The Community Engagement Project for Women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds: A Project Report

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Acknowledgements

The Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (ECCQ) would like to sincerely thank the Brisbane City Council for the funding support and contributions to this project.

We would like to thank the members of the project steering group who provided considerable input into the development and implementation of this project.

Thank you also to the members of ECCQ project team for their community insight, support and dedication.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of the community women for sharing their experiences and wisdom. We have been inspired by their strengths, resilience and special contributions to our community.
Executive summary

In partnership with the Brisbane City Council (BCC), the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (ECCQ) delivered the Women’s Engagement Project to enhance the community participation of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women in Brisbane city. ECCQ’s Chronic Disease Program and the Council’s Community Development Team developed and implemented a culturally appropriate engagement process to identify cultural, social, economic and learning needs of women from the following communities: Arabic speaking, Samoan, Spanish speaking, Tamil, Sudanese and Vietnamese.

The project was initiated by the project steering group with Brisbane City Council and the Ethnic Communities Council Queensland agreeing to achieve the following objectives:

- Work collaboratively with women from different cultural backgrounds to design and deliver an appropriate engagement process to investigate the issues relating to cultural, social, economic and learning needs
- Share skills, knowledge and cultural understanding between project staff and Council staff by working collaboratively
- Provide the project results to inform existing Council services and to provide opportunities to explore future projects and programs for Council and other service providers

This project report is the outcome of the direct consultations with community women representing six diverse communities in Brisbane. Through the consultation, we have identified common challenges that many CALD women experience with regard to community participation.

Furthermore, the project has also identified and documented the strengths and contributions that many CALD women have made as mothers, daughters, and more importantly, as valued community members of wider Australian communities despite significant challenges they have faced. These women’s valuable contributions must be acknowledged and service providers should identify opportunities to work in equal partnership with those women where the women can share their strengths and bring diverse perspectives to strengthen our community.

Given the lack of research in the area of community engagement focused on women’s issues, the project findings provide insights into the day-to-day challenges experienced by CALD women living in Brisbane city. This will further inform future initiatives for service providers to improve engagement with CALD women. Further research should systemically analyses the information collected from women representing wider CALD communities to establish a framework for effective engagement process with women in the context of diverse Brisbane communities.

The findings of the project have been summarised in the paper and we conclude the project by formulating recommendations in consultation with the community women.
Introduction

Project background

The city of Brisbane has a diverse population. According to the Census in 2011\(^1\), more than 28% of the total population was born overseas and 18.5% of the population (192,586 people) spoke a language other than English at home.

Achieving effective engagement with CALD communities enables the government to tap into diverse perspectives and create a more inclusive and accessible city for all CALD communities. As reflected in the Council’s Multicultural Strategy\(^2\), the Brisbane City Council is committed to working with CALD communities to recognise and enhance the valuable contribution and benefits that cultural diversity brings to Brisbane communities. The Council’s commitment to achieving a welcoming, friendly and inclusive city for all is also reflected in recent initiatives\(^3\).

Yet, research indicates that many culturally and linguistically diverse communities experience unique challenges to community engagement\(^4,5\). According to a recent Queensland study, the common barriers to community engagement for CALD communities include: communication barriers, institutional and systemic barriers, institutional trust issues, information barriers and lack of accessibility\(^4\). While Brisbane is known for its welcoming atmosphere and support for diverse communities, the city has also faced some challenges in maintaining the sense of community such as difficult economic conditions and managing the increase in cultural diversity\(^3\). Research in this topic area is therefore necessary to support the Council in promoting social cohesion, connection and supporting diverse communities in Brisbane to play an active role.

Policy context

As the project focused on engagement with CALD communities in Brisbane, it is relevant to review the Council’s policy in this regard. The Brisbane City Council uses the term ‘community engagement’ for involving residents in the council’s decision-making process\(^6\). According to the Council’s Community Engagement Policy, meaningful engagement is a process that:

- is planned, resourced and effectively promoted to those likely to be interested or affected;
- takes into consideration the diversity of the community;
- clearly articulates the level of influence the community has on the decision making process;
- provides a range of accessible opportunities for community participation; and
- provides timely feedback to participants and the broader community showing how community input has been considered and what final outcomes have been determined by Council.

Numerous studies have identified benefits of effective community engagement such as increased quality of life, enhanced social well-being and reinforced social capital\(^7\). In the Queensland context, the State Government has clearly stated the benefits of effective engagement with CALD communities including: better service delivery, a stronger and better skilled workforce, resilient and harmonious communities, better planning, better decision making and cost-effectiveness\(^5\).
**Council’s community engagement spectrum**

The Brisbane City Council adopts the three levels of community engagement in line with the United Nations Office for Community and Economic Development\(^6\). As described in the spectrum below, community engagement involves different levels of engagement from informing, consulting to active participation. This engagement spectrum is based upon the relationship between the community and the Council. All levels of engagement are appropriate and legitimate, depending on the objectives of the engagement.

![Community Engagement Spectrum](image)

**Why CALD women and engagement?**

Women from CALD backgrounds often experience the ‘double-disadvantage’ of cultural diversity and gender discrimination, and their needs are less likely to be addressed adequately\(^8\). Many CALD women arrive in Australia under various circumstances including as migrants, international students, refugees and unaccompanied minors\(^9\).

Overall, a literature review in the area of CALD women and community engagement identified a significant gap in our understanding of their experiences. In the Australian context, several studies focused on CALD women’s engagement in physical activity, workforce participation and leadership experience of CALD women\(^10,11\). While literature suggests that gender, along with other range of factors such as language, education, ethnicity, skills, class and poverty influence on how different groups of populations engage with government\(^5\), there has been a lack of empirical research in the Australian context examining the particular challenges experienced by CALD women in community engagement.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to build upon existing research in the area of CALD community engagement, identify CALD women’s strengths and contributions, and examine the socio-cultural influences of community engagement for CALD women. The research findings will inform future development of culturally appropriate engagement with women from diverse cultural, language and religious backgrounds living in the city of Brisbane.

**Key research objectives**

The project aims to further the Brisbane City Council’s commitment in improving the community participation of CALD women in Brisbane by investigating the following key research objectives:

- Identify CALD women’s strengths and document their contributions to wider communities
- Identify social, cultural and economic challenges faced by CALD women in Brisbane
- Identify how CALD women and service providers can work together to address these challenges
- Identify good practices and sustainable strategies for engaging with CALD women
Methodology

Study design and procedures

A project steering group from the Council and ECCQ was formed at the beginning to establish clear project objectives, time frames and expected outcome. ECCQ project team reviewed literature to scan current concepts of community engagement, relevant policy documents to the Council and studies in the area of CALD women and community engagement. Due to the dearth of literature that currently exists about CALD women’s community engagement, the search was later broadened to review the challenges experienced by migrant women and CALD communities in general.

In order to canvas different perspectives of women on community participation from CALD communities, and to provide them with an opportunity to share their individual views and experience of community participation, six diverse communities were engaged as part of the consultation process: Arabic speaking, Samoan, Spanish speaking, Sudanese, Tamil and Vietnamese communities. These six CALD groups were selected as they were accessible to ECCQ due to prior linkages with the communities nurtured through service delivery.

The research questions for individual in-depth interviews and focus group interviews were guided by the project objectives in consultation with the project steering group as well as the input from ECCQ’s multicultural health workers. This ensured that the interview questions were relevant and culturally appropriate for their communities. Furthermore, all questions were open-ended to encourage a range of responses from participants. The project was informed by the guiding principles of employing a ‘strengths-based’ approach to the consultation process and the need for identifying ‘good practice’ for service providers in relation to culturally appropriate and effective engagement with CALD women in Brisbane.

Study participants recruitment

ECCQ’s multicultural health workers played a key role in recruiting participants using various communication strategies such as distributing promotional flyers in the community language, word of mouth, posting on social networks, emails and phone calls to existing community networks. A total of 84 women participated in the study from north and south of Brisbane River. The demographic characteristics of women are described in table 1.

For key informant interviews, individual community leaders were recruited from each community group representing north and south of Brisbane. In terms of identifying and selecting community leaders for individual interviews, the ECCQ multicultural health workers were consulted and the general consensus was that: leaders do not necessarily have to hold a formal leadership position, but can be a person who is recognised as a leader by the community, who actively engage and influence community members, and who are believed to represent the views of members in their respective community.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Participants (N= 72)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age groups of all women (%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-30 yo</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40 yo</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>51-60 yo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Over 60 yo</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Years living in Brisbane (Mean ± SD)</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudanese</td>
<td>6.2 (3.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoan</td>
<td>11.3 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic speaking</td>
<td>7.2 (3.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>19.7 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>10.8 (9.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>23.1 (9.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status (%)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Married</td>
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<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not married</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total women with Children (%)</strong></td>
<td>83.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Children per woman (Mean ± SD)</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudanese</td>
<td>3.3 (1.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoan</td>
<td>2.8 (1.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic speaking</td>
<td>2.9 (1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>2.5 (1.1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tamil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>2.0 (0.5)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Self-rated English level (%)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Employment status (%)</strong></td>
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<td>Casual employed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Demographic characteristic of research participants

**Ethical considerations**

Voluntary informed consent forms were obtained from all respondents prior to their participation in the study. The participants were provided with pertinent information about the study and were informed of their rights to withdraw during the interview at any time. The interview facilitators explained the procedure for recording and taking notes during the interview. In order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, no names were used during the data collection and analysis process.
Data collection

**Focus group interviews and key informant interviews**

A focus group research method was used to collect data from community groups to explore attitudes, opinions and perceptions of CALD women about community engagement in Brisbane city. A focus group research is defined as a ‘technique involving the use of in-depth group interviews in which participants are selected because they are a purposive, although not necessarily representative sampling of a specific population’\(^{12}\). It is an exploratory research in nature that best draws upon participants’ feelings, beliefs, attitudes and experience\(^{13}\).

Key informant interviews are qualitative in-depth interviews with people who know what is going on in the community\(^{14}\). The objective of key informant interviews is to collect information from a wide range of people such as community leaders and residents who have first-hand knowledge of the community and can provide insight on the nature of issues and provide recommendations for solutions\(^{14}\).

ECCQ project officer provided necessary information and training support, and discussed the responsibilities of multicultural health workers who were a part of the project team. Multicultural health workers’ responsibilities included the recruitment of community participants, arranging a suitable venue for interviews, and undertaking focus group and key-informant interviews. The multicultural health workers acted as a ‘facilitator’ during the interviews to guide the discussion and provided assistance where necessary. All multicultural health workers were native in the language of the selected community, thus eliminating the language barrier and allowing direct communication with community participants during the interviews. Furthermore, those multicultural health workers had a sound appreciation of the culture, which enabled culturally appropriate engagement with the participants and helped them establish rapport.

The duration of the interviews ranged from 60 minutes to 90 minutes. As all interview questions were open-ended, facilitator used probes and clarifying questions to stimulate discussion during the interview. Recording and note-taking methods were used for data collection.

Data analysis

Following the completion of participant interviews, data analysis focused on eliciting themes regarding enablers and challenges to community participation for CALD women. The project team followed 4 steps for systemic data analysis: data immersion, data coding, creating categories identifying themes followed by data display and interpretation as described below\(^5\) (Figure 1). During the first stage of the data analysis, the ECCQ project team systemically read the interview transcripts to develop familiarity with the data.

![Figure 1 Data analysis process](image-url)
In step 2 and 3, coding was started with a ‘bottom-up’ approach by reading the transcripts of the interviews carefully, and paid attention to words and phrases that are more relevant to the study questions. During the initial (level 1) coding, open inductive approach was used line by line in order to identify texts that expressed repeating ideas. The initial coding was followed by focused coding where the initial codes were clustered into subcategories. Finally, categories were analysed for relationships and core ‘themes’ were identified and summarised in the findings section below. There were not significant variations among different CALD groups from the study findings.

Key findings and considerations

1. Focus group interview

CALD women’s strengths and contributions to wider communities

Sharing culture

The response from many participants across all six CALD groups indicated that ‘sharing culture’ is one of their most important contributions to the Australian community. Many women spoke about sharing their traditional culture with wider Australian communities as well as the importance of passing the traditional culture to the young generation in their respective community. Organising and attending multicultural events were also considered as a way of sharing their culture with others, and some women believed that educating other people from different culture about their religious and cultural belief has promoted cohesion and multiculturalism in Australia.

“I use my skills to educate people around me and about my religious belief when they ask me I believe this promotes multiculturalism and peaceful co-existence..” (Participant, Arabic speaking community)

Supporting family

Many participants highlighted the importance of ‘keeping family together’ to strengthen the community. Many women spoke about the importance of caring for their family, in particular, elderly and sick family members. For many mothers among the participants, looking after their children is very important and some mothers took a pride in raising their children to become good citizens in Australia.

“Looking after my children when they were young to be healthy and study well.. Now they all have good jobs (pharmacists) and are good citizens. I believe a good family will build a strong country..” (Participant, Vietnamese community)

Supporting community

Many participants across six groups shared their involvement in supporting communities and helping others in need. Those women’s involvement was various and far-reaching, from charity donation, volunteering, fundraising to working in a leadership position in their ethnic community association. These women’s community support was not limited to their own ethnic community; many participants willingly donated their money to help the victims of the natural disasters in other parts of the world and fundraised through the community’s collective action for hospitals in Brisbane.
“I was a refugee with no money at the beginning.. I would like to say thank you to Australia for giving me freedom and a good life.. Now I always donate my money and my time to support people in natural disaster in Australia and in the world.” (Participant, Vietnamese community)

Personal strengths

Apart from the participants’ contributions to communities, we also encouraged the women to share their personal strengths and skills. A significant number of participants described their strengths as ‘hard working’, ‘ability to quickly adapt in a new environment’, ‘compassionate’ and ‘resilient’. While some women appeared shy about sharing their personal strengths with other community members, others expressed frustration as they have not been given a ‘chance’ to contribute their valuable skills to the Australian community.

“We know we are all different.. We are trying to share our knowledge and experience with Australian community, but because we are not Australian and we didn’t study here.. We don’t have the same chance for many reasons and most important is language and religion (Islam).” (Participant, Arabic speaking community)

Being a ‘good citizen’

A number of participants viewed ‘being a good citizen’ as a way of contributing to communities. More specifically, this also included fulfilling ordinary duties such as paying bills, tax and saving energy for their community environments. For most participants, being gainfully employed was considered as an important means of community contribution through economic participation which is linked with financial independence.

“.ability to work and support family, not depending on Centre link is important.” (Participant, Samoan community)

Challenges to community participation

During the consultation, community respondents highlighted a number of challenges to community participation. In summary, the main challenges identified by CALD women during the consultation include:

- Lack of English language proficiency
- Lack of available information about community programs and activities
- Racial discrimination
- Work-life balance
- Cultural and religious barrier
- Transport barrier
- Safety issues at night for women

“Language – women’s biggest challenge is communication difficulties. Many feel disempowered. They cannot access services and understand flyers.” (Participant, Sudanese community)
Lack of understanding about role of local governments and process to engage with service providers

Education, employment and income parity

Lack of English language proficiency was one of the major challenges identified by many participants. Many women mentioned that the language barrier not only hindered the women’s ability to understand the information about community participation opportunities, but also affected their confidence level; many participants did not feel confident about communicating their needs and interacting with other people in English.

Many mothers with young children also raised the burden of childcare, associated costs and a lack of child minding support when they want to attend community activities and events. While working mothers among the participants may have more financial capacity, they find it difficult to balance between work and family due to time constraint, despite the motivation to participate in social and community activities. Given the assignment of traditional family responsibilities by gender, working women often bear a ‘double-burden’ to perform more domestic work and caring responsibilities that results in less free time for social and leisure activities. Research indicates that the imbalance between work and family responsibilities negatively impact on women’s social and economic status, emotional well-being as well as public participation.

For Sudanese women, when they need to prioritise their commitments due to time constraint, many women preferred to attend community events such as prayer groups instead of organisational event due to a strong communal-spirit values and the fear of losing community support if they do not participate.

“When many women in our community have children below the age of 14 years and according to Australian child safety law, you cannot leave the children alone. So you have to take them with you and especially when child minding is not provided or children are not allowed then it makes it harder for most mothers to participate.” (Participant, Sudanese community)

“When having kids is a big responsibility. Childcare is expensive and it makes it hard for me to participate” (Participant, Arabic speaking community)

When CALD women and children from minority groups look more ‘identifiably different’, they are more likely to experience racism in the form of abuse and violence. Racial discrimination and prejudice was consistently mentioned across the six community groups. Many participants shared their experience of facing racism and over time, the experience of discrimination resulted in many participants developing a fear of participating in the community. In particular, those women living alone with young children experienced increasing insecurity and some women shared painful experience of their children facing racism at school.

“We hear that many mothers of school going children are facing racism. They (mothers) are so worried about racism and one parent even changed the school.” (Participant, Tamil community)
“There is racism and attitude problems.. This has been observed in public places, workplaces and schools.” (Participant, Samoan community)

More specifically, many Muslim women shared their experience of day-to-day discrimination based on their religion and expressed the concerns about the negative stereotypes towards Muslims among Australian communities. Muslim women who wear hijab have been subjected to racial discrimination and vilification when seeking employment and housing.

“I got attacked by people because I wear hijab.. I think this happens because how media is supported by government that always show Muslim as criminal which is not true.” (Participant, Arabic speaking community)

“Women in hijab are scrutinised and may be asked to remove it.” (Participant, Arabic speaking community)

A lack of employment and training opportunities was also identified as one of the major challenges to community participation which is associated with social and economic exclusion. A number of participants made note of unfavourable attitudes towards CALD people when looking for employment opportunities which impedes their ability to engage with community. A recent study has indicated that many candidates who do not have Anglo-Saxon sounding names have been discriminated by many employers during the recruitment process.

“I applied for many jobs because I have the degree and skills (for that job).. But I think I did not get the job because my family name is Mohammed.” (Participant, Arabic speaking community)

In terms of cultural barrier, different gender roles and cultural norms were perceived as challenges that restrict women’s community participation.

“Cultural and religious norms restrict women’s participation in some activities. Secondly, married women have to get permission from their husbands to socialise or participate in activities, and some religion restricts women to participate in non-religious activities or unsuitable activity according to their doctrine.” (Participant, Sudanese community)

“Cultural difference becomes barriers (and) hard to explain to Australians without feeling judged.. like men and women don’t shake their hands in my culture.” (Participant, Arabic community).

Many women also mention about difficulties with physical access due to a lack of available transport options to venues and the associated costs. In particular, those women who do not drive expressed concerns about their safety when they need to travel at night using public transport. This is an especially challenging issue for newly arrived CALD women who are placed in more affordable housing area where there is often limited access to public transport and other facilities.
How then CALD women and service providers can work together to address these challenges?

In order to address those challenges mentioned above, we asked the participants how best the women in their communities and service providers could work together in partnership. The summary of the key suggestions made by the participants is discussed below.

What could women do?

On personal levels:

- Improve English language skills
- Make efforts to overcome personal challenges where resources are available (e.g. arranging child minding where help is available)
- Seek peer support from bilingual community support workers for community participation

On community levels:

- Improve the overall community capacity for active community engagement: attend workshops to develop skills and share their knowledge with other community members
- Increase the awareness among community members: inform other community members of community programs/events and the benefits of community participation
- Collect opinions through community consultation/meetings and submit to service providers
- Apply for support grant to address challenges to community participation
- Directly engage with service providers: meeting with key personnel/service providers to communicate needs to help improve cultural appropriateness of services for CALD women

“You just need to listen, understand and pay attention to women’s needs” (Participant, Arabic speaking community)

These findings are important given that it reflects the willingness of CALD women to engage in the community and focuses on their strengths to overcome relevant barriers with support from service providers.

What could services providers do to help CALD women overcome those challenges?

The participants also identified a number of strategies for service providers to support them overcome their challenges and enable community participation. The key suggestions are discussed below.

- Increase awareness of programs through right channels using appropriate methods: spread the messages/information through the ethnic media, community newspapers, and in their community languages
“Provide interpreter and translated materials can be helpful, but some women are illiterate in their own language, so using simple English with visuals should be used in flyers and brochures.” (Participant, Sudanese community)

“Community outreach is very important for the message to reach the women using bilingual staff and women leaders are very important for the information to reach the women.” (Participant, Vietnamese community)

- **Directly engage and collaborate with CALD women in planning community engagement:**
  identify women leaders and work collaboratively with them in the planning of any programs to ensure sustainability; connect with community associations (e.g. religious organisation); link with existing community networks and support existing community programs where possible (e.g. church based outreach programs)

In order to enable easier communication between community women and the service providers, several participants also suggested providing an accessible and user-friendly ‘platform’ such as a website that is easy to navigate and posting information on it in the community’s respective language. Many participants welcomed an opportunity for community consultation to meet with service providers to share ideas and experiences to improve community participation.

  “Council needs to create better links with community groups, women and their leaders.”
  (Participant, Samoan community)

  “Accept (community) invitation and make some efforts to initiate relationships with women’s groups.” (Participant, Spanish speaking community)

- **Invest in community capacity building:** provide training/skills opportunities to improve community’s English levels and basic computer literacy skills course; job seeking skills; nurture community women’s leadership

Many women from diverse community groups stressed the importance of providing leadership support for their community women to have a stronger voice and represent their community’s needs to government/service providers in order to initiate community actions. Research indicates that many CALD women continue to experience limited opportunities for advancement to senior levels within organisations and corporates. Furthermore, many initiatives aimed at promoting leadership opportunities in both public sectors and private sectors focus on targeting ‘mainstream women’ rather than CALD women.

  “We need to be able to collect opinions through community consultation, meetings and submit to service providers and feedback to ECCQ and the council.” (Participant, Vietnamese community)

- **Enable easier access to funding opportunities**

In order to support the women in their community, several community members mentioned the importance of having easier access to funding opportunities and financial support to provide support for the community and to sustain their efforts.
• Provide flexible arrangement for women and more family oriented programs and support: more affordable childcare; provide more family friendly services; consider planning for ageing CALD women as it is difficult to find appropriate care for them

“Most mothers would feel the need to look after their children so activities revolving around sports, playground, day care and school holiday camps would be more family friendly.” (Participant, Samoan community)

“Most women are interested in participating in programs/events, but are faced with many barriers such as work and family... which hinders their involvement. Especially for single mothers, (programs) needs to be organised at suitable times and at accessible venues...” (Participant, Sudanese community)

Many participants from Spanish speaking communities spoke about the need for better planning for ageing CALD women. According to a recent literature review on social isolation of elderly people from CALD backgrounds, CALD people are at a high risk of social isolation. Nonetheless, there remains inadequate provision of appropriate support services for elderly populations from CALD backgrounds, but also a lack of support for CALD women who often carry responsibilities as a primary caregiver for their elderly family members.

• Provide more simplified process for recognition of skills/qualifications from overseas: easier or streamlined process for recognition of overseas qualifications to promote economic participation of multicultural workforce in the long term

For many migrants and refugee job seekers, finding employment is not only an important determinant of successful settlement in a new country, but also a crucial enabler for social and economic contribution. Yet, the complicated process for gaining recognition of their overseas qualifications result in negative impacts upon CALD people’s capacity to gain meaningful employment and to identify clear career pathways.

“It is not easy to go through the recognition of prior of learning (from overseas)...You go through so many hurdles!” (Participant, Arabic speaking community)

• Implement more research: promote and conduct more surveys, consultation and education on CALD women’s issues to improve engagement

• Develop and consistently implement culturally appropriate engagement with CALD women

A number of participants suggested using community leaders in the planning of programs and activities as a potential strategy to provide culturally appropriate engagement. According to a previous research that examined CALD women’s engagement in physical activity programs in a community setting, the findings highlights that community leaders can play a pivotal role in influencing community members’ perceptions and attitudes towards the program, and the most important determinant of community members’ engagement.

“We need trainers/facilitators who are culturally competent in Pacific cultures, and speak and understand the Pacific cultures” (Participant, Samoan community)
Many participants wanted opportunities to interact with Australian women and other CALD women to share their culture and their proud contributions to Australian communities.

- **Increase the presence of CALD staff in public services**: employ more CALD staff to provide appropriate cultural and language support to CALD clients in public services such as government agencies, legal services and social/community support services; provide Legislative support to increase the number of Muslim women hired

Other enablers included providing free or affordable venues, easing the restrictions on the use of BCC halls and providing transport support due to high travelling cost and safety concerns for women.

### 2. Key informant interviews

For key informant interviews, women leaders from each CALD community were invited for individual in-depth interviews. Interview questions in relation to the research objectives were asked to further explore the insights into the research topic from women leaders’ perspectives.

#### Women leader’s roles and influence in the community

The interview was started with questions about the leader’s role and influence in the community, and the situations where women ask for the community leader’s advice. All women leaders we interviewed perceived their influence on their community women in positive ways.

“They look forward to my initiatives in organising things such as picnics and prayer groups.” (Women leader, Tamil community)

“I have a favourable influence in practical issues, role model of cooperation, patience, support and understanding of women’s issues.” (Women leader, Spanish speaking community)
“With my work experience, qualifications (social work) and career commitment, I have greatly influenced in my community. I am assisting my (Vietnamese) clients in connecting them with other main stream organisations to meet their needs and maximise their outcomes as the language barrier is the most obstacle...” (Women leader, Vietnamese community)

Most of the women leaders were actively involved in a range of leadership roles such as presidents of community associations, organisers for community events, ethnic media and religious/social gatherings and personal development programs. In response to their ‘roles’ as a leader in communities, the leaders shared their diverse roles including: providing support and advocacy, taking initiatives in their communities, understanding women’s needs, providing advice on a range of personal issues and role modelling for women including mothers and young women. The summary of the discussions include:

- Helps to maintain culture and tradition: pass traditional culture on to younger generation; organise events to celebrate traditional ceremonies
- Engage with young women
  “I hope I influence the Muslim girls positively and continuously engage their thought process on contemporary issues.” (Women Leader, Arabic speaking community)
- Source of information about facilities, training and skill development opportunities
  “Women ask for advice in various situations mainly about understanding the (Australian) system, rights and responsibilities, support services, shelter, Centrelink and opportunities to improve English.” (Women leader, Sudanese community)
- Seek advice on a range of personal issues for support: family issues, domestic violence, family conflicts, homelessness, children with disabilities, teenagers with anti-social issues, relationship breakdown, mental health issues, intergenerational conflicts
  “I have supported many women to overcome their family problems and encouraged them to be confident and showed them ways to lead an independent life.” (Women leader, Tamil community)
  “I organise weekly meeting with Muslim girls to chat about their issues and to inform them of their rights and responsibilities as women” (Women leader, Arabic speaking)

An intergenerational conflict was another common issue where women asked the leaders for advice. Literature indicates that Intergenerational conflict is a common issue for many people from CALD backgrounds settling in Australia. The conflicts occur when parents expect their children to maintain their traditional values whereas the children feel pressured to adopt “Western” ways in general cultural contexts.

**Meaning of community participation**

We asked all women leaders from each CALD community to share their ideas about the meaning of community engagement for them and for their community’s women. The emerging themes from the discussion include:
Engaging with community to share culture, knowledge and resources
Sharing the community issues and contributing ideas to overcome barriers
Enabling access to community services and providing support
Building relationships and social networks
Making positive contributions to improve the overall wellbeing of community

“Community participation means to ensure that women could actively involve themselves in sharing their expertise or their resources such as time and effort, with other members in the community freely.” (Women leader, Tami community)

“Community participation means sharing the root causes of the issue to overcome.” (Women Leader, Tamil community)

“Community participation happens when women can reach the services to find support based on their needs.” (Women leader, Spanish speaking community)

“Community participation means bringing people together to break down isolation, widen networks and learn from each other like new life skills, make friends and support each other.” (Women leader, Vietnamese community)

“Community participation means contributing in whatever ways possible to the well-being of the communal environment. The contribution may be direct such as taking volunteer roles, but could be indirect, as I would consider my current role to be, in helping bringing out in others their gifts and talents to be shared within the community.” (Women leader, Samoan community)

“Community participation for me is social wellbeing, getting involved in community activities and supporting each other and help improve self-esteem.” (Women leader, Sudanese community)

Challenges to community engagement from leaders’ perspective
We asked the leaders about challenges to community engagement with their community’s women. While most women leaders mentioned that women from all social and economic backgrounds participate in community activities, generally, those women who experience more challenges to participation include:

• Working women
• Women with a lack of motivation
• Women with young children
• Women with a lack of confidence
• Women with low levels of English proficiency
• Women with caring responsibilities for family
• Frail women
• Single mothers
• Women who have limited transport options

“I think Spanish speaking women still suffer discrimination that affects their confidence to participate in many activities...” (Women leader, Spanish speaking community)
The findings reiterate a double burden on many women – time constraints were a major challenge for them and many working women find it difficult to balance work and family life. On the other hand, those women who stayed at home still found it difficult due to caring responsibilities towards their young children and other family members. The common challenges experienced by women seeking community participation were similar from leaders' perspectives as summarised in the following:

- Time constraint: many women devote their time to family
- Financial barriers
- Language barriers
- Lack of awareness and or/knowledge of programs
- Fear of trying new things
- Lack of available facilities/space for gathering/activities
- Discrimination: racism, gender discrimination

"Women feel that there is discrimination based on language and accent." (Women leader, Spanish speaking community)

- Limited funding
- Lack of culturally appropriate programs
- Caring responsibilities for children/other family members

"Family responsibility such as having kids and child care is very expensive – and the fear of being rejected or refused (to have children at child care) because of the hijab and the way we look and dress.” (Women leader, Arabic speaking community)

- Motivation issues

"Sometimes, it’s hard to motivate the women in our community to engage in things that are new and unexperienced – they have a fear of things not going right so they need to hear good experiences from their peers first.” (Women leader, Arabic speaking community)

- Transport barrier: women who do not drive need to rely on their husbands
- Gender roles: some community women need to get permission from their husbands
- Age difference and generation gaps within women’s groups

Existing community organisations and resources

When asked to identify existing resources in the community such as community level associations, regular social gatherings and support networks, the leaders identified the following:

- Informal social networking groups
- Religious groups
- Ethnic community associations
• Sport groups
• Cultural sharing groups: cultural groups to teach their language and dance
• Separate gathering for men and women (Arabic speaking community)
• Women’s groups/mother’s groups
• Professional association (e.g. Vietnamese doctor’s association)

While the types of various community groups were similar across each community group, separate gatherings for men and women were more prominent in Arabic speaking communities. The frequency of gatherings varied from a weekly to monthly meet ups, and was dependent on the nature and activities of the group as well as the availability of community members. For instance, most religious groups met weekly for regular prayer.

When we asked the women leaders about other resources that could be utilised to help improve engagement with women in their community, the leaders highlighted the importance of utilising their women’s strengths and community support networks. In summary, the recurring strengths of women identified across all communities in the consultation include:

• Working hard
• Resilience
• Strong community networks
• Provide foundations for a strong family unit
• Willingness to contribute to community through collective action
• Motivation to want community services
• Have good skills and qualifications

“We have excellent word of mouth system.” (Women leader, Samoan community)

“Give them the opportunity to do things, do not stop and refuse them by their names and appearance.” (Women leader, Arabic speaking community)

**Good practice for community engagement**

Given the aforementioned challenges that many community leaders have faced, the study further explored the efforts that women leaders have made so far to improve engagement with their community’s women. In summary, the initiatives and activities include:

• Engaging with disadvantaged young women
• Providing training opportunities by linking them with vocational training providers and employment agencies
• Fundraising activities on women’s day
• Holding traditional cultural festivals (e.g. full moon festival)
• Initiating activities to improve English (e.g. language class in a community library)

“A few of our women work in community organisations and are constantly engaged with women from other cultures. I believe that every positive interaction between women of different cultures would serve to educate and teach each other about their respective communities.”
Finally, we discussed the most effective ways for service providers to engage a community’s women to inform service providers:

- Provide family oriented programs
- Involve other multicultural groups to work collaboratively
- Ensure that information communication is formal, complete, clear and condensed to communicate important messages
- Provide information in community languages through appropriate communication channels
- Provide direct funding to communities
- Provide opportunities for community capacity building (e.g. English, public speaking skills)
- Support CALD women to advance into management positions to have a stronger voice
- Work directly with communities and community organisations
- For new initiatives, invite community leaders first to try, provide feedback and encourage other community members to participate
- Ensure more safety and security for women

“Our Samoan culture is very important us, and things goes in hand with our Christian faith and beliefs. We could utilise these (church) networks we already have. The women in our community will most likely participate if the activity involves Samoan culture, church, children and families.”

(Women leader, Samoan community)

“Sometimes, the council and government enforce things which are barriers to Muslims and then Muslims feel like they are being scrutinised. For example, Eid fest has to keep changing venues because of enforcements which is not 100 per cent necessary. Doing Eid fest every year is becoming harder.” (Women leader, Arabic speaking community)

Strengths and limitations

The major strength of this study is the diversity of the participants who come from a range of cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds. In addition, this study examined the insights of CALD community women in relation to community participation in Brisbane city and identified the challenges that many women have experienced from their rich narratives. More importantly, the study employed a ‘strength-based’ approach to elicit the unique strengths possessed by these women and documented their valuable contributions to wider Australian communities.

There were some limitations. The study samples were selected using purposeful sampling and many community participants for focus group interviews are drawn from women who had prior linkages with ECCQ’s services. Thus, the perceptions from those participants may not necessarily represent the views of other women in their community and the sample was limited to women living in the Brisbane city area.

Although this study has built on existing research in the area of community engagement and contributed to the literature pertaining to community engagement with CALD women, the study was only able to include six CALD communities as a result of resource constraints. Given the diversity of CALD women living in Brisbane, future research should extend to other CALD communities.
Future directions

CALD women from diverse cultures and traditions bring extraordinary resilience, strengths, rich experiences and differing perspectives to Australian communities. Despite the significant challenges they have faced, and still continue to face, those women have endured, have negotiated the obstacles and carried forward to nurture their family and build a strong foundation for the community as a whole. The rich narratives of the participants in this study are evidence of their strengths and invaluable resources these women possess. Therefore, opportunities to share these with the Australian community must be created.

The women articulated a range of personal, social and institutional barriers to participation, implicating culturally inappropriate services, language barriers and discrimination as major sources of social exclusion. Concluding this report, ECCQ summarised recommendations from the community consultation with women to inform the development and implementation of future initiatives by service providers that enhance the participation of CALD women in wider communities in Brisbane. The following recommendations have been directly informed by the research findings and the honest reflections of these women.

• Increase awareness of programs through proper channels using appropriate methods
  Service providers should consider using the proper channels and appropriate methods to increase awareness of programs. This includes the dissemination of information through the target community’s ethnic media, community newspapers and in their respective languages to ensure the communication strategies are inclusive and able to reach all community members. Information needs to be complete, clear and condensed into key points

• Directly engage and collaborate with CALD women in planning community engagement
  Service providers should endeavor to directly engage and collaborate with CALD women in planning community engagement. This could be done by identifying women leaders and working collaboratively with them in the planning of any programs to ensure their sustainability and cultural appropriateness

• Ensure the principle of inclusiveness is reflected in recruitment for all service providers
  There needs to be an increased presence of CALD staff in all areas, especially in the area of community support services, who are able to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services to local communities at all levels

• Provide flexible arrangements for women and more family oriented programs and support
  Service providers should consider providing more affordable childcare options and arranging childminding support to reduce the burden on women with young children. More family friendly services are wanted and there needs to be more planning for ageing CALD women due to a lack of appropriate care available to them

• Break barriers between different cultures
  Communities need to break down barriers between different cultures through cross-cultural education. Potential strategies include an establishment of cultural support groups in public institutions and involving other multicultural groups to work collaboratively
• **Invest in community capacity building**

Investment in community capacity building needs to be continued for sustainable outcomes, especially in the area of training and employment. Improving employment opportunities should be considered as one of the most effective ways of building community capacity in the long term through economic participation of the multicultural workforce. Furthermore, additional training needs to be provided to improve a community’s English proficiency and to develop other skills to facilitate meaningful contributions to community.

• **Provide leadership support to CALD women**

There needs be more CALD women in senior management and decision-making positions to directly influence service providers from a top-down approach.

• **Effectively use existing resources in CALD communities to leverage outcomes**

Service providers should consider connecting with community associations and linking with existing community networks. Furthermore, use of human resources such as unique strengths, diverse perspectives and collective actions of a community’s women needs to be considered.

• **Enable easier access to funding opportunities**

Provide direct funding to communities where appropriate and make the funding program more accessible for community groups.

• **Improve safety and security**

Consider the barriers related to physical access to services for women, especially many CALD women who have limited transport options and fear of travelling alone at night.

• **Provide more simplified processes for recognition of skills/qualifications from overseas**

Service providers provide easier or streamlined processes for recognition of overseas qualifications to promote economic participation and social inclusion of all CALD communities.

• **Implement more research**

Promote and conduct more surveys and engage in regular consultation and education on CALD women’s issues to improve engagement.
References


