Multicultural Access and Equity
Perspectives from culturally and linguistically diverse communities on Australian Government service delivery

Prepared by the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA)

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About FECCA

FECCA is the national peak body representing Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. FECCA provides advocacy, develops policy and promotes issues on behalf of its constituency to government and the broader community. FECCA supports multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice and the rejection of all forms of discrimination and racism.

FECCA’s membership comprises state, territory and regional multicultural and ethnic communities’ councils. FECCA has an elected executive committee and a professional national secretariat, responsible for implementing policies and work programs on behalf of its membership and stakeholders.

Acknowledgements

FECCA would like to thank all involved in the access and equity process, and in the preparation of this report. To the consultation participants who generously gave their time to share their experiences and thoughtful insights, FECCA acknowledges your important contributions and extends its thanks for your willing involvement in the access and equity process. FECCA also acknowledges the partner organisations that generously provided their assistance to facilitate community consultation discussions.
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## Acronyms

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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>AMEP</td>
<td>Adult Migrant English Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIBP</td>
<td>Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection</td>
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<tr>
<td>DHS</td>
<td>Australian Government Department of Human Services</td>
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<td>DSS</td>
<td>Australian Government Department of Social Services</td>
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<td>FECCA</td>
<td>Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia</td>
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<td>MMMSC</td>
<td>Murraylands Multicultural Migration and Settlement Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCF</td>
<td>National Coordination Framework</td>
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<td>TIS</td>
<td>Translating and Interpreting Service (National)</td>
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Executive Summary

FECCA’s 2013-14 Access and Equity Report provides a summary of the perspectives and broader feedback received through consultations with culturally and linguistically diverse communities and service providers around Australia, regarding the design and delivery of Australian Government services. The report aims to discuss diverse community perspectives relating to the accessibility and quality of service delivery, highlighting gaps, key issue areas, models of good practice and opportunities for continued service development and positive reform.

There are six core dimensions of the report, consistent with Australian Government agency obligations outlined through the Agency Multicultural Plan model—these include Leadership, Engagement, Performance, Capability, Responsiveness and Openness. Feedback from culturally and linguistically diverse communities and service providers captured in the report has been interpreted around these key areas and analysed to provide a comprehensive summary of community attitudes with regard to agency performance.

The findings outlined in this report provide an insight into the complexities of service delivery in the context of an increasingly diverse population. The majority of feedback, in particular, highlights the view echoed by both community representatives and service providers that new cultures bring with them particular customs, beliefs and histories that impact on their ability to effectively access, make use of, and benefit from, Australian Government services. This view is specifically highlighted in reference to new and emerging community groups, and the extent to which individuals from such communities are often confronted with multiple disadvantages, and concurrently grapple with limited understandings and knowledge of available services and service delivery mechanisms available for their benefit.

Building upon these observations, the report’s key findings highlight the importance of culturally-competent service delivery, and the need for broad application of a ‘client-centred’ service delivery model to ensure a focus on diverse client needs. Such an approach is also advocated as imperative in enabling service delivery to be flexible and responsive to complex and ever-changing client needs.

Another key theme articulated throughout the report concerns the need for Australian Government agencies to demonstrate stronger leadership through sound coordination across all agencies and relevant networks. This position is framed with regard to community perspectives that highlight the extent to which leadership is measured through assessing how well agency representatives appear to reflect access and equity principles through their conduct and thereby ‘set a good example’ on behalf of their agency. Further to this, the report advocates for more robust leadership through improved coordination across all layers of government—including Federal, State/Territory and Local jurisdictions—as well as with Migrant Resource Centres and other key stakeholders, to facilitate improvements in the quality of service delivery. The view is also espoused that Government must assume a stronger leadership role in promoting values of social inclusion in order to positively shape public sentiment towards immigrants in various stages of settlement in Australia.
Following discussion of these points, the report goes on to explore community views with regard to the variety of tools and mechanisms used to facilitate service delivery. In this context, the assertion is forwarded that service delivery must remain focussed on accommodating the needs of diverse clients, even in the context of adapting to external factors, such as technological developments and fiscal constraints. It is forwarded that innovation in the delivery of services through a broad range of platforms and mechanisms is positive, but only to the extent that accessibility for all Australians, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, remains a paramount consideration.

Dispersed amongst community views on the above issues and other key themes, the report contains models of good practice and insights from existing literature that provide workable strategies geared towards the improvement of service delivery to facilitate access and equity for culturally and linguistically diverse clients.

The report concludes with a summary of the key themes drawn from community feedback received, and provides recommended ways forward to streamline service delivery. In particular, it is advocated that Government agencies can more effectively coordinate their service-delivery activities through establishing a centrally-organised Multicultural Access and Equity support group, through which to facilitate stronger and more consistent inter-agency engagement and coordination, and simultaneously, create a space in which to routinely assess their performance and progress against Agency Multicultural Plan obligations.
Introduction

‘Access and Equity’ embodies the notion that all Australians should be able to access Government programs and services equitably, regardless of their cultural, linguistic or religious background. In the context of Australia’s increasing diversity, access and equity is more important than ever, to ensure that individuals can actively participate in, and contribute to, their communities and in return, can fully engage in a fair and inclusive society.

Through implementation of the revised access and equity framework, Multicultural Access and Equity Policy: Respecting diversity. Improving responsiveness, the Australian Government has continued to embed the principles of access and equity in the design and implementation of policy throughout its agencies. This has been most recently demonstrated through the requirement for Australian Government departments and agencies to develop and implement Agency Multicultural Plans, which subsequently provide a solid foundation upon which to more effectively measure the efficacy of Australian Government service delivery from the perspective of culturally and linguistically diverse clients.

FECCA commends the Australian Government, through the Department of Social Services (DSS), for supporting FECCA’s annual access and equity work and providing an opportunity for diverse community views on service delivery to be articulated through this report. The access and equity process remains of fundamental importance, not only in providing communities with a unique opportunity to enter into a dialogue with Government and other service providers, but also provides an opportunity for FECCA to capture feedback and insights that underpin its ability to appropriately represent culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Australia.

Finally, FECCA acknowledges the generous contributions of culturally and linguistically diverse community representatives and service providers, whose insights, ideas and suggestions are presented as truly and accurately as possible in this report.
Scope and Methodology

FECCA’s 2013-14 Multicultural Access and Equity Report details findings based on face-to-face consultations with culturally and linguistically diverse Australians and service providers regarding the accessibility and equitability of Australian Government services and their delivery.

The goals of the access and equity consultation process and this report are to:

- provide an open, genuine and direct opportunity for representatives of culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and those delivering support and services to culturally and linguistically diverse clients, to offer feedback on government service delivery, particularly in reference to agency obligations as articulated through Agency Multicultural Plans;

- gather qualitative, grass-root feedback on the accessibility and equitability of Australian Government services, focusing particularly on what is working well, what areas require improvement, and what innovative and practical measures can be implemented to more effectively cater to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse Australians;

- further develop FECCA’s base of evidence and draw from it examples that provide workable solutions and advice to the Australian Government on how to further develop and improve its service delivery capacity to ensure access and equity for culturally and linguistically diverse clients;

- provide Australian Government agencies with tangible examples of the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse clients in accessing and using services, to raise awareness of issues and facilitate greater understanding of the challenges faced; and

- facilitate effective implementation of the Australian Government’s social inclusion agenda by reducing disadvantage through increased service accessibility and equitability for culturally and linguistically diverse Australians.

Consultation Process

FECCA held four face-to-face community consultations across both metropolitan and regional locations in Australia. Full details appear in the Community Consultation Locations section below.

To complement the face-to-face consultation process, FECCA also designed an online Access and Equity survey, which was hosted through FECCA’s website and advertised widely to culturally and linguistically diverse communities around Australia.
FECCA consulted approximately 250 individuals in total, representing a variety of culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Australia.

Community Consultation Locations

Four locations were selected from which to host the community consultations, details of which are outlined below.

**Dandenong, Victoria**
15 October 2013

Dandenong was identified as an appropriate location for FECCA’s first community consultation, given its metropolitan location and a significant culturally and linguistically diverse population, constituted largely of representatives from new and emerging community backgrounds. The Dandenong consultation provided substantive insights on the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse clients in accessing a broad range of services, specifically focusing on employment, education and health services.

Some of the communities represented at FECCA’s Dandenong consultation were Tamil, Afghan, Hazara, Pakistani and Serbian communities.

*FECCA thanks the City of Greater Dandenong and its Mayor, Cr Angela Long, and the Ethnic Communities’ Council of the South-East, for the generous assistance provided in hosting FECCA’s Dandenong consultation.*

**Murray Bridge, South Australia**
22 October 2013

Murray Bridge was selected as a regional location for FECCA’s community consultations, based upon its high population of individuals from diverse backgrounds, and particularly those representing new and emerging communities. Several consultations were hosted from Murray Bridge, including sessions specifically with culturally and linguistically diverse community members, as well as sessions with service providers, to deliver a range of perspectives on the accessibility and equitability of Australian Government services.

Some of the communities represented at FECCA’s Murray Bridge Consultation included Chinese, Korean, Bangladeshi, Bhutanese and Afghan communities.

*FECCA thanks Regional Development Australia—Murraylands & Riverland Inc. and the Murraylands Migrant Resource Centre for the generous assistance that they provided in hosting FECCA’s Murray Bridge consultations.*
Consultation Discussion Themes

Each face-to-face community consultation was conducted over the course of three hours, with discussion encompassing individuals’ insights on services in following areas:

- employment;
- health and women’s health;
- education and training;
- housing;
- ageing and aged care;
- settlement services;
- child and family support services; and
- justice, policing and safety.

In preparing FECCA’s 2013-14 Access and Equity Report, feedback on the above issues was subsequently reframed to relate to agency performance obligations, as outlined through the Agency Multicultural Plan model.
Findings from face-to-face consultations were also supplemented with responses received through FECCA’s online access and equity survey, which sought feedback on a broad range of issues including:

- client awareness of Australian Government services;
- clients’ ease of access to information regarding services and their delivery;
- client experiences in dealing with agency personnel; and
- broader challenges impacting on effective service delivery.

**Consultation Participants**

The consultations welcomed a broad range of contributions from participants who represented local culturally and linguistically diverse communities, ethno-specific and mainstream service providers and government departments and agencies (predominantly from the relevant state).

Whilst consultations targeted culturally and linguistically diverse community members specifically, the involvement of service providers and Australian Government and/or state and local agency representatives was also encouraged, providing a range of different perspectives on service delivery, as well as additional clarification of client-related issues and models of good practice, which have subsequently been incorporated into this report.

The backgrounds of consultation participants were remarkably diverse, with individuals representing both new and emerging communities, as well as longer-established immigrant and refugee communities. This resulted in an extensive and invaluable volume of qualitative data, that has subsequently been analysed and reflected through this report.

FECCA has made all efforts to ensure the accuracy of the information included in this report, including through the incorporation of views and opinions of consultation participants that are cited.
Part 1:
Background – Access and Equity in Context
Multicultural Access and Equity Policy and FECCA’s Role

The Australian Government’s Multicultural Access and Equity Policy aims to nurture a socially inclusive society in which all Australians feel valued and empowered to participate fully in their community.

The policy is based on the Australian Government’s commitment to the core principle that government programs and services should be accessible by all eligible Australians, be responsive to their needs, and deliver equitable outcomes for all individuals, regardless of their cultural or linguistic background.

At its core, the Multicultural Access and Equity Policy seeks to ensure that Australian Government departments and agencies acknowledge and respond to the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australian society and place the public at the centre of their considerations and actions.

As per the revised Multicultural Access and Equity Framework, FECCA is annually commissioned with the task of providing independent feedback from culturally and linguistically diverse communities on their experiences of government service delivery, and provides a summary of this feedback through its annual access and equity report.

Agency Multicultural Plan Minimum Obligations

The Multicultural Access and Equity Policy outlines a set of minimum obligations that government departments and agencies must address in order to effectively cater to the diverse needs of culturally and linguistically diverse clients. These obligations constitute the performance indicators outlined in Agency Multicultural Plans, which encompass the following:

Leadership:

- **Executive accountability**: Agency to assign a Senior Executive Officer to be responsible for implementation of Multicultural Access and Equity Policy obligations in the agency.

- **Agency commitment**: Agency leadership to ensure that staff understand and are committed to Multicultural Access and Equity Policy Implementation.

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### Engagement:

- **Stakeholder engagement**: Agency to have a stakeholder engagement strategy to understand culturally and linguistically diverse communities’ interactions with their agencies.

- **Language and communication**: Agency to have a language and communication plan for culturally and linguistically diverse communities, including on the use of languages other than English and incorporating the use of interpreters and translators.

### Performance:

- **Performance indicators and reporting**: Agency to develop a set of Key Performance Indicators relating to engagement with, or outcomes of service to, culturally and linguistically diverse clients.

- **Feedback**: Agency to have arrangements in place to ensure affected culturally and linguistically diverse communities are able to provide feedback on agency multicultural access and equity performance.

### Capability:

- **Cultural competency**: Agency to have training and development measures to equip staff with cultural competency skills.

- **Research and data**: Agency to collect ethnicity data on the culturally and linguistically diverse groups with which the agency engages and to which it delivers services directly or indirectly.

### Responsiveness:

- **Standards**: Any whole-of-government standards and guidelines developed by the agency must address Multicultural Access and Equity Policy considerations.

- **Policy, program and service delivery**: Provision to ensure that policies, programs, community interactions and service delivery (whether in-house or outsourced) are effective for CALD communities.

- **Outsourced services**: Where relevant, provision for incorporation of Multicultural Access and Equity Policy requirements into contracts, agreements and related guidance material of which the agency has carriage.
**Openness:**

- **Publishing:** Agency to publish Plans on agency website and performance reports against agency KPI’s for culturally and linguistically diverse clients in agency annual reports.

- **Data:** Agency to make culturally and linguistically diverse data available to other agencies and the public.

**Community Feedback on Agency Performance**

The summary of community feedback that follows provides an overview of culturally and linguistically diverse community and service provider perspectives regarding agency performance, incorporating key findings, examples of good practice and recommendations for improved service delivery.

Feedback is structured around the six core minimum obligation areas outlined above, and draws out key themes relevant to each area.
Part 2: Community Feedback on Agency Performance
2.1 Leadership

Key themes

- **Building cooperation and partnerships**: evidence of effective agency collaboration and cooperation to improve service delivery.

- **Streamlining services**: identifying overlaps and/or areas where services are most lacking on the basis of client feedback and through inter-agency coordination.

The ability of Government agencies to perform well and deliver services that appropriately cater to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse Australians is contingent on effective leadership and coordination at all levels. This is vital not only in terms of encouraging client ‘buy-in’ at a grass-root level, but also ensuring that access and equity principles are promoted throughout government agencies (as encouraged by positive leadership), and are understood and practiced by all agency staff and representatives.

FECCA notes that agency obligations and the subsequent ability to assess agency performance under the *leadership* measure is relatively limited from an external perspective, given that internal agency structures and mechanisms can only be comprehensively mapped and evaluated from an internal perspective. Through its community consultations, however, FECCA has received general feedback from culturally and linguistically diverse clients, service-providers and other stakeholders regarding specific examples and insights that fall under the purview of ‘leadership’, including evidence of agency coordination and adoption of good practice models to streamline and improve service delivery.

Much of the community feedback gathered and analysed by FECCA with regard to the *leadership* measure can be surmised as reflecting the view that effective agency performance, in almost all cases, results from agencies clearly articulating their access and equity goals and maintaining transparency when implementing strategies towards their realisation. FECCA also heard strong community views in reference to the need for agencies to demonstrate leadership and coordination through the sharing of information and good practice models, as well as maintaining consistently high standards of service delivery agency-wide. Such strategies were regarded as the most likely to translate into improved standards of practice and more effective delivery of services across all agencies.

In the context of the above, this chapter focuses on the effectiveness of agency *leadership* from an external perspective, measured with reference to the obvious tools, agency functions and other mechanisms available to clients and service providers that indicate coordinated and streamlined service delivery. It will also comment on perceived levels of consistency across agencies, in terms of standardised information and its broad accessibility, as well as evidence and specific examples of the standard of service delivered broadly across all agencies.
Coordination Across Government Agencies

"Where agencies intend to work together to support the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities… all parties need to be clear about what is expected of each other, and formalise this, where possible, with appropriate protocols."  

Leadership through sound coordination across government agencies is a vital component of effective service delivery, given the need to ensure client awareness of the full range of services and programs offered by government, as well as inter-agency awareness of diverse client needs and how these can be best accommodated. Coordination in this sense is primarily enabled through inter-agency communication, and agency commitment to produce and disseminate client-friendly information that is made readily available for public access. Effective coordination is subsequently a tool through which to mitigate any issues that would otherwise arise in instances from client confusion or misinformation concerning programs and services on offer.

Confusion or lack of clarity regarding service provision and the associated responsibilities of different government agencies to facilitate this, were highlighted as an issue by some community consultation participants. As noted by one community representative, for instance:

"The processes used to deliver services are very confusing, especially to those who are in need of help with diverse issues. Sometimes, government services seem to ‘handball’ people through the system, leaving them confused, or even forcing them to give up. Child protection related issues are a big mess—partly due to the segregation of services, where youth workers only deal with youth, and other services deal with adults. I think there should be better integration of services, so that there is room for reconciliation [in situations of] family breakdown. I sense that families are sometimes even more isolated or separated as a result of poor service delivery models than they are by experiences of family violence."

The extent to which lack of coordination between agencies is seen to potentially result in inflaming sensitive situations in some instances is clearly articulated by the above example,

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4 FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Adelaide, South Australia. 23 October 2013.
and is highly problematic. In addition to this example however, the issue of coordination across government agencies was also highlighted in other contexts, including with regard to the need for greater coordination across government agencies to facilitate the provision of consistent and translated materials on agency websites:

“To avoid confusion, there needs to be a consistent indicator for translated materials on all [agency] websites—for example, scrolling texts in different languages, or some other symbol that people can clearly recognise as being the place to go to get translated material, or pages of a website in their language. Government websites don’t do a good job of this at the moment.”

The above example highlights the need for stronger coordination between government agencies to transmit information that is consistent across all agency platforms. It also demonstrates that, in order for information to be effectively disseminated to communities, the mechanisms adopted for this purpose must be consistent and clearly advertised through agency branding practices. A further discussion of electronic information provision relevant to this point follows in the Engagement chapter of this report.

Further to the above however, in addition to facilitating the broad application of access and equity principles through inter-agency dialogue, coordination also ensures that agencies take responsibility for their own obligations to implement access and equity principles by way of forcing comparisons between agencies to reflect on how effectively they deliver services and respond to client needs. In addition, coordination ensures that policy reforms can be implemented more swiftly, and that any budgetary considerations or constraints can be accommodated in a more consistent and comprehensive manner, to ensure that they do not threaten the collaborative nature of the work being undertaken.

FECCA has previously advocated the need for a centralised source of information and assistance through which clients can easily access services. In this context, FECCA acknowledges the myGov portal as a useful tool and a ‘one-stop shop’ through which to enable clients’ easy access to important information and the capacity to access and receive efficient service delivery online.

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5 FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Dandenong, Victoria. 15 October 2013.
Despite positive feedback regarding the development of the myGov system, however, community perspectives cited the need for consideration of a number of factors regarding the need to improve its accessibility. It was highlighted, for instance, that whilst useful as a centralised access point for culturally and linguistically diverse clients, this is only the case for those with the requisite skills and technology to make use of the system. In addition, it was highlighted that no options are available on the myGov homepage to easily access translated information, nor are translating and interpreting services clearly advertised, further reducing the accessibility of the portal for culturally and linguistically diverse users.

On this basis, FECCA recommends the need for further consideration of the above factors to improve the accessibility and design of the myGov system, including the potential for user-testing with culturally and linguistically diverse clients.

Recommendation

FECCA recommends that further consideration be given to the accessibility and design of the myGov system, including the potential for user-testing with culturally and linguistically diverse clients.

Setting the Example Through Positive Leadership

In its most literal sense, much of the community feedback received by FECCA with regard to leadership focussed on the degree to which agency representatives reflected access and
equity principles through their conduct, and thereby demonstrated positive leadership by ‘setting a good example’ on behalf of their agency. It was consistently observed that agency employees who demonstrated impatience with culturally and linguistically diverse clients and appeared unwilling to take extra steps to facilitate effective communication, did not appear to regard the principles of access and equity as fundamental in guiding their conduct. From a community perspective, this was seen to illustrate a deficiency in strong leadership through failure to effectively adopt inclusive policy stances at a meta-level, to subsequently filter down to frontline service delivery.

On the basis of this example, it is integral that leadership regarding service delivery focuses on consumer and community needs, and that staff are encouraged by agency leaders to engage positively with consumers, and view them as a rich source of information to drive innovation, improvement and change. It is important to note that, in this sense, leadership should be encouraged across an organisation to facilitate ‘leaders at many levels’, rather than being centralised at the top of the organisational structure. This implies a need to facilitate buy-in to access and equity principles at a broad level, subsequently enabling all agency representatives to take leadership in their individual application of such principles. In some cases, this may require implementation of an inverted power structure, where front-line agency staff at the service level have the ability to shape the practical activities and policy impacted on client experiences and access to services, rather than adhering to the standard model of those ‘in control’ only being situated ‘at the top’. Frontline leaders often have greater influence over decision-making, the way through which services are delivered, and ultimately, client perspectives on the effectiveness of that service delivery. It is therefore imperative that they demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge of access and equity principles in their daily conduct.

Coordination Across all Layers of Government

Perspectives from culturally and linguistically diverse clients concerning the degree to which their perceived effective coordination between different levels of government (federal, state and local) were mixed. A common sentiment that was expressed highlighted feelings of confusion with regard to the different levels of government, and where associated service provision responsibilities were seen to lie.

For instance, whilst FECCA’s consultations were explicitly promoted as an opportunity for community members to provide their views on access and equity concerning federal government services, much of the feedback that FECCA received in fact related to programs and services provided at the state and local government levels. Furthermore, as was highlighted by one service provider at FECCA’s Dandenong community consultation:

“Overall, there is a huge deficiency in what information is accessible, and how people can get to it. This forum provides a very good indication of how much information

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is actually lacking. Because of lack of effective communication and coverage over the three levels of government, there is a big knowledge-gap. Government at a federal level should communicate, via a pyramid scheme, with other levels of government and with migrant resource centres, so that [information] eventually trickles down to the people in communities. ⁸

The above perspective highlights issues associated with levels of cooperation and communication between the layers of government, and the implications for culturally and linguistically diverse clients who subsequently lack awareness regarding the availability of services, and the corresponding level of government responsible for service delivery.

Some of the more practical issues resulting from deficiencies in coordination across government agencies were also highlighted by a community representative, who shared the following specific example:

“Most aged care facilities don’t know that [TIS National] provides free services for translation to communicate with culturally and linguistically diverse patients – they don’t know about this, and don’t know what their access codes are to obtain the free service.” ⁹

The above indicates a clear example of the issues associated with lack of community awareness around service delivery responsibilities attached to the different layers of government. As a mechanism through which to fundamentally improve levels of culturally and linguistically diverse client access to aged care services, FECCA advocates the need for improved awareness-raising activities to advertise the availability of such services, as well as how they can be accessed and put to use.

Building on this example, in the context of improving collaboration between layers of government, FECCA notes the existence of the National Collaboration Framework, developed under the auspices of the Australian Government Department of Finance. The Framework’s stated mandate is to assist Australian Government agencies, State/Territory and Local jurisdictions to work collaboratively to achieve government objectives. ¹⁰ FECCA advocates the framework’s implementation, along with its associated planning resources, as an effective means through which to develop better agency coordination and collaboration to improve service delivery.

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⁹ FECCA 2013-14 Access and Equity Survey respondent.
Recommendation

FECCA recommends the comprehensive application of the National Collaboration Framework and its associated planning resources, to facilitate stronger agency coordination and collaboration to improve service delivery.

Coordination with Migrant Resource Centres and Other Community Organisations

FECCA received consistent positive feedback regarding the significant role played by Migrant Resource Centres and similar organisations in keeping culturally and linguistically diverse communities informed about government services and programs available to them. In this context however, the extent to which government agencies can more effectively coordinate information-sharing through utilising Migrant Resource Centre networks was subsequently highlighted. Indeed, as noted by a community representative at FECCA’s Murray Bridge community consultation:

“A lot of people use their community networks rather than any [direct] government source to find information and learn about what [services] are available to them. The Migrant Resource Centres are the ones who provide most of the information.”

The above example highlights the integral role of Migrant Resource Centres as important information hubs for culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and the need for

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11 FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Murray Bridge, South Australia. 22 October 2013.
government agencies to effectively coordinate their information-sharing activities through such organisations in order to best target culturally and linguistically diverse audiences.

The majority of feedback highlighted that the utility of Migrant Resource Centres was believed to stem from their accessibility and obvious location within communities—it was observed, for instance, that centrally-located Migrant Resource Centres, particularly in rural and regional communities, enable easy client access, and this was of great benefit to the culturally and linguistically diverse communities in those locations. Moreover, it was asserted that Migrant Resource Centre staff were typically viewed as ‘approachable and friendly’, and that their capacity to provide tailored customer service as a result of this, particularly in a client’s own language, was highly regarded.

Building on these insights, the utility of Migrant Resource Centres concerning their ability to compliment, and potentially boost, the effectiveness of government service delivery has been well documented in existing literature, as has the need for improved coordination between government and such organisations. As noted in a 2010 report produced by the International Organization for Migration, for instance, “where MRCs are not able to provide services directly, they can provide migrants with referrals to other governmental and non-governmental organisations which can assist”\(^\text{12}\). The report goes on to highlight that, “the core role of Migrant Resource Centres in ensuring migrants’ empowerment for protection is to provide migrants with information that will help them to move in a regular, informed manner”\(^\text{13}\). The extent to which such organisations constitute a vital component of effective settlement is therefore clearly acknowledged.

Moreover, at FECCA’s community consultations, feedback was received regarding the important role played by Migrant Resource Centres in helping to orientate immigrants within Australian governmental structures and systems, as well as their broader efforts to promote principles of social inclusion and assist clients at the point of actual service delivery. This was particularly noted as the case in rural and regional areas, where community members suggested a greater reliance of such organisations to facilitate their settlement in, and effective engagement with, their communities, in order to avoid social isolation.

FECCA advocates the need for improved coordination between government agencies and Migrant Resource Centres in order to facilitate improved awareness of services. Specifically, FECCA suggests that stronger coordination with such organisations should be endorsed and reflected as a specific performance indicator under the ‘leadership’ criterion, associated with agency obligations to ‘build cooperation and partnerships should encouraging stakeholders to work together to achieve an agency’s vision and plans’.\(^\text{14}\)

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Recommendation

FECCA advocates the need for improved coordination between government agencies and Migrant Resource Centres, and for this to be clearly articulated in reference to Agency Multicultural Plan obligations, in order to facilitate improved client awareness of Government services.

Local Government Networks

Feedback and examples from FECCA’s community consultations highlighted the important role that local government networks also play in facilitating and improving service delivery at a grass-root level. This feedback reflects the findings of a substantive amount of existing literature (both local and international), which has highlighted the benefits of local government networks in facilitating the ‘localisation’ of service delivery, to better cater to community needs and address local concerns, as is reflected through the good practice example below.

Good Practice

Murraylands Multicultural Migration and Settlement Committee (MMMSC)

MMMSC operates in Murray Bridge, South Australia, as a committee focussed on the settlement needs of members of the Murray Bridge community. The Committee consists of a diverse membership, including:

- Regional Development Australia—Murraylands and Riverland;
- South Australian Police;
- Centrelink;
- Department of Immigration and Border Protection;
- AC Care;
- Centacare;
- Rural City of Murray Bridge Council;
- Lutheran Community Care; and
- The Murraylands Migrant Resource Centre.

MMMSC provides an important forum for community leadership on settlement issues, facilitating the exchange of diverse perspectives on settlement issues in the Murray Bridge Community, and an opportunity for joint initiatives to enhance settlement outcomes for immigrants in the community.

For more information, contact Regional Development Australia—Murraylands & Riverland (South Australia), at: www.murraylands.org.au.
As with Migrant Resource Centres, FECCA advocates the need for stronger coordination between agencies and local government networks, and for such partnerships to be explicitly factored into the design and implementation of Agency Multicultural Plans.

**Recommendation**

FECCA advocates the need for stronger coordination between agencies and local government networks, and for such partnerships to be explicitly factored into the design and implementation of Agency Multicultural Plans.

**Leadership Through Agency Engagement with the Broader Community**

“Delivering effective public services requires transformation at multiple levels – the way public sector organisations behave, how they view their roles, and how they share information between departments, with businesses and with their customers. On its own, change in the policy and regulatory framework will not achieve the desired results.”

FECCA’s community consultations highlighted that the notion of access and equity must be reflected by agencies in a broad sense, and form part of an agency’s commitment to organically transforming attitudes towards migrants and their settlement in Australia. In this regard, community feedback highlighted that government agencies must demonstrate leadership in pushing the access and equity agenda in their external dealings with all clients and other organisations. In this sense, the need for Government to explicitly support social inclusion and adherence to access and equity norms was strongly endorsed.

Contextualising this view, with regard to the issue of employment, FECCA received substantive feedback concerning discrimination experienced by culturally and linguistically diverse job-seekers in their efforts to secure or maintain sustainable employment. Community feedback broadly pointed to the perceived need for the Australian Government to take a more proactive approach in positively influencing organisations and businesses in mainstream Australia to embrace the value of cultural diversity as benefitting, rather than detracting from the overall productivity and effectiveness of their workforce. As noted by one consultation participant:

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Employers are risk-adverse and are still unsure about employing culturally and linguistically diverse people in their businesses and organisations. In addition to mentoring job-seekers, Job Services Australia needs to do more to mentor businesses and organisations about the advantages of recruiting people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, to dispel any myths or falsehoods about culturally and linguistically diverse employees and to provide cultural competency training.\textsuperscript{16}

The above example identified the need for Government to assume a stronger leadership role in positively reshaping attitudes towards culturally and linguistically diverse workers, and the positive contribution that they are able to make to Australia’s broader workforce.

In this context, FECCA acknowledges the celebration of Harmony Day as an initiative of the Australian Government and a good practice model, and advocates the need for its continued (and increased) promotion, in order to positively shape public sentiment regarding the benefits of a diverse and inclusive Australian workforce.

**Good Practice**

**Harmony Day**

Harmony Day, celebrated each year on 21 March, is a day of cultural respect for everyone who calls Australia home—from the traditional owners of this land to those who have come from many countries around the world. By participating in Harmony Day activities, all Australians can learn and understand more about our country’s rich diversity and how multiculturalism enrich our society.

FECCA commends the government’s commitment to Harmony Day as a celebration through which to encourage all Australians to realise and embrace Australia’s cultural diversity. The event is an opportunity, in particular, to engage workplaces in an active celebration of cultural diversity and the contributions made by employees from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.


\textsuperscript{16} FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Adelaide, South Australia. 23 October 2013.
**Recommendation**

FECCA advocates the need for the continued (and increased) promotion of Harmony Day, in order to positively shape public sentiment regarding the benefits of a diverse and inclusive Australian workforce.

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**Summary**

- Leadership through sound coordination across government agencies is a vital component of effective service delivery.
- From a community perspective, effective leadership is measured through assessing how well agency representatives appear to reflect access and equity principles through their conduct and ‘set a good example’ on behalf of their agency.
- Improved coordination between layers of government—across Federal, State/Territory and Local jurisdictions—is necessary to streamline information and service provision to culturally and linguistically diverse clients.
- Improved coordination between Australian Government agencies and Migrant Resource Centres is advocated by community representatives and services providers as a strategy to improve information-sharing with clients.
- There is a need for stronger connections between Australian Government agencies and local government networks to facilitate the ‘localisation’ of service delivery, to better cater to community needs.
- Government must assume a stronger leadership role in promoting values of social inclusion in order to positively shape public sentiment.
2.2 Engagement

FECCA’s community consultations revealed that culturally and linguistically diverse perspectives on effective government service delivery are predominately influenced by individual experiences with front-line agency staff. Whether or not such interactions are perceived in a positive or negative light subsequently impacts on client perceptions of agency efficiency and the extent to which agencies are seen to effectively deliver services to the community in a broader sense. The quality of engagement, and evidence of how well agency staff appear to ‘know their clients’ and demonstrate knowledge of their diverse needs, is therefore a primary indicator of sound agency performance. This includes the extent to which agency staff appear to exhibit awareness of personal and/or cultural preferences that are likely to impact upon interactions with culturally and linguistically diverse clients. In addition, it encompasses whether or not agency staff are able to adapt their style of engagement in view of such considerations as individuals’ immigration and settlement experiences, their personal and family circumstances, language, and other relevant cultural, religious or linguistic factors.

FECCA received substantive community feedback on the extent to which individuals felt they had received a ‘personalised engagement’ experience that adequately addressed their needs in their dealings with different agencies. Feedback was mixed in this regard, encompassing diverse views on the perceived ability of agencies to facilitate effective face-to-face engagement with clients, as well as other forms of direct interaction, such as through community meetings and consultations. Feedback also incorporated insights on how

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Key themes

- ‘Know your clients’: evidence of agency awareness of diverse client bases and the range of strategies to improve engagement.
- Consideration of personal or cultural preferences: recognition of client background and its likely impact upon the engagement experience, including communication approach, eligibility for services.
- Personalised engagement: evidence of diverse modes of engagement with diverse communities to build positive relationships and facilitate stronger engagement.
- Translating and appropriate language: use of appropriate language and integration of translating and interpreting services.
- Dissemination of information: evidence of effective strategies to distribute information to culturally and linguistically diverse clients.
successfully agencies are seen to disseminate information, build trust and establish stronger relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse clients and their communities.

Expanding on the above, this chapter analyses community perspectives regarding the effectiveness of agency engagement, highlighting the broad community view that effective service delivery is best facilitated by agency adoption of a client-centred service delivery model. The feedback and examples that are discussed provide evidence to support such a model, as well as the view that effective engagement involves ‘knowing’ clients and adapting service delivery on the basis of this knowledge.

The Client-Centred Service Delivery Model

FECCA observes that community views concerning the effectiveness of agency engagement with culturally and linguistically diverse clients were predominantly centred on examining how well agencies appear to implement a ‘client-centred’ service delivery model. A significant amount of literature, including previous FECCA publications, advocates the utility of the client-centred service delivery model as the most effective means through which to identify, and respond to, diverse client needs.

Two core premises underpin the model—firstly, that consumers and their expressed needs, as opposed to what the service provider may wish to prioritise and subsequently deliver, must drive service provision. Secondly, that consumer needs cannot be adequately responded to unless provision is made to seek out consumer feedback and adapt service delivery to accommodate this feedback. For the latter to occur, clients must feel comfortable in voicing issues and contributing their feedback, and have confidence that this will be heard and acted upon.

The model assumes the need for an interdependent relationship between the client and the service provider—just as agencies must ensure that they effectively listen and respond to feedback from culturally and linguistically diverse clients, the latter must also be aware of, and have the necessary capacity to provide feedback on an ongoing basis to the agency, to allow for the ongoing improvement of service delivery.

The following analysis of community observations with regard to agency engagement is framed largely in reference to the client-centred service delivery model and evidence of its implementation.

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Client Awareness of Australian Government Services

"Generally, the client is required to seek out [information on] the service, rather than already being aware of services."

A common theme that emerged from FECCA’s community consultations was the need for improved standards of information provision to enable increased client awareness of services offered by Australian Government agencies. This finding is consistent with previous feedback received and reported by FECCA, regarding the need for improvements in information provision on government programmes and services to facilitate their more effective access and use by culturally and linguistically diverse clients.

The various issues impacting on culturally and linguistically diverse client awareness of Australian Government services have been well-substantiated in existing literature, including lack of systems-knowledge and limited understanding of, or previous experience with, government service provision, fear of authority or reluctance to approach government agencies. Other issues have been earmarked as lack of visible information, and/or information not being made available through appropriate formats and channels, including translated material.

A broad overview of community perspectives on client awareness of government services, encompassing the views canvassed through FECCA’s 2013-14 Access and Equity online survey, is reflected in Figure 1.

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19 FECCA 2013-14 Access and Equity Survey—Summary of Responses.


When contrasted against data collected through FECCA’s 2012-13 Access and Equity survey, the above indicates relatively consistent findings in terms of culturally and linguistically diverse client knowledge and awareness of services, with welfare services recording the highest levels of community awareness. Similarly, in both 2012-13 and 2013-14, settlement services recorded the lowest levels of community awareness.

* FECCA 2013-14 Access and Equity Survey—Summary of Responses.
While the above findings point to relatively high levels of community awareness regarding available services, views expressed by community consultation participants qualified the above findings, through the observation that initial awareness regarding services is much higher than specific knowledge relating to the often complex process through which to qualify for, gain access to, and later benefit from that service.

In addition, community consultation feedback highlighted that clients only become sufficiently informed of available government services in times of personal crisis or desperation. It was subsequently asserted that agencies should adopt a more proactive approach in disseminating information about services prior to them becoming an urgent necessity.

The good practice model below provides an effective example of a targeted and proactive community engagement strategy, geared towards increasing community awareness of services offered prior to their need becoming critical.

**Good Practice**

**Queensland Health: Engagement Strategy for the Townsville Hospital and Health Service**

In order to proactively target service delivery, the Townsville Hospital and Health Service has developed a community and consumer engagement strategy. The strategy states:

“*A robust, evolving and, ultimately, successful health service listens to its consumers and communities. We intend to embrace a model that takes consumers away from simply being the recipients of health care and positions them as our partners in both planning and delivery and involves our communities whether or not they are current receivers of our care.*”

The development of a targeted and proactive engagement strategy is an effective means through which to reach diverse communities and disseminate important information about services for consumers to act upon as required.

*A full copy of the strategy is available at:*


**Information Provision Through Agencies**

The majority of community feedback that FECCA received on how effectively agencies disseminate information suggested the need for improvements in this regard. Many community members, for instance, reported having limited awareness of programs and services available, and an even more limited knowledge of the appropriate processes and steps required to access such services.
For example, as indicated in *Figure 2* below, the vast majority of respondents to FECCA’s Access and Equity survey highlighted that information provided with regard to available government services is broadly lacking.

**Figure 2: Ease of Access to Information – Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Client Perspective**

As a means through which to promote the more effective exchange of information between Australian Government agencies and culturally and linguistically diverse communities, community representatives at FECCA consultations consistently advocated the need for increased direct engagement between agencies and communities. It was specifically asserted that, while community organisations should assist agency information provision where possible, the agency itself should ultimately assume responsibility to ensure that information about its services is directly communicated to culturally and linguistically diverse clients, where feasible.

In this context, it was highlighted that agencies are the ‘authority’ on services and programs that they provide, and therefore, should rely on agency staff to communicate directly with clients to discuss their eligibility for, and ways they can gain access to, such services. As noted by one consultation participant:

> The attitude [adopted by government] is for clients to self-learn what services are available—particularly if you’re a community leader. However, people don’t understand what ‘access and equity’ means. Even some service providers hear the term and don’t understand it. It is important for access and equity to be embedded in the delivery of all government services, but for this to actually be explained clearly—to both service providers and

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24 FECCA 2013-14 Access and Equity Survey—Summary of Responses.
communities. It also needs to be demonstrated through the service delivery process.\textsuperscript{25}

The above perspective highlights issues in relation to the onus being placed on clients to access information regarding services, as opposed to the agency taking the lead on proactive information provision. This point was reiterated by another community representative, who observed that:

\begin{quote}
People look for information in different ways, depending on their culture. The government should not be sitting and waiting for people to come and ask for information, but should be focussing more in sharing information directly with people in the languages that they speak. They should even look at sharing information through a community leader or representative in their own language.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

The above examples highlight the need for a more proactive approach to information provision to be adopted by Australian Government agencies.

\section*{Targeted Resource Development and Distribution}

A number of consultation participants voiced concerns regarding the apparent absence of a client-centred approach with regard to the development and distribution of government information and resources. It was highlighted, for instance, that clients themselves often do not appear to be the intended target audience of resources that are developed, or that information appears to be developed without the client in mind:

\begin{quote}
Often, the text is not authored or targeted to the average person and no amount of translation can rectify this. Information is presented in such a way that you don’t get all of the information. Even workers within government and community services are not able to advise on everything that is available.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

In mitigating the above issues, FECCA refers to a 2013 resource developed by the Australian Government Information Management Office, under the auspices of the Department of Finance and Deregulation, aimed at supporting culturally and linguistically

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{25} FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Adelaide, South Australia. 23 October 2013.
\textsuperscript{26} FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Murray Bridge, South Australia. 22 October 2013.
\textsuperscript{27} FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Dandenong, Victoria. 15 October 2013.
\end{flushright}
diverse client access to information, entitled, *Multicultural Access and Equity in Online Information and Services*. FECCA recommends the need for broad implementation of the guideline’s recommendations, including greater focus on the core themes identified, such as:

- use of plain English;
- making information available online in other languages;
- use of online channels to promote services for people from diverse backgrounds that are available through other channels;
- consider search engine functions and how they might support users from diverse backgrounds;
- text-to-speech options;
- use of design elements that are universally understood and culturally appropriate;
- presentation of data in ways that are clear to international audiences;
- development of mechanisms to support intermediary information providers; and
- user-testing with a focus on culturally and linguistically diverse audiences.

**Recommendation**
FECCA recommends broad implementation of the *Multicultural Access and Equity in Online Information and Services* guidelines to facilitate ease of access to information for culturally diverse and non-English speaking audiences.

**Plain English for Clearer Communication**
Community feedback received by FECCA consistently highlighted that, where information is not available in languages other than English, it should be presented in basic English, rather than formal ‘government language’ or ‘jargon’, in order to facilitate ease of interpretation for culturally and linguistically diverse clients.

Consultation participants particularly noted issues with regard to agency application forms and other official documentation, routinely regarded as overly-complex and confusing. As noted by one consultation participant:

*Filling out forms is a nightmare. The eligibility criteria are very complex and a lot of terms are hard to translate into languages other than English.*

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30 FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Gold Coast, Queensland. 5 November 2013.
Community members also identified issues with excessive and overly-complex information published on agency websites, noting that:

“It just becomes overwhelming—you lose interest or forget what you were looking for and look for other sources of information instead.”

In addition to printed resources, the above sentiments were also expressed with regard to face-to-face engagements with agency staff:

“Friendly [agency] staff are more likely to give information in plain English so that I don’t need to exert a lot of effort to understand the information given to me. Also, friendly staff encouraged me to ask more questions and seek answers that would better enhance my understanding of the topic at hand.”

In accordance with the above feedback, it was consistently reported that, as a result of overly-complex information provided through most agency communication channels, many community members reported a preference to consult Migrant Resource Centres or other information avenues in lieu of agencies directly, for simple information or clear explanations of services that they attempt to access.

Recommendation

Where complex information needs to be provided in its original form, FECCA recommends the need to develop a plain English summary that introduces the reader to the information in simpler terms.

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31 FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Murray Bridge, South Australia. 22 October 2013.
32 FECCA 2013-14 Access and Equity Survey respondent.
All of the information that we receive is in English. And even if it is in our own language, a lot of people don’t have the ability to read it.  

Some of the most consistent feedback received by FECCA in community consultations related to the need for provision of more translated materials. Inability to access translated information was highlighted as a particularly significant issue preventing client engagement with agencies and services on offer. Indeed, as highlighted by one community member:

Most information [from government agencies] is provided only in English. Translated information is not always accessible when it is available because it can be out of date, incomplete or too comprehensive, meaning that the concepts contained in the information are often ‘foreign’. Also, information from different sources can be inconsistent.

The above sentiments were reiterated by many consultation participants who similarly echoed issues with regard to the quality of information provided, consistency regarding information provision across government agencies, and the availability of plain English materials to provide clients with essential details in a clear and concise manner.

A number of community members and service providers also advocated the utility of translated materials to enable culturally and linguistically diverse clients to be more independent and rely less on detailed explanations of services through translators and/or

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33 FECCA 2013-14 Access and Equity Survey respondent.
34 Ibid.
agency staff. As articulated by one service provider with regard to the need for the provision of more translated information on the Australian education system:

“Understanding the Australian education system is very important for culturally and linguistically diverse parents and their children. There is little, if any, information about the education system and related services for parents in their native language. This is an issue—if parents had more information, they would be able to inform and provide guidance to their children about the system and get more out of it.”  

In addition, it was highlighted that whilst some translated material is available for established communities, there remains a lack of translated resources for clients from new and emerging community backgrounds. Indeed, as highlighted by one community consultation participant:

“I always look for information in my language, but it’s hard. There is information available in some languages—mainly the bigger countries—but the smaller countries aren’t represented. There isn’t much for us.”

The need was also advocated for translated materials to be regularly updated, in accordance with changes to English-language materials to ensure that information is consistent and up-to-date.

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36 FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Murray Bridge, South Australia. 22 October 2013.  
37 FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Gold Coast, Queensland. 5 November 2013.
Good Practice

Beginning Life in Australia Guide

Produced by DSS, Beginning Life in Australia is a guide for newly-arrived migrant and humanitarian entrants to Australia, entitled ‘Beginning Life in Australia’.

In addition to the content of the guide, which provides a useful reference point for new arrivals in terms of services available, the guide is made accessible to culturally and linguistically diverse readers (and particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds, by being translated into different languages, and made available for download via the DSS website.

Information contained in the resource is sufficiently comprehensive and provides a sound guide on the key services for new arrivals to access – provided both by government and non-government agencies. The guide provides sufficient detail on accessing Medicare, Centrelink, schools and education systems and applying for a drivers’ license.


Recommendation

Translated materials must be regularly updated in accordance with changes to English-language materials to ensure that information is consistent and up-to-date.

Engagement Through use of Translating and Interpreting Services

Limited awareness of translating and interpreting services was cited as a common concern by community representatives, particularly in regional areas. A specific deficiency was identified regarding awareness of translating and interpreting with regard to aged care services—indeed, as observed by one community service provider:

“Most aged care services don’t use interpreters very well. There’s a lack of capacity and knowledge on how to use interpreters. Despite the information that’s out there, many [people] do not know how to access an interpreter, let alone how to use one.”

38 FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Adelaide, South Australia. 23 October 2013.
Regarding the availability of interpreting services, a number of participants noted that it was common for family members to act as interpreters when professional interpreters were not available, or were not accessed on the basis of lacking client awareness. This was broadly viewed as problematic, with one culturally and linguistically diverse aged care service provider noting:

“It is extremely inappropriate for family member to act as interpreters, as it places older people at risk of elder abuse—when information is filtered by carers and family members, the preferences of the client are often not directly communicated to service providers.”

Several community representatives also noted issues concerning interpreters’ lack of familiarity with medical terminology, citing this as a significant impediment to effective communication. In addition, anecdotal examples of issues experienced when engaging with translating and interpreting services were also provided, including clients booking interpreters in advance of an appointment and the latter failing to show up when required, instances of clients being cut off when using interpreters over the phone, clients being unable to pay for additional services and thereby only having limited service access, as well as reports of interpreters involving themselves in discussions, transcending their mandate to remain neutral.

Digital Literacy and e-Service Delivery

“Technology is no substitute for good customer service.”

“It’ll be very difficult to introduce e-health to culturally diverse people—particularly older people.”

Platforms used by government to facilitate service delivery are currently undergoing a significant transition on the basis of macro-issues, including developments in technology and the need for more efficient and responsive services to cater to a broader client base. This forms part of a broader series of trends, towards greater integration across agencies, shared services and infrastructure, and the government’s overall intention to provide more efficient and less costly services. These factors have resulted in a movement toward electronic information and service provision, away from more traditional mechanisms. As noted by

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39 FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Gold Coast, Queensland. 5 November 2013.
40 Institute of Public Administration
41 FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Gold Coast, Queensland. 5 November 2013.
many consultation participants, however, electronic information provision raises issues regarding the broader accessibility of services. Indeed, as noted by one community member:

“Although most of the information available these days is online, not everyone can afford to pay for a computer and an internet connection.”

This view was similarly shared by one service provider, who observed:

“The assumption that everyone has computer knowledge is actually causing accessibility issues. There should be some preference to be able to fill-out paper forms, or get information in hard copy, as it is otherwise disadvantageous for people who don’t have adequate computer skills.”

The above issues were raised in the context of an increasing number of services becoming available online, and the community view that increasingly, agency personnel available for face-to-face client engagement are gradually becoming diminished, and replaced by online structures and tools. Whilst some feedback from community members positively regarded the shift towards online service provision, these views were qualified by an acknowledgement of previous computer experience and equipment:

“Where I’m from in Korea, lots of people use computers. So, many of us who have moved to Australia meet in internet cafes. We share information on the internet—we set up forums and tell each other about things this way. So in my case, I feel comfortable going to a website and getting what I need.”

Significantly, whilst acknowledging computer skills and experience, the above community representative went on to recall issues in accessing information on Australian Government agency websites:

“On the forum, some people try to help others by posting information or links from government websites. [The links] are not helpful though, because the information on the website is too much—too complex. Even though I have

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43 FECCA 2013-14 Access and Equity Survey respondent.
45 FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Murray Bridge, South Australia. 22 October 2013.
computer skills, my English isn’t great, so the website wasn’t much use to me.  

The above sentiments were reiterated by the majority of community members and service providers who critiqued the increasing preference for agencies to advocate online information provision, and the need for critical consideration of accessibility issues in pursuing communication strategies. As noted by one service provider:

“The belief that there will one day be a time when everyone will be able to access information online is fanciful—it’s impossible to expect that all Australians, and particularly those who have migrated, will have adequate access to, or knowledge of, computer systems and how to navigate and access information. It’s just unrealistic.”

To ensure the more effective provision of information electronically, FECCA refers to the 2004 Australian Government Information Management Office Better Practice Checklist, regarding access and equity issues for websites (see Figure 3 below). The document provides a useful overview of important issues for agencies to consider in the design of websites and information provided electronically, to ensure their suitability for culturally and linguistically diverse audiences.

46 Ibid.
47 FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Adelaide, South Australia. 23 October 2013.
### SUMMARY OF CHECKPOINTS

#### LANGUAGE
- Use plain English on the website, which is more easily understood by people from diverse backgrounds as well as by other Australians.
- Provide information on the website in other languages where appropriate.
- Use search features to provide additional assistance to people from diverse backgrounds.
- Integrate online services designed for people from diverse background with other service channels designed to meet their particular needs.
- Develop mechanisms to facilitate the use of information by others specifically targeting culturally and linguistically diverse groups.
- Consider the needs of relatives, including youth, who may be accessing information on behalf of clients.

#### TESTING AND EVALUATION
- Consider testing web resources with representatives from culturally and linguistically diverse groups.
- Evaluate services provided online to ensure that all customers receive the same level and responsiveness in service provision regardless of their cultural or linguistic background.
- As part of the collection of data about website usage, consider ways in which data can also be collected on cultural and language diversity.

#### OTHER ISSUES
- If appropriate, use the website as part of a strategy to consult people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds on new or revised policies or programs that may impact upon them.
- Ensure that service providers responsible for delivering services on the organisation’s behalf use technology in ways that comply with the Government’s access and equity policies.
- When considering the issues that need to be addressed as part of ensuring that services are accessible to people with disabilities, also consider the needs of people with disabilities who come from diverse backgrounds.

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By way of comparison, FECCA also refers to a 2014 study conducted by Deloitte in the United Kingdom, reporting on public perspectives concerning government’s increased usage of digital services and online service delivery. FECCA advocates the need for similar such research to be conducted in Australia to identify public sentiment, particularly from a culturally and linguistically diverse perspective, regarding the accessibility of online services and digital service delivery mechanisms.

**Other Platforms for Communication**

Whilst the majority of community representatives and service providers cited a preference for face-to-face engagement with agency representatives, feedback was also provided on other platforms for communication that were viewed as being effective. In this context, it was highlighted that the provision of information through newspapers, newsletters and radio stations was seen as an effective way to disseminate information to communities. As noted by one community member, for instance:

“There have been regular advertisements that have appeared about community services in the local paper as well as on the local radio station every now and then. This has been helpful for a lot of people to get that important information.”

This feedback echoes the findings of a large quantity of research that has previously advocated the utility of using community and ethnic print press and radio as effective means through which to disseminate information to culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Specifically, the former have been considered highly effective, given that, whilst such communities are not excluded from engaging with mainstream communications channels, it is through ethnic media that advertisers can “connect emotionally” with diverse audiences and particularly, individuals from non-English speaking backgrounds, through providing information in a direct and targeted manner.

In this context, it is noted that many Australian Government agencies have taken steps to engage culturally and linguistically diverse audiences through distributing information and messages via ethnic press and/or community organisations. The Australian Taxation Office, for instance, provides regular contributions to FECCA’s e-News magazine, to communicate important messages to culturally and linguistically diverse audiences in the lead up to tax time each year (see Figure 4).

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50 FECCA 2013-14 Access and Equity Survey respondent.

Announcements & Opportunities

Tax Help for the community

This year the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) is proud to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Tax Help program—a free and confidential service that assists many people at tax time.

Tax Help is a network of dedicated community volunteers who assist people who earn $50,000 or less and have simple tax affairs to complete and lodge their tax returns. These volunteers are people from within the community who give up their time each year to participate in the program. They are all fully trained, accredited and supported by the ATO.

Volunteers will demonstrate how to use e-tax to lodge a tax return quickly and safely online and can also assist people who are unsure if they need to lodge.

Tax Help is available in almost 900 community centres across Australia; many of these also offer assistance in languages other than English.

Tax Help is available at community centres around Australia from July to October.

To find out more about Tax Help visit ato.gov.au/taxhelp or call the ATO on 13 28 61.

> Tax Time 2013 - Information to help you and your community

July to October is tax time in Australia. During this time, we encourage you to remind people in your community that they may need to complete and lodge a tax return with the Australian Taxation Office (ATO).

For some people, this could mean getting money back if they paid more tax during the financial year than they needed to. There are a number of ways people can to lodge a tax return, including:

- Online using e-tax, the ATO’s free, fast and secure lodgment service. Most refunds are issued in 12 business days or less. E-tax can be downloaded at ato.gov.au/etax
- Using a registered tax agent. If people decide to pay someone to help them complete and lodge their tax return, they should make sure they are registered with the Tax Practitioners Board at tpb.gov.au/online/register
- Using the paper tax return form that comes with the ATO’s Individual tax return instructions. People can order copies online at ato.gov.au/publications or by calling 1300 720 092

Do you know someone who needs help with their tax? They may be eligible for Tax Help - a free service available to people who earn around $50,000 or less and have simple tax matters.

ATO trained and accredited volunteers can help people with their tax returns in a community centre near where they live. In some areas, Tax Help is available in languages other than English. For more information visit ato.gov.au/taxhelp

Remember, if people are preparing their own tax return, they need to lodge it by 31 October 2013.

For more information

- Visit ato.gov.au or phone the ATO on 13 28 61.
- If people don’t speak English well they can call the Translating and Interpreting Service on 13 14 50.
- People and organisations can also connect with the ATO on social media for tax tips and updates. Go to ato.gov.au/findus.

For general tax and super information in languages other than English visit ato.gov.au/otherlanguages.

Your support in passing this information on to your community is appreciated.

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**Recommendation**

FECCA recommends the need for Australian Government agencies to make greater use of ethnic media and alternative communication platforms to better engage culturally diverse and non-English speaking audiences.

**Limited Resourcing and Impacts on Quality of Engagement**

A number of community representatives and service providers regarded the greatest impediment to quality service provision and effective agency engagement with diverse audiences to be a lack of resources to effectively facilitate this. As noted by one community member:

“Job Services Australia advisors do an excellent job in dealing with customers, but they don’t have the necessary resources to do all that they should be doing to assist job seekers. It’s always a case of resource limitations – personnel can only do so much.”

Another service provider similarly noted:

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53 FECCA 2013-14 Access and Equity Survey respondent.
There used to be a Multicultural Services Officer based in the Gold Coast, but it got scrapped to save money. It was really helpful to have that officer in our community—we need more, rather than less of these people.  

The above sentiments were broadly shared by many consultation participants who highlighted the need for additional funding support to ensure that service delivery is effective and responsive to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse clients.

In this context, FECCA observes the need for government agencies to operate with efficiencies in mind, in order to ensure the continuation of services into the long-term. Acknowledging this, however, FECCA emphasises that agency performance should be assessed on the quality of service delivery, as opposed to fiscal efficiency alone.

FECCA subsequently highlights the findings of a 2007 PricewaterhouseCoopers report, investigating issues concerning the efficacy of government service delivery worldwide. Notably, the report assets that:

Integrated and coordinated government is of fundamental importance, since it holds the key to unlocking effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery. It has the potential to remove unnecessary duplication and improve the use of scarce resources. It also contributes to better communications in highly-complex organisations.

Coordination (through effective leadership) and transparency (inter-agency communication and openness) are advocated as effective strategies through which to create better efficiency and subsequently deliver higher quality services to clients.

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54 FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation. Gold Coast, Queensland. 5 November 2013.
Good Practice

Priorities for Public Sector Organisations to improve efficiency and deliver high-quality services to clients

Observing the need for government agencies to operate efficiently and in the context of tight budgetary constraints, FECCA advocates the following priority areas outlined by PricewaterhouseCoopers to efficiently deliver high-quality services to a diverse clientele.

1. **Getting the focus right** – understanding that the ‘customer is king’ in the public sector, just as in the private sector.
2. **Pulling down the walls** – agency silos must give way to connected government.
3. **Empowering to delivery** – building the capacity to delivery in public sector organisations (and in their people).
4. **Delivering the promise** – building customer-centric models and managing risks.
5. **Ensuring continuous innovation** – innovating by harvesting best practices and using client feedback to sustain benefits.

For more information, the full report can be accessed at: http://www.pwc.com/en_GX/gx/psrc/pdf/the_road_ahead_for_public_service_delivery.pdf

Summary

- Effective service delivery is best facilitated through agencies adopting a client-centres service delivery model, premised on the view the successful engagement involves ‘knowing’ clients and adapting service delivery to respond to their diverse needs.
- There is broadly a need for improvement in standards of information provision across Australian Government agencies to facilitate client awareness of services at a grass-root level.
- Where information is not available in languages other than English, it should be presented in clear and basic terms to facilitate ease of interpretation for culturally and linguistically diverse clients.
- Clients’ inability to access translated information prohibits their engagement with agencies and access to services on offer.
- Limited awareness of translating and interpreting services available, particularly in rural and regional locations, is a particular concern for culturally and linguistically diverse clients.
- Electronic information and service provision should complement, rather than replace, face-to-face engagement with clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Using ethnic media and alternative communication platforms are an effective way to better engage culturally diverse and non-English speaking audiences.
2.3 Performance

Key Themes

- **Actively seeking feedback to increase engagement**: perspectives regarding how effectively agencies are utilising available mechanisms, including grass-root consultations and feedback, surveys and online forms, hosting meetings, workshops or other activities at local community venues (where clients may feel more comfortable); and

- **Appropriateness of feedback mechanisms**: extent to which departments and agencies successfully employ and benefit from feedback, compliment and complaint mechanisms.

"Consumer feedback and information is an essential source of the intelligence necessary to inform the kinds of innovation, improvement and redesign of services that will accurately and effectively reflect the client experience."  

"To improve services, there is a need to understand more about customers’ experience of using government’s services. Governments tend to have lots of information on transactions between the customer and the service provider, but little on customers’ real experience and thoughts on the service provider."

A broad theme that emerged from FECCA’s community consultations was the view that implementation of a client-centred service delivery model is reliant on agencies seeking-out and responding to feedback, and using client perspectives as the benchmark upon which to reform and improve processes. This feedback has been well substantiated in existing literature, which has similarly noted:


Customer feedback is a powerful tool, not only for understanding customers’ experience and satisfaction with public services, but also for developing strategies to improve those services. Although under-utilised in the past, feedback from both customers and front-line staff can help to ensure that service improvement strategies focus on those areas that will make the most difference to customers.  

Community perspectives on how effectively agencies perform in this regard were mixed. The majority of feedback received by FECCA focussed on the utility of evaluation mechanisms available to clients and service providers, and issues associated with their effective use.

An individual’s ability to exercise their right to make a complaint through the structure and mechanisms of an agency is largely dependent on two key aspects—namely, quality information provision and the need for effective access to information. This is based on the linked assumptions that, firstly, an individual needs be aware of their right to complain and, once they have this awareness, must be cognisant of the appropriate way through which to make a complaint (i.e. be aware of what the complaints mechanism is). Secondly, an individual needs to be able to easily and effectively access, and make use of, the complaints system.

A summary of the community feedback received by FECCA regarding the performance measure is summarised below.

**Lack of Client Systems Knowledge and Awareness of Complaints Mechanisms**

Another barrier to effective information provision relates to the fact that Australia’s legal and government system, and the complaints structures within those systems, differ from those in many other countries. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that all culturally and linguistically diverse clients will automatically know that they have the right to make complaints in Australia or have immediate knowledge of how to undertake this.

It is subsequently important that complaints mechanisms are advertised as clearly as possible to ensure that people are aware of their right to submit feedback for the improvement of services that they seek access to.

Feedback from FECCA’s community consultations has highlighted that effective information provision is not only about making information accessible on a webpage, but also involves distributing information in a targeted way to different groups in society. In the case of culturally and linguistically diverse clients, this encompasses distributing information to those in the sector that work with new arrivals and other culturally and linguistically diverse Australians, who will be in contact with these groups and who can impart information regarding rights, systems, services and programs in language and in spoken form.

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58 Ibid.
Accessibility of Complaint Mechanisms

In the context of feedback mechanisms, FECCA acknowledges that Australian Government agencies typically have large volumes of information to communicate. This is usually accompanied by a communications budget that does not make allowances for full translation of this information. As such, agencies choose to make ‘key’ information available in translated form, the content of which varies between agencies.

For example, the Australian Tax Office’s translated material includes information about consumers’ right to make a complaint and what mechanisms are available to do this, including contacting the Commonwealth Ombudsman’s office. This is similarly the case for DIBP, which also makes information available to clients regarding lodgement of complaints in languages other than English. Other agencies, such as the DSS and the Department of Human Services (DHS), do not appear to provide any translated materials regarding complaint mechanisms, nor do they include contact details for TIS National, along with information regarding their complaints processes.

FECCA advocates that all Australians have the right to make complaints given the importance of this process in ensuring accountability and transparency towards the improvement of agency policies and service provision. It is therefore imperative that individuals engaging with agencies are cognisant of complaint mechanisms and have awareness of the means through which to access them. FECCA subsequently advocates the need for information about complaint mechanisms to be prioritised by all agencies as ‘key information’ regarding their services and operations and promoted as such through core information channels such as agency websites.

Recommendation

Information about complaints mechanisms must be prioritised by all agencies as ‘key information’ relating to their service delivery and operations, and should be promoted as such through core information channels, such as agency websites.

Translating and Interpreting for Access to Complaint Mechanisms

Feedback from FECCA’s community consultations revealed that when a culturally and linguistically diverse client tries to access a complaint mechanism, they may experience difficulty communicating in English due to limited English language skills. To assist in this circumstance, FECCA acknowledges the option of using TIS National, administered by DIPB. This option can only be utilised, however, when culturally and linguistically diverse consumers know they have access to it. It is therefore important that information about TIS is easy for non-English speaking clients to find and understand, and is consistent in its promotion across agencies’ websites and through other mechanisms.

If an agency relies on TIS National to facilitate contact with a non-English speaking client and the latter’s ability to lodge a complaint, then the integrity and effectiveness of their complaint mechanism may be compromised, given that the effectiveness of TIS National
may gauge the client’s experience of the agency. It is therefore important that agencies work with TIS National to improve culturally and linguistically diverse client access to feedback and complaints mechanisms, given the subsequent connections to the effectiveness of both the agency’s and TIS National’s service delivery capacity.

Barriers to Effective Use of Complaint Mechanisms

FECCA’s community consultations revealed that while written information in other languages is helpful and necessary, some culturally and linguistically diverse consumers face the additional barrier of having low literacy and numeracy, depending on their education and learning experiences prior to their arrival in Australia. They may also have limited digital literacy skills, therefore precluding their ability to access translated information electronically.

These issues infer that written and/or printed information may be less appropriate in certain circumstances, and therefore, it is necessary for it to be complemented with information provided in another format, to enable an individual to approach an agency in person to make a complaint.

Recommendation

Written and/or printed information regarding feedback and complaint mechanisms should be complemented with information provided in other formats, particularly to enable an individual to approach an agency in person to make a complaint.

FECCA’s community consultations have highlighted that this may also make it necessary to disseminate information through other methods than websites, and potentially through organisations and service providers that work closely with (and preferably, in-person with) culturally and linguistically diverse clients.

FECCA’s community feedback broadly highlighted that for ‘in-person’ complaint mechanisms, agencies should make provisions to ensure that they have shopfront interactions with consumers/clients to effectively respond to client concerns in this context. In developing such in-person mechanisms, agencies need to assess the diversity of the population surrounding a given shopfront and put in place necessary staff to ensure an adequate process is in place for culturally and linguistically diverse clients to provide feedback.
Recommendation

To facilitate clients’ effective use of ‘in-person’ complaint and feedback mechanisms, agencies should make provisions to ensure that they have shopfront interactions with consumers/clients to effectively respond to their concerns in this context.

Client Experiences of Discrimination

A number of culturally and linguistically diverse clients reported experiences of discrimination when accessing services, advocating a lack of culturally sensitive and equitable service delivery. The majority of views in this regard were based upon interactions with agency staff that were viewed as ‘culturally insensitive’, and were seen to offer clients a lower standard of service on the basis of their cultural and/or linguistic background. As noted by one community representative, for instance:

“I haven’t had good experiences with Job Services Australia. I’ve gone to them so many times, and done so many interviews, but I never get anywhere. I feel a bit insulted because of how they treat me—it’s because of my accent.”

Another community member similarly observed:

“Government agency [representatives] are not friendly. They’re just doing their job—and not that well. They aren’t very friendly, especially to those of us who come from migrant background. And they’re even less friendly if you come from Asia or Africa!”

A number of community members also reported feeling ‘patronised’ in their dealings with agency representatives, or feeling frustrated with staff who appeared to make assumptions about their cultural or linguistic background and attempted to adapt their service delivery on this basis. As highlighted by one service provider, for example:

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60 FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation. Dandenong, Murray Bridge. 22 October 2013.
Agencies need to know that language or culture, although very important, do not necessarily define the values of the people accessing services—people should be asked about their background and not pre-judged.  

In addition to the above, FECCA also received anecdotal feedback from other community representatives who commented on their own, or others’ experiences of some agencies allegedly refusing to deal with clients requiring interpreters. Acknowledging the potential for miscommunication or misunderstanding with regard to this example, it remains that Government agencies must work to dispel such myths (or dispel the issue, if validated) to make clients feel comfortable in accessing and, if necessary, lodging feedback or a complaint about a service.

In the context of the above, FECCA notes that despite reports of concern from clients who have had negative experiences with agency representatives, many culturally and linguistically diverse consumers do not access complaint mechanisms when they feel they experience discrimination, as they do not feel confident and empowered to do so. Based upon community and service provider feedback, FECCA notes clients feeling intimidated by front line service provision representatives of agencies who lack cultural competency and the ability to communicate effectively with people from diverse cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds, and advocates the need for increased focus on improving the quality of service provision in this regard.

**Agencies Proactively Seeking Feedback**

Whilst noting the importance of accessible feedback mechanisms to enable easy access to services for culturally and linguistically diverse clients, FECCA simultaneously advocates the need for agencies to proactively identify ways through which to obtain feedback directly from culturally and linguistically diverse clients.

In this context, the following good practice models identify positive initiatives taken by government agencies to receive direct feedback from culturally and linguistically diverse clients on the quality of service delivery and opportunities for improvement.

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61 FECCA 2013-14 Access and Equity Survey respondent.
Good Practice

National Multicultural Advisory Group – Commonwealth Department of Human Services

The role of the National Multicultural Advisory Group is to provide advice to the Commonwealth Department of Human Services (DHS) on all aspects of service to clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including:

- the quality and effectiveness of service provided by DHS;
- the impact of new and existing policies and/or legislation on customer service;
- future service delivery developments; and
- opportunities to build a stronger community in partnership with DHS.

Membership of the group includes peak multicultural and settlement organisations throughout Australia, whose contributions ensure that community feedback is provided to DHS on agency performance and quality of service delivery.


Good Practice

Translating and Interpreting Service (National) face-to-face representation at FECCA community consultations

As a model of good practice, FECCA highlights the involvement of representatives of TIS National at each of FECCA’s community consultations throughout Australia.

TIS’ involvement at the consultations not only facilitated direct community feedback for agency representatives present, but also the opportunity for community members and services providers to directly obtain information from agency representatives on services offered.

The example highlights the benefits of direct and face-to-face engagement between agencies and clients, for both the community members themselves as well as government agencies—demonstrating a means through which to effectively deliver information about services, as well as obtain feedback regarding the quality of service delivery and opportunities for improvement.
Summary

- Implementation of a client-centred service delivery model is reliant on agencies seeking-out and responding to feedback and using client perspectives as the benchmark upon which to reform and improve processes.
- Individuals must be aware of their right to provide feedback on their experiences of service delivery and be cognisant of the appropriate way through which to lodge this feedback, through use of appropriate mechanisms.
- While written information in other languages is helpful and necessary, some culturally and linguistically diverse clients face the additional barrier of having low literacy and numeracy, which impacts on their ability to provide feedback through formal mechanisms on the quality of Australian Government service delivery.
- Community feedback highlights the need for government to take more proactive steps in accessing feedback from culturally and linguistically diverse clients, including through identifying platforms to facilitate this at a grass-root level.
2.4 Capability

Key Themes

- Perspectives on flexibility of options for contact with clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, from clients’ perspective (client-centred service delivery).

- Extent to which culturally and linguistically diverse clients have the opportunity to have face-to-face contact with representatives of government departments and agencies.

- Quality of interactions with representatives of government departments and agencies.

- Consideration of, and response to, specific barriers or multiple disadvantages, including limited or no English language proficiency, lack of systems knowledge, compound factors – clients with torture/trauma backgrounds, etc.

- Extent to which information is provided to clients on efforts to improve responsiveness – is information made available and accessible on areas where the government is engaging in research and analysis to improve service delivery and allow greater transparency?

The ability of government agencies to effectively cater to the diverse needs of culturally and linguistically diverse clients is contingent on a number of factors, ranging from agencies’ ability to provide flexible contact options for engagement with clients, as well as opportunities for face-to-face contact where possible. As has been previously discussed, effective service provision is also contingent on the quality of direct engagement with clients. The capability of agencies regarding the latter can be assessed by the degree to which its representatives demonstrate adequate consideration of, and responsiveness to, the specific circumstances of their clients.

In this context, FECCA highlights the need for agencies to acknowledge that clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds often face multiple disadvantages, including limited or no English language proficiency, and lack of systems knowledge. Other factors such as client experiences of torture and trauma, or clients who have come to Australia from countries embroiled in conflict, also dramatically impact on their experiences in settling in Australia, how they access services (if at all), and the mode of services delivered to them.

In recognition of the above, measuring agency capability can be achieved through determining the extent to which information is provided to clients regarding the former’s efforts to improve their responsiveness, as well as client experiences regarding the quality of interactions with agency representatives.
This chapter provides an overview of culturally and linguistically diverse community feedback concerning government agencies’ ability to demonstrate the requisite skills and capability to effectively deliver services to culturally and linguistically diverse clients.

**Personalised Engagement**

“There needs to still be the option to go to Centrelink and make a face-to-face appointment with a representative to ensure that things aren’t lost in communication. There needs to be this sort of direct community engagement.” ⁶²

FECCA received substantive community feedback regarding culturally and linguistically diverse clients’ preference for personalised engagement to facilitate effective service delivery. This feedback is supported by extensive existing literature and research that has advocated the need for personalised engagement with clients to best address their individual needs:

“One of the core requirements for any customer-centric strategy is customer insight. In-depth knowledge about the customer can be drawn from various sources of data - demographic, behavioural, needs-based and attitudinal. Once assembled, this data is built into a joined-up ‘big picture’ of customer segments, providing a foundation for the creation of multiple service delivery channels aligned with customer journey needs.” ⁶³

In the context of the above, it was frequently observed at FECCA’s community consultations that personalised and face-to-face engagement is most effective in providing adequate assistance to clients, in terms of aiding their understanding of complex processes and information, as well as providing direction on how and where services can be accessed.

**Improving Automated Service Delivery Systems**

In pragmatic terms, automated service delivery systems—particularly telephone systems—were criticised by culturally and linguistically diverse clients as being extremely time-consuming and inefficient. Many community members cited frustration that automated telephone systems are often unable to recognise the full range of accents of clients attempting to access them. Broader issues were also raised with often excessive waiting times for clients making phone enquiries. Indeed, as highlighted by one community member:

⁶² FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Adelaide, South Australia. 23 October 2013.
Calling a Centrelink office to have a query answered often requires a two hour wait. Who wouldn't feel distressed and frustrated at having to wait such a long time to have a query resolved?  

The above example highlights the need for continued improvement of automated phone systems to improve service delivery for culturally and linguistically diverse clients. In this regard, FECCA welcomes the DHS' recent adoption of the Place in Queue telephone system as a tool to facilitate more streamlined communication with clients, and particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds via telephone (see good practice example below for more details).

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**Good Practice**

*Place in Queue* telephone call back service – Commonwealth Department of Human Services

Centrelink has set up a new call back service, allowing users to maintain their place in the telephone enquiry queue without waiting on the phone. If a client’s expected call wait time is greater than five minutes, they will be asked to leave their details and then end the call. When their call gets close to the front of the queue, Centrelink will call them back to respond to their enquiry.

Core benefits of the system for clients include:

- **Saving money** – lower mobile phone costs for clients by not waiting on the line.
- **Saving time** – clients can continue with other activities instead of waiting on the phone to speak with a representative.

The system provides an effective means through which to streamline service delivery over the phone, avoiding client frustration with excessive waiting times and costly calls whilst being placed on hold.

Whilst advocating the system as a good practice example however, FECCA reiterates the need for information campaigns to educate users about the system, and particularly those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who may otherwise lack understanding of the service.

Quality of Direct Client Interactions and Engagement

Community members and services providers consistently highlighted the need for high quality engagement with clients to be prioritised as a fundamental enabler of effective service delivery. This was demonstrated by respondents to FECCA’s 2013-14 Access and Equity Survey, who indicated that friendly and respectful staff were most likely to facilitate effective service delivery (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Enablers of Effective Service Delivery

What is most helpful for you when you are seeking to access services from a Government agency or government-funded service provider? (please tick any that apply)

- Staff who are friendly and respectful: 97% (68)
- Staff who speak my language: 40% (28)
- Having an interpreter or translator available: 39% (27)
- The existence of a special service stream especially for migrants: 39% (27)
- Help from a friend or relative: 14% (10)
- Other (please specify): 14% (10)

* 70 total responses, 97% of submissions

FECCA received mixed feedback from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, however, regarding the quality of their face-to-face interactions with agency representatives. Many consultation participants voiced concerns over agency staff appearing reluctant to proactively give information to clients that they felt may be useful. For instance, as noted by one community representative:

“If you don’t ask the right question no one will volunteer the information.”

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65 FECCA 2013-14 Access and Equity Survey—Summary of Responses.
66 FECCA 2013-14 Access and Equity Survey respondent
Other consultation participants noted issues regarding waiting times and processing delays regarding client forms and other documentation:

“I've had to resubmit documents and applications several times, because the wrong information has been written down [by the agency representative]. For example, they've sometimes used the wrong fax or phone number, or documents get lost and there has been no communication or advice of this.”

In the context of the above issues, many community members highlighted that negative experiences with agency representatives often lead to clients becoming distrustful of the service or unwilling to attempt future interactions with the agency to avoid similar negative interactions. In contrast, it was consistently highlighted that experiences of quality customer service greatly assisted clients who felt insecure and embarrassed about accessing services to which they were entitled on the basis of limited English language skills, or any apprehension in coming into contact with government or its associated agencies.

**Cultural Competency**

“Respect is everything in service delivery.”

*Cultural competence is best viewed as an ongoing process and an ideal to strive towards.*

Community members and service providers consistently highlighted that cultural competency was an essential element of effective communication with culturally and linguistically diverse clients, building a vital bridge between government agencies and the communities that they service.

As previously discussed in this report, FECCA received mixed feedback from consultation participants regarding evidence of cultural competency demonstrated by agency staff. Broadly, it was advocated that staff that are passionate about their work, have a person-centred approach and are engaging with their clients are the most effective in terms of service delivery, even if they do not speak the language of their clients. As noted by one community representative:

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68 FECCA 2013-14 Access and Equity Survey respondent.
It’s not necessarily a matter of translating from English and vice-versa, it’s more about how culturally and linguistically diverse clients understand Australian ways, and how effectively staff communicate with that person on the basis of their understanding—or lack thereof. 70

Both service providers and community representatives highlighted the need for cultural competency to involve agency representatives intrinsically demonstrating their ability to broadly identify and challenge their own cultural assumptions, values and beliefs in their dealings with clients. In its most basic terms, this was advocated as involving a degree of empathy in service delivery, and agency staff demonstrating the ability to ‘see circumstances through their clients’ eyes’, to recognise the extent to which individual experiences are shaped through different cultural lenses. 71

Beyond the individual level, improved cultural competency was also consistently advocated at a meta-level. It was highlighted, for instance, that cultural competency must be factored into the planning and delivery of services to facilitate maximum engagement of culturally and linguistically clients. In this context, one service provider highlighted:

“Attendance in the Adult Migrant English Program always drops off when there is a cultural or religious holiday, and people end up missing out on lessons because they’re attending a community event. There needs to be more dialogue [with community members] to accommodate various circumstances.” 72

In accordance with the above example, community feedback received by FECCA broadly advocated the need for improved cultural competence at all levels of agency service delivery.

**Consideration of Client Circumstances and Multiple Disadvantages**

A number of community members expressed concern regarding agencies’ lack of attention to personal circumstances of culturally and linguistically diverse clients, or the multiple disadvantages likely to impact on them and their ability to access and benefit from services. For example, as noted by one service provider:

70 FECCA 2013-14 Access and Equity Survey respondent


72 FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Gold Coast, Queensland. 5 November 2013.
It is difficult for some people to learn English because of their past experience, such as trauma, war, hardship and imprisonment. These are all very valid reasons impacting on why people have difficulty in learning another language. People at different stages might struggle. Placing time restrictions on learning acts as a disincentive and prevents people from ever being able to learn another language effectively. 73

The above example highlights the extent to which an individual’s experience in one sense is likely to impact on their ability to access and benefit from service delivery in another. FECCA advocates the need for increased recognition of, and attention to, the complexity of individual circumstances likely to impact on that client’s experience and ability to benefit from services subsequently delivered to them. This involves the need for service delivery agencies to work with the complexities related to their clients—understanding not just the interdependence between different factors, but also the interdependence between agencies delivering services to them, and the likely impacts on the individual74.

Assumptions Concerning Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Client Systems Knowledge

Community representatives and service providers reported issues regarding perceived assumptions made by agencies concerning clients’ prior awareness of, or knowledge about, services available. As noted, for example, by one community member:

“There are a lot of assumptions made—about people’s understanding and knowledge of how things work.” 75

This was similarly observed by another community member, who asserted:

“When you arrive you don’t speak English, yes, the services are there, but you are treated as the one who is very strange, with no ability to explain what your needs are. Also, there are a lot of assumptions [made] about who you are, what you know or what your skills are.” 76

73 FECCA 2013-14 Access and Equity Survey respondent.
75 FECCA 2013-14 Access and Equity Survey respondent.
The above examples highlight the important need for agency representatives to fully comprehend individual circumstances of clients in order to effectively deliver services to them.

Flexible Options for Client Contact

Some culturally and linguistically diverse community members and service providers noted issues regarding the accessibility of services in the absence of flexible options for contact with agency representatives. Indeed, as was noted by one service provider with regard to community members’ participation in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP):

“Some women might struggle to physically attend language sessions—they might have difficulty leaving their house, particularly if they have children. Some people have to go to extraordinary efforts to learn English. It would be good if the services made it a bit easier for them.”

Much of the community feedback regarding the lack of flexible options for contact with agency representatives focussed on perspectives regarding the lack of funding and adequate resourcing to enable such service delivery.

Summary

- Personalised and face-to-face engagement with culturally and linguistically diverse clients is the most effective means through which to provide assistance, aiding understanding of complex processes and information and providing direction on how and where services can be accessed.
- Whilst typically more cost-efficient, automated service delivery systems are broadly regarded by culturally and linguistically diverse communities as ineffective in catering to specific and often complex client needs.
- Effective service delivery entails recognition of personal client circumstances, and particularly, issues of multiple disadvantage that are likely to impact on an individuals’ knowledge of, and ability to derive benefit from, the services being delivered.

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76 FECCA 2013-14 Access and Equity Survey respondent.
77 FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Adelaide, South Australia. 23 October 2013.
2.5 Responsiveness

Key Themes

- **Flexible delivery of services** and the extent to which there is recognition of the need for tailored, as opposed to 'one-size-fits-all' approaches;

- **Use of inclusive platforms for communication**: feedback on modes of communication and engagement used;

- **Responding to client feedback on accessibility of language**: adjusting to communication needs of culturally and linguistically diverse (and specifically, non-English speaking) clients where necessary, acknowledging the need for access to, and responsiveness of, translating and interpreting services and other mechanisms to facilitate more effective communication.

The need to adopt a ‘client-centred’ approach and demonstrate flexibility and consideration of individual client needs in the delivery of services has been consistently highlighted as fundamentally enabling effective service delivery. In this context, the importance of responsive government services has been highlighted as paramount—that is, the extent to which agencies not only remain in touch with client needs, but adapt their services to adequately respond to them.

Investigating agency responsiveness subsequently involves exploring whether or not intelligent mechanisms are in place to identify and address the complex and changing needs of clients and differing service levels, and whether or not there are drivers for change that are present to effectively adapt and improve service delivery.

A discussion of these themes is covered in this chapter, which considers the responsiveness of Australian Government agencies from the perspective of culturally and linguistically diverse clients.

Flexible and Responsive Service Delivery

FECCA received substantial feedback regarding the need for agency services to be more flexible and responsive to individual client needs. It was highlighted, for example, that many services are overly-rigid and do not acknowledge or accommodate the often complex and inter-related needs of clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. As noted by one community member, for instance:
“English training needs to be much more hands-on to be effective. The formal tuition style doesn’t really work for a lot of migrants who don’t adjust well to that style of learning. It needs to be more hands-on and practical—not just academic.”

The above example highlights the need for a more flexible and tailored approach in the delivery of services such as AMEP training, to ensure that services are not provided on the basis of making incorrect assumptions about a client’s background and/or prior experiences, but that clients accessing such services are benefitting from them in a holistic sense.

Community feedback also highlighted the important need to dispel the view that all Australians will automatically benefit from overall fixes to service delivery—it was conversely advocated that tailored reforms, made on the basis of feedback from a diverse client base, are imperative to ensure that improvements in services address the individual needs of clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Community feedback that FECCA received from rural and regional locations also highlighted a lack of tailored service delivery for culturally and linguistically diverse clients in such communities. As was noted by one service provider, for example:

“There is a fundamental lack of family violence services in regional areas. In cases of domestic violence, we just don’t have enough services for women. Family/domestic violence services are crucial, especially when one is experiencing such violence but service is difficult to access by culturally and linguistically diverse groups. In general, I’d say that regional resources are inadequate.”

The above example highlights the issues associated with services that are not responsive to the needs of individuals requiring access to them, and the particular challenges encountered by clients in rural and regional locations in this context.

A similar issue was noted with regard to services available for older clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds:

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78 FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Adelaide, South Australia. 23 October 2013.
79 FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Murray Bridge, South Australia. 22 October 2013.
Culturally and linguistically diverse people are over-represented in the number of older people, but underrepresented in the services that they receive. In mainstream agencies, despite the population of migrants being greater, it’s a much smaller percentage of aged care services being provided [to them].”\(^80\)

Again, the need to services to be more responsive to community needs was highlighted, in this case, given the large proportion of clients seeking access to culturally-appropriate aged care services.

Flexible Platforms for Communication

In order for services to be sufficiently responsive to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse clients, FECCA advocates the need for greater flexibility and variety of communication mechanisms used to engage with culturally and linguistically diverse audiences.

In this context, FECCA highlights DIBP’s use of social media live feeds to engage with culturally diverse clients and respond to queries that they may have (see Good Practice example below for more details).

Good Practice

DIBP’s live Social Media Feeds

DIBP offers clients the opportunity to ask general, impersonal questions via its social media accounts, to facilitate broader access to information and stronger engagement with clients.

The online engagement mechanism offers clients an alternative platform to engage with agency representatives and seek out information.

For more details, visit the Department’s website, at: http://www.newsroom.immi.gov.au

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\(^80\) FECCA Access and Equity Community Consultation participant. Dandenong, Victoria. 15 October 2013.
Recommendation

FECCA advocates the need for greater flexibility and variety of communication mechanisms used to engage with culturally and linguistically diverse audiences.

Summary

- Culturally and linguistically diverse community feedback highlights that many services are overly-rigid in their design and delivery, and neither adequately acknowledge, nor accommodate the often complex and inter-related needs of clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Tailored reforms, made on the basis of feedback from a diverse client base, as opposed to ‘overall fixes’, are imperative to ensure that improvements in services address the individual needs of clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- There is a need for greater flexibility and variety in the adoption and use of communication mechanisms used to engage with culturally and linguistically diverse audiences.
2.6 Openness

Key Themes

- **Consideration and use of appropriate data**: the extent to which agencies obtain and publish data, and subsequently demonstrate the ability to reach clients and communities and respond to diverse needs;

- **Flexibility in thinking about, and using, diversity data**: how well do agencies ‘know their clients’? Evidence of how well agencies adapt their services and operations to respond to changing demographics, new and emerging issues, as well as targeting new markets and priority areas.

As with the *leadership* measure, FECCA notes that measuring *openness* of government agencies with regard to service delivery is, to an extent, limited from an external perspective, given the lack of recourse to internal processes and mechanisms. Acknowledging this, however, community and service provider feedback received by FECCA at community consultations has revealed interesting insights regarding the extent to which agencies demonstrate *openness*.

Specific examples and feedback provided against this measure are related to how effectively agencies are considered to collect and make use of data about their diverse clientele, as well as make this available to other agencies and the public. In addition, assessing agencies’ *openness* involves considering how flexible they are in thinking about and using diversity data—including the extent to which they appear to ‘know their clients’ and adapt service delivery to appropriately respond to client needs.

**Demonstrating Flexibility and Openness**

Community perspectives highlighted mixed sentiments regarding the effectiveness of government agencies in demonstrating flexibility and openness in seeking-out and responding to client feedback and data. The view was asserted, for instance, that the collection of feedback and data is often viewed as a ‘tick-box’ deliverable for agencies—as an obligation that agencies must deliver on, but one that agency representatives do not necessarily appreciate the value or utility of. Indeed, as was highlighted by one community member:
It seems that [agency] staff lack experience in, and exposure to, tailoring services to meet culturally and linguistically diverse client needs, as well as the requirements of other special needs groups. I was even once told, “this is the way we practice [service provision], and we’re not going to change to suit you”.

In response to the above example, there is subsequent need for agency representatives to gain a deeper understanding of the benefits of client data and feedback for the purposes of enhancing service delivery, and for this to be demonstrated through their conduct with culturally and linguistically diverse clients.

In order to affect broad-level cultural change with regard to this issue, FECCA advocates the need for more robust awareness-raising activities to highlight the imperative links between the collection and analysis of diverse client data, and the need for this to be translated into positive reforms in service delivery. As an initial practical means through which to achieve this, FECCA suggests the development and circulation of regular ‘updates’ for agency staff that highlight the diversity inherent to their agency’s client base. As a specific example, the regular Settlement Planning Updates produced by DSS via its State and Territory branches are advocated as a useful model for broader application in other agencies.

Good Practice

DSS’ Settlement Planning Updates

In addition to providing an overview of key developments in DSS for the information of stakeholders outside the Department, Settlement Planning Updates are also highlighted as useful in providing a statistical overview of up-to-date settlement data, to inform readers of the diversity inherent to their client base.

To maximise the utility of such a resource, it is recommended that such data be complimented with qualitative feedback from culturally and linguistically diverse clients, in order to provide a solid basis from which to further strengthen service delivery and meet diverse client needs.

For more details, visit the Department’s website, at:

81 FECCA 2013-14 Access and Equity Survey respondent
**Recommendation**

FECCA advocates the need for more robust awareness-raising activities to highlight the imperative links between the collection and analysis of diverse client data, and the need for this to be translated into positive reforms in service delivery.

**Measuring the Impact of Agency Multicultural Plans**

FECCA advocates the need for focus on the effectiveness of service delivery to not only be placed on the daily application of access and equity principles within agencies, but monitoring of how effectively Agency Multicultural Plans are implemented through consideration of the following questions:

- From an intra-agency perspective, does implementation of an Agency Multicultural Plan change the culture of the agency, and subsequently have a positive impact on service delivery as a result of cultural change?

- What are the mechanisms in place to measure the impact of agency multicultural plans and the extent to which they influence service delivery to better address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse clients?

FECCA advocates the need for agencies to consider the above questions in the context of broadly implementing Agency Multicultural Plans, to ensure that adequate mechanisms are in place to measure agency openness and progress towards improved service delivery.

**Maintaining Access and Equity Standards in All Aspects of Service Delivery**

In addition to ensuring intra-agency adherence to principles and obligations outlined in Agency Multicultural Plans, FECCA also advocates the need for agencies to similarly monitor service delivery that is outsourced by agencies to external parties, to ensure the application of access and equity principles across all aspects of service delivery.

In this context, FECCA highlights the existing requirements of external parties to adhere to privacy standards, as regulated by agencies, and advocates this model as a benchmark for adherence to access and equity standards.
Summary

- Measuring agency openness involves considering how flexible agencies are in thinking about and using diversity data—including the extent to which they appear to ‘know their clients’ and adapt service delivery to appropriately respond to client needs.
- The development and circulation of regular updates to agency staff regarding the diversity of their client base is advocated as a means through which to disseminate and raise awareness around such important data and encourage flexibility in service delivery, agency-wide.
Part 3:
Summary and Recommendations
Key Findings and Recommendations

An overriding theme that emerged from FECCA’s community consultations was the need for stronger coordination between government agencies to streamline and improve the delivery of services agency-wide. In this context, it was revealed that despite the existence of a number of good practice examples currently being implemented by different agencies, lack of awareness about such programs and limited communication between agencies regarding the processes used to develop and implement such practices, has resulted in service delivery that is often fragmented, and does not fully cater to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse clients.

To address this issue, FECCA subsequently recommends the need for more effective inter-agency communication at a national level to better respond to diverse client needs. Specific strategies through which to facilitate this are outlined as recommendations below.
FECCA envisages that the support group would consist of representatives of each agency responsible for the implementation of Agency Multicultural Plans and would provide a forum through which to share agency insights on partnership and coordination opportunities, models of good practice and other insights to improve the delivery of services to better address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse clients.

FECCA advocates its own involvement in the support group to contribute to agency engagement at meetings, and provide regular community feedback around which to frame support group discussions. In this context, FECCA specifically highlights the potential for greater agency openness through the establishment of the support group in two respects; firstly, through it serving as a mechanism to share information and agency updates, by way of embedding multicultural access and equity principles throughout all aspects of service delivery; and secondly, by providing a context for FECCA to deliver ongoing community feedback directly to agency representatives, and conversely, enabling FECCA to report back to communities on progress regarding the implementation of Agency Multicultural Plans. FECCA highlights that the scope of its work around access and equity goes beyond the community consultations it carries out annually, and as such, regular engagement with government agencies to assess progress around the implementation of Agency Multicultural Plans provides FECCA with a more solid foundation upon which to progress its broader access and equity work.

In addition to the above, FECCA also notes that the establishment of an inter-agency Multicultural Access and Equity support group provides a longer-term approach to the application of access and equity principles, and facilitates an opportunity for agencies to regularly reflect on progress regarding Agency Multicultural Plan implementation—that is, the support group’s establishment provides a mechanism to enable access and equity to move beyond the ‘abstract’, and be realised as an important and ongoing component of effective service delivery.

In this context, FECCA also highlights the potential for greater direct community engagement that could be facilitated through the establishment of the support group representing relevant agencies. Specifically, FECCA advocates the participation of support group members at its consultations with culturally and linguistically diverse community members around Australia, in order to provide culturally and linguistically diverse clients with an opportunity to query aspects of service delivery, and for agencies to subsequently respond and provide information directly to communities. Regarding this proposal, FECCA highlights the example of TIS National's involvement in FECCA 2013-14 Access and Equity Consultations as a good practice example, and a model to be replicated, going forward.
Key Recommendation 2

As an initial measure to establish the inter-agency support group, FECCA recommends that the Multicultural, Settlement Services and Communities Group, within the Commonwealth Department of Social Services, assumes leadership to convene a workshop that draws together representatives on all relevant government agencies to scope the parameters of the support group and its mandate.

FECCA particularly advocates for the involvement of those agencies whose examples of good practice have been included in this report to facilitate discussion about effective service delivery models, and conversely, recommends the involvement of agencies who have demonstrated limited progress in implementing Agency Multicultural Plans, in order to facilitate inter-agency support to boost performance across the board.

As per its previously-noted recommendation, FECCA advocates its involvement in facilitating delivery of the workshop, and recommends this report be used as a basis from which to inform the discussion—particularly in relation to the models of good practice that it has highlighted. In addition, FECCA recommends use of the following resources that it has recently produced to inform the workshop discussion, as well as the subsequent action that will result from it:

**Harmony in the Workplace factsheets**

Harmony in the Workplace: Delivering the Diversity Dividend is a series of factsheets at fostering greater awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity in Australian workplaces. FECCA recommends use of the factsheets as a guide from which to devise strategies to boost cultural competency of agencies and implement strategies to encourage broad support for a culturally diverse Australian workforce.

The factsheets can be downloaded from FECCA’s website, at: http://www.fecca.org.au/resources/harmony-in-the-workplace-factsheets

**Better Beginnings. Better Futures factsheets**

Better Beginnings. Better Futures is a series of factsheets that provide a community perspective on some of the most pressing issues affecting new and emerging communities in Australia. FECCA recommends use of the factsheets to better inform agency awareness of, and responsiveness to, issues impacting on new and emerging community groups in Australia.

The factsheets can be downloaded from FECCA’s website, at: http://www.fecca.org.au/resources/better-beginnings-better-futures-factsheets