporting individuals who cannot transition to digital services

FECCA's consultations have revealed widespread concerns among communities that some refugees and older migrants will be unable to transition to digital service delivery even after their first few years of settlement.

These concerns can be addressed by ensuring that community members can access services through means alternative to online, including face to face at shopfronts and by telephone.

# Recommendations: Bridging the digital access and equity gap for CALD users

1. Recognising the diversity of users and the ensuing gaps in capacity and access.
  - Person-centric design and user experience considerations for those who do not speak English as their first language and/or with limited digital literacy or access.
  - Development of data-collection plans, with consistent terminology and types of collected information across government agencies.
2. Improving accessibility of online government service delivery.
  - Simple and consistent icons across platforms.
  - Clearly identified information online in community languages, with the availability of translated materials signalled using a consistent and prominently positioned symbol across all government agencies' websites.
  - Interactive technologies to improve the experience for non-English speakers, such as the ability to hover over text and access an audio translation, to make information and services available to people who are not literate in both English and their own language.
3. Providing multiple ways for community members to interact with government service delivery.
  - Integration of digital platform-based services, such as My Aged Care, with existing Centrelink and Medicare shopfronts, to provide a face-to-face interaction option for consumers, including through Centrelink's Multicultural Service Officer program.
  - Utilisation of pop up information and assistance shops in high traffic areas, such as shopping centres, community centres and libraries, particularly in rural and regional areas.
4. Implementing targeted communication strategies to reach ethnic communities to improve awareness of online services and reduce concerns about privacy and security.
  - Easy to understand information in plain English and community languages to communicate messages about privacy and security of government digital service delivery to existing and prospective users.
  - A comprehensive strategy to introduce *myGov* to new users including new migrants and young people.
  - Engagement strategies for *myGov* shopfronts targeting migrants and refugees, including adequate provisions for interpreting services and bicultural/bilingual staff in areas with high proportion of certain community groups.
5. Building community capacity and equitable participation in the use of digital services.
  - Funding assistance to multicultural and settlement service providers, through DSS Settlement Grants, to deliver training to migrants and refugees.
6. Coordination and leadership
  - Coordinated development of digital platforms and the overarching policies that address cultural and linguistic diversity considerations
  - DSS and DTO lead in facilitating the inter agency cooperation with regards to the Multicultural Access and Equity Policy as it applies to meeting the Digital Service Standard, including through the development of multicultural digital service design and delivery guidelines, in collaboration with the community sector.

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## **About FECCA**

FECCA is the peak, national body representing Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. We provide advocacy, develop policy and promote issues on behalf of our 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. FECCA supports multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice and the rejection of all forms of discrimination and racism.

For more information and to read more about FECCA's policies and programs, please visit our website: [www.fecca.org.au](http://www.fecca.org.au). Alternatively, please contact the FECCA office on (02) 6282 5755.

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