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Senate Finance and Public Administration Committees
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Submission to the Inquiry on the Delivery of National Outcome 4 of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children

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 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 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 welcomes the invitation to make a submission to the Inquiry on the Delivery of National Outcome 4 of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children.

Recommendations

FECCA recommends:

1. A co-design of the 1800RESPECT service to centre the needs of CALD women who experience family violence
2. An increase of the funding for 1800RESPECT so it can invest in culturally/ethno-specific services that provide specialist crisis and outreach support to CALD women
3. That 1800RESPECT staff undergo training in culturally competent service provision
4. Current issues with the beta version of the 1800RESPECT website be resolved
5. Accessible complaint and feedback mechanisms in languages other than English be developed to ensure equitable outcomes for CALD women
6. The Daisy app be improved in terms of accessibility for CALD users
7. Counselling and support services be adequately funded so that victims of violence can access them regardless of migration status or access to income support

Key Message

1800RESPECT is the National Sexual Assault Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service. It is funded by the Department of Social Services and provides support for people who are experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing, sexual assault, domestic or family violence. Although 1800RESPECT is a valuable and comprehensive service that has made an effort to understand and accommodate the specific needs of women from CALD communities, FECCA argues that there is room for further improvement.

Overview

The design of the 1800RESPECT service needs to centre the needs of CALD women who experience family violence. It must be able to offer culturally appropriate support that also accounts for the specific risks, vulnerabilities and health consequences experienced by this group of people. In addition, 1800RESPECT must provide culturally/ethno-specific family violence counselling options that provide specialist crisis and outreach support to immigrant and refugee women, in order to reduce ongoing risks and vulnerabilities.

According to the Australian National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS):

“Family violence policy and response systems have not been sufficiently inclusive of immigrant and refugee women’s needs and experiences of violence. Immigrant and refugee women have limited access to preventative and early intervention programs across Australia and as a result are over-represented in the crisis response system. While many policy and reform documents have contained statements about diversity, the lack of follow-through limits the extent to which policy has led to effective gains within immigrant and refugee communities. Furthermore, inadequate funding has been allocated for policy and program implementation that specifically addresses the needs of immigrant and refugee communities.”¹

Women from CALD backgrounds who experience family violence often find it difficult to access appropriate assistance. They may also feel reluctant to disclose violence due to a range of factors including language barriers, social isolation, mistrust of police and the justice system, the shame and stigma associated with seeking help, lack of culturally competent services, and immigration status. In some CALD communities, women experience specific forms of family violence including forced marriage, dowry associated violence, and violence from the extended family – rather than intimate partner violence. These issues are not always well understood or recognised by counsellors and support service providers.

FECCA appreciates that 1800RESPECT is staffed by professional counsellors, however, there is no mention on the website of how diverse the counsellors are. Considering that a large proportion of the Australian population are from CALD backgrounds, it is important to ensure that there is a genuine reflection of this diversity within the counselling service. The 2016 Census showed that 49 per cent of Australians were either born overseas, or one or both parents had been born overseas.² In light of this, it is important to ensure that all 1800RESPECT staff are culturally competent, and reflect the diversity of the Australian population. FECCA argues that the service would be more inclusive if there was a provision of ethno-specific counselling available. This would allow CALD women to access assistance

¹ ANROWS, 'Promoting community-led responses to violence against immigrant and refugee women in metropolitan and regional Australia: The ASPIRE Project', Landscapes: State of knowledge paper (Issue 12, 2015), 8.

² The Australian Bureau of Statistics Media Release, 27 June 2017
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/Media%20Release3>

that is culturally sensitive and appropriate to their needs. This may also reduce the need for using interpreters if counsellors are bilingual in a shared language.

Website analysis for users

The beta version of the 1800RESPECT website was released on October 3rd 2017. This new site is clear and relatively easy to use. It requires some digital literacy to navigate but is not overly complicated. FECCA appreciates that key information likely to be utilised by CALD individuals such as Languages and the Translator number, is located on the top right hand corner of every webpage. The Translator number links to an accessibility page which has further information on accessing the service with the help of an interpreter or translator. FECCA commends 1800RESPECT on the navigational ease of its website.

Symbols signifying the availability of translators and translated materials should be consistent across all government platforms. On the 1800RESPECT website, the translated materials symbol takes the user to a new page with 28 different language options to choose from. It appears that these non-English pages are translated versions of the original 1800RESPECT content, and FECCA feels the consistent format and messaging is positive. Each page explains the 1800RESPECT service and provides further information about domestic and family violence in a straightforward manner. By utilising dot points, short paragraphs, subheadings in different colours, and videos with subtitles, 1800RESPECT enables users to find what they are looking for quickly and easily. Although the content is not text dense, some people with very low English and digital literacy levels might struggle to engage with it. However, each page can be printed and this useful feature would allow a CALD user to access support in understanding the information without needing a computer or device.

FECCA noticed a number of errors with the beta version of the 1800RESPECT website and provided feedback on a language related issue. We hope that these problems will be resolved quickly so as to improve the CALD user experience.

At this stage, feedback on the 1800RESPECT service can only be provided in English via the website. To ensure that CALD Australians feel confident providing feedback, special emphasis should be placed on feedback mechanisms that are easy to find and use. These should be consistent, actively promoted, and designed to meet the needs of CALD individuals. Users should be able to provide feedback and complaints in languages other than English via multiple methods (voice, private actions, third party methods) and channels (face-to-face, telephone, online).

Website analysis for professionals

Professionals who support people impacted by sexual assault, domestic and family violence can access information that offers guidance on how to assist clients via the 1800RESPECT website. The 'Inclusive Practice' section encourages practitioners to consider a variety of issues that may create barriers in accessing support. It is here that workers and professionals can better understand and respond to CALD experiences of domestic violence, as well as talk about the service and support systems available to them.

There is a webinar that aims to provide practical strategies and resources for supporting women from CALD backgrounds. It discusses methods to enhance cross-cultural service delivery at organisational and individual levels, and also provides participants with the opportunity to undertake cross-cultural reflective practice. In general, the pages aimed at practitioners are respectful, considerate and encourage cultural competence. However, FECCA feels that more could be done regarding ethno-specific service provision, and this depends on improved funding from the government. With adequate funding and resources, 1800RESPECT could better accommodate the needs of CALD individuals.

FECCA urges 1800RESPECT to train staff in cultural understanding and competency so that they can respond effectively to sexual, domestic and family violence in CALD communities. The ability to meaningfully interact with people from different cultures involves: respect and appreciation of cultural diversity, social justice, and equality and equity. For migrants and refugees, seeking support can be a daunting experience that is exacerbated by language barriers. The ability of support workers to speak languages other than English would help overcome some of these barriers. The 1800RESPECT website gives the impression that diversity exists among the clients but assumes a homogeneity of non-CALD counsellors. It would be an improvement if representational diversity on the website was broadened.

Daisy App

FECCA is pleased that the Daisy app has been created to connect women experiencing domestic violence to specialist services in their geographic area. However, in the two and a half years since the launch of this app there have only been one thousand downloads on Google Play. FECCA is concerned about the lack of uptake as it suggests a lack of awareness from both the general public and CALD communities. FECCA experienced a number of technical issues with the Daisy app and would encourage 1800RESPECT to rectify these so that there is greater uptake and better user experience.

Most of the Daisy content is in English and the app itself is awkward to navigate. Once a user has selected their language, they can only access a translated page of basic information about domestic violence and the 1800RESPECT service. It would be difficult for a user with low English language and digital literacy to utilise the Daisy app. In addition, some key features (such as the Quick Exit and Get Help buttons) are not available when a language other than English is selected. FECCA is concerned that CALD users are not receiving equitable assistance or equal service quality when compared to their mainstream counterparts. Although the database of support services appears to be similar to the content on the 1800RESPECT website, it is unclear how each listing was selected and if any quality controls were applied. FECCA is also concerned about this lack of consistency and urges 1800RESPECT to ensure that the format and messaging of the app and website are the same.

Visas and Legal

The immigration status of women who experience family violence has a significant impact on their experience of that violence and their ability to leave a violent situation. Research conducted by the inTouch Multicultural Centre against Family Violence showed that visa dependence was one of the main barriers to migrant women accessing legal and justice support for family violence:

“Refugee and immigrant women described their dependent visa status as a tool that was used by husbands to threaten and intimidate them, as a factor increasing their vulnerability to violence and impacting on their willingness to seek help.”³

Women on temporary visas who experience domestic violence frequently find that they are ineligible for income support or other forms of assistance, making them more vulnerable to threats from their perpetrator that they will be deported if they report the violence. This group of women often lack the legal rights that enable them to access basic support services including social security, Medicare, legal assistance, rights to work, and refuge at shelters. In these circumstances women are forced to be dependent on the perpetrator of violence.

³ inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, “I lived in fear because I knew nothing”: Barriers to the Justice System Faced by CALD Women Experiencing Family Violence (2010), 25.

Without access to women's refuges for crisis accommodation, women must draw on their (often limited) support networks, stay in an abusive situation, or return to their country of origin.

The absence of safety nets for women on temporary visas can exacerbate existing issues in an already vulnerable cohort of people, and may force some women to stay in unsafe situations. These choices can be complicated when they have children, particularly Australian born children. FECCA is concerned about the lack of awareness amongst service providers of this issue, and encourages 1800RESPECT to create specific content relating to visa status and legal rights for migrant and refugee women – particularly those who do not have access to income support. FECCA believes that all victims of violence should be able to easily access the support services they require to exit violent situations, regardless of their migration status.

FECCA recognises that support requirements for women on temporary visas are often more complex than the support requirements for women who are permanent residents or citizens. This is for a number of reasons, including:

- Language barriers and the need for an interpreter;
- Complexity of legal issues across a number of legal areas (criminal, civil, family and migration law);
- Lack of familiarity with Australian systems; and
- Limited support networks.

Domestic violence crisis services often need to provide complex case management in supporting these women and this uses a significant portion of their resources. In addition, it is difficult to deliver the required level of service in a climate where organisational budgets are shrinking. FECCA encourages 1800RESPECT, and the sector generally, to be resourced appropriately so it can better respond to the needs of such women.

Much of the information aimed at CALD women on the 1800RESPECT website focusses on intimate partner violence. It is important to expand this definition to include domestic violence carried out by other family members. Legal definitions of domestic and family violence often exclude the types of violence that CALD women experience.

Conclusion

Women from CALD backgrounds who experience domestic violence do not have the same access to preventative and early intervention programs. They also face complex issues when trying to access support services. As a result, they are over-represented in the crisis response system. Professionals and workers must recognise the barriers experienced by these women, and develop greater cultural understanding. In order to achieve the outcomes for CALD women as outlined in the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children, the 1800RESPECT service should be expanded and improved.

The service has made an effort to better understand and accommodate the needs of CALD women who experience sexual assault, domestic and family violence. There is a body of easily accessible information on the website and culturally appropriate counselling in languages other than English. However, FECCA feels that 1800RESPECT can be enhanced, and also encourages the government to invest more funding in ethno-specific family violence services that provide targeted support to immigrant and refugee women.

FECCA would be glad to contribute in more detail on this matter. For further information please contact FECCA Director, Dr Emma Campbell, on emma@fecca.org.au or 02 6282 5755.