



Submission on the Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes

Introduction

The Chinese Australian Services Society Limited (commonly known as “CASS”) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes to Joint Standing Committee on Migration.

As a long standing community organisation, CASS has been dedicated to assisting disadvantaged people from local communities and advocating on their behalf. We would like to share our views and experience with the Committee on migrant settlement services.

Our submission is a reflection of the viewpoints and concerns that we received from our service users and people in our community, as well as observation and conclusions we made while delivering services to our clients, who are users of Settlement Services Program.

About Our Organisation

CASS was founded in 1981. Its main service objective is to provide a wide range of welfare services to the community, and assist migrants to settle and integrate into the Australian society. The comprehensive range of community services and activities provided by CASS includes residential aged care, home ageing services, disability services, vocational training, settlement and health, volunteering, and family and children services. Most of the services we provide cover the whole of Metropolitan Sydney, with some covering the areas down to Wollongong. We serve the Chinese, Koreans, Indonesians, Vietnamese, people from other CALD communities, as well as mainstream Australians. More than 2,400 families access our services and activities weekly.

The Settlement Services Program (SSP) of CASS assists newly arrived Chinese-speaking migrants with settlement concerns including housing, employment, education, family and children as well as health & welfare issues. We are currently providing services to approximately 1,000 clients every year. The services provided are welcomed and highly complimented by the local government and the community.

In 2016, we have developed strong community link between newly arrived migrants and service providers. We have delivered about 40 information sessions in various locations

throughout Sydney, including housing, personal safety, education as well as many health and welfare issues. Moreover, our volunteer program, which provides form filling and JP Services, has supported new migrants to improve their engagement with related services.

In considering SSP services of CASS, we respond to the Inquiry as follows:

- (1) The existing settlement services need to be expanded to cover new locations to meet new demand.** With increasing housing cost and living expenses, more and more newly arrived migrants choose to settle in new and more remote suburbs where cost of life is more affordable. However, residents in these suburbs often face lack of services, particularly for new migrants who have extra difficulty due to language barrier.

Based on the feedback provided by our clients, many of them often have to travel long distance to find a professional worker for appropriate assistance if they are based in say, North Western Sydney. Moreover, senior group activity for new migrants to participate in these areas are inadequate, which have resulted in an insufficient knowledge and understanding in their entitlement and have led to lack of access when they are in need of help.

In this regard, settlement services workers need to provide extra assistance to migrants who settle in these new suburbs. With the limited resources from the tight funding, settlement services workers find it hard to satisfy the needs in these areas.

- (2) The language barrier of the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) community must be addressed, and more English language programs and technology approaches are needed.** Through our work, we have observed many migrants, elderly migrants in particular, have low English proficiency even after completing Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). Low English proficiency has impeded the ability of these migrants to access social service and to live independently.

In addition, elderly migrants are significantly disadvantaged in terms of the equality of access for service. It requires intensive case management and assistance to help elderly migrants settle, as studies show they are more vulnerable in social and personal network, physical condition and economic aspects, while in practice they have been disadvantaged due to limited resource and understanding in their needs.

- (3) Culturally appropriate services need to be strengthened, not only on the availability but also on the accessibility.** While most government departments are providing on their website a range of information translated into various languages, many people do not have the access due to low level of awareness or lack of computer literacy. In addition, some of the translations are difficult to understand due to lack of cohesion to the specific culture. The translation was often seemed to have done on a word by word basis.

Meanwhile, migrants have to experience huge difference in terms of the culture, religion and policy between their country of origin and Australia. Culturally appropriate means of service plays an important role in encouraging people to take initiative to seek help. Unfortunately we have observed during our delivery of service that vulnerable migrants, for instance people with disability or those suffering from domestic violence, are not properly assisted and supported. Women's right and access to services are also impeded due to lack of bilingual social workers. Many clients return to us for assistance after being referred to other organisation, because that culturally appropriate service is not available in other service providers.

- (4) We appreciate the effort of translating and interpreting service (TIS)** provided by the government with the objective of assisting members of the CALD communities to break the language barrier. However, 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 or culture. From the experience of CASS, our settlement services workers can provide a better service in assisting the clients to 'interpret' and 'communicate' with officials of Government Departments or other organisations since the settlement services workers are much more familiar with the matter and the situation concerning the clients. If more funding is made available, our settlement services workers can provide extra services to clients which help to ease the above-mentioned problems.

Recommendation

Thus, we urge the Department to increase program funding so that service providers like CASS could deploy more resources to new suburbs in accordance with the latest trend of migrant settlement and demographic movement, particularly in areas with high demand for service of domestic violence, mental health and disability. We believe that more migrants would be benefited if more bilingual workers are trained and placed in these suburbs. Ultimately, the delivery of the services will be conducted more effectively and efficiently.

Conclusion

We welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on the Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes. In this submission, we have included the feedback that we received from people in our community, including our clients, volunteers and staff members. We would appreciate if the Department of Social Services takes into account the viewpoints and concerns raised in this submission. We are happy to have a further discussion to elaborate these viewpoints and concerns.