

## Multiple Disadvantage

Some Queenslanders are far more likely to suffer poverty and social exclusion. And the effects are multiplied when individuals and families belong to more than one group.

QCOSS recognises the serious disadvantage faced by:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- People in rural and remote communities
- Culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- People with a disability
- Young people
- Older people
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender communities

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## Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities

*For cultural competence to flourish within a nation - beyond a particular organisation or institution - there needs to be an understanding of how cultural competence as a set of organisational objectives and practices relates to the **universal and inalienable right to equality**... there must also be a commitment to equality as an end in itself: because that is what we want Australia to be and to stand for, because that is how we want to live our lives and how we want our children to live their lives: knowing and believing that beyond our apparent and immediate differences **we are all fundamentally equal**.*

*Tom Calma, 2006.*

## Embracing Queensland's diverse communities

Queensland is a culturally and linguistically diverse state. With a population of around 4.3 million that consists of people from over 200 cultures speaking over 220 languages<sup>ii</sup>, it is one of the most diverse places in the world.

Queensland's rich and diverse community has at its roots and origin the first Australians – the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people. The inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people into Queensland's community continue to add richness and increase productivity in the state. CALD communities include early settlers, and later, migrants, refugees, and humanitarian entrants.

Queensland has come a long way in embracing cultural and linguistic diversity. Its current Multicultural Policy *Making a World of Difference*, developed in 2004 under the Beattie Government provided to a degree, an impetus for change in the right direction. But we have a long way to go.

People, regardless of race, religion, ethnic or cultural backgrounds, have the right to access services, be included, participate freely and have fair opportunities in civil society. While some people from CALD backgrounds experience success and enjoy positive outcomes, the current reality is that a significant proportion of people from CALD communities experience barriers, prejudice, discrimination and racism.

To positively advance as a state, it is important for all Queenslanders to embrace cultural and linguistic diversity that go beyond enjoying food, fashion and festivals alone. It is important for Queenslanders to work together to improve outcomes for CALD people, especially those who experience marginalisation and disadvantage.

## Leadership to drive culture change

This paper briefly outlines a number of ongoing issues that a significant proportion of people from CALD backgrounds face when they try to access the services or information they require.

Lack of culturally appropriate information about services, rights and entitlements, not accessing interpreters or working inappropriately with interpreters are some ongoing barriers to people accessing the services they need. These experiences are in violation of basic human rights and are in breach of the Anti-Discrimination Act<sup>iii</sup>.

This paper acknowledges that multiculturalism is policy that spans beyond service provision. This paper is a specific call for the Queensland Government to **take the lead on the culture change** required for Queensland's service system to be culturally responsive and inclusive. **Leadership is required to drive a whole-of-government commitment to build a fair and equitable service system that is responsive to all people, regardless of their background.**

This commitment should be demonstrated through individual departments' **Multicultural Action Plans** (MAPs) that articulate clear performance indicators, as well as robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms that are publicly accessible. Further, Government's commitment to cultural responsiveness needs to be demonstrated in **budget allocations** across all departments.

## Key Issues

### Education

- Newly arrived CALD young people who have low proficiency in English receive **inadequate English as Second Language (ESL) support** in schools. Some regional schools receive negligible ESL support despite significant refugee and migrant settlement in those regions.
- **Education models** that are **culturally inappropriate** do not engage some CALD students. Some students are already isolated due to experiences of prejudice, discrimination and bullying. These factors commonly lead to **under-achievement** and **disengagement**. Some choose to leave school early and may eventually experience poor employment outcomes.
- **Some schools make little attempt to engage with parents** of CALD young people to help them to understand the school system. In some cases children are used inappropriately as interpreters between parents and teachers, such as in their own disciplinary proceedings<sup>iv</sup>.

#### Specific recommendations to address this issue include:

- Ensure strategies to engage and improve education outcomes of CALD young people are included in the Flying Start for Queensland Children policy.
- Create effective partnerships between schools, settlement agencies and other community services to provide a holistic approach to the schooling of CALD young people whose socio-cultural and economic needs are high.
- Develop **best practice ESL policies and strategies** in Queensland schools. These may include implementing a well resourced central ESL unit in Department of Education and Training, improving ESL curriculums, and implementing cross-cultural training and development tools for principals, non-ESL teachers and school staff,

- Review current processes of funding allocation to regional schools based on geographical coverage, migration trends and allocation of resources based on Bandscale of ESL students.

*Some schools in Cairns have **intensive ESL units** that provide a conducive environment for quality teaching, access to bi-cultural teacher aides and for CALD young people to interact with their CALD peers. This type of program is essential and should not be threatened by the recommended whole-of-school approach, which may see ESL students absorbed into mainstream education settings and standard resource allocations.*

*Victoria has an ESL policy that includes a well resourced central ESL unit, ESL program officers in regional offices, Multicultural Education Aids to work with families and schools, and outreach programs for students unable to attend ESL centres or schools.*

*Milpera State High School is considered 'a school of choice for refugee families' that provides initial assessment, placement and referral for newly arrived secondary aged students<sup>v</sup>.*

## Employment

*An employment agency insisted that a Muslim woman work in a factory at which she was the only woman. This created problems at home as it was inappropriate for her to work in an all male environment. This woman left the work for this reason. This was considered a breach and she was unable to access any unemployment benefits for 10 weeks<sup>iv</sup>.*

- CALD job seekers commonly experience poor employment outcomes. Many, especially refugees and refugee claimants, experience **long term unemployment**. Refugees face up to 71% unemployment rate six months after their arrival. This rate remains high (43%) even 18 months after arrival<sup>iv</sup>.
- Many highly qualified CALD job seekers experience **under-employment**. They have little choice but to resort to entry level and unskilled work. Overseas qualifications and experience are often not recognised due to overly costly processes, narrow criteria and also difficulties in obtaining documentation from the country of origin. A recent study found up to 49.3% of refugees in their sample were employed in occupations below their skill level<sup>vi</sup>.
- There is a strong body of evidence suggesting the disadvantage experienced by migrants and refugees in gaining employment stems from **discrimination** based on language ability, name, accent, appearance, religion and cultural compatibility<sup>vii</sup>. Some employers appear to hold stereotypical and prejudiced views about visibly different migrants and refugees<sup>vi</sup>.

### Specific recommendations to address this issue include:

- Queensland Government to set clear goals and implementation plans for a **Multicultural Employment Strategy** for CALD communities, including improving access to employment opportunities, employment services and unemployment support.
- Promote the **value of a diverse workforce** amongst job networks and employers. For example, by showcasing successful employment stories and increasing work experience opportunities.
- Establish **suitable job placement models** for migrant, refugee and humanitarian entrants job seekers with individualised support focusing on skills recognition, job readiness, local workplace knowledge, and mentoring.

ACCES Services' Employment Pathways program provides individualised employment assistance specifically for unemployed people from CALD backgrounds. The program helps individuals to acquire life skills to fit into the Australian work culture, job search skills, education and training towards jobs, recognition of prior skills, job placements and post placement support, and even driving lessons. They also contact the employers to help increase the job seeker's chance of finding a job<sup>viii</sup>.

## Housing

*"Women and children sometimes 'couch hop' after they flee violent perpetrators in their homes. When they resort to finding shelter in a refuge, they are only able to stay for 3 months. Finding alternate accommodation for the women and their children is a problem when most of them are still on visas where they are unable to receive income from Centrelink ... Most of these women do not have a rental history to be able to apply for private housing. Then there is the filling out of the forms and understanding them, which is another issue"*<sup>iv</sup>

- There are currently very vulnerable residents who have extremely limited access to **support and services for appropriate housing**. This includes international students, holders of 457 visas and their dependents, and those fleeing domestic violence. As a result, people are increasingly finding shelter in temporary accommodation. One Brisbane based refugee reported that young women from refugee backgrounds make up about 50% of their clients<sup>iv</sup>.
- CALD families are forced to turn to the **private market** where they commonly experience **difficulty obtaining housing** due to unemployment, not having referees and discrimination due to larger families. Families are forced to **live far away** from their supportive communities, appropriate schools, services and employment. With additional **transport barriers**, many families become further isolated.
- **Sustaining tenancies is challenging** when there are barriers to families knowing and exercising their rights and responsibilities<sup>ix</sup>. The Tenant Advice and Advocacy Service Queensland (TAASQ) is working to full capacity and is unable to meet existing demand for support.

**QCOSS supports the recommendations contained in the *Stronger Tenancies for New and Emerging Communities: A Research Report*<sup>x</sup>, including:**

- Increase training, professional and organisational development opportunities within the social and private housing systems that build the capacity of practitioners and their organisations to **respond culturally appropriately and effectively** to the needs of new and emerging communities.
- The Department of Communities and the Residential Tenancies Authority to fund a program to trial, support and employ **Community Partners** as part of the *One Social Housing System* to provide additional support to CALD people seeking housing support.
- Include specific targets for culturally diverse households in current **housing supply** initiatives. In particular, develop specific housing products that respond to the needs of larger and extended households.

## Child Safety

*Involvement with child protection services can be a very emotional and exhausting experience for families. The ability to fully understand and consequently comply with the expectations is essential for every family's ability to cope. Furthermore, it is a fundamental right to be heard and understood when significant decisions are being made about one's children"*<sup>xi</sup>.

- There is strong anecdotal evidence that the child safety system is **not culturally responsive**, which may worsen outcomes for some CALD families. In some cases, families have faced **tragic consequences** that could have been avoided with appropriate support and prevention strategies.
- CALD families do not fully understand **how the child protection system works** in Australia. They are often unaware of their rights, for example, when it comes to reunification for families. Anecdotal experience suggests reunion of families is not high. Some children in foster care can lose their mother language or dialect, leading to difficulty in communication with their parents.

**QCOSS supports the recommendations of the Multicultural Child Protection Working Group<sup>xi</sup>:**

- Implement a **multicultural policy unit** within the Department of Communities Child Safety Services to provide leadership and drive in addressing cross-cultural training, liaise with multicultural agencies, identify the needs of CALD communities, and provide on-going support and professional development to the sector.
- Have a **separate cost centre** to resource the funding of interpreters rather than using child-related costs.
- Child Safety Services to mandate the **collection of data** regarding the country of origin, language spoken at home, religious affiliation and immigration status of the clients and their families.

**Additional recommendations from QCOSS:**

- There is evidence that investment in **prevention strategies**, such as **community-based and driven initiatives** such as parenting programs have improved outcomes for families (e.g. fewer substantiated notifications).

*QPASTT, RAILS, MDA and ACCES Services have been undertaking work that focuses on keeping children safe and provides information on the role of the police<sup>iv</sup>.*

## **People with Disability**

Many Queenslanders with disability are significantly disadvantaged and marginalised. Inadequate funding and inflexible support arrangements mean that people with disability are often left vulnerable and without support.

- It is common in Queensland for people with disability to **accept unsuitable shared accommodation** with people they do not choose to live with, which is at odds with the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Unfortunately, this is not protected in either law or practice in Queensland.
- There is **significant disparity in access** to services and support between CALD people with disability, compared to those from English speaking backgrounds. CALD people with disability experience additional systemic barriers to having their most basic needs met and do not have equitable access to information, services and supports<sup>xii</sup>.

- Families of people with a disability are often **extremely isolated**, with few family or social networks that may provide support. They are often not aware that they or their family members are entitled to the same opportunities as others members of society.

**Specific recommendations to address this issue include:**

- Recognise people with disability as the experts in their own lives by respecting their right to choose where and with whom they live, and providing them with **adequate individual funding packages** so that they are included, and can participate as full citizens in family and community life.
- Engage with community groups about **appropriate means of delivering information** (about services, rights and entitlements) to CALD individuals with disability and their families.

## **Health and Ageing**

There is a great need for a **holistic approach** to the treatment of health and mental health in CALD people that takes into account all their circumstances. The provision of care needs to take into account any **current experiences of isolation and disengagement**, and **past experiences of trauma**, especially for refugees. Some health and mental health issues emerge or are complicated with the oncoming of old age, especially those who have had traumatic experiences.

- There is anecdotal evidence of **discrimination and cultural insensitivity in the aged care system** that can lead to isolation, development of chronic disease, undignified ageing and ultimately diminished quality of life for aged people from CALD communities.
- Service providers need to take into consideration the needs of CALD people who are ageing, such as literacy levels, language barriers, culturally appropriate communication, and the need for interpreters.

## **Recognising Progress**

QCOSS acknowledges recent progress by the Queensland Government including:

- The review of the Queensland multicultural policy as an opportunity to engage stakeholders broadly to develop a stronger, more robust multicultural policy.
- Re-funding the Community Action for a Multicultural Society (CAMS) Program for 3 years from 2009 to 2011.
- The directive from the Premier in October 2008 that departments are to fund the provision and use of fee-free qualified interpreting services for their funded non government organisations in Queensland.

## QCOSS Recommendations

In addition to recommendations specific to each issue outlined in this paper, QCOSS recommends that the Queensland Government:

1. Make a whole-of-government **commitment to cultural responsiveness** consistent with human right principles to ensure fair and accessible services to people from CALD communities. Strategies include:
  - Establish a **Multicultural Unit in each Government department** to enable the building of **cultural expertise, experience and knowledge** over the long term within departments.
  - Commit to **employing a diverse workforce** in government departments.
  - Genuine and timely **engagement with CALD communities** in planning and design of programs and in policy development.
  - Funding and service delivery models that enable cultural specific, multicultural and mainstream services to provide **accessible, flexible and responsive services** to CALD communities.
2. Through the review of the current **Queensland Multicultural Policy**, develop a policy that is supported by a clearly articulated implementation strategy, as well as **regular monitoring and reporting** from each Department against performance indicators that are publicly available.
3. Fund all state government departments and government funded agencies to ensure the sustained development and implementation of **cultural competence in their service provision**.
4. Establish measurable targets for CALD communities that are shared across Government and embedded within departmental **Multicultural Action Plans** with **additional funding to support implementation**. Targets to include:
  - Increase fair and equitable **access to services**
  - Improve **educational outcomes** for CALD young people
  - Improve **employment outcomes** for CALD job seekers
  - Achieving a **secure, appropriate and affordable housing system** for CALD families
  - Improve quality of **health and mental health**, including the aged
  - Increased **access to life choices and opportunities** as others for CALD people with disability
5. Undertake **research and data collection** across the service system to increase qualitative and quantitative evidence to improve policy and practice for CALD communities. (e.g. data on cultural background, immigration status, language needs, key issues etc)
6. Commit to consistent and appropriate use of **interpreters and translators** in all departmental and funded services, particularly in rural and remote areas where there are few or no specialist multicultural workers. QCOSS supports the recommendations from the Queensland Accessing

Interpreters Working Group for the Queensland Government to:

- Adopt a **whole-of-government** commitment and approach to guarantee the provision and use of **fee-free qualified interpreting services** to community organisations in Queensland.
- Until a **whole-of-government** response is achieved, each department to reimburse the costs or **provide recurrent funding** for qualified interpreters to all funded organisations via a model that is consistent and easy to use.

7. Invest in **stronger partnerships** with non-government services (settlement services, cultural specific, multicultural and ‘mainstream’ services) and councils to create a **‘seamless’ service system** to better meet the needs of CALD communities

<sup>i</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission. (2006, September). *What does Australia need to do for cultural competence to flourish? Speech by Tom Calma, national Race Discrimination Commissioner and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner to the Cultural Competencies Conference*. Retrieved from [http://www.hreoc.gov.au/about/media/speeches/race/2006/cultural\\_competencies\\_conference.html](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/about/media/speeches/race/2006/cultural_competencies_conference.html).

<sup>ii</sup> Department of Immigration and Citizenship. (2008). *People of Queensland-Statistics from the 2006 Census*. Canberra: DIAC. Retrieved from [www.immi.gov.au](http://www.immi.gov.au).

<sup>iii</sup> Queensland Council of Social Service. (2008, December). *Speech notes for Susan Booth: QCOSS Case Study Report Launch*. Brisbane: QCOSS. Retrieved from [http://www.qcoss.org.au/upload/5629\\_Speech%20by%20Susan%20Booth.pdf](http://www.qcoss.org.au/upload/5629_Speech%20by%20Susan%20Booth.pdf).

<sup>iv</sup> Queensland Council of Social Service. (2009, August). *QCOSS Social Policy Forum Report 2009*. Brisbane: QCOSS.

<sup>v</sup> Milpera State High School is a secondary school which provides English as a Second Language education in the context of Queensland's secondary school curriculum. It provides intensive settlement services to prepare newly arrived immigrant and refugee students for participation in secondary schools around the Brisbane area. [www.milperashs.eq.edu.au/](http://www.milperashs.eq.edu.au/)

<sup>vi</sup> Colic-Peisker, V. & Tilbury, F. (2008, January). *Refugees and employment: the effect of visible difference on discrimination – final report*. (Available from [www.cscr.murdoch.edu.au/](http://www.cscr.murdoch.edu.au/))

<sup>vii</sup> Booth, A., Leigh, A., & Varganova, E. (2009, June). *Does racial and ethnic discrimination vary across minority groups? Evidence from three experiments*. (Available from [www.econrssi.anu.edu.au/](http://www.econrssi.anu.edu.au/))

<sup>viii</sup> ACCES Service Inc. is a community based, not for profit organisation originally established in Logan City. It now provides services to people in Logan City, North Gold Coast, Inala & Ipswich, and Redlands. [www.asi.org.au](http://www.asi.org.au).

<sup>ix</sup> Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (2009, June). *Review of Literature: Stronger Tenancies Project*. Brisbane: ECCQ.

<sup>x</sup> Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (2009). *Stronger Tenancies for new and emerging communities: a research report*. Brisbane: ECCQ.

<sup>xi</sup> *Multicultural Child Protection Working Group Position Paper* (2010, February) Brisbane: Multicultural Child Protection Working Group.

<sup>xii</sup> AMPARO Advocacy. (2008, December). *Language and Culture Matter: Remove the Barriers Now*. Brisbane: AMPARO Advocacy.

This paper is part of QCOSS's 'policy platform' that contains over twenty policy papers.

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