



**Australia's Bilingual and  
Bicultural Workforce**



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## Key findings

- FECCA recommends that bilingual workers, bicultural workers, interpreters, and culturally competent general staff, be recognised as playing differing professional roles within culturally responsive organisations.
- FECCA recommends that a cohesive strategy on language services include provisions for the training and accreditation of bilingual workers beginning with, but not limited to, standardised formal LOTE testing.
- FECCA argues that bilingual workers and interpreters play different but complementary roles within language services. FECCA does not believe that bilingual workers should be viewed as being on a pathway to accreditation as an interpreter.
- FECCA recommends that bilingual workers be appropriately remunerated for the professional deployment of their language and cultural skills.

## Introduction

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 is funded by the Department of Social Service (DSS) to investigate aspects of the provision of language services across the country. FECCA is also tasked with providing recommendations for future language service strategies based on ongoing consultations between DSS, FECCA and the communities that FECCA represents. This is to ensure the needs and aspirations of CALD Australians are well served through policy and design of government services.

This report examines the training qualifications and career pathways of Australia's bilingual and bicultural workers.

## Definitions

*'Staff with bilingual skills are employed either for their linguistic ability or as generalist workers whose bilingual skills are utilised by the organisation to support the delivery of services to people with low English language proficiency. While most agencies readily acknowledge the benefits of bilingual staff there are no existing standards, training or policies that define or contextualise these roles.'*<sup>1</sup>

There have been significant improvements to standards of training and accreditation for interpreters as part of a national strategy around language services. This has provided a welcome boost to the professionalism and accountability of interpreting services and interpreter skill levels.

However, one of the major challenges in the area of language services is the lack of formal standardised accreditation and training for bilingual and bicultural workers. The result of this is an inconsistency in role descriptions, and a difficulty in determining appropriate remuneration for bilingual and bicultural workers in different employment sectors.

<sup>1</sup>Discussion paper: Defining a Bilingual Worker, Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health, VIC, 2007:3

<sup>2</sup>Broughtwood et al (2011), Futures Upfront (2015), Various FECCA consultations with service providers Centre for Culture, <sup>3</sup>Ethnicity and Health, 'Bilingual Staff Research Project: Report', 2008:14

Research from the aged care, children's services, and disability services sectors, emphasise the importance of bilingual and bicultural workers in building long term relationships between services, staff, clients, and CALD communities.<sup>2</sup> These workers are crucial for building trust and understanding between client and provider, and ensuring that specific ethnic, cultural and language communities use the services available to them. The use of bilingual and bicultural workers within organisations and workplaces increases the overall organisational cultural competence, and enhances the knowledge base and capacity of other workers.

A good working definition of 'bilingual worker' comes from the Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health:

***'A person employed to use their language skills in English and another language with a linguistic proficiency in both languages appropriate to the function of their position who also understands and shares the values of the non-English speaking background and community they are employed to work with and their employing agency.'***<sup>3</sup>

Interpreters focus on being the impartial nexus between two individuals who do not share a common language. Their role is as a conduit third person. Bilingual workers assist in the process of knowledge sharing and general communication which rarely includes direct interpreting between two other parties. They may have differing levels of proficiency in the Language Other Than English (LOTE), for example, high proficiency in speaking and listening, and medium proficiency in reading and writing.

Culture is an additional aspect to working with culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Whilst the roles of 'interpreter' and 'bilingual worker' are centred around language, many organisations seek to employ staff members who are able to build connections with communities beyond language – bicultural workers.

***'A person employed to work specifically with people or communities with whom they share similar cultural experiences and understandings, and who is employed to use their cultural skills and knowledge to negotiate and communicate between communities and their employing agency.'***<sup>4</sup>

Staff members with requisite skills are often employed to fulfil functions which combine roles of both bilingual worker and bicultural worker. For this reason, much of the literature discusses 'bilingual and bicultural workers'. Whilst the terminology currently in use favours the prefix bi, it is important to acknowledge that many individuals are, in fact, proficient in more than two languages and two cultures.

It is important to emphasise that bilingual workers are also skilled in the job they are performing. They are first and foremost trained employees and professionals, who can, as a result of their language skills and community connections, conduct their roles in a LOTE. The literature identifies a number of key themes pertinent to the roles of bilingual and bicultural workers:<sup>5</sup>

- ▼ importance of working with clients and their families
- ▼ importance of the trust building process when moving between cultures
- ▼ importance of understanding language and culture
- ▼ flexibility of their role
- ▼ linking communities to mainstream services (being a 'bridge').<sup>6</sup>

Additional themes become present when examining the roles of bilingual and bicultural workers in specific contexts such as healthcare, aged care, children's services, and government customer service delivery.

Research indicates that bilingual and bicultural workers not only lack appropriate pathways for training, accreditation and professional development, they often face challenges in moving out of low-level roles within organisations.<sup>7</sup> Bilingual and bicultural roles are frequently 'frontline' roles based heavily on client or customer interactions. Staff who fulfil these roles can find it difficult to advance in their careers or access development of their other professional skills. This can be a particular barrier in workplaces with low levels of general cultural competence. Bilingual and bicultural workers should not be expected to know everything about particular linguistic and cultural communities, nor should they be subjected to unrealistic expectations around workloads.

Unfortunately, for some bilingual and bicultural workers these unrealistic and unworkable practices and expectations lead to stress and burnout. It is important that bilingual and bicultural workers do not become 'stuck' in particular roles because the organisation needs their language skills in particular areas. Appropriate career pathways should be provided to all staff members, including those with bilingual and bicultural capabilities.

<sup>4</sup>Centre for Multicultural Youth (2011) 'Addressing the strengths and complexities of bicultural youth and family work', p3

<sup>5</sup>D Boughtwood, C Stanley, J Adams, Y Santalucia, H Kyriazopoulos, J Rowland & D Pond (2011) 'The role of the bilingual/bicultural worker in dementia education, support and care', *Dementia*, 12(1), pp7-12

<sup>6</sup>Centre for Multicultural Youth (2011) 'Addressing the strengths and complexities of bicultural youth and family work – consultation report'

<sup>7</sup>Centre for Multicultural Youth (2011) 'Addressing the strengths and complexities of bicultural youth and family work', p5

# Case studies: roles and training requirements for bilingual workers

## Introduction

The current lack of training and accreditation for bilingual workers has led to a plethora of approaches across sectors and locations. The following section of the report offers some case studies which illustrate the variation, and the subsequent need for bilingual workers to be included in a national approach to languages services. The terminology for staff roles differs across these case studies, and reflects of a lack of cohesion and direction at the level of accreditation and training. FECCA has used the preferred terminology of each organisation (e.g. bilingual worker, community language allowance scheme employee, bilingual bicultural worker).

The case studies were sourced through FECCA's membership and evidence base, and efforts were made to present examples from different states and territories as well as different employment sectors. FECCA acknowledges that this section is not a comprehensive study of all organisations that employ bilingual workers across Australia. The purpose is to illustrate, via case studies, some of the pertinent issues and challenges to the varying training pathways, qualification options, and role descriptions.

### *NSW Community Language Allowance Scheme*

As part of its strategy to better cater to the needs of CALD communities, Multicultural NSW manages a scheme known as the Community Language Allowance Scheme (CLAS) which assists agencies to provide language services. Employees identified as being bilingual must submit to a formal nomination and examination process to ensure they are proficient in a LOTE. Costs for examination are borne by the relevant agency and employees are remunerated for their use of community language skills when incorporated into their professional duties. The main responsibility for a CLAS employee is to assist in the communication between English speaking employees and clients with low levels of English language proficiency. Their role is not to replicate or replace that of an accredited interpreter, but to enhance the communication in face to face encounters between clients and government service providers.

Employees nominated into the scheme are required to sit the Multicultural NSW CLAS Examination. This examination was developed and is run by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI). It is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and it is expected that a bilingual worker should be able to communicate effectively in the LOTE at levels A2-B2. English language proficiency is not part of the assessment for a CLAS.

### **Table 1. Common Reference Levels: global scale, p24,**

The examination is approximately 20 minutes duration and assesses the candidate's ability to:

- ▼ convey information accurately and clarify routine points if needed
- ▼ adhere to the procedural norms, including politeness and time-efficiency that are expected in English language interactions
- ▼ elicit information from customers
- ▼ follow and understand LOTE native speaker speech
- ▼ seek clarification if such speech is not immediately understood
- ▼ pronounce language accurately enough that speech is generally intelligible
- ▼ produce language accurately enough that errors do not impede or impair communication.

The candidate must possess a range of vocabulary that allows the explanation of government procedures and related matters with some precision and clarity.<sup>8</sup>

Under the CLAS special attention is paid to the role and workload of CLAS employees. Managers are tasked with ensuring that CLAS recipients have sufficient time (but not excessive work) allocated to language assistance work. They must also ensure that CLAS workloads are well distributed amongst CLAS recipients and to be vigilant in the use of CLAS recipients so that they are not used as substitutes for interpreters.

Proficient User	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent User	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic User	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Table 1. Common Reference Levels: global scale, p24

## **NSW – Ethnic Community Services Co-operative (ECSC)**

The Ethnic Community Services Co-operative (ECSC) runs a Bicultural Support Program for Early Childhood as well as for Aged Care and Child Protection. The largest program is the Early Childhood program where 400 trained bilingual bicultural child care workers are employed across NSW. The program has run for approximately 38 years to provide assistance to individual children and centres. The bilingual bicultural workers are fully trained child care workers (the majority hold Certificate III in Children's Services) with additional training from ECSC in cultural competency. Their role is to provide a communication bridge between child care centre staff and a bilingual child and their family. Relevant children are assigned support hours based on their need and this varies from child to child. The workers play a key role in capacity building amongst the staff to appropriately work with children from culturally and linguistically diverse families.

ECSC conducts cultural competence training for a number of organisations, including for the TAFE Certificate III in Children's Services. They are keen to see standardised training and accreditation for bilingual bicultural workers in both an 'add on' model and a 'stand-alone' because this approach would broaden the possible options for workers in a variety of fields. In the early 90s there was a Certificate III in Multicultural Childcare and a Certificate III in Childcare for Children with Disabilities. These certificates are no longer available.

ECSC express the view that bilingual bicultural workers are vital because they have implicit understanding of the needs and perspectives of CALD communities and place equal emphasis on culture as well as language. In their experience, there is increasing need for bilingual bicultural workers for both new and emerging communities' languages and more established communities' languages albeit in differing sectors. As reflected by other service providers, ECSC sees an increased need for bilingual bicultural workers in aged care for more established communities as the population begins to age and in child care for new and emerging communities. They stress the importance for bilingual bicultural workers to have one on one experience with individuals, families and communities and also the ability to facilitate communication in a cross cultural setting.

ECSC raised the issue of a lack of appropriate remuneration for bilingual bicultural workers in either aged care or child care where they generally just receive the standard award wage or salary. They argue convincingly that bilingual bicultural workers have different and additional skills and duties which should be adequately reflected in role descriptions and salaries.

## **Queensland – The Ethnic Communities' Council of Queensland (ECCQ)**

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Queensland (ECCQ) employs bilingual workers to deliver many of their community health programs (for example, HIV awareness, Hepatitis awareness, and breast screening information) and to work in their aged care facilities. These workers are primarily employed on the basis of their healthcare qualifications but a significant secondary skill focus is their connection to community (including language ability and cultural understanding). In the past decade ECCQ have internally discussed the need for a minimum benchmark for bilingual worker qualifications and skills. ECCQ and Queensland Health (Qld Health) have been investigating the possibility of developing a Certificate IV for bilingual health workers which could be modelled on the highly successful Certificate IV in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care.

In July 2010, ECCQ was granted funding by Queensland Department of Health to develop an accredited course for health workers in the multicultural sector. ECCQ worked in partnership with the Cunningham Centre in developing and co-delivering the pilot course. In November 2011 the Certificate IV in Primary Health & Community Care (Multicultural) was accredited nationally by the Australian Skills Quality Authority. ECCQ won the 2013 Health and Community Services Workforce Innovation Awards in the Education or Training Provider category for the development and pilot delivery of this course. 50 students had graduated from the course by 2013.

The course was 14 units of study over a 12 month period and covered the following:

- ▶ QLD413MCL1A Promote and facilitate equitable outcomes for people from multicultural backgrounds
- ▶ QLD414MCL1A Address social determinants of multicultural health
- ▶ QLD414MCL2A Provide information and strategies in chronic disease care to multicultural communities
- ▶ QLD414MCL3A Provide information and strategies to promote nutrition for good health in multicultural population
- ▶ QLD414MCL4A Deliver health promotion programs for multicultural communities
- ▶ QLD414MCL5A Respond to loss, grief and trauma in multicultural communities
- ▶ HLTHIR403C Work effectively with culturally diverse clients and co-workers
- ▶ CHCMH301C Work effectively in mental health
- ▶ CHCCD401E Support community participation
- ▶ CHCCM402E Establish and monitor a case plan
- ▶ CHCCS400C Work within a legal and ethical framework
- ▶ CHCGROUP403D Plan and conduct group activities
- ▶ CHCICS406B Support client self-management
- ▶ CHCICS407B Support positive lifestyle



Delivery included a mixture of face-to-face workshops and self-paced learning. The course utilised a range of assessment methods such as:

- ▼ workplace projects reports
- ▼ practical demonstrations
- ▼ written assessment
- ▼ third party / supervisor reports
- ▼ research
- ▼ on the job observation.

The major roadblock to the Queensland model has been that the overwhelming majority of bilingual healthcare workers are from low socio-economic backgrounds and the (approximately \$5000p/a) cost of the Certificate was an insurmountable financial obstacle. The pilot cohorts were subsidised through the grant from Qld Health but after this funding ended ECCQ was unable to fill the requisite student places with full-fee paying students. ECCQ sought funding from the Queensland Department of Education but they were unable to find a scholarship scheme that covered the course. Despite ECCQ's best efforts they were unable to run the certificate beyond the pilot stage due to insufficient student numbers (but not lack of interest) and the registration of the course lapsed in 2015.

As a replacement measure ECCQ provides their own in-house professional development sessions to try and upskill or maintain the skills of their own bilingual workers. It is important to ECCQ that consistency and integrity across their bilingual health programs is maintained, and to this end, ongoing professional development is crucial. However, ECCQ would like to see a standardisation and formalisation of training across the sector for all bilingual health workers across Australia.

ECCQ runs a CALD specific aged care facility in Brisbane, Berlasco Court, which employs a large number of bilingual staff. In consultations with Berlasco Court, FECCA was informed that rather than employing staff on the basis of specific language or cultural connections, staff are selected primarily on their aged care qualifications and their cultural competence. That is, staff are expected to work under a cultural competence model that is not specific to any particular language or cultural group. Due to the lack of formal qualifications for bilingual workers, Berlasco Court works with Diversicare (a division of ECCQ) to ensure that all staff members undertake ongoing professional development in cultural competency.

In the Queensland context neither the Certificate IV in Primary Health and Community Care (Multicultural) nor the ongoing professional development courses at ECCQ include a LOTE testing component. LOTE ability is discussed in employment interviews at ECCQ but competence is self-assessed by the job applicant. ECCQ recognises that this is a limitation but does not have the capacity to conduct LOTE testing of job applicants. They expressed a desire for an accreditation system for bilingual workers to include LOTE testing so they could ensure the professionalism and high quality standards of their bilingual health programs.

## **Western Australia – Central TAFE**

There is currently no formal training available in Western Australia for bilingual workers. However, previously there was a Central TAFE Certificate IV in Bilingual Work which expired in 2011. It was developed after publication of the Analysis of the Need for Interpreter and Translation Services within the Western Australian Government Sector report<sup>9</sup> in 2005 which established a necessity to:

- train unqualified persons acting as bilingual aides
- bridge the gap between AMEP and LOTE courses and the Diploma of Interpreting.

### **The course included the following:**

- ▼ Preparation for bilingual work—570 hours
- ▼ Introduction to interpreting and translation studies—570 hours
- ▼ Preparation for bicultural brokerage—570 hours
- ▼ Preparation for language services coordination—580 hours

At the state level, the course was established in 2008 and developed in 2009. The developmental work was funded retrospectively in 2010 via the VET Workforce and Curriculum Grant Program. However, the course was only conducted once before it expired in 2011. It was not renewed and the reasons for expiration and non-renewal are unclear.

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<sup>9</sup>FECCA can provide a copy of this report to the department.

## **South Australia – Ethnic Link Services in partnership with TAFE SA and the Research Centre for Languages & Cultures, University of South Australia**

Ethnic Link Services, which sits within the Aged Care Services portfolio of UnitingCare Wesley Port Adelaide, is a state wide service that provides in-home assistance to older people from CALD backgrounds. Funded through the Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP), it delivers a range of individual and group services to older people from 45 different cultural groups residing across metropolitan Adelaide, as well as the Riverland and Whyalla.

For over 30 years Ethnic Link Services has provided a ‘cultural bridge’ to services, especially for older people who speak little or no English, who are socially isolated, and are experiencing episodes of vulnerability. This is achieved through its trained and experienced multicultural workforce comprising bilingual bicultural staff who speak 25+ languages. Staff are carefully matched to clients to ensure there is a shared language and culture. Ethnic Link Services is supportive of a national language services policy which recognises the equal contribution of bilingual bicultural workers and interpreters while also recognising the important distinction between the roles.

In 2015, Ethnic Link Services developed a partnership with TAFE SA and the Research Centre for Languages & Cultures at the University of SA to address the current gap in the formal accreditation of bilingual workers. In addition to accredited course work in bilingual work (which has already been piloted with Ethnic Link Services’ bilingual bicultural staff), this includes the development of tools and protocols for LOTE proficiency testing for bilingual workers in human services settings which is interactive and context based—i.e. assessed against the context of their helping relationship. This form of assessment differs from more traditional language assessment processes employed by NAATI in that it also addresses the quality and efficacy of intercultural communication and interaction between CALD clients and bilingual bicultural workers in the context of the particular service that is being delivered. Once the assessment tools and protocols are developed and evaluated, the partner agencies are keen to explore technology based solutions in order to ensure that bilingual bicultural workers across Australia and their employers can access the training and assessment protocols online. The ultimate aim is to develop a Certificate IV in Bilingual Work which encompasses the above elements.

The partner agencies are actively seeking government funding for the second phase of their work which focuses on the development of tools and protocols for the human services/ community services context based language proficiency assessment of bilingual bicultural workers. The aim is to pilot this second phase of development in South Australia and then extend it to other jurisdictions.

## Victoria – fka Children’s Services (fkaCS)

Victoria currently does not have any formal training for bilingual or bicultural workers. One organisation who employs bilingual bicultural workers is fkaCS who are funded by state and Commonwealth funding to provide bilingual bicultural support to children and families who have been identified by Children’s Services (Kindergartens, Day Care Centres, Family Day Care, After School Care etc.). Their workers are highly casualised and often without formal qualifications in either child care or language work. fkaCS assesses worker’s LOTE abilities through the use of community referees.

fkaCS views bilingual bicultural workers as facilitating communication and understanding between children, families and educators. They provide their workers with in-house training around cultural competence and working with children. fkaCS view the role of bilingual bicultural workers as building capacity for educators in children’s services and supporting children and families to adjust to Australian children’s services settings. They seek to match children with support staff who share their language and cultural heritage whilst simultaneously working with centres to provide nonspecific culturally competent contexts through capacity building around cross cultural communication.

## Commonwealth Language Services Unit, Multicultural Services Branch, Department of Human Services (DHS)

The Department of Human Services (DHS) offers a Community Language Allowance (CLA) to staff members who wish to be identified, and work, as bilingual workers. They are distinguished from multicultural workers as their role is based around language proficiency rather than cultural competence. These staff members are required to pass a LOTE proficiency test which is administered by the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT). Eligible staff members approved to be bilingual workers are required to maintain records indicating the times when they utilized their LOTE skills as part of their daily activities. These records are reviewed by supervisors approximately every six months with the supervisor determining whether or not there is need for the staff member to continue receiving the CLA (paid as a fortnightly addition to their salary).

The details are set out in the DHS Enterprise Agreement<sup>10</sup> :

### D7 COMMUNITY LANGUAGE ALLOWANCE

**D7.1** An employee whose language competency is of the required standard may be paid an allowance by the department where:

- (a) there is a business need for the language skills to be used in the workplace, including for communication with customers, in languages other than English, including ATSI languages, and AUSLAN and other deaf languages; and
- (b) there is an identifiable and ongoing need, as determined by the Secretary, for the employee to use their language skills in the workplace for customers and/or employees.

**D7.2** A fortnightly allowance under this clause D7 will be paid at the rates outlined in Table D2, in accordance with the following:

- (a) where an employee is required to use particular language skills at least three times per month: Rate 1; or
- (b) where an employee is required to use particular language skills at least eight times per month: Rate 2.

**D7.3** Over the life of the Agreement, the department and the CPSU will jointly review the application of community language allowance.’ (pg.22)

The majority of DHS bilingual workers are deployed in Centrelink’s multilingual phone service centre whilst other areas of the Department rely heavily on the telephone interpreter service. The multilingual phone service represents 23, mostly established, community languages. DHS includes language skills in their recruitment drives particularly when looking to fill positions in locations or centres where there is an identified need for workers with particular language skills.

### Data from the DHS Annual report<sup>11</sup> indicates:

‘In 2015–16 around 641 staff received the Community Language Allowance compared to 699 in 2014–15. Community Language Allowance is paid at two rates. Rate 1 is \$40.67 per fortnight and is paid to employees who use their language skills at least three times per month. Rate 2 is \$97.63 per fortnight and is paid to employees who use their language skills at least eight times per month.’ (pg.88)

The decision to employ bilingual workers and remunerate them appropriately using the CLA is based upon understanding of efficient service delivery. Bilingual workers are highly skilled on DHS core business, culture and policy, and their language skills allow them to efficiently assist clients. Often clients require assistance because of misunderstandings which are conceptual or policy based—the use of interpreters in these instances is inefficient and time-consuming because a bilingual worker can rapidly identify the client’s need and connect them directly to the relevant information.

Similarly, given the drive towards the use of digital spaces for DHS interactions with clients, bilingual workers are more appropriate than interpreters because they can combine assistance around issues of digital literacy as well as content. They have indicated that the use of bilingual workers in digital spaces is particularly effective with younger migrants who prefer to interface with their services digitally but who need bilingual support to accurately complete their interactions.

<sup>10</sup>[https://www.humanservices.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/dhs-agreement-2011-2014\\_0.pdf](https://www.humanservices.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/dhs-agreement-2011-2014_0.pdf)

<sup>11</sup><https://www.humanservices.gov.au/corporate/annual-reports/annual-report-2015-16>

## Framework for identifying settings that require a bilingual or bicultural worker

Using consolidated data from across case studies and the literature, FECCA has developed the following three visual tools to assist in understanding the bilingual workforce.

**Figure 1** is a representation of the role, skills and professional attributes of bilingual workers. Bilingual workers work across all industry sectors and work within the legal and ethical frameworks specific to those contexts. They demonstrate skills and expertise in understanding the specific challenges that exist when working to achieve positive outcomes for CALD clients, communities and individuals. Bilingual workers work closely with the communities to whom they are connected in order to facilitate equitable outcomes and positive community participation. They exhibit a range of professional attributes such as excellent communication skills, trustworthiness, a commitment to community wellbeing, and a capacity to facilitate learning and discussion.

**Figure 2** provides a representation of the varying roles required within a culturally and linguistically responsive organisation. This may include interpreters, bilingual workers, bicultural workers, bilingual and bicultural workers, and general staff who are trained in cultural competency. Each role is distinct and should be recognised professionally and remunerated appropriately. These roles should be embedded within organisational leadership structures, policies and processes which are culturally competent and inclusive. Each role requires ongoing professional development and opportunities for career advancement.

**Figure 3** offers a decision making tree which assists in deciding on the appropriate role for individual situations—interpreter, bilingual worker, or both. This figure provides a visual tool to help distinguish between the different roles and emphasises that in certain situations it is appropriate to utilise the skills of both a bilingual worker and an interpreter.

**Figure 1.** Role and skills of bilingual workers

### Bilingual Worker Role



Bilingual workers work across all industry sectors.

Work within a legal and ethical framework specific to the context (healthcare, children's services, aged care, customer service etc.).

Bilingual workers use language skills in a very different way to interpreters and should not be used where an interpreter is the appropriate choice.

Bilingual workers have broad accountability & responsibility but are not, and should not be expected to be, impartial.

Skills Required of Bilingual Workers



- Hold relevant skills/qualifications in the service provided.
- Understanding of challenges and barriers to positive outcomes for CALD clients.
- Promote and facilitate equitable outcomes for people from multicultural backgrounds.
- Work effectively with culturally diverse clients and co-workers.
- Support community participation.
- Understand key rituals, traditions and customs for specific communities.
- Work effectively in a Language Other Than English (tested).
- Tested proficiency in English.

Professional Attributes of Bilingual Workers

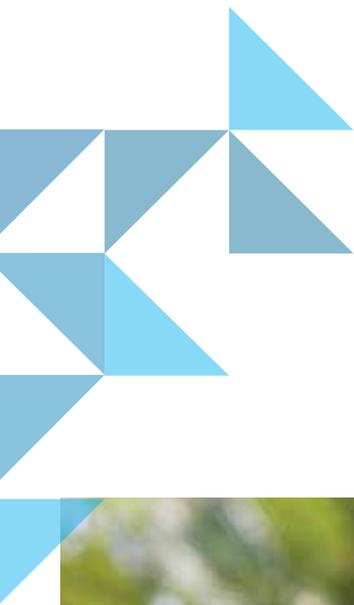


- Excellent communication
- Critical listening skills
- Empathy
- Recognise other people's special needs
- Facilitate learning and discussion
- Trustworthy
- Capable of keeping confidentiality
- Committed to well-being of community
- Are connected to community



**Figure 2.** Differing roles within culturally and linguistically responsive organisations





**Figure 3.** Language services: bilingual worker or interpreter?

Using decision making trees developed by the futures Upfront report, 'Everyone counts – why language services matter' (2015), FECCA has created the following tool to assist in the identification of appropriate situations to utilise bilingual workers and when to use interpreters:



As demonstrated by the visual tool, in some situations it is appropriate to use the services of both an interpreter and a bilingual worker. Whilst some research, including the futures Upfront report, argues that family members or friends who have good English language proficiency and also proficiency in the LOTE can be used when bilingual workers are unavailable, FECCA does not support this position. FECCA believes that bilingual workers are skilled professionals and they should be appropriately remunerated for the professional deployment of their language and cultural skills. The use of family and friends undermines the ability for bilingual workers to request appropriate remuneration for their professional skills.

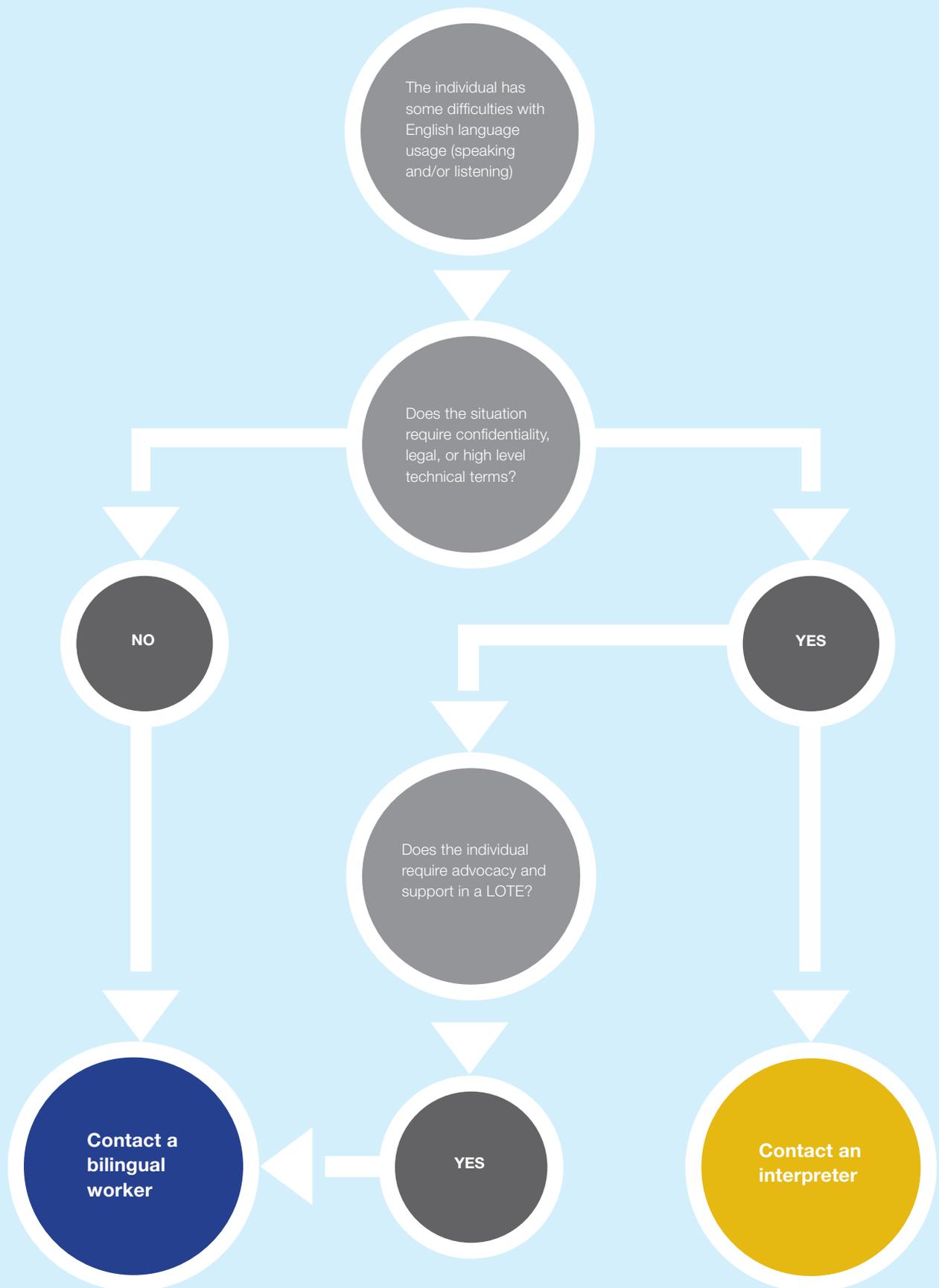


Figure 3.

# The Bilingual Workforce within the Aged Care Sector

Whilst this report is not specifically targeted to the aged care workforce sector, the participation rates in terms of bilingual and bicultural staff in the sector is considerable and is worthy of specific mention. In view of demand and supply of aged care service provision, cultural and linguistic diversity is a substantial factor concerning both market forces which cannot be ignored.

Aged care consumers from CALD backgrounds in Australia are currently around 20 per cent and expected to rise continually as the post WWII migrant, South East Asian and Asian migrant cohorts continue to age and live longer.

Broadly speaking, the aged care consumer sector is divided between residential aged care, and home and community care. As at June 2015, there were 32,483 older Australians from CALD Backgrounds in residential aged care or 18.3 per cent of the total cohort with numbers steadily increasing.<sup>12</sup> The proportion of elderly from CALD backgrounds is considerably higher for recipients of home care with 26 per cent of all home care arrangements allocated to this group.<sup>13</sup> The home and community care sector is likely to grow as the population in general prefer to age in their own homes with government resources targeted in the future to support this preference.<sup>14</sup>

The 2016 National Aged Care Workforce Census and Survey Report (NACWCS) reflects the diversity of the aged care workforce and states that 32 per cent of residential care workers and 23 per cent of community care workers were born overseas.<sup>15</sup>

Aged Care is part of the Australian Healthcare and Social Assistance sector, where it is predicted to be the strongest growing industry in the Australian workforce over the next four years, growing by 250,000.<sup>1</sup> The Aged Care workforce will be required to grow to 980,000 by 2050 to meet demand.<sup>17</sup> It is anticipated that the necessity for bilingual and bicultural staff will therefore continue to escalate. The Australian health, care and related services sector skill shortage could ameliorate the projected deficit of aged care staff by engaging recent migrants.<sup>18</sup>

The NACWCS demonstrated that there are benefits of employing bilingual and bicultural staff in the aged care community sector. This is the sector where aged care is delivered in the client's home and is of particular interest as the Community Care Workers make up the largest occupational group (compared with Registered Nurses, Enrolled Nurses and Allied Health professionals). Amongst the benefits of employing bilingual and bicultural staff for these roles are enhanced cross-cultural understandings, language skills and links to community where added benefits for communication and support can be derived. Examples are CALD specific volunteering programs such as The Community Visitors' Scheme which provides social and often emotional support to its recipients.

The NACWCS highlighted the importance of the bilingual and bicultural worker in aged care sector development, an increased understanding of cross-cultural relationships, and improved quality of life for clients. This supports the FECCA recommendations towards a formalised recognition of the skills and attributes of bilingual and bicultural staff.

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<sup>12</sup>Aged Care Financing Authority (2016), Annual Report on the funding and Financing of the Aged Care Sector, p83.

<sup>13</sup>Aged Care Financing Authority (2016), Annual Report on the funding and Financing of the Aged Care Sector, p62.

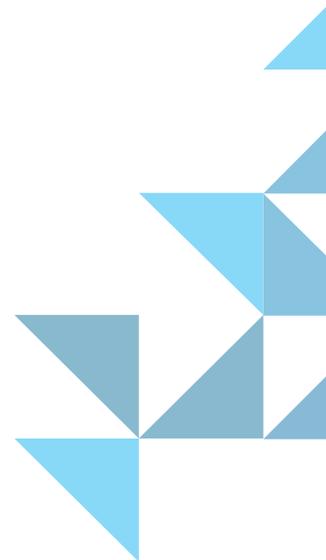
<sup>14</sup>Department of Health (2017), 2016 National Aged Care Workforce Census and Survey – The Aged Care Workforce 2016, p68.

<sup>15</sup>Department of Health (2017), 2016 National Aged Care Workforce Census and Survey – The Aged Care Workforce 2016, pp xv-xviii.

<sup>16</sup><http://mip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/GainInsights/EmploymentProjections>

<sup>17</sup>Department of Health (2017), 2016 National Aged Care Workforce Census and Survey – The Aged Care Workforce 2016, pp xviii.

<sup>18</sup>Department of Health (2017), 2016 National Aged Care Workforce Census and Survey – The Aged Care Workforce 2016, p103.





## Concluding observations

FECCA argues in this report that bilingual workers and interpreters play different but complementary roles within language services and as a result, FECCA does not recommend that bilingual worker training be included on pathways to interpreter accreditation. FECCA believes that a cohesive strategy on language services needs to make provisions for the training and accreditation of bilingual workers beginning with, but not limited to, standardised formal LOTE testing. As evidenced by the case studies, there is currently no standardised way of employers to test the LOTE capabilities of staff members. This lack of standardised testing makes it difficult for employers and organisations to ensure the quality of the services and tasks performed by their bilingual workers unless by chance they share a LOTE proficiency. It is important that a cohesive strategy be developed which takes into account the varying ways standardisation and testing may occur.

This report details how the roles of bilingual workers go beyond language proficiency and also the urgent need for professional training and accreditation in certain sectors which currently employ bilingual workers (aged care, health care, children's services, education). Given the repeated failures of enduring VET training courses it is clear that bilingual workers need to be included as part of a national strategy around culturally and linguistically responsive workforces, including language. Whilst the offering of nationally accredited bilingual worker courses might be a few years away, a good starting point would be the provision of reliable and trustworthy LOTE testing.

FECCA recommends that resources be provided to conduct a detailed investigation into developing a best practice model for the training and accreditation of bilingual and bicultural workers. Evidence in this report suggests that attention must be paid to sector specificities when designing training pathways and courses. Attention should also be paid to the design of professional and career pathways to ensure that bilingual and bicultural workers are remunerated appropriately and are provided with opportunities for career advancement and professional development. A detailed investigation should provide a strategy for financial assistance for low income and newly arrived migrants who are the majority of bilingual and bicultural workers in certain employment sectors, and who face significant economic barriers in accessing education and training opportunities.



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