

- **How can the Government better support you, your family and your community?**

This is a response from AMES Australia and reflects consultation with communities over time as to issues; and research and evidence based practice.

- **What do you want to see for the future of multiculturalism in Australia?**

The objective of Government policy addressing Australia's multicultural profile is to build cohesion and community and to enable migrants and refugees to participate equitably in Australian society, become fully-functioning members of society as soon as possible and to minimise longer term reliance of social and settlement services.

Citizenship

As a first step to increasing cohesion and a sense of belonging in our community the Government could consider expediting the pathway to gaining Australian citizenship - this is core to social cohesion and the sense of belonging.

Self-employment/entrepreneurism

Self-employment has been shown to support refugee settlement as it boosts autonomy, self-confidence and social status. There is also a strong economic case for refugee entrepreneurship; refugee businesses across Australia create jobs for both refugees, migrants and other Australians while generating new products and services.

Yet despite refugees having the highest rates of entrepreneurship of any migrant group, this cohort can face greater challenges than other entrepreneurs.

Early intervention support can help prospective refugee entrepreneurs to overcome barriers to starting a business within the first five years of settlement. Successful intervention the government could support include:

- micro-finance loans
- funding cross program collaboration – for example: settlement programs (Humanitarian Settlement Program, SETS) working with *jobactive* to facilitate a self-employment pathway for refugees and Humanitarian entrants – including training in small business development and assistance with overseas qualification recognition.
- professional development on self-employment pathways available to refugees in Australia for settlement program staff (eg HSP), built into programs to allow early identification and support for prospective refugee entrepreneurs
- adequate self-employment support services across Australia that specialise in CALD (there are currently few and they are dispersed and hard to find), and that they are linked to government programs as best as possible.

These recommendations are based on AMES Australia's experience of working in partnership with Thrive, an enterprise that supports refugees and asylum seekers who are motivated to become financially independent, with microfinance loans and mentoring for their new or existing businesses. Since 2017 this collaboration between AMES and Thrive has supported 1,200 AMES client referrals to Thrive and 200 clients successfully obtaining micro-finance loans.

- Do you face problems accessing government services? What can be done to help you, your family or community access Government services? (This includes Medicare, My Aged Care, National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).)

NETWORKING AND PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Networking and partnership opportunities that help link community groups to federal government services

Practical step: government departments and agencies formalise input from multicultural stakeholders ie steering groups, as a standard practice for informing policy and operational changes. This will drive positive change as needs and solutions of multicultural communities are known and addressed.

ACCESSING GOVERNMENT SERVICE – A TWO-WAY PROCESS

Increased independence and full access to government services for people from culturally diverse backgrounds is a two way process that needs to (i) build the confidence and capability of people from diverse communities to use mainstream government services and (ii) ensure mainstream government agencies overcome cultural and communication barriers that limit their capacity to deliver effective services to newer arrivals, particularly those from humanitarian entrant/refugee backgrounds.

(i) People from culturally diverse backgrounds

Necessary for people from culturally diverse communities to be able to fully and equitably access government services, as a right not as a favour, are:

1. awareness that the service exists and is available to all eligible individuals/families
2. knowledge of how to access the service
3. the language, literacy, numeracy and digital (LLND) skills required for access
4. information and support that is culturally and linguistically accessible
5. service provision that values people from different communities as assets – and does not see them as problems to be solved.

Points 1 and 2 above can, in part, be achieved through community education programs, delivered in person by people from a culturally similar background that engage the target communities and gain their participation – in the education program as well as in accessing specific services.

Points 3 and 4 are not specific to people from culturally diverse communities. Many 'native-born Australians' struggle with the LLND skills required to access and use services – including those using over-the-counter contact, paper-based information and forms and/or online digital platforms. Information provided by many government services can be complex and difficult to follow in any language. For people from a different culture and with a different language the complexity is compounded, especially when information is not easily accessible in a person's first language.

Point 5 goes to the heart of the matter. If people from diverse backgrounds are seen as assets – then the services will make a priority of ensuring they have full access.

(ii) Government services

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To ensure full and equitable access to everyone, including those from diverse cultural backgrounds, our government needs standard multicultural/multilingual support systems embedded systemically in all services and across all government agencies.

And, when designing and delivering services and accessibility supports, it is important not to make assumptions that all people from a community are the same. Intergenerational and other individual differences are as much part of the make-up of diverse communities as they are part of the broader community.

- This means that each department and government service needs to consult with and involve the multicultural communities who will, or should, be accessing the service and involve them in service design.
- All government services should embed a standard range of access support: staff trained in cultural competence; staff who speak major community languages with access to other languages as required (not only via TIS as phone is not always appropriate); interpreting services offered as a right, not something people have to ask for; interpreters with 'content specialist knowledge' – eg medical, legal, finance, housing, family, etc as appropriate to the service.
- Programs that implement this type of model already exist in some areas – for example the community engagement programs in the Department of Justice and in the Police. However these programs are often just that – 'programs' - and not mainstreamed and embedded as part of the system. They remain within one department, and frequently, once set up remain static and do not grow and evolve as communities grow and profiles change.

SPECIFIC SERVICE AND PROGRAMS

ADULT MIGRANT EDUCATION PROGRAM

Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP), and childcare

The Immigration (Education) Amendment (Expanding Access to English Tuition) Bill 2020 proposes the introduction of some significant changes to the AMEP.

AMES Australia supports the extension of AMEP hours beyond 510; amending the upper limit for eligibility to access English tuition to a new level of vocational English; the removal of the statutory time limit; and supports the provision of English language tuition outside Australia. These changes will benefit many people in our culturally diverse communities, however the AMEP needs to ensure equitable access for all, including parents with caring responsibilities.

- Free childcare: for parents of young children with caring responsibilities (usually women) access to free, suitable and accessible childcare is critical to supporting and incentivising them to improve their English proficiency, and enable their English language learning to continue. This cohort, many of whom are women with low levels of English and/or education, is highly likely to benefit significantly from the additional hours of tuition proposed in the new legislation.

NDIS

CALD communities in Australia have similar rates of disability to the rest of the population. However, since the NDIS commenced in 2013 the uptake by CALD communities has been lower than in the rest of the population.

At the end of 2017, an estimated 22% of NDIS participants would be expected to come from CALD backgrounds. However, the data identifies that only 7% of NDIS participants across Australia identified as CALD; and 9% in Victoria. Figures from 31 March 2020 identify a

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minor increase for Victoria. Of the active NDIS participants with an approved plan, 11.0% identified as CALD.)

Since 2018, AMES Australia has been involved in the delivery of disability-focused projects for people from culturally diverse backgrounds. AMES CALD NDIS Awareness project recruited and trained 12 Community Champions from CALD communities. This experience evidenced what is common 'wisdom' around the NDIS – that, as an extremely complex system to navigate for people with English as a first language, understanding of Australian systems and good levels of literacy, numeracy and digital skills, it is highly problematic for people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds to access.

Reasons for high barriers to access for diverse communities include a lack of accessible, culturally appropriate information to enable people from CALD communities to understand what is available, make informed service choices and/or to actually access NDIS support.

The project demonstrated:

- that culturally diverse communities are much more likely to access services when advocacy programs are delivered by a representative from their own community in their first language
- the effectiveness of community education programs to engage people from diverse communities
- people's eagerness to learn about and participate in a service – when they have information in a language/format they can understand.

As evidence of the effectiveness of this type of community engagement program - at the end of this particular project the Community Champions had delivered 60 Community Education sessions in first language, reaching more than 1,050 individuals.

MYGOV

The MyGov website is extremely difficult to use for people from diverse communities who have low levels of language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills. Many of these new arrivals may also have poorer quality IT equipment, limited data allowances and less than reliable internet connections.

- Training like this linked to digital literacy, and in how to use the MyGov site in particular, should be embedded into all relevant government programs and services – including *jobactive*, AMEP, HSP, SETS and any other funded programs.
Uptake of MyGov training delivered by AMES using state funding (ACFE) was strong with around 200 clients from diverse communities undertaking the training in the period from July to November 2019.
- Access to reliable internet connections is increasingly essential to accessing government services – as more and more services and information are delivered online, or require online registration. (A recent ACCC meeting acknowledged that reliable internet access is fast becoming an essential service to which everyone should have access).

HEALTH SERVICES

Settlement Health Coordinators Project: This program, funded by DHHS in Victoria, provides a clear model of how to improve access to health services for people from refugee and migrant communities.

Between 2017 and 2020 three Refugee Health Nurses were co-located as Settlement Health Coordinators (SHCs) at two of AMES settlement sites.

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SHCs played a unique role as the conduit between settlement services, refugee health programs and the broader health system, actively facilitating communication and improving access for refugees to health services.

- Systematising this model of co-located services and embedded support more broadly across settlement, health and allied health service providers, along with medically appropriate interpreter services offered to all people from culturally diverse backgrounds, would positively impact on access to health services for diverse communities.

As evidence of the effectiveness of this type of program: by mid-2020 over 2,250 clinical care contacts were made, largely in the areas of immunisation support and connecting refugees with disability support – services which many would not have accessed without this line of support.

FAIRWORK OMBUDSMAN

Fair Work Ombudsman: access to information about workplace legislation, compliance

There are issues around accessible online learning and awareness modules about Fair Work legislation for people from culturally diverse backgrounds with low language and low literacy skills. Links to Fair Work resources in different languages are also difficult to navigate with resources 'buried' online. Languages of new and emerging communities are not well covered.

This creates a significant knowledge gap – highlighted at this time of the COVID-19 pandemic a casualised workforce (the casual workforce being largely made up of migrants and refugees – and young people), poor pay and lack of knowledge of workers' rights has resulted in people taking on two or three jobs. The ramification of this for the health of the nation in times of a highly contagious pandemic have been very clear.

- This provides another example of where (i) consulting with communities about where and how they would best access information, and (ii) systematising support for all our diverse communities as a part of the service would provide equitable access to information for all Australians, to the benefit of all Australians.
- Training members of diverse communities to deliver information sessions is a proven method of engaging communities: this could involve developing a train the trainer model, employ/pay appropriately skilled community members to undertake the training in Employment rights, accessing the website and resources and then pay them to deliver sessions in community languages.

VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering programs

Considering the benefits to volunteers from diverse communities themselves and the Australian community more broadly, volunteering programs should be formalised in government programs such as settlement services (HSP) and employment programs (*jobactive*).

However, where volunteering is a 'built-in' component of a service, the coordination of volunteers is often underfunded.

- Large volunteering organisation ('Volunteer Involving Organisations') could be funded to employ coordinators with experience of working with culturally diverse communities and language skills to support volunteer recruitment and training for people from these communities.
- Support could also be directed towards volunteers who wish to transition to paid work (especially post COVID). This could be through targeted resources and training to help

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culturally diverse volunteers with this transition and/or incentives to employers to recognise volunteering as legitimate Australian work experience.

MIGRATION PROGRAM

Australia's migration program and Visas

In light of the well-recognised contributions migrants and refugees make to Australia, both socially and economically, and the government's commitment to a Refugee and Humanitarian Program as a key plank of Australia's comprehensive response to refugee displacement, AMES would like to raise the following issues for consideration.

- The Migration program has a significant focus on temporary migration with extremely limited pathways to permanent residency for many migrant workers. As highlighted during the pandemic, this creates an underclass of migrant workers without access to welfare or support services. Having pathways to permanent residency and citizenship for temporary migrants will significantly improve their social and economic participation.
- Make family reunification visa pathways more accessible and expand equal access to refugees despite their mode of arrival to Australia.

• Have you, your family or community faced new challenges during Covid-19?

COVID-19 RELATED JOB LOSSES: IMPACT ON REFUGEES

Refugees are among those most impacted by job losses due to COVID-19 as they are disproportionately engaged in low-skilled and insecure employment, and therefore more heavily impacted by the economic downturn. This is evidenced by data showing that as of June 2020, there were 52,458 refugees registered with *jobactive*, up from 33,084 in December 2019. (*Settlement Council of Australia Pre-Budget Submission for 2020-21*). Strategies to address this issue:

- Recalibrate the HSP to fund employment-focused services for refugees, delivered through current HSP providers, which contribute to addressing the issue of refugee job losses.
- Enhance HSP services to focus on employment, digital literacy and education outcomes for current HSP clients, and those re-registering with *jobactive* and re-engaging with the HSP program due to loss of employment.

FAMILY VIOLENCE

Many families from diverse communities have been impacted by an increase in family and domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

- An increase in funding for Prevention of Violence programs with a specific focus on diverse communities, delivered by trained members of the client communities, would help address the causes of the violence
- Additional resources/programs to provide health services and material/financial support, including alternative housing/shelter for the victims of violence would help address the results of the violence and disruption to homes.

EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE TUITION

Many adults were unable to attend face-to-face English language tuition (AMEP) and other training due to COVID-19 restrictions. Children were unable to attend school. Organisations like AMES Australia needed to rapidly adapt and/or produce online teaching and learning resources and strategies to reach AMEP students. Schools need to do the same so as to be able to continue to reach children at home.

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Access to both IT equipment and internet access were major barriers to accessing learning for many people – adults and children – in diverse communities.

As an example of this: after surveying 1,021 refugee clients AMES learned that 53.5% of school-aged children had no digital equipment available for remote learning or alternative supports.

- Arrangement to provide affordable access to internet connections and affordable, perhaps subsidised, digital equipment need to be part of the suite of government services and programs supporting people from diverse communities – particularly those who are very recently arrived and not yet fully settled.
- Contingency funding for resource development in times of need such as this needs to be built-in to government services, programs and contracts.

Is there anything further you'd like to add?

AMES Australia as a specialist settlement provider for many years is well connected to new, emerging and long-term communities and would be pleased to provide additional information, and research insights as to issues, solutions and effective practices to engage and support newly arrived migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to Australia.

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