Submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding

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Submitted by: Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA)

Q1. What experience have you had with Commonwealth disaster funding support?

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) has not applied or received funding from the National Emergency Management Agency through formal funding processes. FECCA did make a pre-Budget 2023-24 submission to the Minister for Emergency Management, Senator the Hon Murray Watt, on a partnership model to strengthen the relationship between the National Emergency Management Agency and culturally and linguistically diverse communities to deliver a more productive and inclusive approach to emergency preparedness, response and recovery that reflects the needs, experiences, and expertise of the diversity of the Australian people.

Q2. How could Commonwealth funding support communities to reduce their disaster risk?

Recommendation: Commonwealth funding should empower local community organisations to develop place-based disaster risk reduction strategies

Community organisations and networks have deep understanding of the strengths, needs and challenges in their communities and are best placed to develop strategies that work best for their communities. Disaster risk reduction strategies should include significant investments in supporting community-led, place-based initiatives to increase the preparedness and resilience of communities. This includes funding for local community organisations and emergency management agencies to work collaboratively to develop strategies that work best for communities.

Genuine collaboration with local community organisations has proven to be particularly impactful for multicultural communities. COVID-19 demonstrated how people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are largely absent from the overall emergency response approach which resulted in disproportionately negative outcomes for multicultural communities. Data shows there have been almost three times as many COVID-19 related deaths among people who were born overseas, as compared to those born in Australia . Commonwealth Government efforts to collaborate with local community organisations to successfully increase the uptake of COVID-19 vaccinations during and post-pandemic, demonstrate the benefits of genuine collaboration and investing in new ways of doing things, particularly those that are community-led and community implemented.

Multicultural communities' experiences, perceptions, and knowledge about emergencies and disasters differ from one community to another. The nature of disasters in different countries, and each country's

approach to emergency management is unique. Some individuals may not even be aware of the concept or reality of natural disasters such as bushfires as they are not common in their countries of birth. The likely implication of this is that whole communities are not familiar with the processes to follow in the case of a bushfire, putting them at particular risk. An individual's preparedness and resilience also depend on factors such as existing connections and networks, length of residence, proficiency in English and previous traumatic experiences. With their extensive connections to, and deep understanding of their communities, local community organisations and leaders are best positioned to advise emergency services on the strategies and initiatives that would work best to reduce the disaster risk to their communities.

FECCA recommends the Government invest in local multicultural community leaders to partner with local emergency management services across states and territories to ensure all communities across Australia receive the services they need for effective emergency preparedness, response and recovery. FECCA recommends a model based on the successful Multicultural Emergency Management Partnership developed by the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria and the Victorian Council of Social Services. The Partnership is a genuinely collaborative provides a unique opportunity for communities and emergency management services to prepare for and manage the needs of multicultural communities in emergency situations, through a network of trusted and connected community leaders. The genuinely collaborative Partnership provides a unique opportunity for communities and emergency management services to prepare for and manage the needs of multicultural communities in emergency situations, through a network of trusted and connected community leaders.

Q3. Please describe your understanding of Commonwealth disaster funding processes.

No response provided.

Q4. Are the funding roles of the Commonwealth, states and territories, and local government, during disaster events clear?

As a peak body for multicultural community organisation, FECCA does not directly provide services and relief measures to multicultural communities during disasters. FECCA's role is to work alongside culturally and linguistically diverse communities, the broader Australian society and the Commonwealth Government to develop and promote public policy and programs that reflect the diverse needs and perspectives of multicultural Australia and ensure access and equity to government services.

Multicultural community organisations play a central role in responding to emergencies and natural disasters. During disaster events they play a critical role as a conduit between emergency services and communities. Multicultural community organisations and leaders have the connections and trust of their communities and can reach even those that for others may be hard to reach, to pass on important information in a culturally appropriate and accessible manner, and assist emergency services to connect directly with multicultural communities so they can provide the support communities need.

While some FECCA member organisations receive state funding for disaster management related initiatives, our members indicated that they are unaware of Commonwealth disaster funding arrangements or whether they are eligible for funding. Given multicultural community organisations assist their communities during a disaster event that they themselves are also possibly impacted by, it is

crucial to have simple, accessible, coordinated and culturally appropriate information and processes for both organisations and communities, to facilitate a faster and efficient recovery.

Q5. Is there any further information you would like to provide?

Emergencies and disasters are increasing in frequency and intensity. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has found that weather disasters such as floods and heatwaves, have increased fivefold worldwide during the past 50 years, resulting in more than 2 million deaths and costing over 3 trillion dollars in total losses . Better planning is essential to minimise losses and to avoid further deaths. Natural disasters are a prominent aspect of the history of the Australian landscape and these also are increasing in frequency and intensity and having a significant impact on the nation.

Australia's diversity is growing. People from across the world arrive in Australia, bringing with them a rich diversity of backgrounds, life experiences, and strengths. The most recent Census shows that more than half of Australians have a multicultural background with 51.5 per cent having at least one parent born overseas, and 29.3 per cent reporting a birthplace overseas. The most recent Census shows that more than half of Australians have a multicultural background with 51.5 per cent having at least one parent born overseas, 29.3 per cent reporting a birthplace overseas, and 22.8 per cent speaking a language other than English at home.

Multicultural communities are not homogenous. Multicultural communities are incredibly diverse, yet, are often grouped together as culturally and linguistically diverse and treated as homogenous in government policies and services. This overlooks the myriad of differences between communities, such as culture and language, and results in services and messages that do not connect with the intended audience as they are not nuanced to specific cultural differences.

Targeted approaches deliver the strongest results. Targeted approaches, such as communication through trusted channels, have proven to be highly effective during emergencies. During COVID-19, targeted communication strategies developed and delivered by grassroots community organisations were more effective in comparison to official national communication channels, as targeted approaches developed and delivered by community organisations take into account the diversity between multicultural communities and are tailored to meet the specific needs and challenges of individual communities.

Opportunity for government to better meet the needs of communities. The role played by multicultural community organisations and volunteer groups in supporting migrant and refugee communities overcome the challenges faced during COVID-19 and recent extreme weather events, demonstrates the need to strategically engage with such groups on improving communities' disaster preparedness and resilience.