

20 July 2016

Human Services inquiry
Productivity Commission
Locked Bag 2, Collins Street East
Melbourne Vic 8003

Dear Commissioner

Re. Human Services Inquiry – Identifying Sectors for Reform

The Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) provides this submission to the Human Services Inquiry (the Inquiry) as a contribution that advocates for the needs of multicultural communities.

Since 1983 the VMC has provided independent advice to governments to inform the development of service delivery to our culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse society. As specified in the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011*, an objective of the VMC is to promote access to government services, and a better understanding of Victoria's diverse communities.

A key function of the VMC is to conduct state-wide consultations, with a focus on systematic and community-wide settlement and service issues, to determine the needs of Victoria's diverse communities. This includes the development of partnerships between community organisations that provide settlement support and service delivery.

I note that the objective of this Inquiry is to develop policy options to improve service provision with particular emphasis on the use of competition, contestability and user choice. While I appreciate the pressure that budgets are under and the pressing need to re-examine the sustainability of human services for future service users, I would suggest that there are certain human services that are not suitable for market competition or user choice, such as settlement and associated services. These services may however, be suitable for contestability via tender processes.

In considering the service requirements of newly arrived and multicultural communities the Inquiry must ensure accessible services that are responsive to these community needs, and seek to deliver equitable outcomes. The VMC supports the Multicultural Access and Equity Policy which seeks to ensure that Australian Government programs and services meet the needs of all Australians. To facilitate user choice for multicultural communities this means ensuring that translated materials and/or interpreters to address language and cultural barriers are provided.

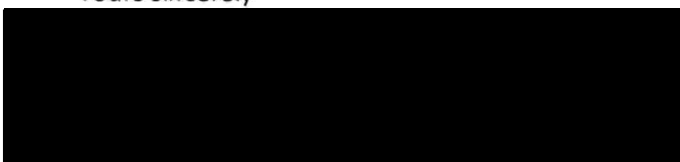
Informed choice requires a certain level of knowledge. For example, in order to decide whether or not a service is suited to their needs, people need to know that the service exists, even before seeking access to the service. An aspect of the Inquiry might therefore be to look at the ways settlement and associated services could be extended to act as an entryway that facilitates user choice for culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

The VMC has learned from its community consultations, that newly arrived communities develop very close ties to case workers and settlement service providers. They often retain that relationship out of loyalty to the provider and because trust has been built with that service. This is a relationship that could be capitalised upon in terms of future needs by providing information about the availability of other human services. This would be especially important once settlement services have fallen away and people are expected to act in their own capacity and access services through a user choice model.

In 2015 the VMC conducted a number of multicultural community forums, three specifically with service providers, who provided information about the issues that they face as service providers, as well as the issues facing their client base. I am enclosing a copy of the final report *Strengthening Social Cohesion: Meeting Community Needs*, for consideration by the Inquiry.

When thinking about human services and the needs of multicultural communities, the social investment paradigm is also worth considering. The European Commission defines social investment as investing in people with policies designed to strengthen people's skills and capacities, seeking to improve people's human capital and support their participation in society and the economy.¹ Akin to capacity building, this is also a theme developed in the VMC service provider's report. It may be that the return on social investments expands exponentially over time. Thus, the efficacy of service delivery frameworks in the human services sector may require a different evaluation.

Yours sincerely



Helen Kapalos
Chairperson

¹ European Commission, Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Social Investment available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1044>