Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing

Multicultural seniors share their perspectives on ageing well

Report
November 2024

Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing
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Community Partners

The Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing commissioned this report, which the following partner organisations have endorsed.

We appreciate the contribution and support from Settlement Services International.

Executive Summary

This report highlights the findings from workshops conducted with seniors from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. These workshops were designed to uncover seniors' values, challenges, and needs as they age and co-create communication to ensure their voices are heard in future planning. Participants shared strong feelings about maintaining independence, accessing culturally appropriate care, and ensuring fairness in the aged care system. These insights form the basis for recommendations.

Key Points

- **Seniors value:**
  - Maintaining independence and having a choice in their care decisions.
  - Staying connected to their communities through meaningful activities and volunteer opportunities.
  - Flexible, culturally tailored services that respect their traditions, languages, and religious practices while adapting to their changing needs.
- **Significant challenges include:**
  - Language barriers that make it difficult to access care and understand services.
  - Social isolation, particularly for those without strong community ties or access to culturally relevant activities.
  - A lack of culturally appropriate care, including tailored dietary, religious, and social needs.
- **We recommend the following key actions:**
  - Expand Language and culturally inclusive services: Increase access to interpreters, multilingual resources, and culturally appropriate care through training programs co-created with diverse communities, upskilling providers in inclusive practices, and providing direct communication channels in multiple languages.
  - Support Community Engagement: Provide regular training, resources, and partnerships with community groups and volunteers to improve outreach, advocacy, and social support for seniors while also enhancing flexibility in-home care packages to better meet individual needs.
  - Improve Access to Information: Develop proactive communication campaigns and hold regular information sessions in various formats to ensure seniors and their communities are well-informed about available services, support options, and elder abuse prevention.

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Introduction

Background

The Centre for Culture Diversity in Ageing initiated this engagement to ensure that the voices of elders from diverse backgrounds are central to the aged care reforms following the Royal Commission. With over 25 years of experience, The Centre helps aged care providers meet the needs of Australia's diverse aging population. This project amplifies the experiences of seniors from diverse communities to ensure aged care services are both inclusive and equitable.

Intent of the Work

We designed this project to engage with seniors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to understand better their unique needs and challenges within the aged care system. The goal of bringing together participants from various communities was to ensure their voices were heard and included in future aged care reforms. This work focused on creating meaningful conversations and co-creating a communication that will be used to inform decisions addressing older Australians' diverse cultural, linguistic, and social needs.

Scope

The scope of this report includes feedback and insights gathered from workshops with senior Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, focusing on their values, challenges, and recommendations for improving aged care services. The report reflects these communities' existing and anticipated needs and offers suggestions based on this consultation.
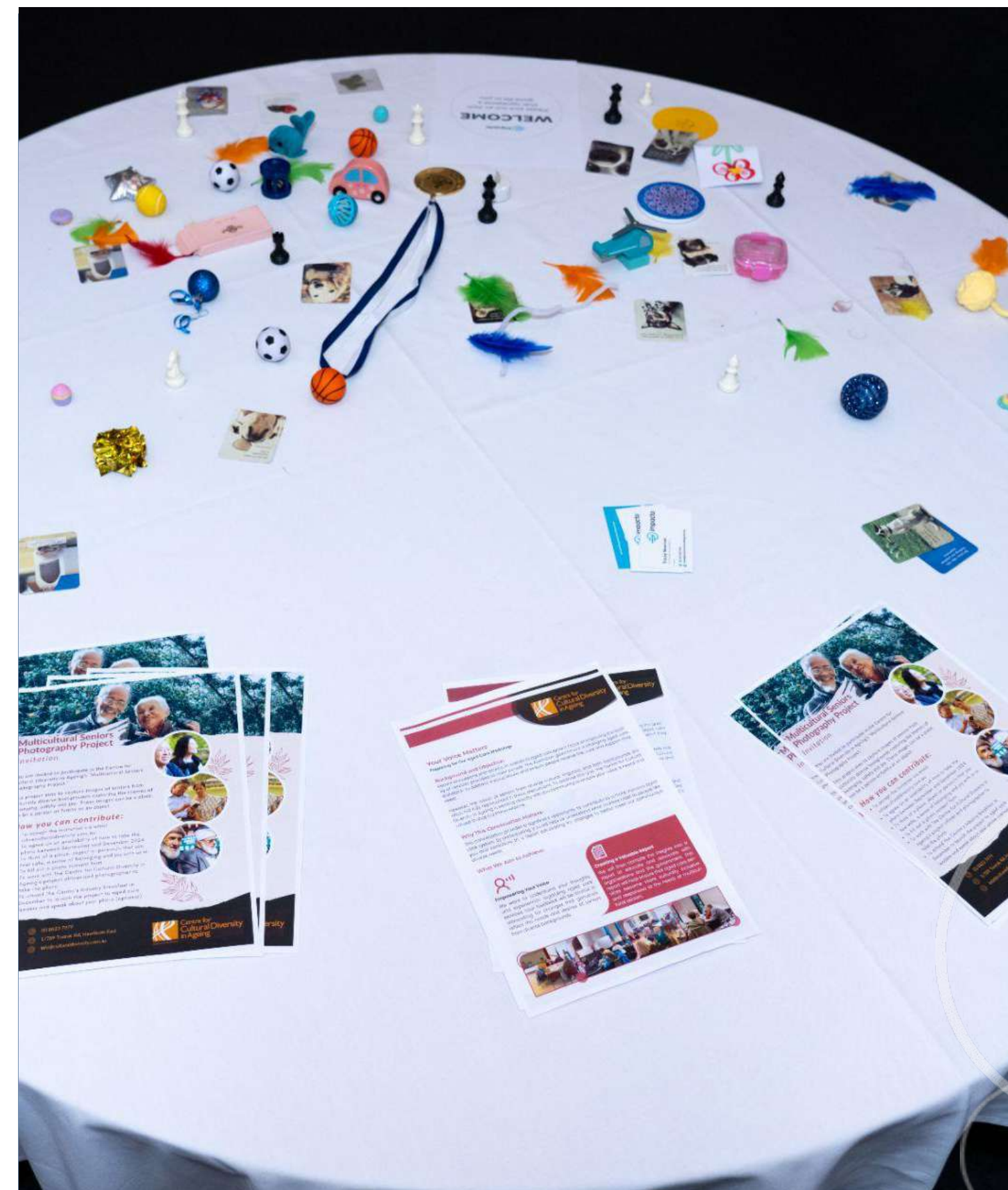
Engagement

We worked with key community organisations to ensure that seniors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds were well represented in the engagement process. These partnerships enabled us to hear from groups often underrepresented in aged care consultations.

Workshop 1

Coburg (Spectrum, with the Northern Federation of Ethnic Senior Citizens Clubs)

Held in partnership with Spectrum, an organisation dedicated to supporting culturally diverse communities. Spectrum helped connect us with members of the Northern Federation of Ethnic Senior Citizens Clubs, which includes seniors from Chinese, Vietnamese, Indian, Polish, Maltese, Filipino, and Mauritian backgrounds. These clubs operate in several local government areas across Melbourne's northern region. By partnering with Spectrum and the Federation, we engaged seniors from various ethnic backgrounds, ensuring broad and inclusive participation.

Workshop 2

Dandenong (Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre, SMRC)

The second workshop was conducted with the support of the Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre (SMRC), which provides services to newly arrived migrants and refugees. SMRC's in-language programs and community connections helped us engage seniors from Filipino, Spanish, Polish, Turkish, Serbian, Romanian, Cambodian, and Chinese backgrounds. Their involvement ensured that seniors from various backgrounds, including those with different visa statuses and differing access to funding, could participate in the consultation.

Workshop 3

Dandenong (African Women's and Families Network, AWAFN)

The third workshop was held in partnership with the African Women's and Families Network (AWAFN). AWAFN's strong relationships within the African Australian community allowed us to reach seniors often not included in mainstream aged care consultations. Their involvement helped us connect with African seniors who felt comfortable participating due to the trust and support AWAFN has built within their community.

Participant Demographics: Participants across all three workshops represented a broad range of cultural backgrounds, including Greek, Italian, Polish, Maltese, Indian, Lebanese, Korean, Macedonian, Mauritian, Japanese, Spanish, South Sudanese, Somalian, Ethiopian, Ugandan, Malawian, Eritrean, Zimbabwean, Assyrian, and Burundian communities. The workshops also included participants who were NDIS recipients and individuals on bridging visas who were not eligible for Medicare or aged care support.

There was a gender mix of participants, with 61% identifying as female and 39% as male, reflecting the cohort's diversity, with a higher proportion of women, similar to the broader older population.

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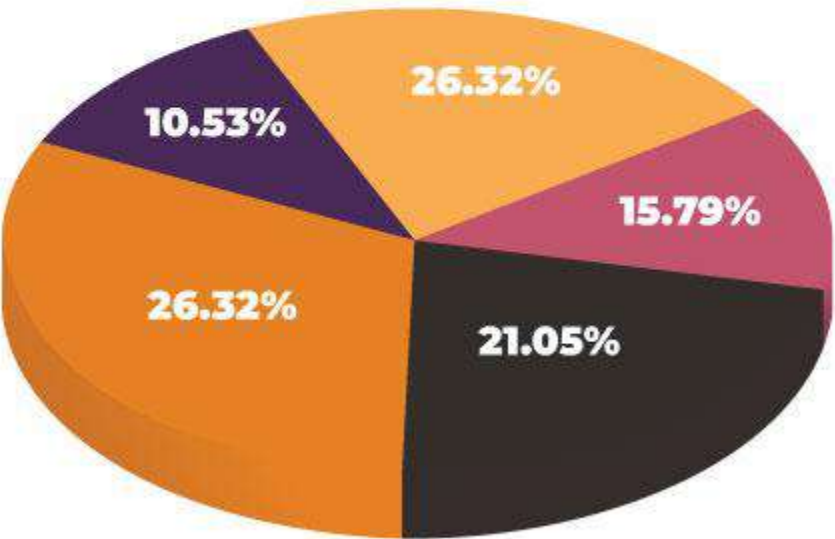in Ageing
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Challenges

Overview

These Workshops, revealed key challenges the participants and their communities currently face and anticipate in the future. Their responses were reviewed and categorised into the following themes:
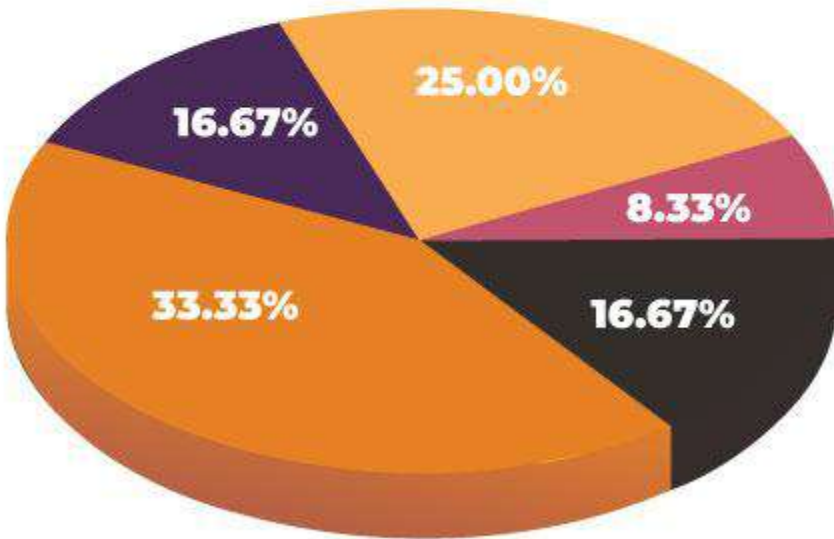
1. **Health and Well-being** – Physical and mental health issues and the impact of aging.

2. **Language and Communication** – Challenges with language and understanding services.

3. **Social Isolation** – Feeling lonely or disconnected from community support.

4. **Access to Services** – Issues with transportation, finances, and navigating aged care.

5. **Technology** – Difficulty using or understanding digital tools and services.

The percentages below show how often each theme was mentioned by participants, reflecting both current and anticipated concerns.

Existing Challenges
- 26.32%
- 15.79%
- 21.05%
- 26.32%
- 10.53%

Anticipated Challenges
- 25.00%
- 8.33%
- 16.67%
- 33.33%
- 16.67%

Combined Challenges
- 25.81%
- 12.90%
- 19.35%
- 29.03%
- 12.90%

"To calculate these percentages, we reviewed each challenge documented, organised them into themes, and then determined the percentage of all challenges that fell into each category or theme."
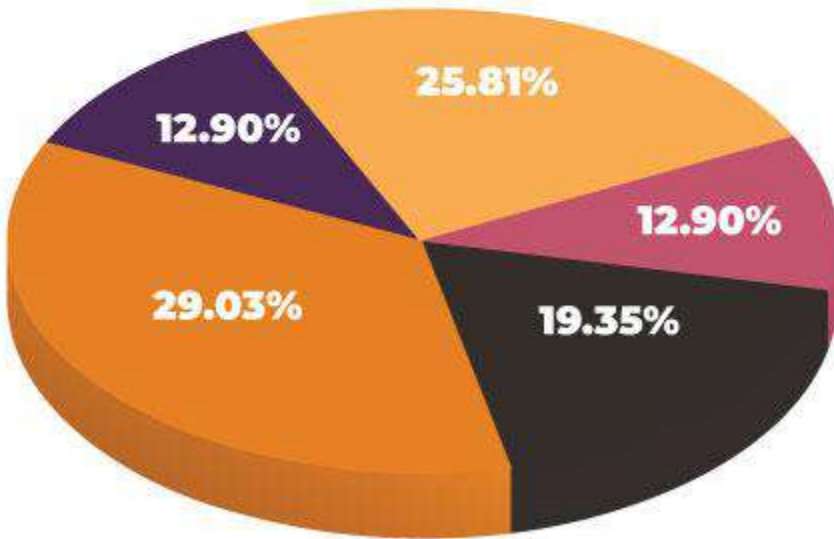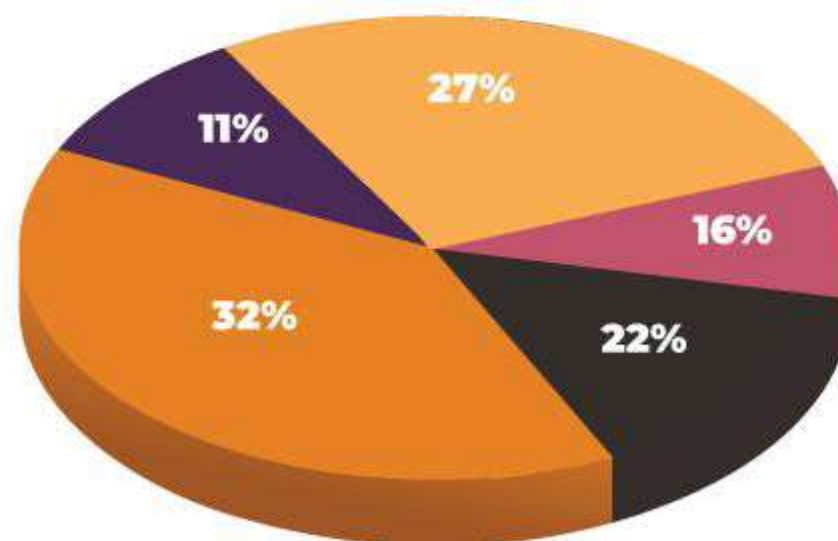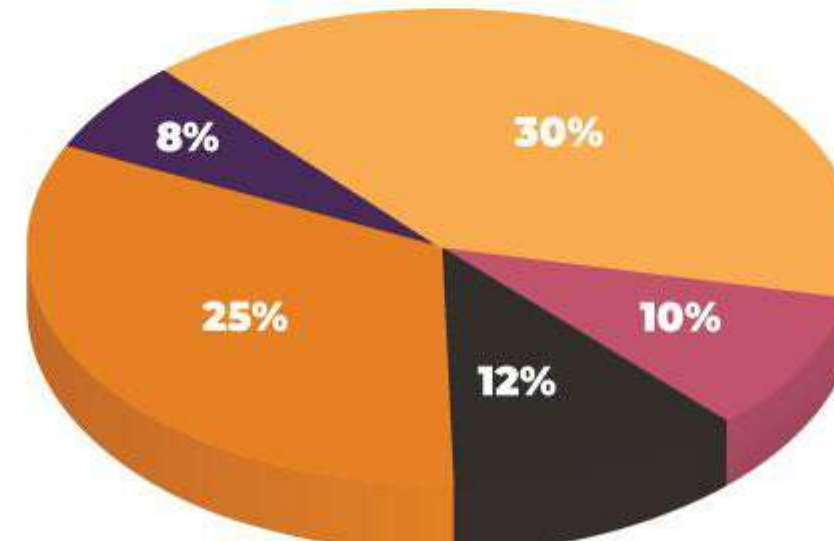
Challenges

The following graphs show the breakdown of challenges identified during each workshop. While the cultural backgrounds and communities represented in each session differ, the challenges raised are similar across all workshops, particularly in health, access to services, and social isolation.

1. **Health and Well-being** – Physical and mental health issues and the impact of aging.

2. **Language and Communication** – Challenges with language and understanding services.

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4. **Access to Services** – Issues with transportation, finances, and navigating aged care.

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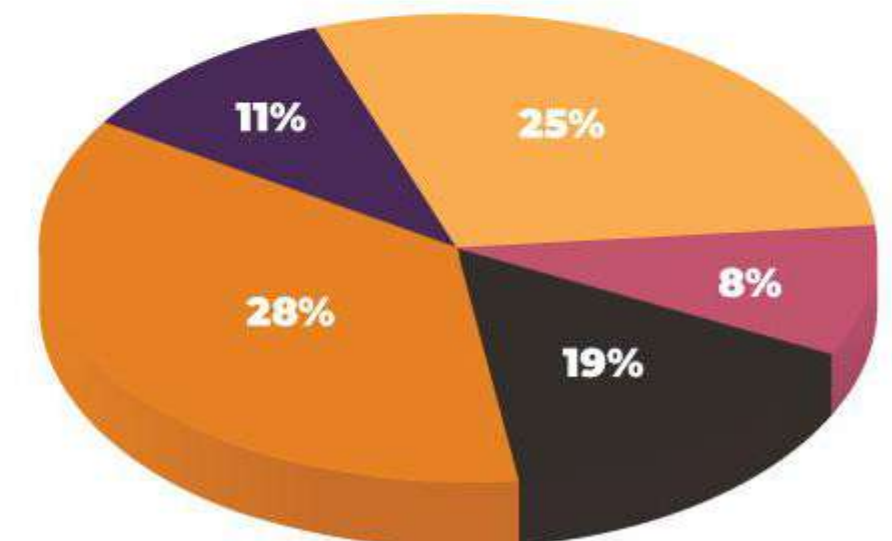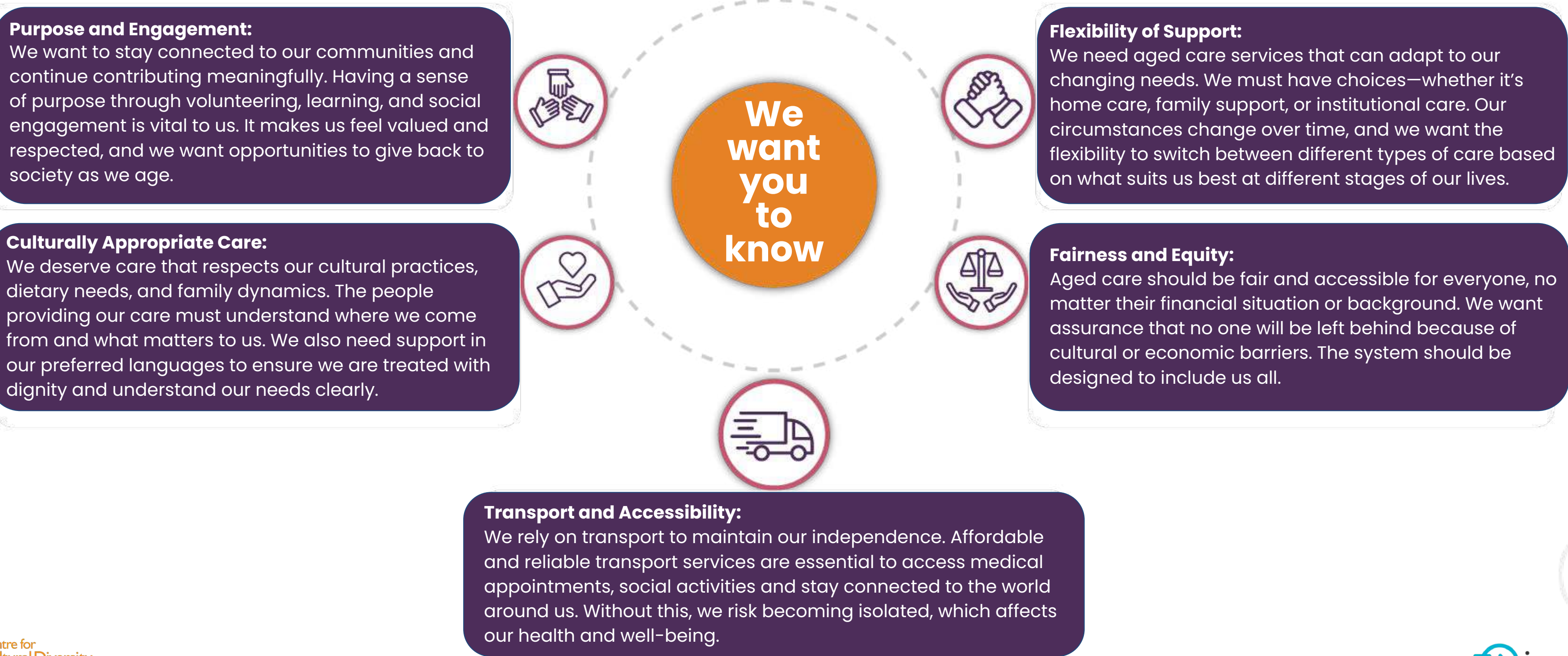## Workshop 1

Workshop 2

Workshop 3

"To calculate these percentages, we reviewed each challenge documented, organised them into themes, and then determined the percentage of all challenges that fell into each category or theme."

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Co-Created Communication

What We Want Everyone to Know:

Across the three workshops, participants shared many common priorities despite differences in their cultural backgrounds. The discussions highlighted shared values such as the importance of culturally sensitive care, language support, and equitable access to aged care services. Across all of the workshops these were the highest rated items that the participants wanted others to know about them.

Purpose and Engagement:
We want to stay connected to our communities and continue contributing meaningfully. Having a sense of purpose through volunteering, learning, and social engagement is vital to us. It makes us feel valued and respected, and we want opportunities to give back to society as we age.

Flexibility of Support:
We need aged care services that can adapt to our changing needs. We must have choices—whether it's home care, family support, or institutional care. Our circumstances change over time, and we want the flexibility to switch between different types of care based on what suits us best at different stages of our lives.

We want you to know

Culturally Appropriate Care:
We deserve care that respects our cultural practices, dietary needs, and family dynamics. The people providing our care must understand where we come from and what matters to us. We also need support in our preferred languages to ensure we are treated with dignity and understand our needs clearly.

Fairness and Equity:
Aged care should be fair and accessible for everyone, no matter their financial situation or background. We want assurance that no one will be left behind because of cultural or economic barriers. The system should be designed to include us all.

Transport and Accessibility:
We rely on transport to maintain our independence. Affordable and reliable transport services are essential to access medical appointments, social activities and stay connected to the world around us. Without this, we risk becoming isolated, which affects our health and well-being.

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Workshop #1

This workshop included seniors from Japanese, Indian, Polish, Maltese, Filipino, and Greek backgrounds, brought together with the help of Spectrum and the Northern Federation of Ethnic Senior Citizens Clubs.

Participants emphasised that they want to **stay in their own homes for as long as possible**. Being able to remain in a familiar and comfortable environment is essential to their well-being. They also stressed the importance of having **more control over how funds from their home care packages are spent**. Participants want the flexibility to direct funds to what matters most to them. For example, some people prefer to use their funds to maintain their **gardens**, which are crucial to their mental and physical health, rather than for other services that they value less. This highlights a strong desire for **personal choice and flexibility** in managing their care.
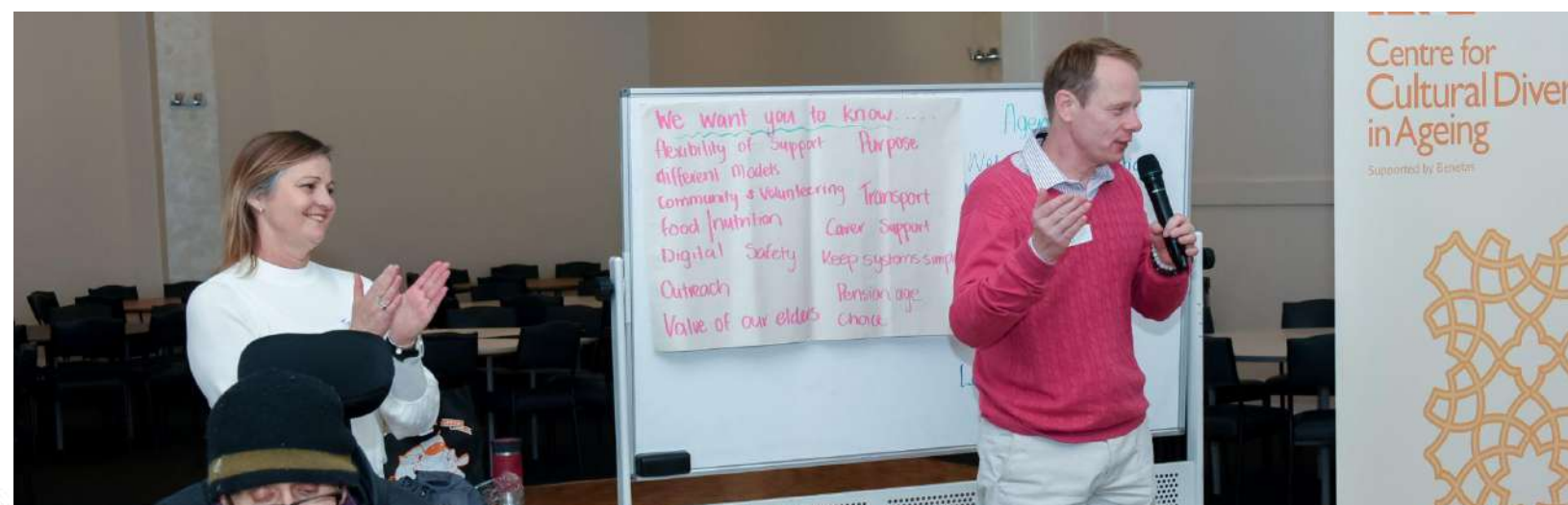
Workshop #1

In addition, participants expressed the need for **purpose** and the ability to **engage with their communities**. They want to feel needed and valued, continuing to contribute in meaningful ways, whether through volunteering, social groups, or other community activities. This sense of purpose was identified as critical for maintaining mental health and overall well-being.

Participants voted on the most important issues to communicate:

Maintaining a sense of purpose

Having flexible support that adapts to our changing needs

Access to **different models of care** that offer choice and personalisation

Workshop #2

This workshop included seniors from Sri Lankan, Afghan, Filipino, Chilean, Cambodian, Indian, and Chinese backgrounds, with support from the Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre (SMRC).

Participants focused on **fairness in aged care**, making sure services are accessible to everyone, no matter their financial situation or cultural background. They also discussed the importance of **respect for seniors**, wanting to be treated with dignity and for their life experiences to be valued. A key concern was the need for **reliable transport**, which is essential for staying connected to the community, getting to medical appointments, and maintaining independence.

Workshop #2

Without affordable and accessible transport options, many seniors worry about becoming isolated.

Participants voted on the most important issues to communicate:

**Fairness** in aged care for everyone

Respect for seniors

The need for **reliable transport** to maintain independence

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Workshop #3

This workshop included seniors and carers from South Sudanese, Somalian, Ethiopian, Ugandan, Malawian, Burundian, Eritrean, Zimbabwean, and Mauritian backgrounds.

Participants spoke about the importance of **support in their preferred languages** and **culturally appropriate care**. They also shared the value of **community support** as they age, with many explaining that it's common for them to **return to their home countries** to be cared for by extended family, even if their children remain in Australia. This reflects the strong cultural tradition of family care. However, participants also acknowledged the challenges of maintaining these traditions while living in Australia and the importance of **local community support**.
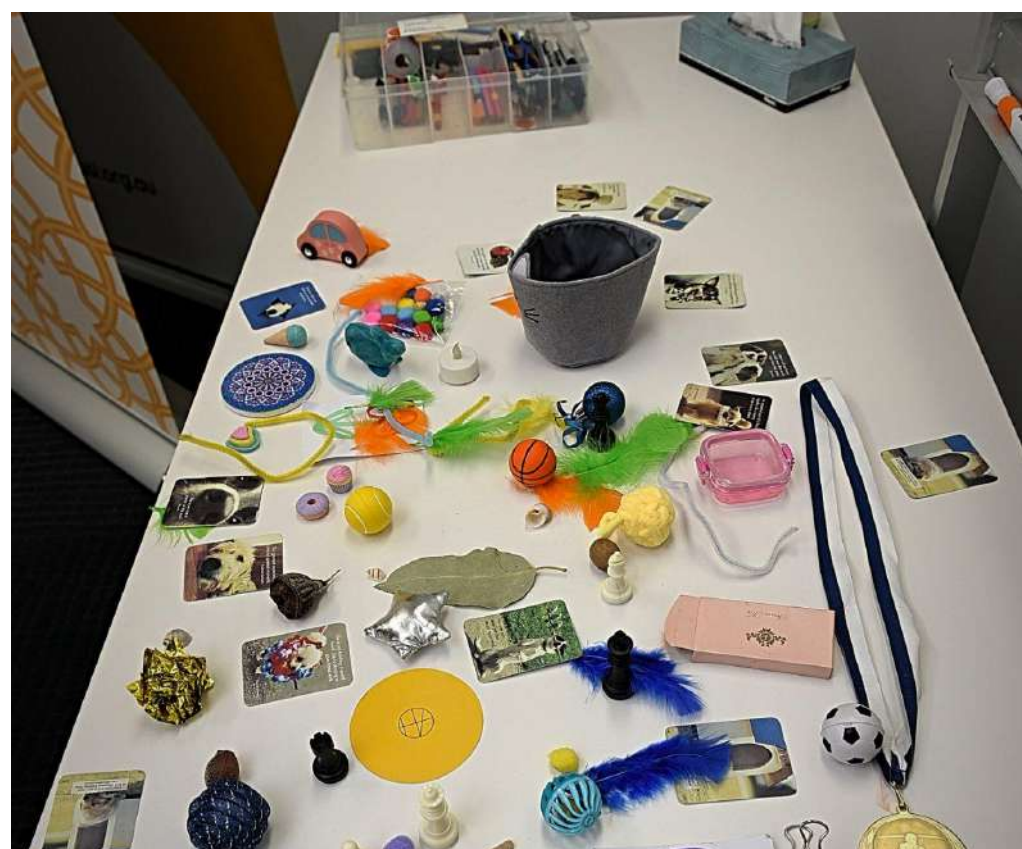
Workshop #3

There was a strong call for **real action** after these discussions, with participants asking for tangible changes instead of just more consultations. They want their feedback to lead to outcomes.

Participants voted on the most important issues to communicate:

Support in preferred languages

Culturally appropriate support

The need to see **tangible outcomes**, not just more consultations

Additional Benefits

This project allowed participants to share their experiences, strengthen existing relationships, and form connections between community organisations, government agencies, and the Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing. These relationships will continue to support efforts toward more inclusive aged care services.

Connections Between Participants

The workshops allowed seniors from different cultural backgrounds, with varying visa statuses and access to funding, to connect. Participants formed new relationships by sharing their stories and challenges, reducing feelings of isolation. Many appreciated the chance to meet others facing similar situations, helping to create a stronger sense of community and support.

Deepened Relationships with Existing Community Organisations

The Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing has long-standing relationships with Spectrum and SMRC. Through this project, these relationships were further strengthened, as working together on the workshops allowed for closer collaboration and a deeper understanding of the needs of the seniors in these communities. The partnerships with Spectrum and SMRC made engaging a wide range of participants easier, and the project reinforced the importance of ongoing collaboration to better serve seniors from culturally and linguistically diverse vs backgrounds in the future.

Engagement with Government Representatives

Representatives from the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission and the Australian Department of Health and Aged Care participated directly in the workshops. This participation allowed them to hear seniors' concerns and needs first-hand. These agencies also built connections with community groups and have since been invited to continue conversations with other community members. Learning more about how these government departments work helped build trust and understanding for the participants.

New Relationship with AWAFN

A key outcome of the project was forming a new relationship between The Centre and AWAFN. This new connection lays the foundation for future collaboration, enabling The Centre to understand better and address the specific needs of African Australian seniors. This partnership will strengthen the support networks for African Australian seniors and ensure their voices are included in aged care discussions going forward.

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Participants Feedback

At the end of each workshop, we asked participants to share their feedback on the session and whether they would recommend the workshops to friends and family. Almost all participants said they would highly recommend the workshops. Only one participant expressed hesitation, explaining that they wanted to see progress and the implementation of issues discussed before making a recommendation.

Participants appreciated the opportunity to learn about the challenges faced by other communities and were surprised by how much they shared in common. They found the session **informative** and enjoyed **their conversations** with others, often expressing that they felt **understood, appreciated, and heard**. Many noted that the open discussions and the chance to speak freely were highlights of the session.

Key highlights participants mentioned included:

- **Learning from each other** about different communities' experiences.
- They felt their voices were being **listened to**, and we took their concerns seriously.
- The **open questions and conversations** allowed everyone to share their perspectives.
- Discovering that **residential aged care can be accessed even on a pension** was new information for many.

> *Thanks, I will recommend this highly since it opened my eyes.*

> *Learned a lot and enjoyed meeting the staff from The Centre.*

> *They listened to us. Some ideas sound silly but it was important to us.*

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Participants Feedback

> " *Thank you for giving African Women's and Families (AWAFN), the opportunity to interact with you face-to-face. Your attendance was not a gesture but a profound expression of support and willingness to listen. We are looking forward to a positive outcome.*
> *- Theresa Ssali* "

Overall, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Participants left the workshops feeling more informed and connected to their communities and the aged care system.

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Recommendations for Further Consideration

These recommendations are based on what the participants shared during the workshops. They align with the current Aged Care Quality Standards (Standards 1 and 4) and the new strengthened standards (Standards 1, 2, and 3)

Expand Language Services:
- Increase access to interpreters and multilingual resources in various formats, including direct contact channels in multiple languages.
- Partner with local communities to recruit workers from diverse communities and support culturally appropriate communication.

Enhance Culturally Appropriate Care:
- Co-create training programs with diverse seniors and community leaders to ensure aged care workers understand cultural practices, dietary needs, and family dynamics.
- Introduce tailored support for emerging cultural communities and certify care providers in culturally inclusive practices.

Support Community Groups and Volunteers:
- Provide regular training and resources for community groups to support older adults, including funding and advocacy tools.
- Build direct partnerships between aged care services and community organisations for better outreach and information sharing.

Increase Flexibility in Home Care Packages:
- Allow seniors to direct their home care package funds to support what matters most to them, such as garden maintenance or social activities.
- Streamline processes for adjusting care plans as needs change.

Improve Access to Information and Support:
- Develop targeted campaigns with community leaders to share available services and support information proactively.
- Establish regular information sessions, both online and in-person, using simple language and accessible formats to keep seniors informed.

Additional Information

Additional Insights

Participants emphasised the **importance of community**, explaining how they rely on each other for support and how being part of a strong community network gives real value to their lives.

Many people **don't know what services are available**, meaning they often miss out on support. More **proactive communication is needed** to ensure that information about services is easily accessible and understandable. Engaging community leaders or trusted organisations to share this information could help reach more people effectively.

Participants were also very aware of **elder abuse** and noted that communication around this issue has been effective in raising awareness. Participants are eager to be part of the solution and to work with local councils and other organisations to improve the care and support available in their communities.

Next Steps

The report will be presented to government representatives to initiate discussions on improving aged care services for culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The findings will also be available to the broader community to raise awareness and foster further dialogue on the importance of culturally inclusive care.

Conclusion

This report shows how important it is for multicultural communities, service providers, and the government to keep working together. By continuing this collaboration, we can ensure the voices of seniors are heard and that their needs shape the future of aged care. Together, we can create services that respect their cultural, language, and social needs, while also helping them live with dignity and independence. Ongoing partnership is key to making real improvements in aged care for everyone.

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