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By email: nutritioninagedcare@health.gov.au

FECCA Submission to National Congress on food, nutrition and the dining experience in aged care

FECCA is the peak, national body representing Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. FECCA's role is to advocate and promote issues on behalf of its constituency to government, business and the broader community.

FECCA advocates on behalf of older people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, their families, and carers in order to ensure that their preferences and needs are included in the development of Australian Government ageing and aged care policies and programs.

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the *National Congress on food, nutrition and dining experiences in aged care (Congress)* and support efforts to develop solutions that benefit all older Australians in aged care.

Recommendations:

1. Develop accessible food preference questionnaires for CALD consumers to provide staff with a stronger understanding of cultural and religious significance of culturally appropriate food delivery (relating to items B3, B4 and E6).
2. Introduce best practice frameworks for aged care service providers to implement in order to diversify and innovate menu design, food presentation and availability to ensure greater accessibility to culturally appropriate food for CALD consumers (relating to items E6, E7, E8, E9 and E10). The CALD Aged Care Diversity Action Plan¹ can be utilised as a point of reference in the design of new frameworks and guidelines of this nature.
3. Conduct further consultative research into CALD consumers in aged care relating to food service delivery (including food offerings, frequency and cultural significances) to determine how aged care providers can respond and deliver culturally appropriate food, therefore encourage greater health outcomes.

¹ <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2019/12/actions-to-support-older-cald-people-a-guide-for-aged-care-providers.pdf> accessed 11 February 2021

The importance of diverse food choice

Constituting a considerable part of the population, one in three older Australians were born in non-English speaking countries. While barriers to accessing aged care services remain, CALD consumers still constitute 19% of all aged care residents in 2014-15.²

FECCA is concerned that a lack of culturally accessible and appropriate foods can negatively impact the overall wellbeing of CALD consumers in aged care, particularly those in residential care, and diminish consumer choice. For CALD communities and consumers, food represents more than just nourishment, it can be a powerful social vehicle that connects people with traditions, culture and identity. Developed over a lifetime, food habits and preferences can evoke feelings of familiarity, safety and comfort for older CALD people. Access to culturally appropriate food offerings does not only provide enjoyment to those from diverse backgrounds, but more importantly it provides consumers with choice and agency over what and how they eat.

Services and care provided to CALD older people can be significantly undermined by a lack of cultural awareness of CALD specific needs. Interim findings from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety ('Royal Commission') have reported that aged care services in Australia do not adequately meet the needs of CALD consumers, stating that in relation to culturally appropriate servicing, older people from CALD backgrounds can "experience difficulties feeling seen, heard and understood."³

CALD clients engaging in aged care services must be consulted regularly on the types of foods that they would like to eat, and the cultural and religious connections to food. This consumer engagement can be achieved through CALD client-specific questionnaires conducted at regular intervals to ensure that cultural considerations and preferences are communicated to staff and accommodated.

Issues relating to language skills and proficiency identified in the appendix provided, specifically items B3 and B4, directly affect CALD consumers. In facilitating any communication with CALD older people, In-language and interpretation services should be utilised, particularly when staff and/or facilities do not possess the language skills to communicate with consumers from non-English speaking backgrounds.⁴ Any questionnaires or consultation with consumers on food preferences should be developed from a person-centred approach, keeping language accessibility in mind, and where possible engaging with CALD staff or interpreters to provide a more equitable experience for CALD consumers.

² <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/55509a73-450d-42e4-9841-b7ed6f58c3ee/20342.pdf.aspx?inline=true> p.5, accessed 11 February 2021

³ <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-02/interim-report-volume-1.pdf> p.114 accessed 11 February 2021.

⁴ https://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/AgedCareReport_FECCA.pdf p.14, accessed 11 February 2021.

Menus, food planning and staff training

As identified in items E6 – E10 of the proposed topics supplied in request of this submission, menu, design and presentation are incredibly important. Providing best practice guides for staff and translated resources for consumers can aid in making existing menu planning processes more accessible and streamlined, however, it does not entirely accommodate for culturally specific food preferences, variety and religious considerations. An example of inappropriate meal and menu design is meal frequencies and timings conflicting with a Muslim client's prayer timings.⁵

Ensuring food offerings are flexible and accessible can be addressed through the development of tools and frameworks to support staff in incorporating cultural and religious considerations in meal planning, menu design and food delivery. As previously highlighted, increasing CALD consumers' ability to choose what they would like to eat, translated menus and the ability to communicate with staff can all have a great positive impact on the individual consumer.

Additionally, involving CALD aged care residents in these processes can better inform service delivery and reaffirm to residents that their needs are being considered. This is not specific to menu planning alone, another example could be allowing residents to prepare their own meals from time to time, if an in-house kitchen is available for meal preparation, to maintain an environment in which they can express and hold onto their cultural identities.

Access can be furthered by incorporating culturally significant meals in the menu, including imagery in menus and providing training and skills opportunities for staff to diversify their knowledge and upskill. In a survey conducted as part of the Royal Commission, titled *Consumer Engagement in Aged Care*, the importance of culturally appropriate services and engagement with consumers is highlighted. The survey found that there were service providers who shared that they trained staff to appropriately address situations where "an understanding of cultural differences is particularly important" including providing culturally appropriate food.⁶ Greater staff knowledge and training will increase the impact of any frameworks, tips and guides being created in this context.

⁵ <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2019/12/actions-to-support-older-cald-people-a-guide-for-aged-care-providers.pdf> p.22, accessed 11 February 2021.

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https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/sites/default/files/media/acqsc_consumer_engagement_in_aged_care_-_survey_report.pdf p.19, accessed 11 February 2021

While efforts are being made to better understand and address food and nutrition related issues faced by aged care consumers, further research on CALD specific consumer is urgently needed as the topics and subtopics proposed for discussion in the *National Congress on food, nutrition and the dining experience in aged care* do not sufficiently address how a lack of food choices for CALD clients can impact overall nutrition and affect long term health outcomes. All frameworks and regulatory options being proposed must therefore consider and consult CALD communities.

If you wish to discuss the contents of this submission further, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Al-Khafaji', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mohammad Al-Khafaji

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