

21st May 2007

The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs Committee
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT 2601

**SENATE INQUIRY
PATIENT ACCOMMODATION AND TRAVEL ASSISTANCE SCHEME.**

SUBMISSION FROM ETHNIC COMMUNITY CARE LINKS INC.

VISION

ECCLI's vision is of a community which through its attitudes and practices, promotes and works within the principles of inclusion, compassion, care and respect for others and equal access to all people, regardless of background, culture or abilities.

Ethnic Community Care Links Inc.(ECCLI) is a culturally inclusive public benevolent institution servicing the aged, younger people with disabilities, their carers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in North Qld.

ECCLI is funded by the Dept of Health and Ageing Community Aged Care Packages (CACP) Program and the National Respite for Carer's (NRCP) Program and Queensland Health Home and Community Care (HACC) Program.

Under this funding ECCLI's main focus has been to meet the needs of older people whose cultural/language barriers present significant difficulty in accessing mainstream services but also has a mandate to look after the needs of younger people living with a disability and any client who may require a high level of coordination of services to continue living at home.

The majority of the culturally diverse aged population in the Hinchinbrook and the Burdekin regions are of Italian descent with important numbers of Greeks and Spanish. The Townsville Thuringowa area shows a greater mix. As well as the three groups mentioned above, there are significant numbers of Chinese, German, Dutch, Polish, Russian, Latvian and Latin Americans (El Salvador).

The southern European migrants and those who came as a result of the Second World War have been in Australia for a long time. Despite long periods of residence, this group is facing difficulties accessing the services many Australians take for granted. For those who have arrived later, the situation is very similar.

Gender issues and generational differences are a cause of stress on families as older migrants age. Older migrant women are more likely to survive partners and are less likely to have English proficiency or driving skills, which precludes them from community interaction, leading to social isolation and depression.

Language barriers, lack of understanding and information on their entitlements as part of this society, family expectations, culturally inappropriate service are some of the reason for the under-utilization of services amongst the non English speaking population.

THE KINDS OF ASSISTANCE PROVIDED

- Home based support like house cleaning and laundry.
- Assistance with shopping, banking, etc.
- Meal preparation.
- Respite for the carer : in-house or in the community.
- Transport to hospital, doctor, dentist appointments, outings, etc.
- Assistance with language support, if required.
- Home maintenance (lawn mowing, removal of rubbish, minor repairs, etc.)
- Social activities to combat social isolation: outings, friendly visiting, arts and crafts, letter writing.
- Personal care (bathing, grooming, toileting, rehabilitative support, assistance with medication.)
- Access or purchase of specialist services: podiatry, home nursing, occupational therapy, hydrotherapy, etc.

ECCLI has offices in Townsville, Ayr and Ingham and is servicing 350 clients. Personnel employed at ECCLI speaks 20 languages other than English of relevance to the target group.

ECCLI was born and continues to exist as a result of prevailing societal context - The General Environment. The predominant economic conditions, societal context and policies have changed and deteriorated over the years, exerting more pressure and demand over the services ECCLI provides due to the ageing of the population, the exodus of the younger generation to larger cities in search of better job opportunities, economic and climatic uncertainty and the worst drought in living memory.

Rural families need special considerations. The National Families Week (13th – 19th May) initiative “Families investing in time together” is a good idea that will provide an opportunity to showcase and assist rural families at a crisis time when drought, water shortages and climate changes are hitting hard. Social and community determinants of health play an important role in the well being of rural people. There is evidence suggesting that “having a sense of hope and of control over one’s life contributes more to a person’s good health than health related behaviours.” The injection of recent budget funds to provide additional mental health services in rural areas is welcomed but it would be more effective to invest in health and community services, community transport and health promotion to manage poor health.

The improvement of the Patients Accommodation and Travel Assistance Scheme is urgent in rural and remote areas to close the gap between services for city people versus rural people. There is a need for greater uniformity in the State and Territory schemes and sufficient investment in them to ensure that all eligible families are informed of entitlements and can be assisted. Patient Accommodation and Travel Schemes should not be seen as an optional extra but as the only fair means by which people in rural and remote areas can access a range of specialist services such as those listed on the Medicare Benefits Schedule - enhanced primary care items such as allied health and dental treatment. The

Scheme should have eligibility criteria that are flexible enough to consider special family circumstances.

Good health and well being is the aspiration of most families and the gap between rural and metropolitan access to services must be closed.

Sandra Soto
Manager
Ethnic Community Care Links Inc