

Chinese Australian Services Society Ltd

Submission to the Access and Equity Inquiry Panel of Department of Immigration & Citizenship

Re: Inquiry Into The Responsiveness Of Australian Government Services To Australia's Culturally And Linguistically Diverse Population

Introduction

Australia has been one of the most culturally diverse societies in the world with the admission of 7 million migrants from very different culturally and linguistically backgrounds over the last sixty years. People from more than 200 countries have made Australia home.

When new migrants come to this country to settle and blend into the Australian society, most of them will require support and assistance. The Australian Government has adopted the Access and Equity policy with the aim to ensure that all Australians can have equal access to Australian Government services for which they are eligible, no matter what their cultural background is or what language they speak. Non-English speaking (NES) migrants are supposedly able to enjoy and use all the services provided by the Australian Government agencies and all those service organisations funded by the Australian Government.

The Access and Equity policy has been in place for about 20 years. There are various views in the community about the issues arising from the implementation of the Access and Equity policy. The present inquiry, hearing directly from migrant communities and clients on the different aspects of the outcomes of the policy, would be greatly beneficial to understand the policy of Access and Equity for people from the culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

Our organisation, the Chinese Australian Services Society Ltd (CASS), a community services provider which has served migrants from different places for 30 years, would like to contribute to this Inquiry by this submission for consideration.

Our Experience In Providing Services To The CALD Community Under The Access And Equity Policy

CASS was established in 1981 and is a registered charitable organisation. Its main service objective is to provide a wide range of welfare services to the community, assisting migrants to access various mainstream services, to settle and integrate into the Australian society. Through the provision of multicultural interaction and activities, it fosters better understanding between Chinese

Australians and the wider community as well as building friendly relationships among different communities in the Australian society.

CASS provides a comprehensive range of community services and activities (including Health, Ageing & Disability Services; Family & Children's Services; Settlement & Miscellaneous Services; Vocation & Training Services; Social & Recreational Activities; Promotion of Chinese Language & Culture; and Building Community Capacity) in a wide geographical area which includes Sydney Inner West, Southern regions, South-West regions, the Northern suburbs and Wollongong, etc. We serve people from the Chinese-speaking, Korean-speaking, Indonesian-speaking and other people in the general community. More than 1,800 families access our services and activities weekly. CASS employs over 150 staff, on full-time, part-time or casual basis, and we operate on an annual budget of over \$7.0 million.

Since CASS is one of the leading Chinese NGOs in NSW, many Chinese are familiar with our services and lots of mainstream and other organisations have various levels of contacts and collaboration with us. Our clients get satisfaction through engaging in our services or joining our activities as they get social and emotional support and not 'just receiving' services from a service provider. The social and emotional support is very important for them because their limited English command often hinders their motivation in approaching and participating mainstream services / activities. For our NES clients, with CASS around, they feel assured, comfortable and relaxed to be involved in the mainstream affairs or activities as CASS is their best assurance in gaining Access and Equity to the mainstream services.

Indeed, it is due to the Government's multi-cultural policy that enables CASS to develop from a concept to one providing so many services which target the CALD communities, in particular, the Chinese-speaking community. CASS started from initially establishing one child care centre for the Chinese community to the current three child care centres serving the general community, as well as the provision of quality and professional child care services in the homes of registered Chinese-speaking family day educators in different suburbs. Apart from family and children's services, CASS's aged care team provides Community Aged Care Packages (CACP), Extended Aged Care at Home (EACH), Extended Aged Care at Home - Dementia (EACHD), Home Care Brokerage Service and Respite Service. Disability Services (including 2 group homes) and health services in the form of providing health information and resources to the community are also provided. In addition, with funding from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), CASS has been providing settlement services assisting newly arrived Chinese-speaking migrants with settlement concerns for years.

All the above mentioned services (together with the social and recreational activities organised by CASS), which are widely participated and welcomed by

the Chinese-speaking people, are the 'actualisation' of the Government's Access and Equity policy. The development of CASS over the last 30 years, resulting in the current size, scale, knowledge and the wide range of services / activities undertaken and provided by CASS, is a direct response of the community to the implementation of the Access and Equity policy of the successive Australian Governments. In other words, the direction of the strategy of Access and Equity is a catalyst in the capacity building of the community services of the Chinese community, with the development of CASS to provide "one-stop' seamless services to the Chinese community, which is greatly beneficial to the NES clients, thus, achieving the Access and Equity policy.

Coupled with the service provisions, CASS also plays an important role in community capacity building in advocating and lobbying for the Chinese community to safeguard and gain their rights as well as encouraging their participation in community affairs. When there are problems facing the Chinese community, CASS would assist to advocate for them in seeking the assistance and attention of the Government to problems faced by the community.

The dedication and achievements of CASS in serving the Chinese community gain the recognition of many quarters. In particular, when CASS celebrated its 30th Anniversary in 2011, the Upper House of the NSW Parliament passed a motion to congratulate CASS for serving the community in NSW excellently for 30 years. Similar acknowledgment was also mentioned in the Federal Parliament. The achievements of CASS definitely reflect the success of the Access and Equity policy. Without the vision and realisation of Access and Equity, it would not be possible for CASS to have developed to its present size and scale.

The Current Access and Equity Strategy and Situation

The Access and Equity policy is a practical and valuable principle which is highly supported and treasured by service providers and recipients of the CALD communities alike. As aforesaid, the development and achievement of CASS is a direct response of the community in upholding the strategy of Access and Equity by the Government.

However, while we acknowledge and support the valuable principle of the Access and Equity policy, we need to evaluate the effectiveness of its implementation practices. There appears to be gaps between what is in principle and whether Access and Equity actually exists in reality. In recent years, it seems that the Government has changed its course and not supported the concept and model of ethnic organisations like CASS in assisting the Government to deliver its services as in the past. There is a clear trend that services to clients of the CALD community are supposedly to be served by the 'ethnic' workers employed in the Government Departments and mainstream organisations. Without the involvement and assistance of organisations like CASS in the provision of

services, the social and cultural support to NES clients would be absent, and so the NES clients would not and cannot be well served as in many situations. Unless there is social, cultural and emotional support and understanding, the needs of NES clients cannot be met or resolved. Even though the worker speaks the same language of a particular client, services provided to the client would still not be comprehensive enough. A large gap usually exists since there is no appropriate coherent support for the worker and the CALD client.

For example, a bilingual worker in Centrelink could not replace the role of a worker from an ethnic organisation which can provide seamless services to support the clients. The social and emotional arena is extremely important for those needy clients which a 'single' bilingual worker in a Department is impossible to cater for. Thus, if the current situation continues to exist, the principle of Access and Equity would not be fulfilled.

Furthermore, there would only be a handful few multicultural workers in each of the office of a certain government department or mainstream services, as such, how could the handful few multicultural / bilingual workers serve the people from all different ethnic backgrounds? Take Centrelink as an example, all Centrelink offices may have a 'Chinese' worker dedicated to serve the Chinese-speaking clients, how about the other ethnic communities? Why not combine the resources of all Government Departments or mainstream services to support ethnic organisations to employ some staff of relevant social and cultural backgrounds to assist the respective NES people centrally? The model being used by the Government Departments or mainstream services indeed is not practical and is just wasting society's scarce resources.

The case of our CASS Chinese Family Day Care (CFDC) is a good illustration of how the principle of Access and Equity could be effectively implemented through an ethnic organisation like CASS. Our CFDC service was established in 1982 and initially funded by the Federal Government as a support service to the mainstream FDC scheme. Even though our CFDC service was licensed by the State Government to provide childcare services in the homes of registered carers supervised and supported by CASS, the families accessing our service were not entitled to receive child care assistance. The Government's explanation was that mainstream FDC services were open to people from all ethnic backgrounds and thus the policy of Access and Equity was satisfied. Chinese families were asked to use mainstream FDC services. The role of our CFDC was, according to the Government, to support mainstream FDC schemes to provide a culturally appropriate service to the Chinese-speaking community and to promote FDC services to the Chinese community. However, because there was no bilingual worker in the mainstream FDC schemes, it was difficult for Chinese carers to remain registered with the mainstream schemes due to communication problems, and Chinese families had reluctance accessing mainstream childcare due to language barriers and differences in cultural practices. Even though our CFDC has worked hard in promoting the services to the Chinese community and

actively supporting the mainstream services, we were only a go-between and the services were not provided directly to the Chinese families. Chinese families were reluctant to access mainstream FDC services. In 2007, there was a change in Government policy and our CFDC was recognised as a scheme and began to receive some operational subsidy. Families accessing our services have become eligible for child care benefits. We could train and retain our CFDC carers. With this change, we could see that when CASS is directly providing the service, the number of Chinese families using our CFDC services has increased dramatically. The number of Chinese families accessing our CFDC service has increased from 10 in 2007 to 200 in 2011. It needs to be noted that our CFDC service is not limited to serving the Chinese families but to the general community as well. While the number of families accessing mainstream FDC schemes has been dropping in the last few years, forcing some schemes to merge or some closing down, our CFDC scheme has been growing. This clearly illustrates that it is more effective for an ethnic organisation to provide services for ethnic communities as there is better cultural understanding, more effective communication when workers and clients speak the same language, and hence a more comprehensive service can be delivered. When more people from ethnic communities are facilitated to use the service, this is what Access and Equity truly means. While we are happy for our Chinese families, we have concerns for other ethnic communities such as the Koreans and the other emergent communities when they cannot fully access FDC services that meet their cultural needs as there are no other ethnic organisations currently funded to provide FDC services.

For aged care service, it is even more obvious that how ethnic organisations could deliver much better services than mainstream ones to the CALD community. The current approaches by the State and Federal Governments are different. In the Home and Community Care (HACC) program, which is traditionally state-managed, the strategy taken by the state department is to create Multicultural Access Project positions to promote the services to the CALD community. The majority of the service providers, such as Home Care, Home Modification, Community Transport, Meals On Wheels and Community Options are all run by mainstream service providers. The best they can do is to employ a couple of direct care staff who can speak a CALD language. As a result, there is very limited promotion in CALD languages, and the services are unable to meet the specific needs by CALD clients. A lot of researches clearly indicated that the CALD community is seriously under-represented in HACC services. An example of these researches is "Practising Positive Partnerships in the Ethnic and Multicultural Community Aged Care Sector" by the Monash University.

In the Federal funded community care services, including CACP, EACH, EACHD, and National Respite for Carers Program (NRCP), CALD specific packages are allocated to ethnic organisations, such as Co.As.It and CASS. The percentage of CALD clients is much higher for these Federal funded packages. However, there are also CALD packages allocated to mainstream organisations, whose only

strategy in CALD services is to employ CALD direct care workers to provide the services. It is found that at the end a lot of Chinese speaking / Korean speaking clients finally switch back to use our services because the office staff of those mainstream organisations cannot speak their languages. The clients encounter difficulties in assessment, requesting temporary changes in service hours, and making complaints, etc.

Similar difficulties are faced by CALD clients attending aged day centres operated by mainstream service providers. Although they employ frontline staff who can speak CALD languages, the contents of their services is not culturally sensitive and appropriate. At present, there are some clients in our day centres who have previously participated in other mainstream day centre activities. However, they finally decide to choose the service of CASS because we provide hot Chinese meals, all our staff members speak their language, and we celebrate traditional Chinese festivals – all these are very important considerations for clients in selecting appropriate services for them.

Clients from CALD community are highly disadvantaged in accessing disability services too because first, the whole in-take process is fully controlled by the Department. There is almost no promotion about the services, even in English. Because of the lack of information and language barrier, the NES clients, especially new migrants, are generally not aware of the services available, and their rights in the services. Second, the disability service sector is basically dominated by mainstream and large service providers because the Department's funding and tendering process does not give any favour to CALD specific organisations. As far as we know, CASS is the only ethnic organisation receiving ongoing grant from ADHC to provide disability services, plus a couple of multicultural organisations providing services targeting the CALD community in general. NES clients definitely face a lot of difficulties in knowing and receiving necessary services that they require.

As regards the aspect on health issues, NSW Health has a team of multicultural promotion workers whose main role is to promote health information for the CALD communities. However, these workers do not have the root in the CALD community. As a result, when they organise promotional activities, they always have to seek support from CALD community organisations like CASS. It is of no doubt that a better service model is to directly fund CALD community organisations in health promotion, which would definitely be more efficient and effective in achieving the purpose.

The settlement service funded by DIAC is yet another area Access and Equity is not fully achieved. The policies of the Government are constantly changing. In the past, there were quite a number of funded Chinese SGP workers positions for Sydney. However, in 2010, the Government ceased funding two Chinese organisations to provide settlement services even though the proportion of Chinese migrants remained high. In 2011, it was even more obvious that DIAC

was not in favour to fund ethno-specific organisations for SGP settlement services. For that round of funding, the Vietnamese community lost some of its funds while the Chinese community remained to have four funded SGP workers' positions only (though Chinese was one of the largest groups of family stream migrants in Sydney) and this trend would continue in the future. On the other hand, more and more DIAC funding is allocated to the mainstream service providers and/or the migrant resource centres with the rationale that the generalist services they are providing could cover the needs of most ethnic communities, including Chinese. Strictly speaking, such a policy is in line with Access and Equity principle as clients from CALD community are 'catered' to have services delivered to them by the 'bilingual' workers of those organisations. However, as explained earlier, it is difficult, if not impossible, for a 'single bilingual' worker to provide adequate support to the vast majority of Chinese clients since not the entire organisation understands them well linguistically and culturally while the targeted clients are those socially disadvantaged group of new migrants who do not know English. They do not just need one single worker's service, which is relatively 'narrow' in scope. Rather they are desperate to have a one-stop support from the ethnic community. No matter how the mainstream / migrant resource centres cater the needs of people from diverse cultural and language backgrounds and change the way they do things to help clients access the services they deliver, their infrastructure and staffing are not able to support each and every CALD community.

The translating and interpreting service (TIS) seems to be a very good service in realising Access and Equity. On the surface, it is a very good idea in assisting people from CALD backgrounds, however, in reality, since the interpreter cannot be familiar with every subject area that he/she is assigned to interpret, he/she would not be able to always understand what the client is facing/handling (e.g. domestic violence), without knowing the full picture, the interpreter would misinterpret/misguide the conversations. It is not that the interpreter is not 'professional', but it is just that the interpreter is not an expert in every subject he/she is assigned to interpret. It is hard to convey concepts/ideas unless the interpreter is familiar with the topic. From the experience of CASS, our SGP workers can provide a better service in assisting the clients to 'interpret' and 'communicate' with officials of Government Departments or other organisations since the SGP workers are much more familiar with the matter and the situation concerning the clients. As such, Access and Equity is not achieved by having TIS as compared to settlement services provided by ethnic organisations.

As the Government has changed its course in favouring 'large' mainstream organisations, the resources for ethnic organisations becomes less and less. The work for community capacity building even seems to be non-existing for those ethnic organisations. CASS has also found difficulties in 'squeezing' manpower and resources for this area of work as from 2011, CASS SGP workers are not funded to perform community development work by DIAC's funding.

Our Views

In order to realise Access and Equity principle, the care and help given directly by respective local ethnic community of the migrants is equally important. It involves the adaptation or adjustment by the new migrants in the new environment with respect to various matters, including culture, language and living habits. Instead of obtaining services from a worker who may or may not speak their language, it is more ideal for clients from CALD background to obtain services from an ethnic organisation which deeply understands their needs while the organisation acts as a bridge between the clients and the Government.

In general, existing CALD community organisations have good understanding of the needs of the CALD communities and also have good rapport with the CALD clients. They should be the most ideal organisations to provide culturally appropriate services for the CALD communities. It is only under such policy / practice could the principle of Access and Equity be effectively implemented. Thus, it is strongly urged that the Government should concentrate to fund and give adequate support and resources to ethnic organisations like CASS to deliver appropriate services to those in needs. Our CFDC is a success story and the present situation in aged care services (as explained earlier) presents a strong case illustrating the differences in having services provided by mainstream and ethnic organisations to CALD group of clients. The real essence of Access and Equity will not be achieved if the Government continues to change its course and not support the concept and model of funding ethnic organisations in assisting to deliver services to the CALD community. There is absolutely no reason why the Government does not put resources and support ethnic organisations to deliver the services as in the past. This is of particular importance for settlement services, which are effectively the forefront of service delivery for new arrivals. For most migrants, settlement services provide the initial introduction to Australia's services – Access and Equity could only be achieved if these clients could best be served at this stage.

Having worked closely with the CALD communities for more than thirty years, we are particularly concerned about the effect of Government policies on service recipients from the CALD background. We are glad to see that the Government recognizes the importance of Access and Equity. We hope the Government will take into consideration of our views. CASS, as a well-established non-profit community organisation, is ready to work collaboratively with the Government to provide high quality community services to the CALD community and to work hand in hand with the Government.

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