

Future directions

Government services will have to be delivered in the future in an environment characterised by:

- the rapidly increasing size of Australia's ageing multicultural population
- the settlement of increasing numbers of migrants and refugees in rural and regional Australia
- the growing number and increasing diversity of Australia's migrant and refugee intake
- the availability of new channels of service delivery due to technological advances
- the continuing demand by the Australian Government for effective and efficient service delivery and value for money
- the community's desire for more customer focus through partnership arrangements.

There has been an influx of refugees from various African countries who bring with them an increasingly diverse set of languages and cultures. Some of these communities rely on oral rather than written communication. This will continue to be a challenging issue for agencies. Some agencies have taken a practical stand, producing information DVDs in community languages and arranging community meetings to show the DVDs and make initial introductions between service providers and communities.

Barriers to participation are still very strong for some groups. Unemployment levels for people with disability are not declining despite the current record low unemployment rate in Australia and the national skills shortage. More work still needs to be done by all agencies to utilise the strengths of Australians with disabilities by giving them temporary and ongoing employment opportunities.

The background and experiences of recently arrived humanitarian entrants present specific and varied barriers to participation for these clients. Understanding and addressing these barriers requires disaggregated data on their participation rates and labour market experiences, which is currently not available.

This lack of data on current experiences limits the ability of agencies and services to develop strategies to address the specific challenges faced by humanitarian entrants in entering the labour market.

Recently arrived humanitarian entrants have a strong desire to participate socially and economically and become a part of the broader Australian community. English language, literacy and numeracy are key to both social participation and employment. Supporting the concurrent achievement of the complementary goals of English and employment is a critical challenge for government services and employers.

Access to affordable housing continues to be a significant issue for many Australian households. Declining affordability in the home ownership market and low vacancy rates in the private rental market mean that access to affordable housing is increasingly competitive. Language barriers, discrimination and a lack of rental history in Australia can mean that recent arrivals are less well-placed to secure appropriate and affordable housing, with associated impacts on household finances, family relationships and access to services. Cooperation between the Australian Government, states and territories, local government and the community sector will be needed to improve the equitability of housing outcomes.

Government cooperation is also pivotal in helping meet the health needs of migrants, particularly humanitarian entrants. Pre-arrival experiences for these clients, including exposure to torture and trauma and long periods of time spent in refugee camps, mean that an holistic approach to health care is needed.

Australia's ageing population will need aged care facilities which employ staff from the cultural backgrounds of the communities they are serving. Staff working these aged care communities will require cross-cultural training, and there will need to be cultural competence testing as part of accreditation and service validation procedures. There needs to be culturally and linguistically appropriate information campaigns to ensure that Indigenous and culturally diverse communities are aware of aged care options and services.

Other issues of importance will be the provision of adequate interpreter and translation services in the health care sector, the need for involvement of family in care decisions, including appropriate dietary and cultural arrangements, and the facilitation of religious observances by older people in care. A simple first step forward would be for all government agencies to provide links for interpreting services on their website.

In the coming year, DIAC will work with government agencies to further develop the *Accessible Government Services for All* reporting process to make it more specific, more practical and more accountable.