



PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA – COMMITTEES

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

### LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

#### Terms of Reference

59th Parliament

#### **Inquiry into support for elderly migrants and refugees**

**On 4 August 2021, the Legislative Assembly agreed to the following motion:**

That this House refers an inquiry into support for elderly migrants and refugees to the Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee for consideration and **report no later than 17 February 2022** and the Committee should consider the needs of older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds including, but not limited to, an examination of the:

- (a) adequacy of services for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds;
  - (b) unique challenges faced by this cohort, including, but not limited to, social isolation, civic participation, digital literacy, elder abuse and access to culturally appropriate aged care and home care services; and
  - (c) ideas to advance the physical and mental health and wellbeing of Victoria's multicultural seniors including global best practices.
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South East Community Links would like to provide the following comments relating to the Inquiry into support for elderly migrant and refugees, as described below:

#### **(a) Adequacy of services for older Victorian from migrant and refugee backgrounds and, (b) Unique challenges faced by older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds**

The case study attached provides some insights into the experiences of a Sri Lankan woman who has been experiencing significant challenges with the assessment processes and eligibility criteria of the Disability Support Pension and then navigating the mutual obligation requirements of the Job Seeker Payment. She is also a victim survivor of family violence and is experiencing isolation and ongoing family violence in the care of her family.

Digital literacy amongst our older CALD community members continues to be a challenge and a barrier for them. Increasingly more services and government bodies are pushing people onto these platforms to access health, Medicare, benefit services, information in general and as we have seen more recently, COVID-19 vaccination proof. Older people of migrant and refugee background are further disadvantaged as English is not their first language and navigating digital platforms in English without strong digital skills can create an incredibly stressful and anxiety provoking environment for them. As a result, older Victorians of migrant and refugee background are really struggling with this and missing supports and critical information either because of language barriers, digital literacy challenges and lack of access to IT devices and familiarity with technology. Our evidence shows that older CALD community members will not be able to participate in a program or 'opt out' if it requires them to register online and they lack confidence in doing so.



Family violence is also a real concern for older CALD community members as anecdotal evidence collected from CALD community workshops highlights that in many cases CALD community members are strongly dependent upon their children for care, emotional, physical and financial support and sometimes housing and in some of these cases children or in-laws are treating them unfairly physically abusing them, neglecting them, limiting their freedoms and accessing their finances for personal gain. In these cases, CALD community members feel powerless and are at times unaware of their rights and entitlements.

Mental health issues for older CALD Victorians can be another challenge when particular CALD communities lack the understanding and knowledge of mental health and may tend to feel shame or embarrassment due to cultural perceptions. This prevents older CALD community members from receiving the therapeutic care and treatment they deserve.

### **(C) Ideas to advance the physical and mental health and wellbeing of Victoria's multicultural senior's**

It was identified that older migrant and refugee people are not used to the level of planning and organising that is required to engage in social and recreational activities. In their home country, neighbourhoods and villages were more open and social; there are gathering places, piazzas, parks, and community settings that facilitate more informal and casual ways to engage with others and access support. Here in Australia, you always need appointments, and you need to plan ahead to avoid feeling left out, bored, disengaged or not included. This also relates to financial planning in which community members are often not familiar or attuned to the need to plan for future finances as well as social events.

A suggestion was made for workshops or sessions that are tailored to build capacity of older migrant and refugee community members to:

- manage their finances and plan for future expenses and dreams, and
- to understand how to stay connected socially and what is involved so they can connect and participate equally.

It was also suggested that more informal opportunities for older Victorians to connect in social spaces such as community gardens and parks is needed. It could be seen by this group of individuals that life is becoming so complicated with the need to always book, register and complete forms, when all they want to do is share a cup of tea with others and have a chat.

It was recognised there is a divide between those older migrant and refugee Victorians who are more educated and financially secure, compared to those who have less education and financial supports. Those with less are more disadvantaged and this can be illustrated more clearly if we apply an intersectional lens to the experiences of older migrant and refugee Victorians and look holistically at their person, their journey, and their changing place.