

Access, support, and inclusion for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds

Response to the Parliamentary Inquiry into support for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds

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backgrounds

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In this document, 'Aboriginal' refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. 'Indigenous' or 'Koori/Koorie' is retained when part of the title of a report, program, or quotation.

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Statement from the Minister

Older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds deeply enrich our community through their significant contribution and representation of diverse skills, life experience, belief systems and cultures.

The Victorian Government is committed to strengthening social, economic, learning and wellbeing opportunities to better support older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds to live healthy and safe lives connected to their community.

The 2022 Parliamentary Inquiry into support for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds was established to examine the adequacy of services for, and the unique challenges faced by older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

I would like to thank the Legal and Social Issues Committee for leading this Inquiry and for their strong commitment to improving access and inclusion for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

I would also like to acknowledge the significant contribution to the Inquiry that was made by local government, social and community-based agencies, the community health sector, and peak, tertiary and research bodies.

Most importantly, I recognise the invaluable contributions of older Victorians who have shared their own experiences when accessing support and services to help inform this Inquiry.

The Victorian Government invests in many programs and services that support older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

The findings of this Inquiry will further focus the Government's efforts to continue to create opportunities and enhance programs that improve access, inclusion, and participation for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

The Victorian Government remains committed to working in partnership with multicultural communities, so services and policies better reflect and respond to the lived experiences of older Victorians.

I look forward to meeting and talking with more people from our rich multicultural communities and the organisations that represent them so that together we can improve the lives of older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.



Hon. Lizzie Blandthorn MP
Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council
Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers
Minister for Child Protection and Family Services

The Parliamentary Inquiry into support for older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds

The Parliamentary Inquiry into support for older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds was established in August 2021 to consider the needs of older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds and examine the:

- adequacy of services for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds
- unique challenges faced by this cohort, including, but not limited to, social isolation, civic participation, digital literacy, elder abuse and access to culturally appropriate aged care and home care services and
- ideas to advance the physical and mental health and wellbeing of Victoria's multicultural seniors including global best practice.

While undertaking the Inquiry, the Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee consulted widely with 33 witnesses and received 73 submissions from local government, social and community-based agencies, community health sector, peak, and tertiary/research bodies.

The Inquiry report, tabled by the Committee in August 2022, along with the valuable insights provided by witnesses and through the submission process, are welcomed by the Victorian Government and will inform ongoing commitment to support older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

This response has been prepared by the Victorian Government in consultation with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH), Department of Health (DH), the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR), the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS), and the Department of Government Services (DGS).

It provides an overview of the supports available to older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds and identifies opportunities to expand and leverage current services.

Older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds

Victorians come from more than 200 countries, follow over 135 different faiths, and speak over 260 languages, with more than 1.5 million Victorians speaking a language other than English. Among Victorians aged 60 and over, 27 per cent are from non-English speaking backgrounds, compared to 21 per cent of Victorians under 60 years of age.¹

Older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds are a highly diverse group of the Victorian community representing a wide range of experiences, belief systems, knowledge and needs. Victorians of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds have unique experiences as older people in the community. Many are first- or second-generation migrants who have made significant contributions to Victorian or Australian society, through their work, food, volunteering, creating small businesses, and through countless other means.

Despite the many positives of their migrant or settlement experience, older Victorians can experience a range of challenges. Difficulties related to low health literacy and accessing the healthcare system, as well as language barriers, can greatly impact the ageing experience for some, and increase the likelihood of people experiencing social isolation.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016). Cultural Diversity. [Census Table Builder]

Older Victorians of migrant and refugee backgrounds are more likely to have lower English proficiency, and services can often be culturally inappropriate or difficult to access. Healthcare and social services systems in Victoria and Australia more broadly can differ significantly from those available in migrants' prior country of residence, as can health beliefs and understandings of wellbeing.

For individuals, the intersecting identities of being from a migrant or refugee background, and being an older Victorian, can result in compounding social impacts requiring tailored support. Language barriers and cultural disconnection can increase social isolation, and further entrench feelings of loneliness. This can place them at higher risk of experiencing elder abuse, due to greater dependency or complete dependency on family members, unwillingness to disclose abuse because of stigma (linked to community factors), ignorance regarding available services or an inability to recognise elder abuse due to cultural expectations regarding family.

Priority actions

The Victorian Government is committed to improving outcomes for older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Key priorities include:

- improving access to support and quality of services
- supporting economic and civic participation
- strengthening social participation and community connections
- supporting digital inclusion
- enhancing elder abuse prevention and support.

Further information on each of these is provided below including examples of what the Victorian Government is doing to address each of these priorities.

Access to support and services

The Victorian Government is committed to improving access to, and quality of, services for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds. The Victorian Government will explore options to continue working across departments and with service providers to increase the cultural responsiveness of essential government services. These options will leverage the success of existing initiatives, such as:

- the Victorian Multicultural Commission and the Ethnic Communities' Councils of Victoria (ECCV) to undertake community consultation to develop evidence-based policy and advise government on systemic reforms impacting multicultural communities, engage older Victorians to discuss ageing and aged care policy;² and advance research on the intersecting forms of disadvantage older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds experience
- implementation of a Language Services State Purchase Contract (SPC) to streamline Victorian Government procurement of language services. The new SPC will include a range of service delivery, quality, and workforce support features to encourage and support a high-quality, professional, and sustainable interpreting and translating sector in Victoria
- existing partnerships between ECCV and COTA Victoria's Seniors Information Outreach to continue their work together to raise awareness of community services and resources, and strengthen service and support connections for culturally diverse older people in their local area³

² Rec 15

³ Rec 6

- delivery of the Multicultural Seniors Support (MSS) 2021-25 program, which funds 920 multicultural seniors' groups supporting over 120,000 seniors, and aims to engage communities in social, physical and community activities.⁴ The Victorian Government will consider opportunities to improve data collection on the needs and service usage of culturally diverse older people, and to address challenges experienced by older people from multicultural backgrounds during the COVID-19 pandemic, through this program
- The Victorian Government recognises the importance of using culturally appropriate modes of communication and engagement and will continue to support trusted partners such as the Victorian Multicultural Commission, multicultural and multifaith organisations and peak bodies, community leaders, bicultural workers, and service providers to disseminate health information and hear feedback from older people in the community. For example, DFFH has promoted health literacy and knowledge of government services and resources amongst older people and their families, including through the following initiatives:
 - The Multilingual News Service, run by the National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council provides daily audio news in 19 languages across Victorian community radio stations. This service began in August 2020 to increase in-language news about the COVID-19 pandemic. Since October 2022, has promoted information about flood response support. It has been funded until March 2023 to share health and Victorian news more broadly.
 - The Multicultural Communications Outreach Program, a \$5 million grant program to support community-led health content. This program has supported two rounds of recipients, with the final round delivering content in the second half of 2022. This included projects with support specifically for seniors such as:
 - The University of Melbourne, in partnership with community organisations, developed a video series based on five COVIDSafe themes by and for senior Chinese, Sri Lankan and Indonesian communities. A digital photography competition and exhibition for the same groups also encouraged older Asian Victorians to capture and share their everyday COVID experiences, knowledge, and ideas.
 - Nepalese Association of Victoria created audio and podcasts, videos, social media content, speech competition for children and a Dohori (folk song) competition for seniors.
 - Victoria Tamil Senior Citizens Benevolent Society Australia created videos, songs, artwork, and interviews about COVIDSafe behaviour and vaccinations, and connecting members with support from government and not-for-profit organisations.
 - Il Globo created content for Italian seniors about re-connecting in a COVIDSafe way.
 - Macedonian Community Welfare Association created content on vaccinations, boosters and staying safe through COVIDSafe behaviours, and correcting misinformation targeting the older and senior Macedonian community.

The Victorian Government continues to engage older people and carers in the co-design of services and policy through outreach and consultation. For example:

- The Commissioner for Senior Victorians' 2019 Ageing Well consultations engaged almost 5,000 older people through an online survey and 231 through in-person consultations and informed the Ageing Well Action Plan released in June 2022.
- The Commissioner for Senior Victorians' 2022 Ageing Well consultations engaged almost 47,000 older people through an online survey and almost 200 through in-person and online consultations and will inform the Commissioner's ongoing advice and advocacy to the government on behalf of older people.

⁴ Rec 10

- The development of a refreshed Victorian carers strategy in 2023 will see broad consultation with carers of all ages and backgrounds, including carers of older people to identify areas for future focus, and support for carers. Support to engage with diverse communities to understand carers specific needs, including awareness raising of available carer supports and culturally appropriate respite, will be sought through peak bodies and grass roots organisations such as the ECCV, Australian Multicultural Service Centre (AMSC), Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO), Carers Victoria, and other smaller organisations and grass roots groups.

Both DH and DFFH are developing new diversity plans. DFFH is developing an Inclusion for Equity Framework and supporting tools and practical resources to embed a whole-of-department, intersectional approach to improving outcomes for diverse communities. DH is developing a cultural diversity plan that will set out department priority actions to deliver outcomes for multicultural Victorians.

Additionally, the DFFH Homes Victoria Community Connectors Program, through local community health services will employ teams of residents in public housing, people with lived experience and health promotion workers. These Community Connectors will link public housing communities and individuals to targeted preventative and early intervention health and social care services.

The program aims to improve health literacy, connections, and engagement across a wide range of public and community health topics, including COVID-19 prevention and other topics as identified by residents. It involves leveraging strong community connections, creating sustainable employment pathways for residents, and working together on targeted localised health and wellbeing responses, in partnership with residents and local communities.

The Victorian Government will continue to raise awareness of other important services to older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds, for example public dental services are available to eligible Victorians (for people over 18 years - a healthcare or pensioner concession card is required). All refugees and asylum seekers are eligible for public dental care, have priority access and are fee exempt.

In addition, DH delivers the Refugee Health program in areas with high numbers of newly arrived refugees. The program is delivered by community health services and employs community health nurses, allied health professionals and assistants, and bicultural workers. The key aims of the program are to provide refugees with increased access to primary health services, improve the response of health services to refugees' needs and enable individuals, families, and communities to improve their health and wellbeing.

The Commonwealth Government is responsible for the funding and regulation of aged care services, including residential aged care and in-home care services. The complex aged care reform environment has greatly impacted the residential aged care sector, including increases in operation and construction regulations and costs, access to building materials and the impact of COVID-19.

Significant reforms are occurring across the whole aged care system as a result of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety recommendations. Reforms to the way aged care services are funded, delivered, and regulated is changing. Commonwealth initiatives to improve access to aged care services and support for people to navigate through the system include:

- Face-to-face aged care service in Services Australia centres to provide information and help people access My Aged Care.
- Certification for providers where specific services are offered that meet diverse needs, such as cultural and linguistic services. This is aimed at supporting people to select providers that meet their specific needs.
- Additional funding to provide greater access to translating and interpreting services for culturally and linguistically diverse people.
- Implementation of local "care finders" in each state and territory from Jan 2023 to support people to access and navigate aged care services including My Aged Care.

As part of broader engagement with the Commonwealth Government, the Victorian Government will explore advocacy that includes highlighting the importance of cultural awareness training across the sector.

Cultural awareness training is mandatory for aged care assessment staff.

Guidance for an accessible aged care system for every care recipient including actions plans to support government, aged care providers, consumers, families, and carers is available through the National Aged Care Diversity Framework.

Supporting economic and civic participation

The Victorian Government strongly supports opportunities for all Victorians to engage with and contribute to their communities. Through existing programs across government departments, the Victorian Government is committed to fostering inclusive avenues for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to help them fully participate in economic and civic life. Some of the programs that leverage the value of bicultural workers, increase opportunities for education, training, and electoral participation, in addition to employment and financial support programs are outlined in this section.

DFFH has established a Memorandum of Understanding with the Victorian Public Service Commission (VPSC) to lead the development of a Bicultural Worker Pilot Project. The bicultural workers project aims to build public sector awareness of bicultural workers' skills and expertise on the path to setting a common agenda for the public sector. The project will examine current projects and initiatives underway in the Victorian Public Service (VPS) as well as develop pilot programs to increase VPS use of bicultural workforces. As part of this work, consultation continues to be conducted with multicultural bodies, service providers, and culturally diverse communities to guide the project and its outcomes.

As part of the project, DFFH together with VPSC will consider how to support people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to apply for bilingual and bicultural roles (within the purview of the VPS). Focus may also be on how to embed workers in service delivery, including in regional areas.

The VPSC's work will include design and implementation of approaches that strengthen the VPS's understanding of the role, value, and engagement approach for bicultural workers. This will include prototyping approaches to increasing understanding and promoting the value and skillset of bicultural workforces to the public sector.

It may include the creation of a job family for people with cross-cultural skillsets on the Jobs and Skills Exchange (JSE), a Victorian Government initiative connecting VPS employees with priority access to VPS roles. A job family is a group of similar jobs with related tasks, skills and knowledge.

Employees would be able to access the job family when recruiting. Bicultural workers engaged on eligible projects could also be given access to the JSE for. These measures would increase future employment and professional development opportunities for bicultural workers not directly employed in the VPS.

Work is also underway in DFFH to better recognise the expertise of people with lived experience including people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, and the value they can bring to policy, program, and service delivery development, including guidance on payment, reimbursement, and recognition.

DJSIR, through Jobs Victoria, provides people facing barriers to joining the labour force personalised employment support, recognising that everyone's journey to employment is different. Jobs Victoria actively targets culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Twenty-two per cent of Jobs Victoria service partners are organisations specialising in supporting multicultural jobseekers. There are over 30 multilingual Advocates providing pro-active outreach in shopping centres and other public places, and Mentors deliver pre-employment and post-employment support in over 70 languages, through 75 partners at over 200 sites across Victoria.

Jobs Victoria prioritises assistance to a range of cohorts facing barriers to employment, based on evidence of disadvantage in the labour market. Priority cohorts include newly arrived migrants, refugees, and culturally diverse people. Jobs Victoria can help people gain qualification and/or employment in a range of sectors, including the aged care sector, based on the needs and strengths of the job sector. Existing programs use a case-management model (an individualised as-needs basis) and include access to flexible funding to address barriers to work. Programs include priority workforce projects supporting 1,000 jobs in health care and social assistance sectors across the state.

Jobs Victoria Mentors provide personalised support to people looking for work and have successfully placed almost 7,000 participants from culturally diverse backgrounds into jobs since July 2021. DJSIR continuously monitors its suite of services to ensure they meet the needs of cohorts facing barriers to employment, considering intersectionality of individual characteristics and circumstances.

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC), an independent statutory body, developed its Democracy Ambassador Program in 2014 to increase electoral engagement and participation of people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Democracy Ambassadors (DAs) are carefully recruited and trained to advocate the importance of participating in elections; this is done through outreach sessions aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of how to enrol and vote correctly.

For the 2022 State election, the VEC recruited and trained 74 DAs, the majority from within CALD communities with more than 40 languages between them. The VEC publicises that DAs can be booked – free of charge – to attend sessions with the community or specific organisations and can attend in the evenings and on the weekend. The program and work to date has been fully funded by the VEC, to increase formal electoral participation of targeted groups with typically lower electoral participation.

The Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board, supported by DJSIR, is developing a range of multicultural engagement strategies to support new migrants and refugees via direct engagement with funded Learn Locals, including the leading settlement support provider AMES Australia. The ACFE Board is finalising its communication and promotional campaign for 2023 to raise awareness and learner take up. The ACFE Board is also commissioning work to develop resources to help Learn Local reach hard to engage CALD communities to encourage and increase engagement of CALD learners.

DJCS funds several specialist legal assistance programs (including under the Early Intervention Investment Framework) that directly support older people at risk of or experiencing elder abuse through Seniors Rights Victoria and Justice Connect Senior Law programs. Both services operate integrated services in partnership with health and community-based support services and work with their partners to provide confidential and safe access to legal assistance.

Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) within the Department of Government Services funds agencies to provide financial counselling services across the state for all eligible Victorians, prioritising those who are most in need including older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds. CAV also administers specific financial counselling programs on behalf of the Victorian Government tailored to support cohorts of vulnerable communities such as people experiencing domestic violence and people that have been impacted by floods, storms, and bushfires. CAV's program includes the provision of grants for financial counselling only. Services such as financial literacy sit within the Commonwealth Department of Social Services' National Financial Wellbeing and Capability Program.

In addition, DFFH funds financial counselling as a component of the trial of an Integrated model of care for responding to suspected elder abuse led by five public health services, the Elder abuse family counselling and mediation service that interface with the five Orange Door Networks, and the Preventing Elder abuse through financial counselling project in bushfire impacted communities of East Gippsland, Alpine and Towong.

Strengthening social participation and community connection

The Victorian Government is committed to supporting older Victorians with timely access to services and supports that will continue to foster and maintain good mental and physical health through physical activities, social participation opportunities and building strong community connections.

Promoting physical activity and active living for culturally diverse communities is in progress through key policy platforms and programs including:

- The *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019-2023* which prioritises action on active living initiatives at the local government level through Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans.
- *Active Victoria 2022-26*, the Victorian Government's Strategic Framework for Sport, and Active recreation, prioritises efforts that address common barriers to sport and active recreation and increasing more equitable participation including people from different cultural backgrounds.
- Community health services, supported by DH, deliver locally tailored health promotion programs, including a focus on active living. This presents an opportunity to provide programs and services for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds.
- The *Healthy Parks, Healthy People Framework 2020* - a Parks Victoria framework promotes the health and wellbeing of people from all backgrounds and abilities through connections to the natural and cultural values of parks. This includes building opportunities for healthy and active ageing seniors and all abilities access.

DH is working with the Commonwealth on the development of a new National Dementia Action Plan to be released in January 2024. On 21 November 2022, a Consultation Paper was publicly released with consultations closing at the end of January 2023. The paper was informed following consultations with people with a lived experience of dementia and their carers, clinical experts, and interjurisdictional working group. It is expected the Plan will have a focus on dementia awareness, prevention, and early diagnosis. Funding from DH is provided to Dementia Australia to support a range of Victorian specific activities including community dementia awareness raising activities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD communities.

The MSS program funds 920 multicultural seniors' groups supporting over 120,000 seniors, and aims to engage communities in social, physical and community activities. To support the next round of funding (commencing in July 2025), DFFH will undertake consultation with multicultural seniors, ECCV and regional councils to gauge if health literacy should be incorporated as one of the main program objectives.

The Victorian Government is committed to supporting Victorians to age safely in place at home, access services, maintaining purpose, independence, and autonomy in life with family, community, and social connections. Social housing serves a range of people in the community, including people of migrant and refugee backgrounds, with approximately a third of public housing residents from a CALD background.

In late 2020, Homes Victoria surveyed 3,500 residents living in public housing across Victoria where residents were asked their views on their home, housing services, and feelings of health, safety, diversity, and community connection. The survey found 60 per cent of residents agreed or strongly agreed they felt part of their community, and 84 per cent of residents agreed or strongly agreed they welcome cultural diversity in their neighbourhood. Results from the 2022 survey are expected to be released in 2022-23 and again asked residents about social inclusion and community connection.

The DH's Mental Health and Wellbeing Promotion Office (MHWPO) is currently implementing social prescribing trials to meet the needs of culturally diverse older people. Social prescribing trials support people to engage in non-clinical community-based activities such as art, creative, nature or other groups and activities, to reduce loneliness and social isolation. The trials aim to strengthen pathways between mental health and wellbeing services and community initiatives and activities and will include older Victorians as a priority cohort.

The social prescribing trials are currently being implemented in six Local Adult and Older Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Services. Providers will be required to identify and support their local communities, including culturally diverse older people, to ensure social prescribing meets individual needs. This work will be informed and further strengthened by the development of the *Mental Health and Wellbeing Diverse Communities Framework and Blueprint for Action*. The MHWPO will work with new service providers to support them to understand and respond to culturally diverse older people who may be experiencing social isolation or loneliness.

The MHWPO is also establishing the first five Social Inclusion Action Groups. Led by local government, Social Inclusion Action Groups will bring together community members and leaders to understand local needs related to social connection and social inclusion. The Social Inclusion Action Groups will fund place-based initiatives that support social connection and inclusion. It is expected older Victorians from culturally diverse communities will be included in Social Inclusion Action Groups.

To create further opportunities for older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to meet and build social connections, DFFH continues to support community activities and events through the MSS Program. DFFH will review the program guidelines to consider models that more effectively fit the needs of older people who may want to interact with peers and other generations outside of culturally specific groups or forums. DFFH has also made progress to ensure the MSS Program is accessible to seniors, including by simplifying guidelines, providing translated material, and delivering ongoing information sessions.

Local governments continue to work with multicultural senior groups to improve access to accessible spaces to run social activities and remain connected with their local community. Additionally, local governments continue to work with culturally diverse older people through ethnic specific and multicultural groups to explore strategies to improve overall access for older people in their local communities, for example, Merri-bek City Council have held pop-up focus groups to discuss local transport options in Fawkner.

Local governments also continue to fund community development teams and positive ageing officers who work closely with older people in their local communities and support them to remain actively connected to their local community.

Supporting digital inclusion

As more government support and services move online, the Victorian Government is committed to ensuring older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds stay informed and connected.

The Victorian Government's digital priorities are outlined in *A future-ready Victoria: Digital Strategy 2021-26 and the Digital Inclusion Statement*. The Strategy recognises the shift towards a digital government and commits Victoria to better, fairer, more accessible services. Key objectives include:

- experiences that support and empower everyone
- universally accessible government services for all, including those with poor digital access, disability, low income and culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- personalised engagement to promote awareness and access to services while giving people confidence and control over their information.

The *Digital Inclusion Statement* outlines the Victorian Government's approach to remove barriers to digital access and increase opportunities for economic, social, cultural, and community participation through online technologies.

Funded by the Victorian Government, the Commissioner for Senior Victorians is undertaking a review of the digital connectedness of older Victorians. Early findings of this review suggest while older people are the most digitally excluded cohort, they have a strong interest in building their digital capability and need support from government and community organisations to develop skills, confidently manage their safety online, and access digital devices and data plans that are affordable and appropriate for their needs.

The Victorian Government has also invested in several initiatives that continue to support and foster digital inclusion for vulnerable cohorts, including older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Among these are the following DFFH initiatives:

- Diverse Audiences Ambassadors program to upskill accessible communications champions in each department
- training program, goal development and initiatives for staff to support audiences facing barriers to mainstream communications
- Accessible Communications Month where a series of education sessions are delivered for communications professionals across the VPS.

DFFH will also advocate to the Australian Government to support tailored digital mentoring programs and digital literacy resources to culturally diverse older people. Funding provided through the MSS Program within DFFH also provides support for engagements and capacity building within multicultural seniors groups.

DFFH also provides funding through the Neighbourhood House Coordination Program (NHCP) for neighbourhood houses to develop programs that meet community needs. Digital literacy programs are offered by many Neighbourhood houses and those with high culturally diverse cohorts are encouraged to use NHCP funding to develop tailored programs.

In 2020-2021 Local Government Victoria assisted 38 rural councils through the Rural Council ICT Technology Support Package. The package supported rural councils to develop and implement effective and ongoing capability to convene and stream virtual council meetings. Each of the 38 rural councils received \$100,000 to improve their information technology to facilitate remote governance and community engagement. This helped engage and include vulnerable groups including older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds. This package was also essential to support rural local governments deliver the expanded community engagement requirements of the *Local Government Act 2020*, which includes requirements for deliberative engagement practices, and supports the delivery of these practices across widespread communities.

Elder abuse prevention and support

The Victorian Government is committed to preventing and responding to elder abuse in Victoria and provides funding to a range of services delivering prevention and response initiatives and resources that assist older Victorians. People from migrant and refugee backgrounds, and staff that are working with them to stop elder abuse from occurring in the first place or prevent its escalation where disclosed or identified.

In 2022-2023, DFFH will release a primary prevention of Elder Abuse framework. The framework will embed an intersectional approach to prevention for all Victorians, including those groups at a higher risk of elder abuse, including migrant and refugee communities, and provide cohort specific toolkits and resources (to be developed and released in 2023-2024). The concept of intergenerational relationships will be embedded across all areas of the framework, with a strong focus on combatting ageism in the community, noting that ageism is a recognised driver for elder abuse. The framework will also provide guidance to individuals as well as organisations that have regular contact with older Victorians and therefore will be beneficial to all industries, including banking and finance.

Family Safety Victoria is leading the development of an Elder Abuse statement. Due by December 2023, the statement will provide a high-level policy position on elder abuse in Victoria.

The Victorian Government funds a range of elder abuse prevention and response initiatives including the following:

- The trial of an Integrated model of care for responding to suspected elder abuse aims to prevent elder abuse from occurring in the first place. It also strengthens elder abuse responses and support within Victorian health services by creating multiple entry points for older people, their carers, and families to access specialist support services to address suspected elder abuse. Key components of the model include workforce development, an Elder Abuse Liaison Officer (providing specialist clinical advice and secondary consultation), a counselling (including financial counselling) and mediation service and an Elder Abuse Prevention Network. The trial is led by five public health services
- People from a broad range of CALD groups, including migrant and refugee backgrounds who live in the catchment areas of the lead health can access these services and seek support for elder abuse concerns.

- The Elder Abuse Prevention Networks raise awareness and prevent elder abuse from occurring in the first place using a primary prevention approach. The Networks collaborate to develop and share resources. Membership across the Networks varies but includes organisations working with migrant and refugee communities, and representatives from migrant and refugee communities. This ensures diverse representation and participation within communities. This has included working with Common Cause Australia to develop the *Framing Age Message Guide* launched in late 2020 and was led by the then Southern Melbourne Primary Care Partnership.
- An Elder Abuse Training and Learning Hub is now available. It has several self-paced eLearning modules centred on prevention and response to elder abuse. This Hub is public facing and accessible to all relevant sector workers.
- ECCV are funded to deliver the Raising awareness of elder abuse in ethnic communities project. This includes focusing on targeted communities and developing in-language resources, training bilingual community educators who in turn deliver in-language community sessions on elder abuse and available supports.
- Financial Counselling Victoria have been funded to develop elder abuse resources for financial counsellors and raise awareness of their role in the community. They are also working on a targeted bushfire recovery project which supports collaboration with the banking and finance sectors.

Victoria Police also work closely with the Integrated model of care, and at times has included the Elder Abuse Prevention Networks and has led a successful Financial Elder Abuse Trial.

The trial of an Integrated model of care for responding to suspected elder abuse has provided alternatives to a justice pathway by working with the older person and upholding their preferences.

Legal services are only one pathway of support and not all older people seek such a remedy to family violence. This was also identified by the Royal Commission into Family Violence. The Victorian Government continues to work with Seniors Rights Victoria, a community legal centre that delivers the statewide helpline for elder abuse. They also support other legal services to work with older people where appropriate.

Respect Victoria has led a successful elder abuse awareness raising campaign, launched in 2019 and re-aired during the COVID-19 pandemic. It re-aired again in 2022 together with an 'Authentic Story' featuring a Victorian grandmother, Helen, and her grandson, Ollie. Working in partnership with peak bodies has enabled a targeted and far-reaching focus that aligns with statewide strategies and builds on existing resources. There is an opportunity to continue to build awareness through the existing partnership project with ECCV *Raising awareness of elder abuse in ethnic communities* and to explore opportunities for targeted in-language campaigns and resources.