



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Immigration and Citizenship**  
Australian Multicultural Advisory Council

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Commissioner Mike Woods  
Caring for Older Australians  
Productivity Commission  
PO Box 1428  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Commissioner

The Australian Multicultural Advisory Council (AMAC) welcomes the Inquiry into Australia's aged care system. AMAC commends the terms of reference that request an examination of how well the mainstream service system is meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. We find the Inquiry and the terms of reference to be of great significance because many CALD older Australians access aged care services through the mainstream system.

AMAC also welcomes the Productivity Commission's proposed reforms to the aged care system in the draft report on *Caring for Older Australians*. However, we note that solutions to address the needs of CALD older Australians are not embedded throughout the proposed reforms and limited to language service provision. We appreciate the opportunity to provide a submission to comment on the draft report, and elaborate on this and other concerns.

Once again thank you for conducting the Inquiry in the interests of improving Australia's aged care system for older Australians and their carers.

Yours sincerely

Judge Rauf Soulio  
Deputy Chair  
Australian Multicultural Advisory Council

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### **Role of the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council**

1. The Australian Multicultural Advisory Council (AMAC) was established on 17 December 2008. AMAC consists of 16 members with a wide range of backgrounds, experience and professional expertise, and reflects a balance of ages and gender. AMAC provides the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and the Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs with advice on:
  - social cohesion issues relating to Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity
  - government policies to overcome intolerance and racism in Australia
  - mechanisms to communicate the social and economic benefits of Australia's cultural diversity to the broad community
  - issues relating to the social and civic participation of migrants in Australian society, and
  - the accessibility of Government services with respect to cultural diversity.

### **Caring for Older Australians**

#### ***Introduction***

2. Australia's new multicultural policy, *The People of Australia*, which draws on AMAC's earlier advice, states that services need to be responsive to the needs of Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. This important whole-of-government policy must be reflected more effectively in your report through a greater emphasis on aged care services for older CALD Australians.
3. Research indicates a growing population of older Australians from CALD backgrounds. In fact one in five older Australians come from non-English speaking countries and this part of the older population is growing faster than other segments<sup>1</sup>. Generalisations that homogenise the CALD population and simplistic solutions are often inappropriate<sup>2</sup>. As people from CALD backgrounds age the first language can become more prominent and cultural practices can become even more important to them<sup>3</sup>. People from non-English speaking countries are a diverse group and their needs and care requirements necessitate deeper understanding, respect and responsiveness.
4. An examination of aged care in Australia that considers future challenges for the sector, should acknowledge the significance of the large number of older Australians from CALD backgrounds. Meeting their needs and care requirements

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<sup>1</sup> AIHW 2007. Older Australia at a glance (4th edition). Cat. no. AGE 52. Canberra: AIHW.

<sup>2</sup> AIHW 2007. Older Australia at a glance (4th edition). Cat. no. AGE 52. Canberra: AIHW.

<sup>3</sup> Gibson, D, Braun P, Benham C & Mason F 2001. Projections of older immigrants: people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, 1996-2026, Australia. Cat. no. AGE 18. Canberra: AIHW.

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necessitates comprehensive culturally and linguistically appropriate care options to be made available through the mainstream system as well as the adequate provision of government funded ethno-specific aged care services where economies of scale exist. Innovation, flexibility and the capacity for responsiveness are crucial to ensure that all older Australians, and especially those from CALD backgrounds, have options to choose care that is most appropriate for them, are well informed of those options, and live with dignity.

***Need for embedded solutions in the draft reforms***

5. The draft report found that some participants to the inquiry identified difficulties with the mainstream aged care system delivering care that meets the needs and preferences of non-English speaking background (NESB) clients. While the main issues identified (information about aged care services in languages other than English, communication of needs and preferences to staff, and culturally relevant social activities) are indeed significant the proposed solutions are largely limited to the provision of translating and interpreting services.
6. AMAC is concerned that the reforms proposed in the draft report are inadequate, lack innovation, and serve to address CALD needs and preferences as a peripheral 'special needs' issue rather than an integral consideration of the aged care system. AMAC envisions a more comprehensive and consistent recognition of the significance of CALD older Australians and their carers throughout the reforms. A recognition that will only become more pertinent as the population of NESB older Australians is growing faster than other segments<sup>4</sup>. AMAC considers it crucial that CALD needs and preferences and cultural competency are incorporated into core service delivery, at all levels and stages of the aged care system in Australia. There is a need for embedded cultural competence strategies in the organisational policies, processes and programs of mainstream aged care services.

***Small and newly emerging ethnic groups***

7. Access and the availability of appropriate services may be problematic where numbers are insufficient to support multicultural or ethno-specific aged care services. As such it is imperative that mainstream providers have the capacity to provide appropriate care to the increasingly diverse population of older Australians.
8. AMAC considers mainstream services need to be more responsive to smaller communities. Improving the cultural competency of all services, and increasing engagement between aged care services and small and newly emerging ethnic groups are necessary to ensure effective and appropriate aged care.

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<sup>4</sup> AIHW 2007. Older Australia at a glance (4th edition). Cat. no. AGE 52. Canberra: AIHW.



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***Need for flexibility at point of entry***

9. The Commission's Australian Seniors Gateway is proposed to reduce the complexity of the aged care system and to improve older Australians understanding and access to information. However, the emphasis on a single point of entry and pathway to all services may not be appropriate and may in fact create an unintended barrier and limit access to required services.
10. AMAC is concerned that a single point of entry may be unable to provide equitable access for people from NESB with diverse needs and not adequately address Australia's increasing cultural diversity. AMAC is cautious of solutions that fail to address heterogeneity within CALD communities.
11. In order for the Seniors Gateway to effectively reach a large proportion of its intended clients, it should have flexibility, responsiveness and cultural competency training built and embedded into its design and service delivery.

**Regional CALD communities**

12. A single entry point and pathway may put disproportionate strain on older Australians living in areas without the infrastructure or finances to promote aged care services awareness in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways.
13. AMAC considers innovation, flexibility and responsiveness is necessary in these locations and that a multiple entry point and a cultural and language sensitive approach to the Seniors Gateway is necessary to ensure more equitable access to aged care services for those in rural and regional areas.

***The Social Inclusion Agenda and CALD older Australians***

14. CALD older Australians are a significant proportion of Australia's ageing population and if not provided with opportunities to engage and influence the decisions that affect them, are vulnerable to social exclusion. This is particularly true for regional and remote communities or where numbers are insufficient to support tailored aged care services.
15. AMAC reiterates the Government's Social Inclusion Principles of Approach that include building partnerships with vulnerable communities, developing tailored services and using locational approaches. AMAC considers the draft report should better reflect these Principles of Approach from the Government's Social Inclusion Agenda, particularly with regard to Australians disadvantaged by language or cultural barriers.

**Local cultural and recreational activities**

16. The prevention of social isolation requires opportunities to participate in relevant social activities and remain connected to the community. Since the relevance of
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language and culture can become more important to ageing CALD Australians, it is essential that mainstream service providers offer access and opportunities to support their CALD clients to maintain ongoing connections with their communities. Ethno-specific providers should also be funded to deliver such services where relevant.

***Need for prevention of ill health in older CALD Australians***

17. CALD communities face distinctive health issues, and without adequate preventative measures, older CALD Australians appear to have a predisposition to certain chronic conditions. Lifestyle factors, like diet, exercise and participation in social activities, can play an important part in mitigating ill health in old age.
18. AMAC considers the draft report must address the important area of prevention of ill health and better incorporate preventative measures into the proposed reforms. Mainstream aged care services need to understand CALD specific health issues, in particular, and ensure they have the capability to implement appropriate prevention strategies and remain responsive to the specific needs of their CALD clients.

***Need for multicultural and ethno-specific not-for-profit aged care services***

19. Some NESB older Australians are well served by dedicated services that tailor their aged care services to particular groups, e.g. Italian, Greek, Spanish, Dutch and Jewish communities. The draft report rightfully acknowledges the dedicated multicultural aged care providers that tailor their services to particular groups.
20. AMAC notes little recognition of the important role that these multicultural aged care providers will have well into the future. Current ethno-specific aged care services are often under-resourced, and rely heavily on volunteers to deliver services to meet the increasing demands of their community. These services must be seen as an essential element of the multicultural not-for-profit sector and supported accordingly.

***Need for CALD workforce development***

21. The draft report found that some participants to the inquiry reported mainstream providers have difficulty providing staff that are bilingual, can communicate effectively with their clients, are culturally competent and satisfy regulatory requirements.
  22. AMAC considers cultural competency training should be a requirement for the aged care workforce and integrated into the design and service delivery of aged care. Substantial professional development is required in this area and diverse modes of communication, beyond translation and interpreting services, should be incorporated into the mainstream system.
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23. AMAC considers the major shortage of bilingual CALD staff to be a serious issue that needs to be addressed. Resources should be allocated and programs, for example a training pathway for migrants, should be developed.

***Need for appropriate carer support***

24. Research suggests that many CALD communities tend to resist the use of residential care with a preference for at-home care among families. Consequently, many family members take on the role of carer without consciously acknowledging that role.

25. AMAC considers the role of families and family care should be better understood and incorporated into the proposed Seniors Gateway solution. In addition, the need for appropriate carer support should involve targeted efforts, to not only provide culturally and linguistically appropriate support, but to ensure that carers are aware of the support available to them.

**Conclusion**

26. Older Australians from CALD backgrounds are a significant proportion of the ageing population and research indicates this segment is growing faster than other segments. Furthermore there is significant heterogeneity within CALD communities, and proposed solutions that appear to simplify can in fact create unintended barriers, without the required flexibility and capacity for responsiveness. Language and culture can become more important as Australians from CLDB become older and the proposed reforms should better reflect this.

27. AMAC believes that mainstream organisational policies, processes and programs should comprehensively incorporate cultural diversity into their core service delivery framework, at all levels and stages of the aged care system to effectively meet the needs and preferences of CALD older Australians and their carers. This should be backed up by strengthened regulatory requirements in this area. AMAC also believes that ethno-specific aged care service providers should be adequately and appropriately funded when economies of scale exist.

28. AMAC recommends that the final report include a strong and robust emphasis on the effective provision of aged care services to older Australians from CALD backgrounds.

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