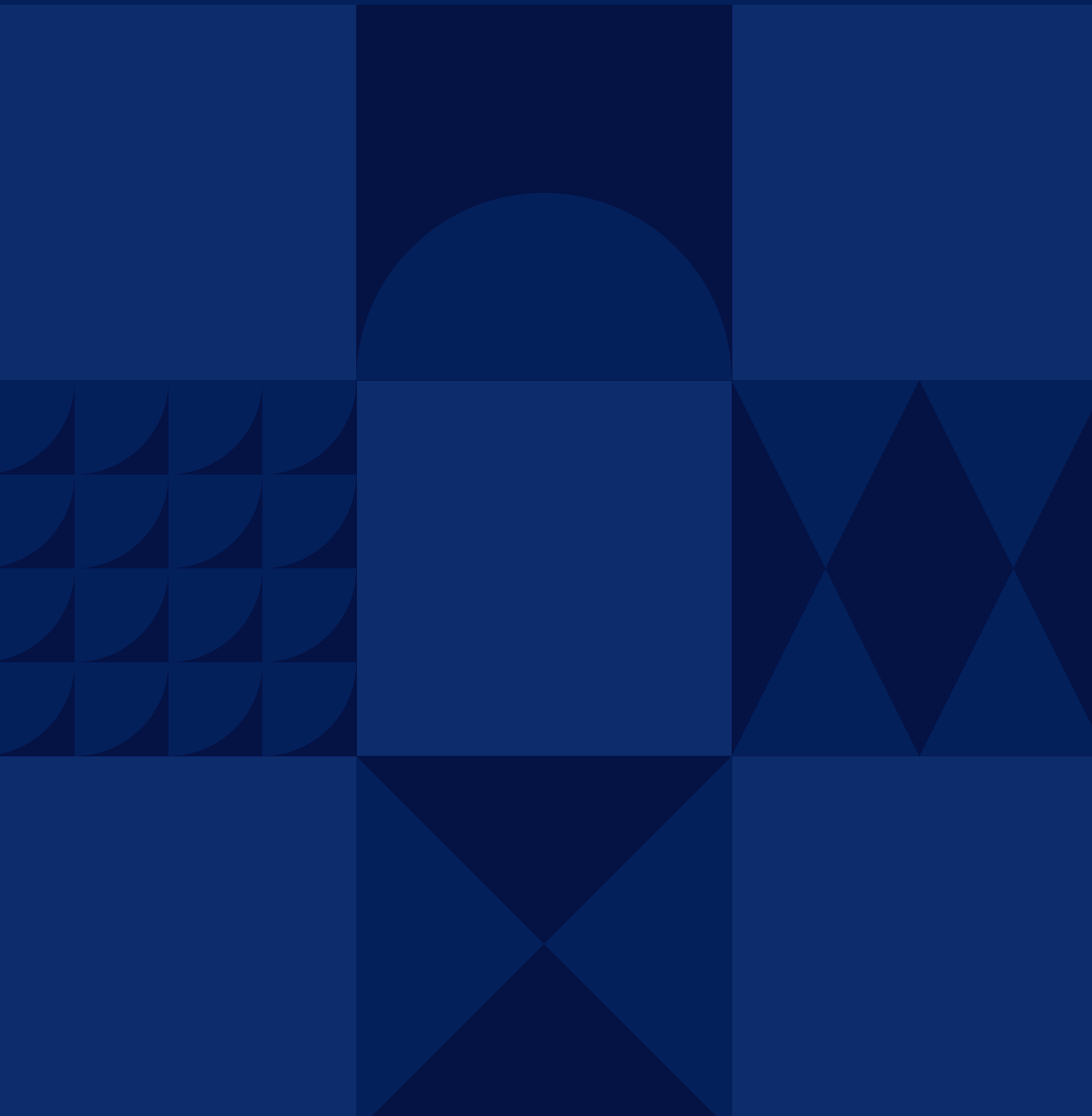


Evaluation of the EnCOMPASS  
Multicultural Aged Care  
Connector Program  
Summary Report





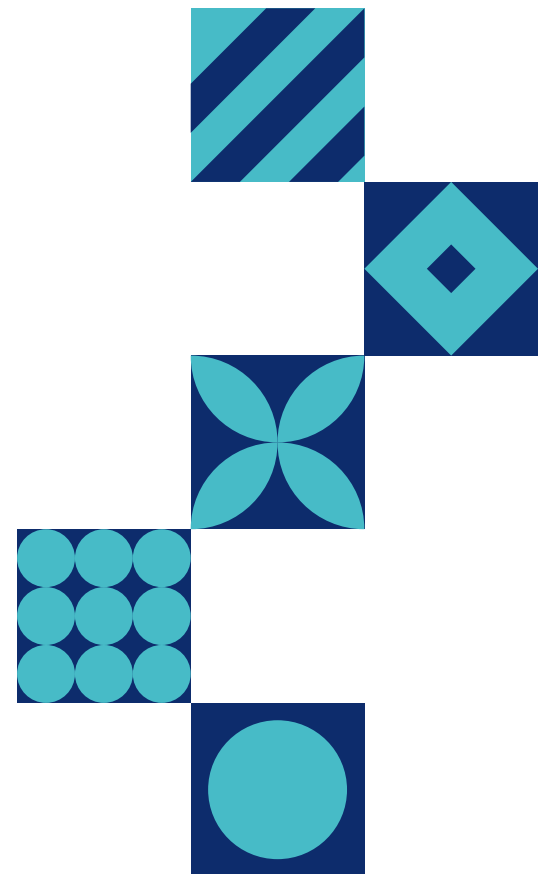
## Context

In February 2021, the *Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care* commissioned the *Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia* (FECCA) to design and implement the *EnCOMPASS Multicultural Aged Care Connector* (EnCOMPASS Connector) program. With a \$9.74 million investment, the program responded to a long demand from the multicultural sector for tailored support services to older persons in multicultural communities, aiming at reducing barriers to and inequity in access to aged care services. To deliver the program, FECCA partnered with 23 local organisations, with presence in 29 sites across all states and territories of Australia.<sup>1</sup>

Through the EnCOMPASS Connector program, bicultural/ bilingual support workers, called 'Connectors,' worked with their local communities, providing one-on-one support to older persons from multicultural backgrounds, their carers and families to access *My Aged Care*. Connectors received training and used a community development approach to engage with communities, including assertive outreach, network building, and co-design with older persons, families, and carers for the development of culturally and language appropriate messages.

The EnCOMPASS Connector program officially wrapped up in mid-2023, including six months of transition of clients to the *Care finders* program.<sup>2</sup> During its lifetime, over 9,000 older persons and carers from multicultural backgrounds received 1:1 support, and 37,000 individuals were reached through community outreach.

The evaluation of the EnCOMPASS Connector program was conducted by Charles Darwin University (O'Rourke et al. 2024), and covered the period up to December 2022.<sup>3</sup> This summary report presents the key findings from the evaluation, and recommendations for culturally appropriate navigation support.



- 1 FECCA acknowledges the valuable contribution received from the EnCOMPASS Advisory Committee members, including Mary Patetsos, Chairperson, Bernice Murphy, Dwayne Cranfield, Lui Di Venuto, Margaret Deerrain, Paul Sadler, and Regina Quiazon.
- 2 In January 2023 the Commonwealth Government introduced the Care finder program to target aged carer navigation support for groups considered more vulnerable, including those with language barriers. The Primary Health Networks administer the Care finder services, and only some of the organisations delivering the services identify as multicultural specialists. For more information, see <https://www.myagedcare.gov.au/help-care-finder>
- 3 Difference in numbers in relation to the evaluation occurred due to the fact that the evaluation covered a shorter timeframe: it did not include the seven partner organisations that transitioned from the *Aged Care Navigator program*, run by COTA Australia, and which continued under the EnCOMPASS Connector program before the evaluation started, nor the six months up to June 2023.

# Evaluation participants

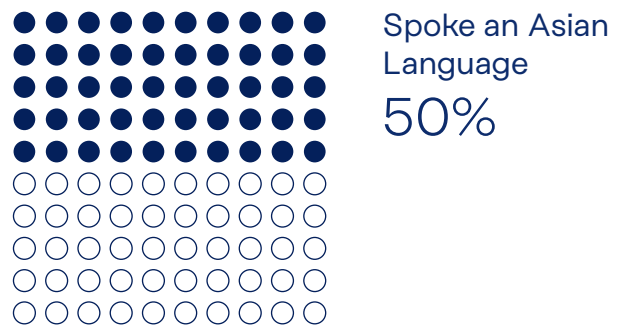
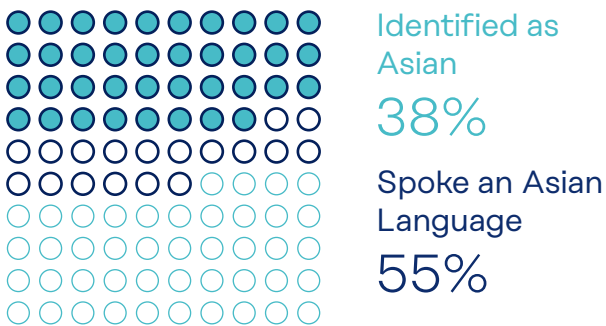
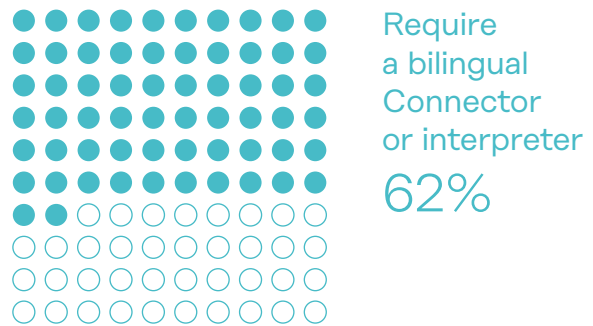
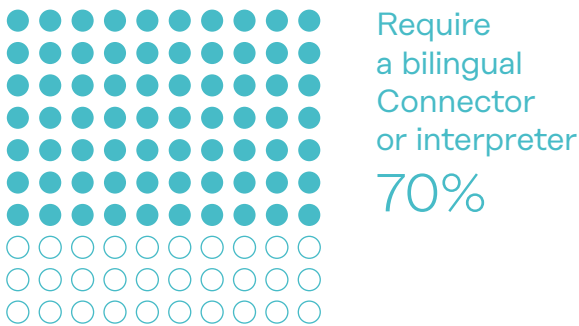
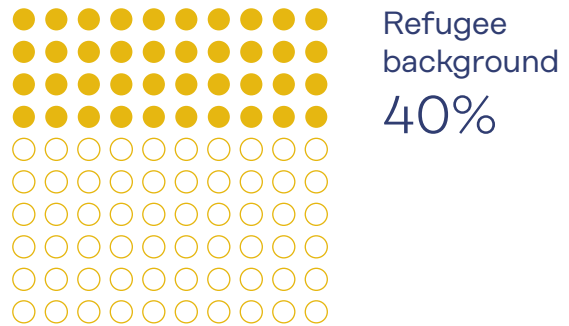
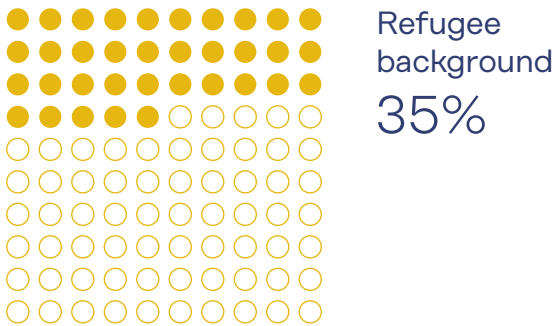
The evaluation included data from 1,038 older persons and 266 carers who were served by the EnCOMPASS Connector program and agreed to have their information shared with the evaluation team.

## Profile of older persons

- There were 1.75 times as many female older persons as male older persons
- Around 35% had a refugee background
- Around 70% had challenges with English and required a bilingual Connector or interpreter
- Around 38% were ethnically identified as Asian, with 55% speaking an Asian language

## Profile of carers

- Around two-thirds were aged under 65 years
- Over two-thirds (68%) were female
- 40% were from a refugee background
- Around 62% of carers required a bilingual Connector or interpreter
- Almost half spoke an Asian language



## Key findings

The evaluation found that the EnCOMPASS Connector program was effective in increasing the ability of older persons and carers to perceive, seek, reach, and engage with My Aged Care and aged care support services.

### High rapport was critical to connect clients who needed to access services, but did not feel ready to engage.

Clients had different levels of readiness to engage with the aged care system due to many factors including stigma, having complex social or medical needs, worry about costs, misunderstandings about services available, and a reluctance to accept help. When rapport had been established between the older person and/or carer and Connector, the Connector provided personalised care and attention, including gentle and respectful challenging of cultural beliefs and perceptions, with information, stories of others' positive experiences, and encouragement, so that the client better understood and accepted their need for support, so registered with My Aged Care.

### Connectors helped clients get the most out of aged care services.

For clients with immediate need for support, the time waiting for an assessment and subsequent service delivery was frustrating, with uncertainty and low accountability. Clients were left waiting for long periods of time, and the Connectors had no or limited authority to directly check with My Aged Care. For this reason, Connectors typically "held onto" clients and stayed in touch until assessment was completed, and services were in place, reassuring them throughout the lengthy process.

### Bicultural Connectors were better able to build rapport and trust with clients who faced language barriers than interpreters.

Connectors who were from the same community and spoke the same language as their clients (had inherent cultural knowledge) or those who were able to access relevant cultural knowledge and language support from colleagues within their organisation, were the most successful in engaging clients. Use of professional language interpreters (in-person or via telephone) did not establish the same level of rapport and trust with older persons and/or their carers.

### Connectors were not able to remove the barriers experienced within My Aged Care and with service providers.

It was commonly found that where a Connector's support ended, clients were failed by the system, particularly in the process of gaining actual access to aged care services. In most cases, the Connector had no influence over services. For many older persons or carers, appropriate services were not available, or if they were, they were unreliable, inconsistent, or more costly than anticipated.

When appropriate services were not forthcoming, clients generally understood that the problem was not due to the Connector.

Beyond the direct relationship of support between Connectors and clients, the EnCOMPASS Program increased understanding of the Australian aged care system amongst the community, building an 'ecosystem of care' and forging new connections with service providers and healthcare professionals.

### Capacity building offered for Connectors, including through formal training and a Community of Practice, was beneficial for clients as well as Connectors.

Training provided to Connectors afforded them opportunities to gain knowledge required for the role, such as how best to support clients in a culturally responsive, safe and respectful manner. Additionally, the Community of Practice (CoP) established by FECCA provided opportunities for peer learning, collective problem solving, and collegial support and validation of shared challenges. The CoP meetings also generated increased awareness and ideas for good practice. Hearing from others, collegiality and validation of concerns and frustrations made the Connectors feel connected with others. Connectors were able to carry these skills and experience forward after their period of employment under the Program ended.

### Co-designed and localised approaches resulted in high community engagement.

When Connectors or their employing organisations had existing positive relationships with target communities and the Connectors had the time and resources to develop marketing and engagement approaches with them, they were able to design tailored marketing and engagement approaches. This allowed Connectors to implement the program suitable for local needs.

### Community outreach, through building relationships with community leaders, CALD organisations and healthcare professionals, maximised the benefits and reach of the Program.

Community outreach activities were undertaken by the Connectors to increase the CALD communities' awareness of the aged care system and how to support people to access required services. The Connectors employed a range of strategies to increase aged care service awareness and knowledge amongst multicultural organisations, 'touchpoints' (such as community leaders and faith leaders) and health professionals. This helped to develop their capabilities in aged care navigation and service knowledge, as well as to enhance the capacity of the community to provide an 'ecosystem of care' in multicultural communities.

## Conclusion and recommendations

With the introduction of the Care finders Program as the main navigation support service for those who are more vulnerable and need extra support, it is fundamental that the lessons from the EnCOMPASS Connectors program are considered. In particular, the Care finders and any other navigator service that aims to be inclusive of multicultural communities must:

1. Ensure comprehensive training, peer learning and engagement opportunities for bicultural/bilingual aged care navigators
2. Provide flexibility around targets and key performance indicators and support a place-based, community-oriented approach
3. Commission local organisations that are known and trusted by multicultural communities, providing proper and sustainable funding to avoid the immense loss of social and human capital that occur with the end of 'pilot programs'
4. Employ bicultural navigators who have existing networks in their local community
5. Prioritise and enhance multicultural stakeholder networks and program promotion.

### Reference

The full report will be available at FECCA's website: [www.fecca.org.au](http://www.fecca.org.au).

Reference: O'Rourke, K., Meggetto, E., Schiff, A and Westhorp, G. (2024). Evaluation of the EnCOMPASS: Multicultural Aged Care Connector Program. Final report. Charles Darwin University (commissioned by the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia and the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care).



Partner organisations by aged care planning region

Aged Care Planning Region	Partner Organisations
<b>Australian Capital Territory</b>	
<b>ACT</b>	Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra
<b>New South Wales</b>	
<b>Southwest Sydney</b>	Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre
	Cass Care
	Multicultural Care
<b>Western Sydney</b>	Cass Care
	Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association
	Islamic Women's Association of Australia
<b>Southeast Sydney</b>	Ethnic Community Services Cooperative
	Advance Diversity Services
<b>North Sydney</b>	Australian Nursing Home Foundation
<b>Illawarra</b>	Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra
<b>Inner West</b>	Co.As.It. Italian Association of Assistance
<b>Victoria</b>	
<b>Southern Metro</b>	Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre
<b>Loddon-Mallee</b>	Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council
<b>South Australia</b>	
<b>Metro North</b>	Australian Refugee Association
<b>Metro East</b>	Multicultural Communities Council of SA
<b>Metro West</b>	Multicultural Communities Council of SA (previously Uniting SA)
<b>Riverland/Mallee</b>	Multicultural Communities Council of SA (previously Uniting SA)
<b>Tasmania</b>	
<b>Northern/Northwestern</b>	Migrant Resource Centre Tasmania
<b>Southern</b>	Migrant Resource Centre Tasmania
<b>Western Australia</b>	
<b>Metro</b>	Multicultural Services Centre of Western Australia (MSCWA) (previously Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre)
	Chung Wah Association
	Umbrella Community Care
<b>Southwest</b>	Multicultural Communities' Council of WA
<b>Northern Territory</b>	
<b>Darwin</b>	Multicultural Council of Northern Territory
<b>Queensland</b>	
<b>Metro North/ Metro South/West Moreton</b>	World Wellness Group
	Inala Community House
<b>South Coast/Logan River</b>	Islamic Women's Association of Australia



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