

All Together Community of Practice Advocacy Brief

Prepared by the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health
July 2022



MULTICULTURAL
CENTRE FOR
WOMEN'S HEALTH



Whittlesea
Community
Connections
Making a positive difference everyday

inTouch
Multicultural Centre
Against Family Violence

Who are we?

The *All Together* Community of Practice (CoP) comprises of 20 multicultural, ethno-specific, and faith-based organisations across Victoria from the wider multicultural and settlement services sector. The workforce of expert community practitioners works with migrant and refugee communities across Victoria. Our diverse workforce is made up of many skilled bilingual and bicultural workers who have strong ties and engagement with multicultural communities. This is one of our key strengths.

When migrants and refugees settle in Australia, our services are often their primary point of contact. We have a deep understanding and knowledge of the complex barriers and challenges migrant and refugee communities face in accessing and navigating critical services. We provide a range of services including prevention of violence against women programs, early intervention programs, settlement services, educational workshops, training and capacity building activities, and we connect migrant women to social, employment, health, legal and other services. Through our work, we develop ongoing and trusting relationships with migrant and refugee communities, particularly women.

Due to our long-standing relationships with community members, and notably women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, we often receive disclosures of experiences of violence. As such, we play a critical role in supporting women from migrant and refugee communities experiencing violence to navigate the family violence service system and interconnected services.

All Together Community of Practice (CoP) Member Organisations

- African Family Services
- AMES Australia
- Arabic Welfare
- Australian Vietnamese Women's Association
- Brotherhood of St Laurence
- Charis Mentoring
- Chinese Community Social Services Centre
- Community Abundance
- Diversitat
- Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District
- IndianCare
- Jewish Care (Victoria)
- MiCare
- Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne)
- Multicultural Centre for Women's Health
- PRONIA
- Refugee Legal
- South East Community Links
- Wellsprings for Women
- Whittlesea Community Connections

Preamble

The *All Together* Community of Practice (CoP) was established in June 2020 as a part of the *COVID-19 Multicultural Communities Family Violence* program funded by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. The CoP meetings were held bi-monthly and funded to run until July 2022.

Purposes of the CoP include to:

- Strengthen collaboration and coordination between specialist family violence services and multicultural, ethno-specific and faith organisations funded under the *COVID-19 Multicultural Communities Family Violence* program
- Share learnings, strategies and resources relating to our early intervention work
- Discuss challenges in our family violence work
- Strengthen individual and collective practice
- Create a space for reflective practice
- Build the evidence base on migrant and refugee experiences of accessing the family violence service system.

Common challenges impacting the Multicultural and Settlement services sector are raised at the CoP meetings and the wider Multicultural Communities Family Violence Working Group meetings. These issues highlighted the need for further exploration. Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, Whittlesea Community Connections and inTouch led consultations with CoP members from August 2021 to further gather data on these issues and propose solutions for addressing them.

Below we have provided the main issues and recommendations identified by CoP members. These recommendations work alongside and add value to the recommendations made in the 2021 '*Multicultural client journey and ecosystem mapping – Final Report*'.

The purpose of this advocacy brief is as follows:

- To highlight the important role of the Multicultural and Settlement services sector in the family violence service system and highlight the main systemic issues experienced by them which impedes their work in supporting migrant and refugee women experiencing family violence
- To propose practical recommendations to address these issues and advocate for sustained funding, capacity building and the urgent need for embedding intersectionality into addressing systemic issues.

In this document, when discussing the ‘family violence service system’, this encapsulates family violence specialist services, Victoria Police services and legal/court services. We acknowledge that there are more mainstream services that interact and are embedded within this system such as Child Protection, schools/centre-based education and care services, Maternal and Child health services, Aged care services and universal services.

Embedding cultural safety and intersectionality in the family violence service system

Issues:

CoP members highlighted the lack of cultural safety and responsiveness of the family violence service system. When Multicultural and Settlement services refer their clients to services, through ringing emergency services (000) if unsafe or supporting community members to book an appointment with a local community legal service, they are often met with sexism, racism, or other forms of discrimination and are at times misidentified as being the person using violence. Practitioners and policymakers within the family violence service system, often display a lack of understanding and application of intersectional approaches/thinking to their service provision response and policymaking. Additionally, migrant and refugee communities are often grouped together, with their diverse ethnicities, cultures, and backgrounds, homogenised. As a result, client’s experience of the family violence system can be traumatising; community members do not feel heard, and they become further distrustful of services. This treatment can reinforce their reluctance to seek help and support from the family violence service system. Consequently, some women may remain in extremely unsafe and violent situations that could lead to lethality. The journey maps from the *‘Multicultural client journey and ecosystem mapping – Final Report’* demonstrate this. These maps present women engaging and disengaging from the family violence service system multiple times across their journey, with their needs and safety inadequately addressed, if at all.

Contributing to the lack of cultural safety and responsiveness of the family violence service system is the limited bilingual and/or bicultural workforce representation within this system. This lack of diverse representation results in a reliance on interpreting services, which may be inaccurate, unsatisfactory, or not adapted to the needs of women.

Recommendations:

1. Training Package

The Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Management (MARAM) Framework incorporates the use of intersectionality in practice. However, it is evident that this is not enough. In-depth Cultural Responsiveness training that addresses cultural safety, cultural responsiveness, use of interpreters and reflective practice on one's own privilege, assumptions and biases is essential. In addition, the provision of separate intersectionality training is essential. This training should put intersectional feminist approaches at the core of the modules and support a better understanding of systemic racism and other forms of systemic discrimination. We recommend that this training comprises a package to be provided at induction and annually for the family violence specialist services workforce, police workforce and legal workforce. Further, the Victorian Government needs to ensure this training is up-to-date, free and accessible and developed in consultation with the Multicultural and Settlement services sector.

2. Embed intersectionality into the family violence system

Using an intersectional approach in prevention and response of family violence does not refer only to the provision of intersectionality training for the workforce. Preventing and responding to violence against women involves challenging gender inequality but also racism and other forms of discrimination. We recommend that initiatives related to the prevention and response of family violence are tailored to the targeted communities. This can be achieved through the centering of the voices of multicultural communities – they must be consulted and involved during all stages of the planning and implementation and fairly retributed for their time. Partnerships between specialist expert organisations working toward social equity must also be fostered and sustainably funded. It is critical to identify and transform the systems of power and privilege that negatively shape individual outcomes.

3. Bilingual and bicultural workforce quotas

As well as providing comprehensive cultural responsiveness training, the Victorian Government should consider introducing quotas dictating that a percentage of the family violence workforce must be bilingual and/or bicultural. Bilingual and bicultural workers have an in-depth understanding of cultural context, including the complex impact of migration, are best positioned to communicate effectively and in language with community members. Bilingual/bicultural workers must be considered experts for the ethnic/cultural groups that they belong to rather than being expected to address the needs of women from all various cultural/ethnic backgrounds.

It is essential to have qualified family violence specialist bilingual workers within the family violence units at police stations, within the Magistrates' Court as duty lawyers and/or within The Orange Door initial assessment teams. It is critical for these workers to be positioned at the initial entry point of services to ensure that community members feel safe engaging with the services. It is important to further upskill and build the capacity of bilingual and bicultural workers to engage in such work such as through providing training to work with women impacted by family violence.

Valuing the role of Multicultural and Settlement services

Issues:

The Multicultural and Settlement service workforce plays an integral role in assisting migrant and refugee women to navigate the complex family violence service system and in filling the gaps this system fails to meet. The family violence service system is at maximum capacity, which means the service response to victim-survivors is often limited to risk and safety assessments. Victim-survivors require a myriad of support to ensure that they are stable and safe. This is where the Multicultural and Settlement service system steps in to refer, advocate, and navigate a variety of supports for the victim-survivor women and children to ensure their continued safety. The Multicultural and Settlement service workforce not only provides a high level of service to the victim-survivor women and children, but they also do this mostly unfunded.

We recognize and acknowledge that since the Royal Commission into Family Violence provided its recommendations in 2016, the Victorian Government has provided further investment in family violence prevention and response initiatives. However, despite this, Multicultural and Settlement services have continued to be over-worked, undervalued, and unsustainably and insufficiently funded. Funding is often short-term and there is often great competition amongst organisations to secure funding for their critical services.

Recommendations:

1. Representation of diverse Multicultural & Settlement Sector workforce

There needs to be increased representation of Multicultural and Settlement services at the appropriate governance groups and more consultation between government departments and the Multicultural and Settlement service sector for future family violence response and prevention strategies. We note that there will be an opportunity through the *Working Together Program* from Family Safety Victoria, with the establishment of the Multisector Working Group to address the above recommendation. We recommend that there is wide representation of the Multicultural and Settlement service sector at the table. This includes representatives from small ethno-specific organisations and state-based and national-based organisations. We also encourage representation from Police and legal services to strengthen collaboration and communication between systems.

2. Equitable & Sustainable Funding

Family Safety Victoria and other funding departments need to provide long-term and matched funding comparable to family violence specialist services for Multicultural and Settlement services to be able to continue to provide essential response services to community.

3. Consultation & Co-case Management Program

We strongly recommend Family Safety Victoria in the specialisation of the Multicultural and Settlement sector workforce is done in consultation and guidance with sector representatives including bilingual and bicultural representation. Furthermore, we would support models such as InTouch's 'Co-case Management' Pilot Program which facilitates partnerships with community organisations, improving case management services. Specialist support remains with the family violence specialist service (such as InTouch) and the community organisation provides the knowledge and links to local services and community. We would encourage such programs be rolled out to other regions such as the North.

4. Recognising the expertise and leadership of migrant and refugee specialist organisations

More migrant and refugee women's organisations need to be actively involved in working to prevent violence and build gender equity in their communities, and the wider community. Migrant and refugee women and ethno-specific specialist organisations who have expertise in gendered violence should be involved and meaningfully consulted in all phases, such as in the planning, decision-making and evaluation of prevention of violence against women initiatives.

Strengthening Family Violence and Migrant & Refugee Communities Data and Evidence-base

Issues:

Currently there is insufficient data, restricted data availability and limited evidence on migrant and refugee communities and family violence that can demonstrate the scale and importance of the issues and its impacts. This makes advocacy and service improvement efforts difficult for Multicultural and Settlement services.

Recommendations:

We propose that the peak bodies in specialist family violence response and primary prevention, such as Orange Door, are both responsible and required to lead this work, sharing data with the wider sector to inform continued improvement of services and project design and delivery.

Supporting prescribed organisations to better align with MARAM

Issues:

Many Multicultural and Settlement services have limited resources and infrastructure to support alignment to MARAM. For example, they may not have a Human Resources Team or a Learning Management System. Consequently, this leaves most of the work with project officers who are responsible for fulfilling other funded project deliverables. Another challenge for MARAM alignment is staff turnover, which can be high for reasons such as short-term funded projects, over-representation of part-time staff or being a volunteer-led organisation with limited resources.

The MARAM eLearn and other MARAM training and resources provided are inadequate and/or inaccessible. For example, some organisations need multiple staff and volunteers to complete the basic Screening and Identification training, with each individual needing to create their own account to access this training. This is not feasible. Alternatively, they can gain access to the material through the Learning Management System. However, many of the Multicultural and Settlement services do not have a Learning Management System (LMS) or capacity to track training. In addition, there has been limited training available that addresses the complexities for Multicultural and Settlement service workforce working in the space of family violence response especially for bilingual and bicultural staff and volunteers.

Recommendations:

1. Continue Sector Capacity Building Grant Program– Multicultural and Settlement Services

Family Safety Victoria should increase and extend funding of the Sector Capacity Building Grant (SCBG) – Multicultural and Settlement Services: minimum increase of funding over a 12-month period of \$350,000. At the 10-month mark, Family Safety Victoria should assess with grant recipients where the 41 prescribed Multicultural and Settlement organisations are at on their alignment to the MARAM Framework and whether further time and funding is needed. An extension and increase of funding would allow SCBG recipients to provide a more tailored and supportive model to the Multicultural and Settlement services in their organisation's alignment journey, including tailored training and delivery.

Clear communication regarding mandatory requirements for Multicultural and Settlement services is critical. For example, Multicultural and Settlement services are not required to complete the Comprehensive MARAM training unless they are delivering a program such as a men's behaviour change program. This will ensure that Multicultural and Settlement Services can set clear boundaries for their workforce and provide best practice to the community.

MARAM training and resources need to be provided free of cost and in a way that is accessible and tailored to the Multicultural and Settlement services workforce.

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