

SETSCoP Insights

Working with older migrants

Welcome to this Special Edition of SETS Insider News: Settlement Insights.

Older migrants are now a priority group in the SETS program. This recognises that many vulnerable migrants and refugees may experience issues as they grow older. How can settlement service providers best respond to this important development?

Many SETS providers already work with older migrants: For instance, the organisations that provide aged care services alongside their settlement supports. Some SETS providers may have less experience working with older migrants, with past eligibility requirements restricting services to people who first arrived in Australia less than 5 years ago.

With the removal of the 5-year limit on SETS support and the new focus on older people, SETS providers are increasingly likely to work with more older people in 2024 and beyond.

To help grapple with this issue, the SETSCoP has brought together three reflections on working with older migrants and refugees in settlement.

1. Vincent Hu – Community Services Worker & Peter Chen – Team Leader Settlement and Access Support Services, Chinese Community Social Services Centre Inc.
2. Sharon Smith – Senior Manager Settlement Services, Southern Migrant Resource Centre
3. Nikolaus Rittinghausen – Manager, Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing

Addressing Acculturation Challenges and Support Needs for Older Migrants in Australia

Peter Chen – Team Leader Settlement and Access Support Services, Chinese Community Social Services Centre Inc

Vincent Hu – Community Services Worker, Chinese Community Social Services Centre Inc



Migration can pose significant challenges for older individuals, particularly due to cultural changes, known as acculturation, as described by Dr. John W. Berry and David Sam. Acculturation can have both positive and negative impacts on older individuals, depending on their capacity to adapt. Further reading on acculturation psychology can enhance program design and improvement.

Our experience shows that older migrant cohorts face acculturation issues such as language barriers, intergenerational family issues, and challenges in interacting with the host culture, including digital literacy. Many older migrants lack necessary daily living skills, are socially isolated, and have limited support, requiring more assistance. In addition, elderly clients may be on a 143 Contributory Parent visa, which restricts access to Centrelink payments or social housing during the first ten years due to a ten-year assurance of support (AoS). This arrangement, typically involving their adult children or their children's partners as assurers, makes them vulnerable if these relationships deteriorate.

To address potential settlement challenges for the elderly, we recommend delivering information sessions on financial support and retirement planning, elder abuse prevention, and the aged care system in Australia.

Older migrants often struggle to find employment, making discussions on financial support eligibility crucial. The AoS further complicates access to government financial support. Awareness of this impact helps set realistic expectations, prevent unplanned crises, and enable smarter retirement planning.

The ECCV Elder Abuse Literature Review 2022 highlights significant abuse in the migrant community, with financial abuse being the most common, often perpetrated by family members. Neutral discussions on prevention strategies with older migrants, particularly those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, can make a substantial difference.

My Aged Care (MAC) is an essential system for those over 65 needing support with independence. Family or informal support may not always be available. MAC services, such as accompanied support, transport, and client advocacy, offer practical assistance for independent living. Client advocacy or care finder services help bridge cultural gaps while the system continues to improve.

Vincent has been working as a community services worker for the past 5 years for the Chinese Community Social Services Centre Inc (CCSSCI) in Melbourne. He is one of the key workers specialised in settlement service delivery but also assisting older migrants with service enquiries relating to ageing. Vincent's training background is in psychology and counselling, he is currently completing his Bachelor of Psychology (Honours). Vincent is passionate about supporting clients through the migration journey with innovative approaches utilising learning from his training.

Peter has been a dedicated professional at the Chinese Community Social Services Centre Inc. (CCSSCI) for the past eight years, specialising in settlement and aged care services. He earned his master's degree in social work from RMIT in 2016 and joined the organisation immediately after. A trilingual worker fluent in English, Mandarin, and Cantonese, Peter is passionate about helping his community. As a migrant himself, he understands the barriers migrants face and works tirelessly to support their integration.

Supporting Older Migrants and Refugees: Best Practices and Recommendations

Sharon Smith – Senior Manager of Settlement Services, Southern Migrant Resource Centre (SMRC)



Funding allocations to support the most vulnerable cohorts of people settling into Australia have often seen the older person overlooked. Past eligibility requirements restricting services to people within their first five years in Australia limited SETS providers' ability to support older people even when providers were already delivering aged care services alongside their settlement supports.

The new inclusion of older migrants as a priority group recognises that many vulnerable migrants and refugees may experience issues as they grow older and creates a welcome opportunity to better provide aged care services within settlement supports.

Best Practice support for older refugees and migrants is service delivery that is in the best interest of each individual, which can only be achieved by immersing oneself into the life of an older person by listening, observing and viewing service delivery through their cultural lens.

Older migrants who have accessed services within their first five years in Australia have an established level of trust with the organisation. Familiarity of face and a welcome space allows for difficult conversations, without fear of judgement or assumptions.

The capacity of internal cross-referrals within organisations that provide both Aged Care and Settlement Services, allows for warm referrals, minimising the need for older migrants to repeat their stories. Asking for support can be particularly difficult for older migrants. As well as undermining their traditional authority, this can be a cause of humiliation and shame, particularly for older men who have previously held jobs with status.

Providers should ensure various modes and flexibility of communication are employed, to avoid information overload. This includes being conscious of the language used, as this can be misinterpreted and create fear and mistrust, regardless of the best intention of the communication. Providers should also recognise that an older person may perceive their relationship with their case manager and/or support organisation, as that of an extended family.

The provision of information and activities that bridge Aged Care and Settlement Services, via group activities and programs is important. Cross-pollination across services allows for a holistic approach to information sharing which increases awareness of services, and supports informed decision-making, for both family members and the older migrant.

Information sessions could include, but not limited to:

- How to access My Aged Care.
- General information on Australian law and culture.
- Accessing age-related services and/or programs.
- Information about Medicare and pension cards.
- Using interpreting services.
- Accessing public transport.
- Booking medical appointments.
- Accessing Legal Aid.
- Information about tenancy rights.
- Health and wellbeing education.

Skilling up and using bicultural workers to support the cultural connection between clients and mainstream supports within the aged care and settlement services is recommended. SMRC Bicultural Workers have undergone ECCV training on Elder abuse and have successfully been employed to help educate older refugees and migrants on the services available to them via the My Aged Care portal. Bicultural workers are well connected and trusted within the community and have proven to be a key contributor to people understanding and using aged care services.

Providing transport for older migrants to participate in social, religious and educational activities is a critical component to reducing social isolation, which impacts physical and mental health. SMRC provides transport to clients via a fleet of buses to ensure they can take part in planned activity groups, enabling older migrants to participate in culturally specific activities. For SMRC clients this includes learning about gardening and homegrown produce at SMRC's HIVE Community Garden in Braeside Park, and meeting and mingling with others at social outings.

SMRC's Diverse Care labour hire provides culturally appropriate support within the home but also recognises that this service may not always be acceptable within the cultural context.

Whilst all the above is well intended to support the older migrant and/or the community in general to access services, we must always consider what I call the "Browsing Model". Often, we go into a shop and just wander. The last thing we want is someone asking us what we need, as we may not even know if we need or want anything, but it is a time to think. The "Browsing model" allows for this space and gives control back to the individual to reach out when they are ready.

Sharon has worked at SMRC for the last 18 years, in both the Aged Care and Settlement sector. Sharon's lived experience as a migrant and carer for elderly family members, and the challenges faced, continue to see her advocate for changes to service delivery, that are representative of the voices of the communities.

Resources for working with older migrants and supporting more inclusive care

Nikolaus Rittinghausen - Manager, Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing



The Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing provides expertise in culturally inclusive policy and practices for the aged services sector. The Centre has over 25 years of experience in supporting aged care providers to address the needs of seniors from diverse cultural, linguistic, and faith backgrounds. The Centre is funded by the Australian Department of Health and Aged Care under the Partners in Culturally Appropriate Care (PICAC) program and supported by Benetas.

The Centre has a range of resources to support the cultural inclusion of seniors from diverse cultural, linguistic, and diverse backgrounds. While many have been designed for seniors or for aged care providers, the resources and topics could be useful for settlement service providers working with older people from diverse backgrounds.

Our most popular resources are the multilingual communication cards which include a range of languages from new and emerging communities.

[See Resources](#)

The Centre also has developed videos in 45 languages titled “You can ask for what you need from aged care services”. This short video encourages seniors to ask for what they need from aged care services.

See Videos

The Centre also delivers the Cultural Diversity in Ageing Interactive Webinar Series, with topics such as *Supporting Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Older Women at Risk of Homelessness and Tips for Effective Co-design with Older People from Diverse Backgrounds*, amongst many more.

(For more information and to watch the recordings of the national online series, please visit The Centre’s website: <https://www.culturaldiversity.com.au/training-development>)

Additionally, The Centre provides training to aged care providers. This includes the Diversity Mentoring Program which provides structured and targeted organisational mentoring to support individual aged care providers on their inclusive care journey. The Centre also provides culturally appropriate care training to aged care providers in metro and regional/rural Victoria. In 2022, The Centre was invited to facilitate two aged care-related panel discussions with leaders from new and emerging communities as part of the Multicultural Communities Council of the Illawarra (MCCI) CALDWays Conference.

To watch the video recordings of the panels:

- [CALDWays Webinars - New and Emerging Communities Panel \(South Asian, Filipino and Latin American\)](#)
- [CALDWays Webinars - New and Emerging Communities Panel \(Afghan and Indian communities\)](#)

With older migrants being a priority group in the new SETS program, there could be opportunities to collaborate and combine areas of expertise. For more information about The Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing, please email info@culturaldiversity.com.au or visit our [website](#).

The Centre is part of the Partners in Culturally Appropriate Care (PICAC) Alliance with member organisations in each state and territory: <http://www.picacalliance.org/members/>.

Nikolaus (Niki) is the Manager of the Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing. He has significant experience in project management, multicultural affairs, aged care, policy advocacy, social cohesion and community engagement. He has held Senior Advisor, Senior Policy Officer and Project Coordinator roles. He provided Secretariat support to Policy Committees in the area of multicultural aged care, consulted across Australia on access issues of seniors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to aged care services, and was the editor of the multicultural aged care magazine, Golden Years.

The Settlement Insights Special Edition Newsletter drew partial inspiration from the

Development Intelligence Lab’s The Intel, a curation of three expert responses to questions on Indo-Pacific development issues. For settlement stakeholders who are interested, The Intel is published weekly. <https://www.devintelligencelab.com/the-intel>.

Settlement Insights was also developed based on the continual perceptive discussions during SETSCoP meetings, events, and consultations, where policymakers and practitioners share keen insights on the latest settlement issues and trends.

The Settlement Engagement and Transition Support Community of Practice (SETSCoP) brings

together service providers delivering the SETS program to collectively harness and maximise the sector’s contribution to effective settlement of migrants and refugees in Australia.

SETSCoP is facilitated by

