eccq
Ethnic Communities
Council of Queensland

Putting Queensland Kids First
consultation paper response

February 2024

The Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this state and nation. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live, learn and work.

We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders past, present and future. We honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique culture and spiritual connection to the land, waters and seas and their contribution to enriching Queensland and Australia's communities.

About the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland

The Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (ECCQ) is the peak body representing culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in Queensland. We have a membership base of over 450 individuals, ethno-specific organisations and multicultural owned businesses. We have been pioneering this work for over 45 years, since 1976.

Our work focuses on strengthening and advocating for the needs of CALD communities throughout Queensland. We do this by building their capacity through the delivery of leadership training, strengthening community associations as well as through the delivery of culturally tailored healthcare programs.

We believe that Australia's systems should allow for every Australian, irrespective of their background, to be able to participate and contribute in all aspects of Australian society. We know that the diversity of our multicultural society is one of Australia's greatest strengths.

For further information on this submission please contact:
Lisa Ward
Chief Executive Officer
07 3844 9166
lisaw@eccq.com.au

Introduction

Good health and wellbeing of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) children, young people and families is part of the foundation of a strong, cohesive multicultural society. 22.7% of Queensland's population were born overseas, with many more having one or both parents born overseas as at the 2021 census[1] and we know this number is increasing. When discussing equity and accessibility of services for children, young people and families, the need for an intersectional approach must be at the forefront. This kind of approach would include:

- A flexible system that takes into account the intersections impacting on individuals and can respond
- Recognition of communities' lived experience as holders of wisdom
- The importance of decentralized, place-based services
- A workforce who are diverse and culturally responsive
- A holistic approach taking into account all areas of life, including culture and its connectedness to wellbeing
- Addressing racism as a key factor that impacts wellbeing of multicultural communities and
- Genuine collaboration between all levels of government, services and grassroot communities including other minority groups.

1. What are the core principles you think should inform our early/ intervention and prevention approach to support children, young people and families?

Flexible systems

Culturally diverse children, young people and families need services that are responsive to and recognise the intersectionality of their person and consider all intersections, not just cultural and/or linguistic diversity, but other intersections such as: ability or disability, socio-economic status, religion, access to previous education, gender identity, sexual orientation, and geographic location.

Recommendation: Expand community health education services, in-language community education and women's groups where information sharing can occur, including through the use of multicultural community system navigators.

Diverse and culturally responsive staff

Throughout many consultations conducted by ECCQ, one of the most common recommendations is that the workforce of the services more closely reflect the community they reside in. One participant

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[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022) Cultural diversity of Australia.

said "Not having a professional that looks like us can be a challenge". The many testimonies of community members accessing health services included how reception staff, nursing staff or doctors responded to patients in a way that they felt unwelcome and unlikely to re-engage with health services. In addition, some cultures have boundaries for women around engaging with doctors who are men, especially when it comes to specific women's health issues. This is due to modesty and a sense of shame. Due to this, diverse women are unlikely to ask questions or admit if they do not understand everything they are told by health service staff. In order for diverse community members to feel a sense of belonging, and welcome into the health service system, staff need to be diverse and all staff need to be trained in culturally responsive practice. This would include having familiarity with how to work with interpreters and translators.

When health practitioners do not know how to work in a culturally safe way, culturally diverse community members are deterred from accessing further health services, not matter how vital it may be to their wellbeing. It should be acknowledged that the types of supports and resources shared for multicultural communities will benefit other communities, such as First Nations communities and other vulnerable groups.

Recommendation: Queensland government and funded service providers be incentivised to employ staff that reflect the diversity of the community they work in.

Recommendation: That staff are trained in recognising the various intersections impacting on individuals and the system is flexible, empowering staff to respond appropriately.

The amount of time required for multicultural women to attend health, employment support or school appointments, which require leaving dependent children and taking time off work (often times casual work) impacts on their ability to access wellbeing supports. In addition, the signage around facilities and ability to locate services can impact upon their attendance at appointments. Another barrier is that appointments are sent in writing, in English and some multicultural community members cannot understand the letter they are sent. In addition, due to women often carrying familial responsibilities, not only of caring for young children, but also elderly family members, it can be a challenge to arrange the required time away from their home to attend at the time allocated. If there was flexibility in timing of appointments, if these appointments were closer to their home, or if they had the ability to choose the time, this would enable more women to actively engage and reduce the rate of nonattendance.

Recommendation: That walk-in booking options were made available, which would allow for more multicultural community members to be empowered to connect with education, housing, health and community services.

Place-based responses

ECCQ focus group participants reinforced the need for further community education on health issues, as well as the health system, to understand what is available and how to access health services. Due to the wide range of CALD community members in Queensland and the various levels of eligibility to services, there can be a lack of knowledge and understanding of what is available, what they are eligible to access or how to work through the Queensland Health system. Consultations revealed that many times multicultural community members feel overwhelmed by the system. They are concerned that if they ask questions or upset a doctor or a nurse, they will have services withheld from them. Many multicultural communities do not have a regular check-up, preventative health practices within their culture. There can be at attitude of "I'm not sick enough to go to the GP". One participant spoke of one elderly woman over the age of 65 years who had never had a blood test in her life. This is one example of the many women lagging behind in regular checks which can prevent requirements to attend hospitals later on. "One thing I find with the communities, they don't distinguish between various health services. The expectation is they go to health and they should get the service. That is an issue, they don't know who to complain to or give compliments to".

In Cairns there is an example of how a safe community space has been established, which allows for connections between community members and information from services:

> *"We run a session with free talk and free chat and have morning tea to share. This group also practice English. Women come and sit with women from other countries to improve their English. We invite speakers from the health department and police department to share information for the women. They talk about how to live safely and what to do, for example, to get breast screening. We provide information about women's health. Women feel more capacity to talk with providers in a safe place."*

This example from Cairns was the joint Refuge Health, CentacareFNQ and BreastScreen Queensland Women's Health Morning Tea, introducing breast screen in comfortable setting with bicultural support by language group with an opportunity to opt in for first ever breast screen on site and greater open forum women's health education session with opportunistic needs assessment. Having a sense of belonging and being valued, having the confidence to self-advocate, within yourself, your family, your community or being aware of the services you can access.

Formerly 'Access Community Services' in Logan, now SSI, implemented a school-based program called the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Education Coordination program alongside the Health Impact Program tailored to multicultural communities. These programs delivered sessions were held on school grounds and facilitated by qualified teachers and occupational therapists. Parents were encouraged to bring their below school aged children, and this community hub space allowed for these health professionals to interact and assess children in low-stress, familiar environments. Children felt supported and safe, and this allowed for them to receive help they need in a manner that facilitates positive outcomes; the children were safe to play and behave naturally and

professionals could observe. This also allowed for the health professionals to build a trusting relationship with the families and provide information to parents on the potential services that could support them and their children, if required. This model could be replicated with other kinds of professionals. This could be used as a pipeline to enable the process of diagnosis and engaging with interventions to be expedited for those who struggle to engage with the existing systems.

Recommendation: Expand community health services delivered in centres where other community services are provided, and in some cases for specific multicultural groups.

Recommendation: Expand community health education, system navigation, workforce preparation, in-language community education and women's groups where information sharing can occur, including through the use of multicultural community navigators.

Recommendation: Queensland government increases preventative health education in community-based locations which are culturally responsive and enable communities to thrive.

2. What are the key protective factors in keeping children and young people on positive trajectories, and how can we further boost these?

Tapping into communities' lived experienced and wisdom

No matter which type of leader, all multicultural community leaders are influential. They provide their cultural lens to the Australia system and society for new arrivals. If the community is existing positively within the Australian society, with feelings of inclusion and trust they can in turn positively influence the settlement and integration of newly arrived community members. If a community feels mistrust in the Australian system or society, these feelings can just as easily be transferred to new arrivals also.

An example of this was shared during a consultation where a few young people who attended a local high school experienced racial discrimination from peers. A parent attempted to report this to a teacher, but no action was taken. During an episode of racial abuse, the young person punched the perpetrator and was in turn suspended from school. The community lost trust with the education system and removed all children from that school. With no other schools they trusted in the catchment area they were enrolled in a private school, the fees and transport cost putting the families into financial hardship.

By building mechanisms that facilitate communication between community leaders and government decision makers, Queensland will be better placed to focus on what unites us and to maintain the common values of love, justice and peace.

We need mechanisms that:

- **Listen to communities and acknowledge their distress and challenges**. Before anything else, communities are requesting that they are heard, and they need government to express care beyond politics and divisions.
- **Work with service sector providers and community leaders to establish a specialised mechanism** that fosters deep listening, authentic partnerships, and collaboration, and to develop, with community, strategies to temper social cohesion issues when they arise. This mechanism should incorporate specific thresholds or triggers that activate its functionality, and enable a coordinated response from partners who are willing to be led by community. This mechanism should be able to be activated when significant events occur in Queensland, or offshore, which are likely to negatively impact our community. This will allow the timely identification by community of funding needs and appropriate community-led initiatives aimed at strengthening community cohesion and resilience.

3. Are there any other priorities you think that Putting Queensland Kids First should consider?

Addressing Racism

In order to ensure all people feel safe, respected and belong there needs to be a proactive approach to addressing racism. Numerous reports of racism in schools have been made to ECCQ. In New South Wales, the Department of Education has an Anti-racism policy[2] and has commissioned an Anti-racism Program in schools, which is being delivered by lived-experience trainers. This does not exist in Queensland and should be included across all states. These policies need to support staff and students to feel safe in schools and to be equipped to respond to instances of racism.

ECCQ facilitated research recently with students, parents and staff of Education Queensland schools. The full report can be found [here](#). Key comments from research participants include:

> *I lost all motivations to go to school. Some days, I remember, I would use any excuses for not going to school because of how bad it was – how badly I didn't want to be there. Because almost every day or every second day, something racist was being said…. I lost a lot of attendances in crucial classes, which definitely brought down my grades- crucial like exam times, I would not want to go. I missed a lot of studies in terms of preparation… that significantly brought down my grades, I believe (Noella, Interview, 23 November 2023).*

> *I was playing sport on a Tuesday afternoon, and this white kid came out to me and he took my hat while his friends are recording. And then I was, 'can I have my hat back?' He started running. As I was chubby, I wasn't chasing him. I just gave up, and he was like, 'go back to your country, go back to your country'… the teacher was right there, not said a word. I went to the teacher and before I could speak, the teacher was 'where is your hat?'. I got in trouble for not wearing my hat (Joe, Interview, 8 Nov 2023)*

The final section of the report – [Racism in Australian Schools : Impacts and Possible Solutions](#) says:

"Accounts from my sample have confirmed Glenn Auld's[3] argument that racism affects oppressed students' affiliation with the school, their self-esteem, and their motivation to succeed. They also confirm Tseen Khoo's[4] point that the lived experiences of Asian students in Australian schools leave them traumatized, angry and ashamed, significantly reducing their motivation to attend school,

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[2] NSW government (2022) *Anti-racism policy*. https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/pd-2005-0235

[3] Auld, G. (2018). Is there a case for mandatory reporting of racism in schools? *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, *47*(2), 146–157. https://doi.org/10.1017/jie.2017.19

[4] Khoo, T. (2017). High school racism in the merry old land of oz. *Eureka Street*, *27*(11), 14–16.

largely missing out academically. But a range of initiatives that have previously worked to prevent or alleviate the effects of racism with Australian schools were also uncovered by the literature and proven through participants' accounts as they **recommend:**

1. **Every school to have an anti-racism policy and tool like the NSW Government's (2005), designed to eradicate any expressions of racism and to challenge the attitudes and actions that enable racism, including but not limited to some students' victimisation.**
2. **Teacher training to equip them with knowledge to address racism within schools effectively and confidently. These trainings would help them detect, understand, and dismantle racially induced exclusions, effectively fostering inclusive environments for students from culturally diverse backgrounds.**
3. **More robust discussions about racism at the foundational level – call racism as it is.**
4. **Mandatory reporting rules that require teachers to report and act on racist incidents within schools.**
5. **Expansion of the guiding counsellors' team to include officer/s mandated to help victims of racist attacks at school.**
6. **Inclusion of the school anti-racist policy as an agenda item during the parent-teacher interviews**
7. **Training designed to enhance resilience in students who face racism at school."[5]**

Healthcare, mental health services and community services are specific government departments that have an immense impact on culturally diverse communities. During a consultation, an example was shared by a member who had arrived in Australia at a very young age as a refugee from Poland. The Polish community is now seen as one of the more established communities, however, intergenerational trauma continues to create issues. People who were born to migrant parents and grandparents continue to live with the impacts of growing up in a family who faced difficulties integrating into Australia decades prior.

> *"The generations are experiencing trauma related to the migrant experience."*

This impacts on children, grandchildren and so on.[6] An increase in the number of bilingual health workers and specific multicultural positions and resources needs to be made in order to improve wellbeing outcomes.[7] In order to meet the needs of culturally diverse communities education of the service sector needs to include culturally diverse voices, education and understanding.[8] Not only

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[5] Bosco Ngendakurio, J. (2023) *Racism in Australian Schools: Impacts and Possible Solutions*. https://eccq.com.au/publications/report-racism-within-australian-schools-impacts-and-possible-solutions/

[6] Kelstrup, L., & Carlsson, J. (2022). Trauma-affected refugees and their non-exposed children: A review of risk and protective factors for trauma transmission. *Psychiatry Research*, *313*, 114604–114604. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2022.114604

[7] Abell, Bridget (2022) *Evaluation of the CALD COVID-19 Health Engagement Project (CCHEP) – Prepared for the Refugee Health Network Queensland and project partners*. https://www.refugeehealthnetworkqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Summary-CCHEP-Evaluation-Final-2022.pdf

[8] Day, L., & Beard, K. V. (2019). Meaningful inclusion of diverse voices: The case for culturally responsive teaching in nursing education. *Journal of professional nursing*, *35*(4), 277-281. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2019.01.002

this, but due to the significant need for mental health and wellbeing support, policies for more accessible and culturally safe mental health support needs to be implemented.[9] Many people for whom English is a second language need support and information in their first language as it increases understanding and engagement. Limited access to health and mental health professionals from CALD Communities who understand the cultural needs of people influence their acceptance of and engagement with care provided.

Recommendation: implement a co-designed and community led response to address the lack of accessibility and inequity for multicultural communities to health and mental health services.

Recommendation: implement policies that ensure provision of culturally safe and accessible mental wellbeing support is made for all culturally diverse community members.

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[9] Aumarah, K, Akbari, H, Louise, K & Keegan, D. (2023) *Cultural Transitions: Migrant Youth and Family Stories of Belonging and Cultural Wellbeing.*
https://www.hostint.org/_files/ugd/d958bb_a39cd79d5f8d4c2cae7e4ab9c25a73c4.pdf

4. How can we best support connection to culture and community for children, young people and families?

A holistic approach

Migrants to Australia mostly do not have an understanding of service systems in Australia and the responsibilities of different levels of government when they arrive. Government services and systems are not explained to many migrants on arrival. ECCQ acknowledges the provision of information to humanitarian entrants, however, information for skilled migrants, international students and those on other visas is not routinely provided. Social disadvantage and disparity between migrant families and the broader Australian community is apparent in the areas of employment, health, mental health and housing.

Skilled migrants, international students and those on other visas need more support to navigate different bureaucratic systems and find the information and advice they need to find appropriate supports for life challenges on arrival. ECCQ heard from community leaders of the Afrikaans and German communities who explained that people coming from South Africa and Germany don't understand the processes. They expect things work a certain way and when it doesn't, they are sent from one government department to the next, despite strong English language skills. The government should use all available resources, including community assets and invest more in multicultural-focused organisations who support social cohesion.

Recommendation: implement a service navigation hub which provides information and support, which is accessible for all migrants newly arrived to Australia, to facilitate connection to available services and systems.

Any child's transition from preschool into school is a complex, non-linear path. The changes between children, their parents and their environment are all challenging[10]. To support this transition, communication between all parties involved is essential. For children from multicultural families, one consideration must include their culture as it has an impact on the child's learning, perspective and environment. The work of children who live at the intersection of different cultures within their family and within their school environment and their ability to incorporate both of these cultures for themselves as part of their identity is needed for a successful transition through their development.

Ensuring that there are systems in place that enable a two-way dialogue between schools, parents and service providers is crucial. The example shared by a consultation attendee was that of

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[10] Ma, J. (2019). The complex trajectory of children's transition to school within a bi-cultural context: a case of a Chinese immigrant child in Australia. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, *27*(1), 81–99. https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2018.1556536

parenting in Australia. During orientation new arrivals are told strongly that Australian law does not allow a parent to hit a child, the result of which could be the child being removed and/or the parent facing legal charges. This one-way conversation disempowers the new arrivals as, in some cases, physical punishment is the only form of discipline. The result being the parent breaking the law and being accused of child abuse or a child having no form of discipline and understanding of consequence. What is beneficial, and what many community members do with new arrival families is engage in deeper conversations. This two-way conversation discusses culture and the law and how they intersect with each other.

Recommendation: embed multicultural liaison officers who can support communication between schools and multicultural families and who can support the implementation of culturally responsive practices within schools.

Educational institutions need to acknowledge the shifting role of young people within the family unit, particularly if they migrated to Australia with their parents, or their parents are first generation migrants. The role of young people within a family can change dramatically and family conflict can arise. In addition to this, young people often develop what is what is referred to as a 'third culture'. This is when individuals during their formative years are raised in a culture other than their parents' culture. They move between cultures before they have had the opportunity to fully develop their personal and cultural identity. ECCQ found that disengagement between generations can be mutual, as parents reported to disconnect from their families due to their own challenges within the community and home. These included: language and education barriers, accessible and culturally appropriate services, transport barriers and social supports. More on this can be found on our paper : [Intergenerational Disconnect and Trauma, Impacting Engagement](.).

Recommendation: implement family counselling sessions which can be accessed through educational institutions.

Recommendation: implement support groups for young people who are experiencing the challenge of 'third culture' acclimation through their developmental years.

A culturally responsive workforce

Key service industries (including teachers, doctors, nurses, and police) receive much training and professional development, but there are currently no compulsory and ongoing training requirements for learning about cultural diversity. ECCQ applaud the work that has been done to implement training on understanding First Nations peoples and cultures and propose that multicultural training be conducted alongside this. Additionally, multicultural awareness should be a compulsory component of all tertiary courses so that all students are equipped with intercultural skills to work in Australian society.

All those working with children and families need to understand culturally responsive practice, so that they can implement it every day in their workplace. In particular awareness of unconscious bias

is essential for those representing government, so that policies and programs delivered by government are reflective of Australian society and provide equitable outcomes.

Recommendation: implement mandatory cultural awareness training for all government staff, funded service provider front line staff, key industries including healthcare, education, and legal.

Recommendation: require all tertiary education courses to include a unit on culturally responsive practice to build understanding of culture and unconscious bias.

5. What would it look like for us to work together as partners, all committed to improving outcomes for children and young people?

Genuine collaboration

System and community wide change starts with local level initiatives. The local level can be within a workplace, school, club, or neighbourhood. Prevention must be seen as a continuum, not a problem to be fixed in a few hours. A continuum means the group learning and growing together. Education is key, but specifically learning which promotes and celebrates differences as a positive.

This can be achieved through creating a dialogue. Having a dialogue in a safe space will enable bridging across communities and intersections. This will have success with community-based prevention programs, developed and delivered by local people. We want to take a strength-based approach through promoting values and the positive part of difference of culture. Effective and respectful ways to achieve this include substantial engagement with multicultural communities.

The current systems in place to engage multicultural communities in Queensland leave gaps, which mean that a large number of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, international students and those on other visas do not have their voices heard. There is a lack of leadership from government to ensure that all Queensland residents are being heard and considered as policies, programs and budgets are developed. This in turn causes the rights of community members to be ignored.

> *"Communication and engagement from the Federal level needs to be a priority, not an after-thought or just a check-box. Communities need to feel the engagement is genuine and caring, and it doesn't feel like that."*

Currently culturally diverse communities are treated as lower tier. Often when government engage with multicultural community leaders and members, there is no compensation for their time, which demonstrates a lack of respect. The community knows that "If it is important to you, you put money on it". Moreover the perception from those we spoke with was that the actions of government demonstrate an attitude of "You guys have a problem, so you need to fix it". This includes the difference between compensation made for those who speak at government-led events and the overall funding put aside for events targeted at culturally diverse communities.

When the government is developing policies, there needs to be more time and resources allocated to consult a broader range of community members, so that a few individuals are not speaking on behalf of many culturally diverse and different communities. This may require more travel budget and high-quality professional interpreting services to be made available or online options. ECCQ has filled this role for federal reviews previously, such as setting up consultations in kind when the national chronic disease action plan was being developed to ensure more voices were gathered.

Recommendation: every government department establish a culturally diverse community advisory body, who are compensated for the time they spend providing advice.

Recommendation: government allocate more time and resources when developing policies to enable consultation of a broader range of culturally diverse community members.

Recommendation: implement co-design processes with culturally diverse community representatives through meaning engagement across government departments.