

# Royal Commission Submission

## About Us

**Name: Tamil Senior Citizens Fellowship (VICTORIA) Inc.**

**Group: People from non-English speaking (culturally and linguistically diverse) background**

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**State/ Territory: Victoria**

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Established in 1987, the Tamil Senior Citizens Fellowship (VICTORIA) Inc. (hereinafter referred to as TSCF) is an ethnically oriented, community-based, not-for-profit seniors forum that has operated continuously in Melbourne for over three decades. The members are mostly retirees in the age range of about 60 – 90 years. The current number of active members of TSCF is around 310. TSCF is managed by a committee of 23 volunteers elected annually by its members.

TSCF was initially established with the objectives of preserving and promoting Tamil language and culture, and promoting inter-community harmony within our multicultural Australia. However, as it evolved over the years, TSCF has initiated a number of ongoing activities that are geared towards enhancing the quality of life of the senior members of our community. These activities include:

- organising monthly luncheon meetings to promote social interaction among members by, among other things, hosting exercise sessions, health and wellbeing-related seminars (with particular reference to the Tamil community which has been identified as more prone to heart disease than the wider community) and cultural programs (i.e., music, dance etc.), as well as to celebrate significant cultural, religious, national and international events in the annual calendar;
- organising weekly social gathering of members to engage in various recreational activities such as mentally stimulating card and board games and others;
- organising 3 - 4 excursions for members (regional, national or international) per year;
- organising various learning and skill-building events (i.e., building IT skills among seniors, etc.); and
- assisting the community to effectively access the support and services provided by the local Councils, State and Federal Government Agencies.

TSCF is also in the process of promoting (a) small group activities among its members based on their individual interest/s (i.e., gardening, book clubs, walking etc.), and (b) participation by members of TSCF in the Community Visitors program which aims to visit and engage with socially isolated seniors receiving home-based care as well as those living in aged care homes. TSCF's activities are focused on the health and wellbeing, loneliness, disengagement, disconnection and/or boredom of our seniors.

TSCF's submission to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety concentrates on issues related to (a) the ethno-specific, intermediary, community-based organisations that complement aged care from a community perspective, and (b) the delivery of culturally appropriate care. TSCF is not directly involved in aged care service provision but, as stated earlier, undertakes a number of

activities to support aged care needs of the Tamil community in Victoria. Through this submission, TCSF seeks to share experiences with similar organisations as well as with main aged care providers, and to enhance the services it can provide towards improving the overall quality of the aged care services to the Tamil community in anticipation of the increase needs of the community that are likely to emerge over the coming decades.

## **Background and issues**

The Sri Lankan community in Australia is made up of three main groups – Burghers (direct descendants of Europeans), Sinhalese and Tamil communities. The cultural and religious profile of each of these three groups are significantly different. According to 2016 Australian census, over 73,000 people speak Tamil at home, and the total number of ethnic Tamils are over 150,000 – the majority of whom live in New South Wales and Victoria. According to the 2011 Australian census, Sri Lankans make up the eight largest migrant group in Victoria, and almost 50 percent of Tamils are Sri Lankan born. The original Sri Lankan migrants were mostly professionals from an urban background with high levels of education. However, since the mid-1980s, the majority of the Sri Lankan migrants have been moderately educated, predominantly para professionals, refugees or family members immigrating under the family reunion category. While this submission focuses on Sri Lankan Tamils, much of the analysis is more broadly applicable to Tamils originating from other countries as well.

Traditionally, elderly Sri Lankan people have been supported by their extended family. When parents come to a stage where they can no longer care for themselves, Sri Lankans are generally taught that it is the duty of the younger generation, specifically adult children, to look after their elders. Inability or unwillingness to care for one's elderly relatives is considered deeply shameful, and shirking in their responsibility and obligation to support and care for their elders. As a result, the majority of the elders of the Tamil community do not currently use aged care facilities away from home. While they still reside at home, they do make use of other facilities provided by various publicly supported agencies for the elderly population. However, this trend is rapidly changing due to the changing socio-economic circumstances of the second generation of migrants. More and more, adult children are finding it extremely difficult to provide the care needed by their aging parents and other elders in the family.

A number of actors are required to be engaged in an effective and efficient good quality aged care system in a multicultural society like ours. These actors, their actions and interaction, rules of engagement as well as the associated learning are critical for the success of this system. Although aged care homes play a critical role, the effective functioning of the system requires the other components to function appropriately and support should be provided to create and facilitate the smooth functioning of these other components. Organisational structures as well as institutional arrangements are vital, and effective partnership is a critical component of prime service delivery.

Unfortunately, at the moment much attention is given to aged care homes, and there is no opportunity for the other voluntary organisations that complement the services provided by the aged care homes to meet and share experiences, lessons learned as well as best practice. This needs immediate attention to improve the quality of ethno-specific home care services.

The concept of aged care homes is new to our community of first-generation migrants. They are not very aware of available services and are generally not familiar with institutionalized care. In addition, there are hardly any ethno-specific culturally appropriate services with respect to our Tamil community.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1.** Ethnically oriented, not-for-profit, community-based and volunteer-managed organisations of seniors play a significant role in **filling the gap** as well as **positively complementing** the existing services provided by aged care facilities in enhancing the quality of life of seniors. Public funding support for these organisations should be continued to ensure sustainability. Opportunities should be created and financial provisions made for these organisations to meet and share experiences and lessons learned in identifying suitable best practices for scaling up. Information regarding available public services for seniors should be translated in Tamil and distributed through organisations involved with the Tamil communities.

Therefore, TSCF **urges** the Federal Government to commit to long-term funding support at an increased level for ethno-specific, community-based volunteer organisations of seniors in order to enable culturally diverse communities to better support the older people of their community.

**Recommendation 2.** Given the changing demographics as well as the socio-economic circumstances of younger generations, demand for aged care homes and other services by the Tamil community will increase in the coming years. Therefore, in selected geographical areas, the Government should support a minimum number of ethno-specific aged care providers to address the specific needs of the Tamil community (i.e., in terms of language, cultural and spiritual care and food habits). The quality of aged care will be greatly improved by Government agencies working more closely and directly with ethnic senior citizens fellowships /clubs in the design and delivery of culturally sensitive and more respectful community-oriented aged care services.

**We agree that our submission can be made public under the name of Tamil Senior Citizens Fellowship (Victoria) Inc.**