

**ACCESS TO  
MAINSTREAM  
SERVICES  
BY CULTURALLY  
AND  
LINGUISTICALLY  
DIVERSE  
COMMUNITIES  
IN  
MANNINGHAM,  
WHITEHORSE  
& KNOX**

**Executive Summary**

**Disclaimer:**

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The report is also available on the MIC website at [www.miceastmelb.com.au](http://www.miceastmelb.com.au).

For further information please contact:

Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne)  
333 Mitcham Road  
Mitcham  
VIC 3132  
ABN 27 084 251 669

Phone: 9873 1666  
Fax: 9873 2911

Email: [sherbst@miceastmelb.com.au](mailto:sherbst@miceastmelb.com.au)  
Website: [www.miceastmelb.com.au](http://www.miceastmelb.com.au)

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# Executive Summary

*This project was initiated in response to concerns by the Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne) that people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds in the Eastern Region of Melbourne are not accessing mainstream services.*

The project aimed to assess the level of usage by CALD communities of mainstream services, identify what barriers exist that inhibit CALD communities from utilising mainstream services, and investigate ways of addressing those barriers. The project was focused on a range of family and youth services provided to populations in the local government areas of Manningham, Whitehorse, and Knox in the Eastern Region of Melbourne. HACC services were not considered.

## BACKGROUND

The impetus for the project came from four sources:

1. Anecdotal evidence collected by the MIC regarding low service use of mainstream services by CALD communities in the Eastern Region of Melbourne. One of the roles of the MIC is to promote access for migrants to all services provided in the community (MIC 2003b) including promotion of the availability of these services and encouraging agencies to develop culturally sensitive services.
2. Recognition that a significant proportion of the population in the Eastern Region of Melbourne were born in non-English speaking countries (18%) and speak a language other than English at home (20%). More specifically, 27% of the Manningham population was born in non-English speaking countries and 35% speak a language other than English at home. These percentages are 20% and 22% for Whitehorse and 15.5% and 16% for Knox (Ashby 2003).
3. A continued emphasis by government on minimal specific intervention for migrants and the provision of services to migrants via the mainstream. Most recently espoused through the 2003 Coalition Government's policy statement *Multicultural Australia: united in diversity* (Commonwealth of Australia 2003) and supported by the 1998 *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society* (DIMIA 1998). More recently the DIMIA 2003 *Review of Settlement Services* recommended that specific settlement services for migrants be focused on humanitarian and refugee entrants who have been here for less than five years and on family entrants with low English proficiency. All other members of CALD communities, including newly arrived skilled migrants, are expected to access services via mainstream agencies (DIMIA 2003c).

In addition, the Victorian Government, responsible for many of the mainstream services considered in this project, has endorsed the *Charter* and emphasises a "whole of government" approach to diversity (VOMA 2002).

4. A review of Australian research from the last ten years regarding service use by CALD communities, factors that affect access to services and strategies to make services more accessible. Half of the reports considered service use by CALD communities and all of these found that service use by non-English speaking people was lower than for English speaking people. Issues raised included the need for reliable ethnicity data, assumptions made about the level of need for services, and the quality of service provision.

Nearly all of the reports consulted with service providers, CALD communities or both to identify factors and strategies that affect access to services with similar results to this research (see below). The past research also identified factors and strategies regarding the policy and planning of services such as the existence of access and equity policies, type of data collected, and level of understanding of community needs.

The review of past research highlighted the need for more local data about service use and strategies to improve access to services in the Eastern Region of Melbourne.

## **METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS**

The project was undertaken within an action research philosophy and collected quantitative and qualitative data. Stage one of the project aimed to determine the level of usage of services by CALD communities. It involved the collection of country of birth and language data about clients who used services in Manningham, Whitehorse and Knox in 2002/2003. Quantitative data was obtained from individual agencies or from the Victorian Department of Human Services. The percentage of clients from CALD backgrounds using services was compared with the percentage of people in the population from CALD backgrounds and deemed to have a satisfactory outcome if the difference was no more than 5% either way.

The overall finding from Stage one was that people from CALD backgrounds did not access mainstream services as well as they should. Only 26% of data groups analysed for country of birth data had a satisfactory result, and 19% of data groups analysed for language data had a satisfactory result. In addition:

- 61% of data groups for country of birth data had unsatisfactory results with a percentage difference of between minus 5% and minus 20%. Only 13% of these data groups had unsatisfactory results where the percentage of CALD clients was actually higher than the percentage in the population statistics.
- 78% of data groups for language data had unsatisfactory results with a percentage difference of between minus 5% and minus 20%. Only 3% of these data groups had unsatisfactory results where the percentage of CALD clients was actually higher than the percentage in the population statistics.
- While Manningham has the highest percentage of people born in a non-English speaking country out of the three LGA's considered, it had the lowest percentage of data groups (7%) with a satisfactory result for country of birth data. Alternatively, it had the highest percentage of data groups (25%) with satisfactory results for language data.
- 3 of the 10 satisfactory data groups for country of birth data were made up from Enhanced Maternal and Child Health services, 2 from Clinical Mental Health services and 2 from Community Health services. 2 of the 6 satisfactory data groups for language data were made up from Enhanced Maternal and Child Health services and 3 from Problem Gambling services.

Stage two of the project collected information about factors that affect access to services and strategies to address those factors. It involved interviews with satisfactory and unsatisfactory mainstream agencies and ethno-specific agencies, and analysis of previous consultations conducted by the MIC with CALD communities. A Reference Group of representatives from mainstream and ethno-specific agencies was established to provide advice and support about the consultation and

development of recommendations. Results from Stage two indicated that there are a number of factors that affect access to services by CALD communities and a number of strategies that could address those factors. There were no clear differences between satisfactory and unsatisfactory agencies. The factors and strategies identified can be classified into three main groups:

- Language and communication – such as English proficiency, availability and use of interpreters, bilingual workers and translated material;
- Information and knowledge about services – such as knowledge about the existence of services, what they do, and how this is targeted and distributed;
- Cultural understanding – such as level of knowledge and respect for cultural differences, being welcoming to people from other cultures, cultural sensitivity in service provision, availability of cross-cultural training, and outreach to CALD communities.

Mainstream agencies identified the need for more resources and organisational change to implement the strategies identified.

A fourth group of factors and strategies concerned with the policies and planning of services was also identified through analysis of recent research. These areas were discussed in the interviews with varying results highlighting the need for more research about access and equity policies and their implementation, the collection of ethnicity data about clients, and whether demographic data is used in the planning and evaluation of programs and services.

## **FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

*The analysis of stage one and two results, together with information gained in the literature review and advice from the Reference Group, point to a number of ways to address these issues in the future:*

- That the MIC continue to widely promote the availability of resources to assist with access to services for people from CALD communities for example the cultural resource kit available on the MIC's web page, cultural fact sheets and cultural awareness training.
- That the MIC seek a meeting with the Eastern Regional Manager of the Department of Human Services to discuss the findings of this report and opportunities to address its findings, in particular:
  - agencies' collection of data regarding ethnicity;
  - agencies' provision of services and communication about services in the client's own language through appropriate use of interpreters, employment of bilingual staff and translated materials;
  - agencies' provision of information about services through a range of avenues that take into consideration the whole target group;
  - agencies' acknowledgment of the cultural differences within their target group through the provision of culturally appropriate services;
  - the role of the Department of Human Services in ensuring that access and equity policies are developed, implemented and reviewed in funded agencies.

- That the MIC discuss the findings of this report with the MIC Youth and Family Support Working Group with the view to the working group identifying and implementing actions that will address the findings of the report. In particular:
  - development and delivery of services that recognise the cultural diversity of the catchment;
  - use of interpreters and translated information;
  - promotion of services to CALD communities;
  - data collection.
- That the MIC provides culturally specific training to support the development and implementation of culturally sensitive services.