

Senate Committee releases report on DSS tendering processes

The Senate Community Affairs References Committee released its report of the inquiry on the impact on service quality, efficiency and sustainability of recent Commonwealth community service tendering processes by the Department of Social Services (DSS) on 16 September 2015. FECCA and other multicultural and settlement sector organisations made submissions to the Committee.

The Committee found that the DSS tendering process did not appear to have been equitable and transparent, with an apparent inherent bias toward larger providers at the expense of local knowledge and expertise that smaller providers have developed in response to their clients' needs. It also found that the tendering has impacted on the relationships between providers through a competitive process.

FECCA's submission to the committee

In its submission to the inquiry, FECCA raised concerns that ethno-specific and multicultural organisations, which no longer receive funding for their programs and projects, would need to scale back or discontinue services to their communities, with some organisations at risk of having to close.

The report recognised an important issue raised in FECCA's submission, that the loss of grant funding has resulted in reduced capacity for multicultural sector organisations to deliver highly needed services to their clients and communities.

FECCA's submission also reflected feedback from its constituency that indicated that larger, mainstream providers may not have appropriate cultural expertise in place to service CALD communities effectively.

Report recommendations

The report has 12 recommendations, including:

- that the selection criteria for future tendering processes need to consider the contribution small, community-based organisations provide to their community beyond the service they are directly funded to provide;
- that advocacy support should be considered a vital component of community services in future funding arrangements and is given appropriate weighting in funding assessments;
- that the Auditor-General should conduct its own review into the tendering process, including examining the extent to which the capacity for community-based service delivery, particularly the capacity to provide services to CALD and Indigenous communities, was factored into the tender selection process; and
- an examination of the impacts of the tendering process on service delivery, advocacy and the support available to vulnerable people and communities.

Conclusion

FECCA emphasises the need to enhance collaboration with, and seek advice from, the community sector, including multicultural and settlement organisations, with a view to enabling expert input into the DSS grants tendering process.

We welcome the publication of the Committee's report and looks forward to the Government's response to the recommendations. FECCA also looks forward to engaging productively with DSS, with a view to enhancing future tendering processes.

To read the Committee's report [click here](#).

To read FECCA's submission to the inquiry [click here](#).

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