

Policy Position

Improving outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) children and families in contact with systems that protect children

Purpose

This policy provides The Benevolent Society's public position on how governments and non-government organisations (NGOs) should work to improve outcomes for CALD children, families and communities in contact with systems that protect children. The Benevolent Society believes there is an urgent need for research that examines the complexity and diversity of migrant and refugee families' experiences and the particular cultural practices and contexts that affect and influence their parenting. There must also be action to collect, disaggregate and publicly release data to ensure accountability for adequate funding, workforce training and the development and delivery of specialist services to improve outcomes for children from CALD backgrounds.

Issue

All children have the same right to a safe childhood. However, all children are also unique and different, and one of the most important contributors to differences between people is culture. ⁱⁱⁱ

- There is extremely limited empirical evidence in the Australian research literature examining the needs and experiences of CALD families in contact with the systems that protect children and how best to meet them.ⁱⁱ
- There is also no publicly available data on the numbers of CALD children and young people in contact with systems that protect children. It is therefore unknown if there is under-reporting or over-reporting of CALD and refugee families to child protection authorities in Australia.ⁱⁱⁱ
- This lack of information and research has obvious ongoing impacts on policy development, funding, service design, delivery and outcomes.
- There is no system wide strategy to provide a culturally competent workforce to work with CALD children and families and the availability, efficacy and cost of cultural competency and cultural sensitivity training for the existing workforce remains an issue for both government and service providers.

- There are no specific assessment tools for CALD populations to assist practitioners in understanding the underlying and multi layered issues that may be present in CALD families.^{iv}
- There is a significant lack of awareness from CALD families of Australian child protection laws, the system or available services. For many CALD families this may stem from a general distrust and fear of government or official attention as a result of experiences in their former countries or their migration journey.^v This includes cultural stigma around help seeking for mental health issues.
- The experience and extent of refugee trauma can have a significant effect on refugee parent's ability to care for their children and their ability to seek help.^{vi} This is made more difficult by the lack of culturally available services, including counselling for refugees.
- The use of interpreters, whilst necessary, is not always adequately funded and accredited interpreters may not be always be used.^{vii} Whilst interpreters may provide a language match, they do not always provide a cultural or even country of origin match, and may bring their own stigma or cultural views to the interpretation. This can increase the difficulty of relationship building and trust between caseworkers and CALD clients.
- There is no state or national peak body for CALD children and families in contact with the child protection system leaving this population group without a voice to publicly advocate for their particular needs and hold governments to account for outcomes.

What The Benevolent Society is doing

- The Benevolent Society has a long history of supporting families and communities to care safely for their children and advocating for policy reform for families. We provide services across the continuum from universal early years' programs, community building and parenting programs to promote family functioning and wellbeing, to more targeted and intensive family support services to strengthen families, who may be 'at risk' or experiencing disadvantage.
- Our Gold Coast Women's Space delivers a suite of programs in partnership with Multi-Cultural Communities Gold Coast, Multicultural Families Organisation and Anglicare. Program's include *Talking Circle* (for CALD women to learn to speak English more confidently), *3E's to Freedom* (which supports CALD women, new arrivals and refugees to learn employment skills or to further their education), and *Boomerang Bags*, which help CALD women form social connections.
- The Gold Coast Child and Family Centre delivers targeted multicultural programs for families and children to promote social connection, and provide support for isolated families, many of whom have no family or social supports in Australia. In addition, the centre delivers a Maori targeted playgroup in recognition that the Gold Coast has the largest population of Maori people outside of New Zealand.
- The Benevolent Society will soon be delivering *Living Local*, a program to support the integration of refugee and new arrival migrant women through connection with local services and assistance.
- The Benevolent Society is working with STARTTS (NSW Services for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors) to assist refugee and asylum seeker families heal from trauma experienced in their country of origin or refugee journey and assist their cultural adjustment to life in Australia. Benevolent Society staff have undergone

cultural capacity training and are working to encourage CALD families to access mental health services.

- The Benevolent Society's Headspace Liverpool works closely with the Refugee Health and Migrant Resource Centre to ensure young people are able to access both the specialist and mainstream services they need.
- The Benevolent Society's Child & Family Services-South Western Sydney works with Settlement Services International to gain culturally appropriate guidance in the services we deliver to high risk CALD families. Staff must undergo cultural competency training before commencement and continue to update their knowledge and skills as part of their ongoing learning and development. Our diverse staff enable the promotion of cultural inclusion in the wider community and therefore an increase in CALD referrals to our services.

What needs to be done?

The Benevolent Society supports and will advocate that:

- All governments establish and fund a cooperative national research program to understand the scope of issues facing CALD children and families interacting with the child protection system to inform policy, program development and implementation.
- State and territory child protection systems collect, disaggregate and publicly release data on the number of CALD children in contact with the child protection system.
- The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children national minimum data set and the AIHW Child Compendium include and publish the numbers of CALD children interacting with the system and the type of interaction.
- That state, territory and federal governments and mainstream service providers develop a national strategy to support a culturally capable and diverse child and family workforce.
- All governments must increase funding to ensure accredited interpreters are available for use by service providers when working with CALD children and families.
- Child protection systems must work in partnership with CALD communities to increase the numbers of CALD kinship and foster carers and facilitate the placement of CALD children with culturally appropriate out-of-home care placements.

Background

- The available research suggests there are four possible causes for CALD families contact with the child protection system: culture, migration related stressors, poverty and institutional bias.^{viii}
- Research from the USA has shown that overall rates of abuse and neglect do not differ across cultures but that there are cross cultural discrepancies in each of the types of abuse (physical, emotional and sexual) or neglect (inadequate supervision, nutrition, housing and education).^{ix}
- Australian child protection systems are 'child-centred' in philosophy, consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children. This guiding philosophy may be at odds with the cultural values of collectivist CALD groups that value the family over the individual putting them at odds with the system.^x
- Cultural competency allows for child protection laws to be interpreted in ways that affirm cultural differences in parenting and family functioning without compromising the

equitable protection of all children from harm regardless of their cultural background. It balances cultural awareness and sensitivity with parity in child protection service delivery across cultural groups.^{xi}

- The very small amount of research that has looked at outcomes for CALD families, measured in terms of parent or child well-being and improvements in well-being overall, means that it is not possible to determine whether some approaches to family support work are "better" than others for particular groups of families.^{xii}

Consultation

The following were consulted in the development of this policy:

- Child and Family Policy Reference Group
- Child and Family Managers and Practitioners

Approval

This policy has been approved by the Executive Director, Strategic Engagement, Research & Advocacy on 2 July 2019.

Principles

The following principles underpin The Benevolent Society's Child and Family Policy Framework and have been developed to guide our social policy platform.

1. All children have the right to grow up in an environment free from neglect and abuse.
2. Children have the right to have a voice in all decisions affecting them.
3. Systems and institutions must address the social determinants, including poverty and social exclusion.
4. Policy, practice and advocacy is outcome focused, evidence based, measurable and evaluated.
5. Children are best cared for by family and kin where possible and every effort should be made so that children can remain with, and return to, their families.
6. Australian society has a responsibility to value, support and work in partnership with parents, families and communities care for children.
7. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families have the right to self-determination.
8. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have a right to grow up in culture.
9. Children and families with disabilities have the right to full and effective participation and inclusion in society.
10. Children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse families and refugees have the right to full and effective participation and inclusion in society.

Endnotes

- ⁱ Sawrikar, P, Katz, I. (2014) *Recommendations for improving cultural competency when working with ethnic minority families in child protection systems in Australia*. Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, October 2014, Volume 31, Issue 5. P 9
- ⁱⁱ Sawrikar, P; Katz, I. (2013). *Normalizing the Novel': How Is Culture Addressed in Child Protection Work With Ethnic-Minority Families in Australia*. Journal of Social Service Research. P 2.
- ⁱⁱⁱ AIFS, *Working with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) adolescents* (2019) Retrieved from <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/working-culturally-and-linguistically-diverse-cald-adolescents/export>
- ^{iv} Sawrikar, P. (2011) Culturally appropriate service provision for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) children and families in the New South Wales (NSW) child protection system (CPS) INTERIM REPORT 1, LITERATURE REVIEW P 19.
- ^v *Improving the Family Law System for Clients from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Background*, A report to the Attorney-General (2012) Family Law Council. P32
- ^{vi} **Trang, T. Winnie, L. Psychological Well Being of Child and Adolescent Refugee and Asylum Seekers: Overview of Major Research Findings of the Past Ten Years. National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention. Australian Human Rights Commission. Viewed at 14 May 2019 <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/psychological-well-being-child-and-adolescent-refugee-and-asylum-seekers>.**
- ^{vii} Enhancing family and relationship service accessibility and delivery to culturally and linguistically diverse families in Australia (2019) AIHW viewed at 17/4/2019 <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/enhancing-family-and-relationship-service-accessibility-and/export>
- ^{viii} Sawrikar, P, Katz, I. (2013). *Normalizing the Novel': How Is Culture Addressed in Child Protection Work With Ethnic-Minority Families in Australia*. Journal of Social Service Research. P 8
- ^{ix} IBID P 20
- ^x Sawrikar, P (2011), 'Culturally appropriate service provision for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) children and families in the New South Wales (NSW) child protection system (CPS)' Final Report, prepared for the NSW Department of Human Services (DHS).P 13
- ^{xi} Sawrikar, P (2011), 'Culturally appropriate service provision for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) children and families in the New South Wales (NSW) child protection system (CPS)' Final Report, prepared for the NSW Department of Human Services (DHS).P 17.
- ^{xii} Enhancing family and relationship service accessibility and delivery to culturally and linguistically diverse families in Australia (2019) AIHW viewed at 17/4/2019 <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/enhancing-family-and-relationship-service-accessibility-and/export>