



# Supporting Australian Women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds (CLDB)

Women's Policy Statement 2007



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## About FECCA

- FECCA is the national peak body representing and advocating for culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Our role is to advise, advocate, and promote issues on behalf of our constituency to government, business and the broader community.
- FECCA promotes Australian multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice, community participation and the rejection of discrimination so as to build a productive, culturally rich Australian society.
- FECCA's policies are designed around the concepts of empowerment and inclusion, and are formulated with the common good of all Australians in mind.

## Recognising issues affecting Australian Women from CLDB

Women from CLDB experience the double disadvantage of cultural diversity and gender that can result in their needs and issues being neither recognised nor addressed.

The key issues for women in 2007 are:

- discrimination
- leadership
- safety in the home, the community and the workplace
- health and disability
- employment
- work life balance



## Factors Impacting the Health and Well-Being of CLDB Australian Women

### **Discrimination**

- Women who are identifiably 'different', especially Muslim women and also African refugees have been subjected to racial vilification and discrimination in areas such as accommodation and employment<sup>1</sup>.
- Citizenship testing and increasing the qualifying time from 2-4 years marginalizes women from CLDB as they are less able to access English classes due to family commitments and cultural issues around the participation of women in the wider community<sup>2</sup>.

### **Leadership and Decision Making**

- Women consist of 50% of our society and yet only a fraction participate in leadership and decision making positions<sup>3</sup>.
- Despite skill shortages, many migrant women are prevented from practicing their professions in Australia because of slow processes and lack of recognition of their qualifications<sup>4</sup>.

### **Safety at home – Family and Domestic Violence**

- Family violence for women from CLDB is an often hidden issue that is significant within the community<sup>5</sup>
- There is a great need for newly arrived communities to be provided with education about the rights of women and children.
- Police and the legal system generally have lack of cultural knowledge and sensitivity in relation to family and domestic violence in the CLDB community<sup>6</sup>.
- Women from CLDB have problems obtaining access to existing resources and structures in the Family Law system<sup>7</sup>
- The latest changes to the Family Law Act will act as a disincentive for women to seek service. The risks and disadvantages for a woman of disclosing violence in a relationship are magnified for people whose first language is not English.



- Many of the women whose safety will be imperilled or whose lives will be lost as a result of actions facilitated under these new arrangements will be from culturally diverse backgrounds.
- Mental health and substance abuse problems will grow amongst domestic violence survivors<sup>8</sup>.

### **Safety in the Community**

- Abuse and violence targeting women and children from minority groups
- Victims of rape and sexual assault have poor access to the judicial system - evidenced by under-reporting rates<sup>9</sup>.
- Human trafficking including bringing women to Australia as sex workers<sup>10</sup>
- Women are not able to safely and reliably get to their destinations using public transport.

### **Safety at work**

- Reported harassment, bullying and accidents

### **Health and Disability**

- Women from CLDB identified important health issues including doctors lack of use of interpreters, need for greater access to medical specialists, waiting lists, the need for health information and prevention programs in languages other than English, and the lack of culturally and language appropriate doctors, nurses, meals on wheels providers and personal carers<sup>11</sup>.
- Mental health issues for women from CLDB include the impact of isolation from their extended family, the isolation of ageing, the need for greater social connectedness and the isolating impact of caring for children and home responsibilities<sup>12</sup>.
- Women from CLDB who have a disability face severe problems accessing services and participating in society.

### **Women, Employment and Economics**

- Lack of appropriate and available English language programs has a significant impact on the self esteem of women from CLDB and their capacity to obtain meaningful employment or further education<sup>13</sup>.



- Other issues that impact upon the capacity of women from CLDB to gain meaningful employment include problems obtaining the accreditation of overseas qualifications, access to training, access to education options in regional areas and unclear career paths and education choices<sup>14</sup>.
- As a consequence CLDB women are highly represented in unsecured and lower wage jobs. Recent changes to the Industrial Relations system have weakened the position of these women. Costs of seeking justice are beyond the reach of many, particularly those affected by unfair treatment at work.
- Welfare to Work changes have increased the pressure on single mothers putting the safety of their children at risk.
- Costs of childcare are often high.

#### **Work-life balance**

- Women are bearing a heavy burden for unresolved issues involving changing social roles and responsibilities<sup>15</sup>

Women with family/carer responsibilities carry an excessive share of unpaid work, including child care, elder care and associated housework. The imbalance of paid work and family/carer responsibilities has a direct impact on their life outcomes, including their social and economic status, participation in public life, health and emotional wellbeing<sup>16</sup>



## FECCA's Position on Policy and Programs for Australian Women from CLDB

FECCA Supports:

- The Federal Government's national campaign *Violence Against Women Australia Says No!* which has raised the community's awareness of issues of domestic violence and sexual assault.
- The full implementation of Access and Equity policies within the public sector to ensure that all service users are effectively represented in decision making.
- A national stock-take of women-led actions to promote cross cultural respect and understanding.
- The provision of resources for communities who aim to promote community cohesion and harmony.
- A national action plan to address the needs of international female students in Australia to be developed and resourced.

## FECCA's Recommendations for the Formulation of a Responsible and Effective Women's' Policy

### Policy Objectives

- The elimination of all discrimination against women, whether it is on the grounds of gender, religion, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity or age;
- Advocating and ensuring the rights of women to freedom from violence and oppressive acts, including domestic and family violence, detention that compounds pre-existing trauma, detention without fair trial or justifiable reasons and traditional practices detrimental to the health and well being of women and girls.



- Advocating and ensuring the right of women to access services, information and opportunities that will optimise quality of life.
- Supporting women to fulfil their responsibility in seeking to build a society that nurtures these rights.

## Supporting Australian Women from CLDB

FECCA believes that the following would positively address issues confronting women from CLDB.

**A strong commitment to eliminate discrimination against women from CLDB** by publicly advocating and enforcing existing anti-discrimination legislation and community inclusion policies.

**A strong commitment to building the participation of women from CLDB** in all parts of Australian life by:

- Supporting an increase in the participation of women on Boards and Committees at all levels of Government, Business and Non-Government organisations women's participation on boards and committees.
- Developing programs that enable the women's groups to contribute to decision-making within government.
- Leadership courses targeted to CLDB women.
- Leadership courses targeted to women from CLDB and advanced training to improve the skills of current women leaders.
- Commissioning research to determine the proportions of women from CLDB who participate in Boards and Committees.
- Increase resources for initiatives that target the participation of women from CLDB, for research into women's issues and for specific policy advocacy around gender issues.
- Greater promotion of women's interests through International Women's Day and other initiatives.

**Promoting access to leadership positions by women from CLDB** by:

- Improving the process for recognizing the skills and qualifications of overseas trained women from CLDB including the provision of bridging



courses to enable overseas trained professionals to meet the standards for recognition by Australian professional organisations.

- Providing a student loan program for bridging courses whereby you can borrow from the government to fund enrolment which is then paid back from earnings.
- Providing resources for Professional bodies, which regulate the practice of the professions, to aid in the recognition of skills gained overseas.

**Improving the safety of women from CLDB** in regard to family relationships, in the community and at work by:

- Providing education programs throughout the CLDB community about domestic violence, the law and the rights of women and children.
- Monitoring the impact of the Family Law system on women from CLDB.
- Developing cultural competency skills programs for staff who work in the area of violence against women including service providers, police and staff in the Family Relationships Centres.
- Including women from CLDB in decision-making in regard to safety policies in the areas of transport and other public sectors.
- Developing research to identify areas of under-reporting of violence and problems with access to services.
- Developing programs and providing resources to target human trafficking and the exploitation of women from CLDB.
- Providing resources and materials for women from CLDB in the workforce to improve their understanding of workplace rights and entitlements including in relation to workplace bullying and violence.

Improve access to health and disability services by women from CLDB by:

- Developing processes that include women with a disability in decision-making
- Support advocacy groups that provide services to women from CLDB in the areas of health and disability
- Support and provide specific funding for community based organisations and groups to collate and analyse data on the prevalence of chronic and



preventable health issues for women from CLDB and implement health education programs specifically designed for women from CLDB

- Ensure that health promotion campaigns and materials are available in languages other than English and that information is disseminated and promoted in ways that are accessible to women from CLDB.

Improve the employment conditions for women from CLDB by:

- Improving current access to ESL programs through the creation of more flexible arrangements for the English language allowance so that women can be allowed to commence the learning when they are ready and there is greater variety in the structure and nature of classes for which women can apply including the provision of classes after hours.
- Providing employment assistance programs and advice for women from CLDB so they are supported in developing skills to prepare for interviews, write resumes, understand the nature of the Australian workforce, learn about basic employment rights, and address other employment related issues.
- Supporting women from CLDB without qualifications to be able to receive recognition of prior learning and accreditation of their skills.
- Conducting research into the impact of the 'Fairpay Commission' on the wages and conditions of women from CLDB.
- Support the introduction of minimum wage levels that will allow women from CLDB to participate fully in society.
- Provide more childcare places and increase training of childcare workers.
- **Develop programs to address problems for women from CLDB in regard to the work/life balance** by implementing the recommendations of the HREOC Report 'It's About Time: women, men, work and family'.
- **Develop support programs for men**, particularly from newly arrived communities, to educate and assist them in accepting the different roles for women in Australian society.



## Sources

This policy has been formulated using feedback, comment, information, consultation and advice from the following:

1. FECCA's members and their networks across Australia
2. Service Providers, case workers, healthcare professionals and workers, volunteers
3. Federal, State and Local Government agencies
4. Advocacy bodies, peak bodies and professional organisations
5. Community leaders and members
6. Individual comment and experience

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> SUCCESSWORKS (2005b) Victorian Government Policies, Programs and Services for Migrant Women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds. A Discussion Paper. Department of Victorian Communities.

<sup>2</sup> FECCA (2006) Submission to discussion paper: Australian Citizenship: Much more than a ceremony. IN DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION AND MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS (Ed.) ACT.

<sup>3</sup> NESCI, A. (2006) Overcoming Barriers to providing domestic violence services for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. *National Homelessness Conference*. Sydney.

<sup>4</sup> AHMED M BERHAN (2006) Report of the African-Australasian Community's Initiative Workshop on Issues Affecting the Resettlement of Africans. African Think Tank Inc.

<sup>5</sup> SUCCESSWORKS (2005a) *CALD Women's Project. Final Report*, Department of Victorian Communities.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> NESCI, A. (2006) Overcoming Barriers to providing domestic violence services for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. *National Homelessness Conference*. Sydney.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



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<sup>9</sup> ASTBURY, J. (2006) Services for victim/survivors of sexual assault Identifying needs, interventions and provision of services in Australia. Australian Institute of Family Studies.

<sup>10</sup>(2007) Humantrafficking.org A web resource for combating human trafficking.

<sup>11</sup>SUCCESSWORKS (2005a) *CALD Women's Project. Final Report*, Department of Victorian Communities.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>AHMED M BERHAN (2006) Report of the African-Australasian Community's Initiative Workshop on Issues Affecting the Resettlement of Africans. African Think Tank Inc.

<sup>16</sup>HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION (2007) *It's About Time: Women, men, work and family. Final Paper.*