

# Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre

## Submission to Productivity Commission's 'Caring for Older Australians'



Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre (Spectrum MRC) welcomes the Commonwealth Government's Productivity Commission's request for a submission regarding the future of caring for older Australia. Spectrum MRC's specific interest in submitting this response relates to our organisation's work with elderly clients from diverse cultural backgrounds, recognizing that this client groups' aged care needs are distinct from mainstream ageing Australians. Spectrum MRC also echo's the views of peak CALD agencies in their response, in particular Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV).

### **About our Organisation**

Spectrum MRC is a not-for-profit community organisation working to assist generations of migrants and refugees to successfully settle and reach their full potential in Australia. The organisation was initially established in 1980 to provide settlement services for migrants and refugees living in the North - West Metropolitan Region of Melbourne. As service demand has expanded, Spectrum MRC has responded by offering support reaching widely across Melbourne, including specific project areas which have state-wide reach. The scope of our services includes:

- Assisting ageing migrants and people with a disability to participate in life at home and in the community.
- Influencing society to build more inclusive communities;
- Delivering culturally appropriate and responsive settlement & family services;
- Making immigration advice affordable for individuals and employers;
- Empowering communities to identify and address settlement challenges;
- Providing culturally-tailored, hands-on & job-focused training;
- Transitioning jobseekers into sustainable employment;

Spectrum MRC aged services provide the opportunity for older people to access the service system at different entry points dependent upon need at any given time. This gives individuals the opportunity to build on existing and trusted relationships with Spectrum MRC staff, maximising the benefits of continuity of care. Spectrum MRC's capacity for flexibility and innovation allows for the creation of special programs to meet the needs of clients from emerging cultural groups or as new needs are identified. The organisation's aged care values are underpinned by a focus on ageing in place and supporting migrants preference to remain in home.

Spectrum MRC sees a need for reform from the Aged Care sector in how agencies provide care for our CALD elderly and we anticipate a future of innovative service delivery. National projections indicate that by 2011 nearly one quarter of Australia's population aged over 65 will speak a language other than English. In Melbourne the proportion will be 38%. The proportion of persons 65 years and over is greater amongst the overseas born population (17.7%) than for the Australian-born population (10.9%), hence the urgent need to prioritise the type of integrated service models multicultural and ethno specific agencies provide for CALD clients.

Below are the 4 main areas Spectrum MRC would like to make comment in regards to this report:

### **1) The value of diversity and cross cultural awareness in the aged care workforce**

It has been widely acknowledged, both nationally and internationally, that the provision of bi-lingual workers is a best practice approach of working with CALD aged care clients. This holds true for both one-on-one care and social support group care.

An example of this bi-lingual best practice is Spectrum MRC's award winning Multicultural Home Support Service (MHSS) which has been operating since 1995 – this service matches elderly clients from a migrant background with in home carers from the same cultural background. The benefits of this service can be explained in economic, social and health terms.

Economically, maintaining a bilingual workforce reduces the financial strain placed on the aged care system by CALD clients as their general health and wellbeing level is high due to their social connection with carers speaking their language. Additionally, Spectrum MRC has historically recruited a high percentage of bi-lingual workers who have been retrenched from declining workforce sectors such as manufacturing. This has resulted in improved economic participation for mature migrant workers who would often otherwise be dependent on unemployment benefits.

The positive social outcomes that are a result of the language match are multiple and include reduced isolation on the behalf of the elderly client as he / she is able to engage in outings and communicate in his /her first language. Spectrum MRC can testify that the social connections between bi-lingual carers and their client are very strong resulting in friendships and bonds. This bond that is formed improves clients' desire to engage with others on outings and excursions when in the company of their carer.

The mental health and overall wellbeing improvements are significant through matching appropriate carers with CALD clients. Client's who have previously refused care through mainstream services, which has resulted in deteriorating health, to then have a bi-lingual worker engaged to support them has seen significant improvements in client's wellbeing .

**CASE STUDY- MHSS Client Story 'Mum gained another daughter'**

80 year old Nada from a Polish background was matched with an MHSS worker Zofia who also speaks Polish. Over the past 5 years the two have built up a friendship based on respect and cultural understanding. Nada's daughter was no longer able to care for her mother alone and was hesitant about finding a carer. She has now seen an improvement in her mother and says 'I can completely trust Zofia with Mum's personal care – we call Zofia our angel.'

Spectrum MRC's 7 years of experience in providing education and training services (including Spectrum Education and Training) has ensured the organisation hears first hand from CALD aged care students engaging in HACC training, that tailoring training packages for prospective carers from a non English speaking background is integral to maintaining a diverse aged care workforce. SET's training takes into account the language, literacy and numeracy challenges which some students from a non-English speaking background possess. In order to ensure strong bi-lingual representation in the aged care sector, training organisations need to be more aware of the needs of CALD students.

Spectrum MRC recognizes that maintaining a bi-lingual workforce is not always adopted by some aged care agencies and in this case our organization recommends improvements to agencies' professional development regarding cross cultural awareness. Through appropriate cross cultural training agencies can begin to foster a better understanding amongst their workforce of the special needs of diverse groups as they age. An improved awareness of cultural values and beliefs will help assist in the provision of quality aged care for CALD clients. Moreover, the use of interpreters could be more widely adopted by workers and agencies to ensure CALD clients understand information about key services in their own language. Spectrum MRC stresses the importance of conveying aged care information to clients in their first language by someone who can also appreciate the comparison with system in client's home country.

## **2) The importance of ageing in place for CALD elderly**

Although this report emphasizes a need to review residential care, the majority of Spectrum MRC's CALD aged clients and their families do not consider residential care an option. On the whole, residential care does not cater for CALD elderly in regards to bi-lingual workers, meals and cultural social activities. We know that residential care is the most expensive and least preferred option which is only adopted by families as a last resort in an emergency when home based support is inadequate to address the crisis.

Spectrum MRC has seen that there is a strong emphasis from multicultural communities to take on the responsibility of caring for their elderly. In many cultures it is an expectation for son's and daughter's to care for their mothers and fathers and this value, combined with the stigma surrounding residential care, results in a strong focus on the provision of 'in-home' care options. For many migrant communities there is a sense of shame and dishonor associated with residential care options.

Furthermore, for many of the communities Spectrum MRC works with, the elderly have lived in the same location for many years developing local friendships and supports with friends and families from the same culture. These connections are important for migrant groups' sense of belonging and harmony and to take an ageing family member away from these connections decreases their overall wellbeing. As a result, migrant families require as much assistance as possible in helping their ageing family members 'age at home'.

## **3) Complementary and integrated care models for CALD elderly**

Spectrum MRC envisages the future of aged care as being more than just direct one-to-one support, with activities of daily living to also encompass innovative care models which improve the wellbeing of CALD elderly. Models such as Spectrum MRC's respite day centre 'Clifton Respite Cottage' and Planned Activity and Social Support groups help to increase our elderly client's awareness of services, provide respite to families and reduce social isolation.

These group models create social connection for many who would otherwise be isolated as well as provide carers with a much needed break resulting in the family's strengthened capacity to continue caring for the older person at home.. As participants age, many revert to their native language and enjoy reminiscing about life back home. These models are critical in terms of improving the health and wellbeing of CALD elderly as they ensure participants feel less alone as they age.

### **CASE STUDY- Clifton Respite Cottage**

Clifton Respite Cottage employs bilingual cooks to engage the elderly with meal preparation and to ensure the group share meals over conversation. Aside from culturally appropriate cuisine, the centre also helps keep clients' physical, cognitive and social skills active as they become more confident and engaged through interactions with friends from their homeland. 'Other places give you coffee and biscuits; we get respect here!' states a participant from the centre.

## **4) The importance of tailored, individualized care for CALD elderly**

Echoing ECCV's comments, Spectrum MRC also sees a need for culturally appropriate assessment tools to ensure that CALD elderly gain access to much needed support services as well as culturally appropriate care. Spectrum MRC advocates also for bi-lingual assessment workers who have both a good understanding of the care system in Australia as well as some knowledge of the system in the clients' home-country.

## **Summary of Recommendations**

Spectrum MRC would like to commend the Australian Government for seeking to consult with the Aged Care sector broadly in developing the report 'Caring for Older Australian'. Spectrum MRC believes that the key priorities for elderly CALD clients which should be reflected in this report are:

- 1)** To ensure that 'ageing in place' is prioritised for CALD elderly in recognition that this is a preferred model and that there is a lack of CALD representation in residential care.
- 2)** To prioritise a diverse, bi-lingual aged care workforce to meet the special needs of our ageing CALD population.
- 3)** To ensure appropriate levels of funding are prioritised for innovative HACC aged care service models including multicultural and ethno specific group programs.
- 4)** To ensure that industry training is culturally sensitive and tailored for migrants looking to engage in the aged care employment field.
- 5)** To dedicate both federal and state funding to multicultural and ethno specific agencies and to also involve these agencies in future service planning.

## **Contact Details**

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