



**SUBMISSION to Access and Equity Inquiry  
Panel:**

**INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S ACCESS & EQUITY  
STRATEGY & FRAMEWORK**

**March 2012**

## **1. Introduction**

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### **1.1 The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (Australia)**

The MYAN is the recognised national policy and advocacy body representing migrant and newly arrived young people, in order to advance their rights and interests. The MYAN is comprised of representatives from each of Australia's states and territories. These representatives are involved in multicultural youth issues at the policy or program levels in their respective states and territories. Auspiced by the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) in Victoria, the MYAN was established in 2005 in response to an identified need for a coordinated national advisory and advocacy network for multicultural youth issues.

While the MYAN has a focus on newly arrived young people, particularly those from refugee or humanitarian backgrounds<sup>1</sup>, the term 'multicultural' includes international students and young people who were born in Australia to parents who settled in Australia as migrants or refugees<sup>2</sup>.

The issues and needs of multicultural young people are often overlooked as they are a sub-group of both the broader youth and multicultural sectors and often underrepresented in the policy and advocacy work of both the government and non-government sectors. The MYAN works to address this by working partnership with government and non-government agencies, across the youth and settlement sectors.

### **1.2. Access and Equity and multicultural young people**

The MYAN believes that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds have particular needs, including specific settlement needs, that are different and distinct from those of adults. While this group of young people demonstrate high levels of strength, resilience, resourcefulness and understanding (Francis and Cornfoot, 2007:7), they face particular barriers to accessing services and opportunities.

These barriers include: language, culture and cultural dislocation, limited or lack of social capital, unfamiliarity with Australian (complex) systems and processes that are require a high level of accountability, and racism and discrimination, including structural/systemic discrimination. Overcoming these barriers is compounded by experiences of trauma, the developmental stage of adolescence and the impact of migration on family structure and relationships.

CMY has presented these barriers within a 'vulnerable youth framework' (consistent with Victorian government youth policy) , where vulnerability and risk of social exclusion increase at transition points in adolescence and young adulthood. Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, particularly those newly arrived, often face numerous and more profound transitions than their Australian-born counterparts, prior to arriving in Australia, and subsequently face another set of complex transitions upon settling into Australia (CMY:2011).

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<sup>1</sup> That is, those arriving in Australia under the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program.

<sup>2</sup> Often this group of young people are referred to as 'second generation' migrants.

These factors can often place young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds at social and economic disadvantage within Australian society, which in turn can place them at higher risk of social isolation and exclusion.

The MYAN believes that a targeted response at both the policy and service delivery levels, including meaningful access and equity policies, is necessary to support the sustained participation and engagement of this group of young people in Australian society.

We believe that a robust Australian Access and Equity framework and strategy is essential to achieving this and ensuring that all Australians access the services and support they need to achieve their potential and contribute meaningfully to Australian society.

## **2. About this Submission**

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The MYAN welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Inquiry into Access and Equity in Australia. This submission provides a national perspective on the Access and Equity Discussion Paper, drawing on the MYAN's breadth of experience working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their communities and the youth and settlement sectors across Australia.

The MYAN has also contributed to the development of the SCOA submission.

This submission will briefly respond to the following areas of the Access and Equity Discussion Paper:

- Concepts of Access and Equity
- Authority for Access and Equity
- Access and Equity Framework
- Service Delivery, Contracts and Contract Management

## **3. Response to the Discussion Paper**

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### **3.1 Concepts of Access and Equity**

The MYAN believes that the language of 'access and equity' is language of the service system and concepts of 'access' and 'equity' are best communicated to Australian government agencies through accountability strategies and to the community, through the demonstration of service delivery models that facilitate access to services and appropriate support.

The MYAN endorses the submission of the Multicultural Youth South Australia (MYSA) who state that: "the best way to communicate the meaning of access and equity is to introduce mechanisms into service delivery contracts and arrangements to ensure agencies fulfil their responsibilities" (to provide services to all Australians, regardless of language or cultural background). (MYSA:2012:4)

The MYAN also believes that it is important to communicate and promote the concepts of access and equity to young people through (i) educating young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds about their *right* to access services appropriate to their needs, (ii) seeking feedback from young people about their experiences with government services to influence policy and program development/delivery, and (iii) supporting young people to provide feedback directly to services/government agencies about how or why their needs were not met, and service responsive might be improved.

### **3.2 Authority for Access and Equity**

The MYAN believes that authority for access and equity needs to sit with an independent body such as the Productivity Commission or, alternatively, with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Monitoring and reporting is only one part of the picture to improve access and equity performance. The analysis of how government is responding must be accompanied by accountability. It is recommended that annual access and equity reports are tabled in parliament and that the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet undertake the responsibility to set performance goals for departments that are not doing well. The whole process of monitoring, reporting and performance management must therefore sit within the portfolio of the Prime Minister and administered by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. The AMC's role could be a reference point for the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in how they implement the monitoring, reporting and performance management.

The MYAN endorses MYSA's submission to this inquiry in relation to authority for access and equity, noting that: "Access and equity measures need to be integrated into core business and not (considered) an optional extra. This leadership is critical in promoting and enforcing reform across a range of portfolio areas." (MYSA:2012:5)

### **3.3 Access and Equity Framework**

#### **3.4 Service Delivery, Contracts and Contract Management**

The MYAN believes that it is critical for government to review the current framework and set clear qualitative and quantitative benchmarks for measuring access and equity. This is vital in setting expectations for government service delivery, and in turn, providing clear reporting frameworks and accountability (in relation to delivering services that are accessible and equitable for all).

In relation to Ques. 5 and 8, the MYAN believes in the need for increased accountability and clearer performance standards for agencies at program level (i.e. program guidelines and monitoring/reporting frameworks) to ensure that policies, programs and services are accessible and equitable. It is the experience of the MYAN that programs such as (DEEWR-funded) *Youth Connections* and youth mental health programs such as *headspace*, are welcome initiatives in addressing youth education, training and employment, and mental health, but that service-delivery models do not in fact meet the needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. While there exists an access and equity framework, a number of youth-specific services are not accessible to a significant proportion of the youth population.

We endorse MYSA's comments that there is a need for "highly focussed and articulated performance standards and accountability mechanisms..." to encourage a commitment to the Access and Equity Framework. (MYSA:2012:6).

In relation to Ques. 16, we also believe that the most appropriate (in terms of achieving meaningful, concrete outcomes) place for adequate standards for measuring performance is in service delivery contracts and arrangements.

The MYAN believes that it is critical that concepts of access and equity are translated into program guidelines and therefore models of service delivery in order to ensure that the needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are met. These models need to:

- Be flexible and responsive (to the specific circumstances and experiences of this client group),
- Include an outreach competent,
- Combine principles of youth work with a family-focussed approach and,
- Incorporate a strengths-based approach.

#### ***Purpose of access and equity reporting***

In relation to Ques.21, we believe that the purpose of access and equity reporting is fundamentally, and critically, to measure agency performance in delivering services that are accessible and equitable for all Australians – so that all Australians regardless of regardless of culture, language, ethnicity, migration experience or age, receive the services and support they need to engage meaningfully in Australian society. To achieve this, reporting needs to be meaningful - against standards or benchmarks that measure accessibility and equity in relation to specific program guidelines.

This reporting needs to be publically accessible in order to strengthen agency accountability.

#### ***Building cultural competence***

We also believe that services need to invest in building and supporting culturally competence - at both the individual worker level and at the organisational level.

The MYAN endorses MYSA's submission with regard to investing in a culturally competent workforce. MYSA notes that: "At the service delivery level, there is a needs to be a more concerted effort to build organisational and worker cultural competency and address the barriers refugee and migrant young people face to (accessing) services". (MYSA:2012:6)

The MYAN also endorses the comments in the submission of Foundation House in relation to client access to interpreter services. (Foundation House:2012:5). The MYAN believes that this is a fundamental component of access and equity (and cultural competency) - but it is our experience that government does not do not adequately fund interpreters, agencies do not adequately budget for interpreters nor support workers to engage interpreters.

#### ***Nationally consistent data collection***

The MYAN also believes that there is a need for a consistent whole-of-government data set for how programs and services collect data. This will provide government with a better capacity to

compare performance across government departments and across time (i.e. longitudinal comparison rather than just a point in time 'achievement').

In relation to Ques.9, the MYAN believes that the answer is 'Yes' - as employment, health, welfare and education are key policy and program priorities for the MYAN.

#### **4. References**

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Centre for Multicultural Youth (2011), *Finding Home in Victoria*, Melbourne.

Foundation House (2012), *Submission to the Inquiry on Access and Equity*, 2012.

Francis S. and Cornfoot S. (2007) *Multicultural Youth in Australia: Settlement and Transition*. Melbourne. Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues.

Multicultural Youth South Australia (2012), *Submission to the Inquiry on Access and Equity: response to the discussion paper*, 2012.

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