

Australia's ICESCR Review 2017—NGO Coalition Fact Sheet

Article 15. Cultural Rights- *Access to Government services for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Populations*

Australia's government services are increasingly being delivered online. This impacts Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) populations disproportionately. They may experience disadvantaged capacity in terms of literacy, both in English and their native language. Digital capability and institutional understanding are also an issue. Additionally, insufficient interpreting services and bicultural/bilingual staff in some areas of Australia means that many CALD individuals are precluded from full participation in economic, social and cultural life.

Digital by Default

In many cases government departments, such as The Australian Tax Office and Centrelink, offer services online by default. This has meant substantially reduced opportunity to interact face-to-face. Certain services are not offered on a face-to-face basis at all. This excludes persons with issues of literacy and reduced digital capacity from accessing many services.

Proposed Recommendation:

All services offered online should also be fully available on a face-to-face basis upon request.

Access to Translated Information

In many cases individuals from Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse communities who are digitally competent and are literate in their own language still face disadvantage in service access. Difficulties in accessing information translated into preferred language mean services are not being equitably accessed.

Proposed Recommendation:

All information regarding government services provided in written format should be available in translation into the preferred language of the user of that service or the recipient of that information.

Interpreting Services and Bicultural/Bilingual Staff

The absence of sufficient, and sufficiently qualified, interpreters and bilingual workers means that there are circumstances where vital information is not being communicated effectively to culturally and linguistically diverse persons. This is particularly pronounced in medical and legal contexts.

Proposed Recommendation:

Invest in properly accredited interpreters to ensure that in circumstances where important information is being conveyed it can be understood by all affected parties.

Cultural Awareness

In addition to questions of access to information and services, there are cultural issues preventing some from full participation in economic and social life. These relate to inadequate levels of cultural awareness in key areas and inadequate levels of institutional and systemic understanding amongst some communities.

Proposed Recommendation:

Specific outreach should be undertaken to build institutional capacity among Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Also, cultural awareness training should be provided to all government service providers.