

## Supporting new and emerging culturally diverse communities to access aged care

### Introduction

Australia is home to a diverse population, including many seniors from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. These seniors often face unique challenges in accessing and receiving aged care services. This guide aims to provide practical strategies for supporting new and emerging culturally diverse seniors in aged care settings.

### What are new and emerging communities?

New and emerging communities in Australia are those that have recently arrived and are increasing in number. These communities can include humanitarian entrants, asylum seekers, skilled migrants, or individuals who are part of the family stream of entrants. They often face unique challenges in the settlement process, such as feelings of dislocation, housing issues, education worries, past trauma, low English proficiency, and employment issues.

The main identifiers of a new and emerging community are:

- a lack of established family networks, support systems, community structures and resources
- unfamiliarity with mainstream services and challenges in accessing these services.

New and Emerging Communities may have other identifiers including:

- limited English language proficiency
- high numbers of refugees
- low levels of formal education
- financial vulnerabilities
- difficulty in finding long-term and sustainable employment.

Some new and emerging communities, particularly those predominated by individuals from a refugee background, may have most or all the identifiers or vulnerabilities.

Some other migrant communities in Australia have grown very rapidly. These communities may also be considered as 'new and emerging' because of limited family networks and community structures, for example South Asian communities, or because of limited English proficiency, for example migrants from Mainland China. There may be especially vulnerable individuals within these communities such as women, partner visa holders or older persons.

The settlement experience of an individual, family and community has been influenced by a range of situational factors impacting the migration experience including:

- the reason for leaving place of origin
- the nature of the migration journey

- the support received on arrival.<sup>1</sup>

## Understanding the Needs of Culturally Diverse Seniors

Culturally diverse older people may experience an increased risk of poor mental and physical health due to factors such as migration journey, trauma, marginalisation, visa status, financial hardship, socioeconomic disadvantage, and social isolation. It is essential to understand these factors to provide effective support.

Some other challenges facing senior from new and emerging communities include:

### **Preference to live at home and the importance of extended family networks in supporting the ageing process.**

Family plays an important role in bridging cultural gaps and overcoming language barriers. Research from the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) found that seniors from the Bhutanese community are not familiar with the concept of living in an aged care facility and prefer their children to look after them. It is seen as a shame if children cannot take care of their parents. Services targeted at seniors from new and emerging communities need to take into account that people prefer living at home and that maintaining family connections is a vital component in ageing well.

### **Ageing Trends**

New and emerging ageing communities have arrived in Australia more recently. They are yet to experience their peak in their aged populations and will increasingly need access to aged care services. Communities need support to build an aged care infrastructure for their community. Often those communities are overlooked in funding allocations. Aged Care Infrastructure for New and emerging populations have no or an underdeveloped ethno-specific aged care infrastructure in place. Currently those communities mostly support their older people through the goodwill of volunteers.<sup>2</sup>

### **Social Isolation**

ECCV community feedback indicated that seniors from new and emerging communities are often isolated such as in some residential care facilities. One challenge is that new aged care facilities are being built far away from where ethnic communities live. It has been suggested that diversity standards of the accreditation process need to be put in place to include requirements to cater for diversity. This should entail same-language visiting programs, culturally appropriate food, and cultural activities to overcome social isolation.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Refugee Experience**

A considerable proportion of older people from new and emerging communities have experienced trauma and hardship in their country of origin. Further to this, the process of resettlement may affect negatively on their health and wellbeing. Pre-migratory and resettlement experiences may have a negative effect on mental health. Applying culturally appropriate trauma-informed practices, understanding the refugee and migrant experience and its impact on mental health and wellbeing is important in supporting seniors from new and

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<sup>1</sup> [New and Emerging Communities in Australia – FECCA](#)

<sup>2</sup> [https://eccv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/20-ECCV\\_Discussion\\_Paper\\_-\\_Healthy\\_Ageing\\_in\\_NEC.pdf](https://eccv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/20-ECCV_Discussion_Paper_-_Healthy_Ageing_in_NEC.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://eccv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/20-ECCV\\_Discussion\\_Paper\\_-\\_Healthy\\_Ageing\\_in\\_NEC.pdf](https://eccv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/20-ECCV_Discussion_Paper_-_Healthy_Ageing_in_NEC.pdf)

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emerging and refugee backgrounds.<sup>4</sup>

Many people who have had a refugee experience may have had difficult experiences such as fleeing war, community violence, or extreme poverty. Due to this experience, people from refugee backgrounds may be vulnerable to premature ageing before the age of 65<sup>5</sup>. Older people from CALD backgrounds are also vulnerable to experiencing racism and discrimination, which, when combined with trauma, can affect their wellbeing and limit their access to support. Examples of traumatic experiences may include:

- Escaping war, torture, dispossession, living in camps or detention – leaving a familiar environment and adjusting to a completely new environment
- Separation from family members due to the migrant or refugee experience
- Being exposed to disease, loss and violence in the context of poverty and/or poor nutrition
- Exposure to people who are sick and dying<sup>6</sup>.

## Key Considerations

- **Build rapport and trust:** Establish relationships of trust with CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) communities, families, and carers. This involves being aware of cultural and religious attitudes and beliefs about health and wellbeing.
- **To understand a new community,** it is important to research its demographic make-up, including country of birth, spoken languages, and visa stream. Engaging with key community leaders and influencers can help increase understanding and grow better knowledge.
- **Culturally Responsive Care:** Develop and implement care practices sensitive to the cultural, linguistic, and spiritual needs of seniors from CALD backgrounds. This includes co-designing service models with people from multicultural communities, families, and carers.
- **Community Engagement:** Engage with ethnic and multicultural community organisations to improve pathways to care.
- **Education and awareness:** Inform and raise awareness about health and mental health issues in community languages. This helps to reduce stigma and encourages seniors to seek assistance when needed.
- **Training and capacity building:** Provide ongoing culturally responsive training for all staff working in aged care and mental health services. This ensures they are equipped to identify and address the needs of culturally diverse seniors.
- **Addressing barriers:** Identify and address barriers to accessing services, such as language barriers, stigma, and discrimination. This may involve providing bilingual and bicultural support and developing stigma reduction programs within ethnic communities.
- **Collaborative partnerships:** Work in partnership with peak bodies and specialists in multicultural community engagement to deliver culturally appropriate care. This includes collaborating with organisations like Victorian Transcultural Mental Health and Beyond Blue.
- **Trauma-informed practices:** Apply culturally appropriate trauma-informed practices, understanding the refugee and migrant experience and its impact on mental health and wellbeing. Trauma-informed care takes a holistic approach, addressing the physical, emotional, and social aspects of well-being. This may involve integrating various therapeutic modalities and support services.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://eccv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/20-ECCV\\_Discussion\\_Paper\\_-\\_Healthy\\_Ageing\\_in\\_NEC.pdf](https://eccv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/20-ECCV_Discussion_Paper_-_Healthy_Ageing_in_NEC.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [https://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/3051/1/Caring%20for%20older%20refugees%20in%20NSW\\_SSWAHS.pdf](https://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/3051/1/Caring%20for%20older%20refugees%20in%20NSW_SSWAHS.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [April-June Workbook WEB\\_FA2.pdf](#)

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- It is important to minimise re-traumatisation; listening patiently to a person's life story and experiences, use gentle and supportive 'third person' enquiry, 'generalising and normalising' their difficult experiences and current issues, contributes to healing<sup>7</sup>.

## Good Practice Story

### Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria's Ageing Well Hub

The Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria's (ECCV) Ageing Well Hub is a resource for older people from migrant and refugee communities and their families and carers, as well as the multicultural aged care sector.

The hub runs a range of projects promoting positive ageing to multicultural seniors groups, coordinate the Access and Support (A&S) Network, and deliver training for bilingual community educators to engage and inform their communities about how to prevent and respond to elder abuse. This hub also features an overview of ECCV's work as well as information on positive ageing in culturally diverse communities, resources and in-language information.

For more information visit:

[Ageing Well Hub - Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria](#)

**Ageing Well Hub**

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Welcome to our Ageing Well Hub. This hub has been developed as a resource for older people from migrant and refugee communities and their families and carers, as well as the multicultural aged care sector.

Older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds face multiple, overlapping disadvantages and barriers and can find it difficult to navigate the aged care system and access culturally safe support.

Promoting the rights and interests of older people from migrant and refugee communities has long been one of our organisational priorities. Since ECCV was founded in 1974, we have supported and advocated for multicultural seniors through our policy and advocacy work, including consultations and research to inform government policy and programs and improve inclusion and equity.

We also run a range of projects promoting positive ageing to multicultural seniors groups, coordinate the Access and Support (A&S) Network, and deliver training for bilingual community educators to engage and inform their communities about how to prevent and respond to elder abuse.

This hub features an overview of our work as well as information on positive ageing in culturally diverse communities, resources and in-language information.

### Our Projects

- Aged Care Sector Support
- Elder Abuse Prevention
- Seniors Health & Wellbeing
- Seniors Clubs & Associations
- Supporting Carers

<sup>7</sup> [Older people » Australian Refugee Health](#)

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## Useful Resources and Further Reading

**Australian Refugee Health Practice Guide, 2025 Victorian Multicultural Commission**

<https://refugeehealthguide.org.au/older-people/>

**Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, 2018**

[https://eccv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/20-ECCV\\_Discussion\\_Paper\\_-\\_Healthy\\_Ageing\\_in\\_NEC.pdf](https://eccv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/20-ECCV_Discussion_Paper_-_Healthy_Ageing_in_NEC.pdf)

**Federation for Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, 2018**

[New and Emerging Communities in Australia – FECCA](#)

**National Seniors Australia, 2018**

<https://nationalseniors.com.au/uploads/07183049PAR-DealingWithDiversity-ResearchReport-Web.pdf>

**NSW Refugee Health Service, 2006**

[https://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/3051/1/Caring%20for%20older%20refugees%20in%20NSW\\_SS\\_WAHS.pdf](https://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/3051/1/Caring%20for%20older%20refugees%20in%20NSW_SS_WAHS.pdf)

**NSW Refugee Support Network Older Refugees Working Group - 2017**

<http://refugeenursesaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Key-Issues-for-Newly-Arrived-Older-Refugees-FINAL-for-circulation.pdf>

**Phoenix Australia, Trauma Informed Care workbook, 2021**

[April-June Workbook WEB FA2.pdf /](#)

**STARTTS, 2025**

<https://www.startts.org.au/training/introductory-workshops/aged-care-and-refugee-trauma/>

**University of Virginia, 2021, Trauma-informed Primary Care of Refugees**

[https://med.virginia.edu/family-medicine/wp-content/uploads/sites/285/2021/11/Piccolo\\_Trauma-Informed-Care-of-Refugees\\_Final-October-2021.pdf](https://med.virginia.edu/family-medicine/wp-content/uploads/sites/285/2021/11/Piccolo_Trauma-Informed-Care-of-Refugees_Final-October-2021.pdf)

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LAST UPDATED: April 2025