

**Submission  
No 34**

**INQUIRY INTO SUPPORT FOR OLDER VICTORIANS FROM MIGRANT  
AND REFUGEE BACKGROUNDS**

**Organisation:** South East Community Links

**Date Received:** 30 November 2021

## Inquiry into support for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds

Ms Michelle Rowland

**Organisation Name:**  
**Your position or role:**

### YOUR SUBMISSION

**Submission:**

South East Community Links would like to provide the following comments relating to the Inquiry into support for elderly migrant and refugees, as described below:

(a) Adequacy of services for older Victorian from migrant and refugee backgrounds and, (b) Unique challenges faced by older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds

The case study attached provides some insights into the experiences of a Sri Lankan woman who has been experiencing significant challenges with the assessment processes and eligibility criteria of the Disability Support Pension and then navigating the mutual obligation requirements of the Job Seeker Payment. She is also a victim survivor of family violence and is experiencing isolation and ongoing family violence in the care of her family.

Digital literacy amongst our older CALD community members continues to be a challenge and a barrier for them. Increasingly more services and government bodies are pushing people onto these platforms to access health, medicare, benefit services, information in general and as we have seen more recently, COVID-19 vaccination proof. Older people of migrant and refugee background are further disadvantaged as English is not their first language and navigating digital platforms in English without strong digital skills can create a very stressful and anxiety provoking environment for them. As a result, older Victorians of migrant and refugee background are really struggling with this and missing out on supports and critical information either because of language barriers, digital literacy challenges and lack of access to IT devices and familiarity with technology. Our evidence shows that older CALD community members will not be able to participate in a program or 'opt out' if it requires them to register online and they lack confidence in doing so.

Family violence is also a real concern for older CALD community members as anecdotal evidence collected from CALD community workshops highlights that in many cases CALD community members are strongly dependent upon their children for care, emotional, physical and financial support and sometimes housing and in some of these cases children or in-laws are treating them unfairly physically abusing them, neglecting them, limiting their freedoms and accessing their finances for personal gain. In these cases, CALD community members feel powerless and are at times unaware of their rights and entitlements.

Mental health issues for older CALD Victorians can be another challenge when particular CALD communities lack the understanding and knowledge of mental health and may tend to feel shame or embarrassment due to cultural perceptions. This prevents older CALD community members from receiving the therapeutic care and treatment they deserve.

(C) Ideas to advance the physical and mental health and wellbeing of Victoria's multicultural senior's

It was identified that older migrant and refugee people are not used to the level of planning and organising that is required to engage in social and recreational activities. In their home country, neighbourhoods and

villages were more open and social; there are gathering places, piazzas, parks and community settings that facilitate more informal and casual ways to engage with others and access support. Here in Australia, you always need appointments, and you need to plan ahead to avoid feeling left out, bored, disengaged or not included. This also relates to financial planning in which community members are often not familiar or attuned to the need to plan for future finances as well as social events.

A suggestion was made for workshops or sessions that are tailored to build capacity of older migrant and refugee community members to:

- manage their finances and plan for future expenses and dreams, and
- to understand how to stay connected socially and what is involved so they can connect and participate equally.

It was also suggested that more informal opportunities for older Victorians to connect in social spaces such as community gardens and parks is needed. It could be seen by this group of individuals that life is becoming so complicated with the need to always book, register and complete forms, when all they want to do is share a cup of tea with others and have a chat.

It was also recognised there is a divide between those older migrant and refugee Victorians who are more educated and financially secure, compared to those who have less education and financial supports. Those with less are more disadvantaged and this can be illustrated more clearly if we apply an intersectional lens to the experiences of older migrant and refugee Victorians and look holistically at their person, their journey and their changing place.

**Are you interested in appearing before the committee in person to talk about your submission?\***

Yes

**Are you a carer/family member helping an older Victorian make a submission?\***

No

**Are you an older Victorian from a culturally diverse background? If yes, what is your age and cultural background? \*:**

No

## **FILE ATTACHMENTS**

**File1:** [61a5f7a622cde-Kyra's story - Inquiry into CALD Older Persons Challenges 29.11.2021.pdf](#)

**File2:**

**File3:**

**Confidentiality:**

**Signature:**

Michelle Rowland



## KYRA'S STORY OF FAMILY VIOLENCE, SOCIAL ISOLATION AND MUTUAL OBLIGATION PRESSURES - WHEN WILL IT END?

### AT A GLANCE

#### CHALLENGES

- Isolation and lack of support
- Mental and physical health conditions
- A history of family violence
- Disability Support pension eligibility requirements and processes
- Mutual obligation pressures

#### OUTCOMES

- SECL delivered intensive advocacy and practical support with navigating the health system, Centrelink and Jobs Victoria services.
- SECL advocated to have her Jobseeker allowance reinstated
- SECL linked Kyra with Sikh Volunteers for free food delivery service
- Referrals made to Monash Health Assisted Care and Housing, a SECL Financial Counsellor, emergency relief for medical prescriptions and the Home and Community Care program

### CLIENT SITUATION

Kyra is 64 years old and arrived in Australia in 1990 with her family on a family visa. Soon after her arrival from Sri Lanka, Kyra gave birth to her second child, who devastatingly lost sight in one of her eyes. During this time Kyra's mental and physical health further deteriorated as she had been enduring family violence for a number of years. With the support of a community member, Kyra found the courage to file for divorce from her husband. She sought assistance for her mental and physical condition and was granted a disability support pension.

Kyra had been longing to see her family back home and made the decision to return to Sri Lanka on an extended visit. Upon returning to Australia, Kyra discovered that she had lost her disability support pension and was instead to receive jobseeker allowance. With great distress, she reapplied for the disability support pension, but her application was rejected.

Due to the financial hardship, multiple ongoing health issues and lack of support, Kyra now lives with her daughter and son in law in shared accommodation in a residential area with very little public transport where her freedom is restricted and hostility pervades the family home. She feels isolated, mentally and physically unwell, unsupported and overwhelmed with the requirements of meeting mutual obligation requirements for her jobseekers payments to continue.

### BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES FOR KYRA

#### Mental and Physical Health Issues

Kyra is unable to afford the travel costs involved to see medical practitioners. Due to the lack of public transport and limited finances she cannot easily travel by public transport to doctor appointments nor spend the higher fees in accessing a taxi. SECL has reached out to a number of local services to see if Kyra could access some discounted taxi vouchers or community bus so that she can attend her doctor appointments, but our attempts have not been successful.

#### Government financial supports

Kyra suffers from on-going mental and physical health conditions that prevent her from working. She is 64 years of age with no Australian work experience and is repeatedly forced to try to fulfil mutual obligation requirements in order to receive government payments. This causes further harm and highlights the failures of this system.