

ECCWA's support for FECCA's Request to Ethnic data count in Australia

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Introduction:

The Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia Incorporated (ECCWA) is pleased to support the request of the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA) to appropriately include the ethnicity of Australians in the Census and also in the definition of the term culturally and linguistically diverse. ECCWA strongly believes that including people's ethnicity in the definition and also in the Census would help policy makers, legislators, service providers and the community to develop an understanding of how their behaviour is determined socially and what barriers, challenges and opportunities people experience and practise, to put in place strategies, policies and programs to support them more appropriately. It is imperative that the data is accurate and meaningful so as to ensure that services being considered are appropriate for the needs of the community.

About the Ethnic Communities Council of WA Inc.

ECCWA is Western Australia's peak Non-profit / non-government, community based ethnic umbrella organisation. ECCWA takes an active interest in all aspects of multiculturalism, culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) affairs and acts on behalf of all ethnic communities in Western Australia (WA). ECCWA has been providing advocacy supports to multicultural communities for 45 years and is a member of the Federation of the Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA).

Through the Ethnic Advocacy and Support Team (EAST), ECCWA provides specialised advocacy supports for individuals who are unable to access government funded services. ECCWA's objectives are to:

- Ensure that ECCWA's policy positions contribute to government's policy making;
- Promote and safeguard the interests of CaLD communities in WA;
- Disseminate WA government information to the CaLD Communities. For more information about ECCWA, please refer to our Website at: www.eccwa.org.au/

Importance of including ethnicity data in Census:

Australia has the largest community of people from diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds. According to 2016 Census, 33% of Australians are born in a country other than Australia; that is about one in three people; and a further 16% have either one or both parents born overseas. Australian people speak more than 300 languages excluding the languages of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. CaLD people are not a homogenous people. There is diversity within diversity, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/Media%20Release3>.

When people migrate to Australia, they usually come with their beliefs, values, pre and post migration stress and trauma. To ease the process of acculturation, integration and adaptation in a new country, Australia has a very comprehensive Multicultural Policy which recognises and supports people's diversity and encourages them to adapt and integrate into the new dominant culture with programs that are funded.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) people as those who were born in a non-English speaking country other than Australia, USA, United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, Canada, South Africa and New Zealand. According to ABS's definition, people who are born in Australia to parents from CaLD backgrounds and speak English fluently are not included as CaLD.

Many people who are born in Australia to migrant parents may still tend to speak their mother tongue / first language at home and are influenced by their ethnicity, old cultural practises and religious beliefs. Thus ABS's definition is very restrictive and denies Australians from CaLD backgrounds their ethnicity which in turn prevents developing strategies and programs to protect them from inherited diseases and disabilities including psychosocial disabilities, abuse and neglect due to their ethnicity, cultural barriers, religious beliefs, etc that are specific to people who belong to some ethnic backgrounds.

There are practises, for example, of female genital mutilation (FGM), honour killings, some blood borne diseases like, HIV / AIDS, hepatitis B and C, that are more prevalent in South and South East Asian and in the Sub-Saharan African countries. People from some ethnic backgrounds are more likely to experience mental ill health and are likely to suicide. However unfortunately, when people present to the health services with psychosocial disabilities having survived a suicide attempt, their ethnicity, cultural diversity and religious backgrounds are not recorded.

As the ABS doesn't keep an accurate count of people with disability including psychosocial disability in general, it is not possible to know what percentage of the people from CaLD backgrounds may have disability. The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) has been continuously reporting to the COAG that only eight per cent of people with disability that are registered with NDIS are from CaLD backgrounds. This seems extremely low and may not accurately reflect the real number of people with disability from CaLD backgrounds living in Australia and the reasons that are preventing them from accessing supports and services they need. Without the data appropriately reflecting these people's ancestry, ethnic, and religious beliefs and disability, they may miss out on prevention programs and may not be included meaningfully in the community.

Our work with migrants and refugees shows that mental health and disability are not valued positively in many cultures. CaLD people with mental health conditions and disability are not empowered enough to apply for supports and services due to:

- The persons, their families' and carer's lack of English language proficiency, cultural and religious barriers that are imposed on them;
- Their lack of knowledge of what is available to them in the community as those supports and services may or may not have been available for them in their countries of origin, even if the person with disability or mental health condition was born in Australia and speaks English well.

ECCWA's Recommendations:

ECCWA supports FECCA's request to include ethnicity in the definition to read as 'Cultural, Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity'.

Census counts should include the country of birth of each parent; language spoken at home; ancestry / ethnic background; and disability including psychosocial disability. The question about disability should state: Do you have a disability? Yes / No. Does your disability impact on your day-to-day life? Yes / No.

Benefits of obtaining the data on ethnicity, ancestry, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity would ensure informed important decisions on appropriate allocation of resources and also ensure that services are accessible, inclusive and respond to the needs of all Australians. It would also be easier to develop policies, programs and practices to target people's specific needs and barriers to support them to achieve good life outcomes and be included meaningfully in the social, economic, cultural and political life of the community.

