



Australian Government

Australian Institute of  
Health and Welfare

# Diversity among older Australians in capital cities 1996–2011

## Main points

- The population of older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is growing faster than for other older Australians. In 1996, 18% of Australians aged 65 and over were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. By 2011, this population is projected to increase to 23% of older Australians (or 653,800 people).
- According to projections, the proportion of older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds living in capital cities will remain at 80% in 2011 as it was in 1996. In comparison, this proportion for Australian-born older people is expected to decrease from 56% to 53%.
- The proportions of older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds vary from city to city, with projections for 2011 ranging from 9% for Hobart to 38% for Melbourne.
- The fastest growth rates for older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are projected for the smaller cities of Darwin and Canberra. Hobart and Adelaide have the slowest-growing populations.
- Although many birthplace groups are common across the capital cities, the mix varies. In all capital cities except Hobart and Darwin, people born in Italy made up the largest proportion of this older population in 1996 and, according to projections, will continue to do so in 2011. Greece, Germany and the Netherlands also have substantial numbers of older immigrants in many cities.
- Past migration patterns have a significant impact on the mix of backgrounds found among the older culturally and linguistically diverse population. For example, the numbers of Polish-born older people are declining in all capital cities due to a lack of continued migration following an initial wave after World War II.

# 18bulletin

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# Diversity among older Australians in capital cities 1996–2011

## Introduction

The proportion of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in Australia's older population (65 and older) is growing. Identifying the changing geographic distribution of this older population is of particular importance because location plays a significant role in understanding and planning health and aged care services. As most of the culturally and linguistically diverse population aged 65 and over in Australia live in metropolitan areas, this bulletin focuses on the change over time to the older populations in capital cities.

The timing of migration cohorts has helped shape the present structure and resources of Australia's older population. Differences in group size among migrant communities, and to some extent location, are the result of differences in the timing of migration waves to Australia. Changes in Australian immigration policy after 1973 led to an increase in migrants from China and other non-European countries. This relatively recent migration pattern accounts for the younger age structure of these populations in comparison with those who came to Australia in the large migration waves from Europe after World War II. Older members of the post-war immigrant groups often have established community networks, but more recently arrived older migrants, or those who have a lesser concentration in their city of residence, may lack such community resources. Australia's migrant population continues to evolve, and looking at where they reside helps create a picture which can assist government policy advisers, planners and service providers in understanding the needs of specific cultural groups within cities.

## Defining 'diversity'

The focus of this bulletin is the Australian migrant population. Although the geographic distribution of Indigenous communities is important for planning health and aged care services for this population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations have not been included in the discussion. For information concerning the distribution of the Indigenous population see *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (ABS & AIHW 2003:13–21).

For this bulletin, people are considered to come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds if they were born overseas in countries excluding the mainly English-speaking countries of the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Ireland, the United States and Canada. The exclusion of these countries is based on the general English language ability of residents in these countries. It may not, however, reflect broader considerations of ethnic identity. Often South Africa is included in this list of English-speaking countries; however, it is recognised that many Australian migrants born in South Africa may be speakers of Afrikaans or other African languages and have a distinct cultural identity. Therefore they have been included among those coming from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Although identification by country of birth has been the primary method used here to identify culturally and linguistically diverse communities, the use of country-of-birth information on its own may conceal diversity within some birthplace groups (Rowland 1991). To cover this possibility, language use is also examined, noting that language is a marker of 'active ethnicity' (AIHW 1998).

## Methodology

The analysis in this paper is based on detailed projections by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in 2001 (see AIHW: Gibson et al. 2001). The cohort component method was used to project the number of older overseas-born Australians from a base population at 30 June 1996 to the year 2026. The projections were by country of birth, religion and main language spoken at home at the national, state and Statistical Local Area (SLA) level. The projections are based on a zero migration hypothesis, and thus are likely to be a conservative estimate of the future size of population groups. For more detail on the methodology used, refer to Appendix B of *Projections of Older Immigrants: People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds, 1996–2026, Australia* (AIHW: Gibson et al. 2001).

For this bulletin, data on SLAs have been aggregated to construct capital city regions. Selected data on overseas-born Australians and main language spoken in the home are presented for 1996 and 2011.

## Social context

Research clearly establishes that group size and geographic concentration play significant roles in the welfare and wellbeing of culturally and linguistically diverse peoples at all ages. As the majority of Australia's migrants live in capital cities, establishing the characteristics, location and concentration of these groups and assessing their change over time helps in understanding and, consequently, meeting the needs of their older members.

A total of 50 countries of birth, 34 languages and 30 religions are represented in the population of older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in Australia. In addition, English language proficiency among these people varies greatly. Planners and service providers need to be aware of this diversity before they can consider the specific needs of older people in this population.

At the aggregate level, older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have lower average income and home ownership rates than the older Australian-born population, although there is substantial variation across countries of origin (AIHW: Benham & Gibson 2000). At younger ages, they also have higher unemployment rates, which can potentially contribute to older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds having fewer resources accumulated for old age and consequently a greater need for support.

The higher marriage rates and lower proportions of people living alone among these older persons have traditionally been considered a form of protection against the need for aged care services. However, although the proportions of culturally and linguistically diverse peoples who are married or living alone have changed only slightly in the recent past (falling marginally between 1986 and 1996; DHHCS 1991), as life expectancies rise, more older persons in general will be living alone. This is particularly true at the oldest ages (85+) and will be more common among women than men due to longer life expectancies.

English proficiency is also an important determinant of the need for ethno-specific services. In 1996, 19% of older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds spoke English not very well or not at all (AIHW: Benham & Gibson 2000). However, levels of English proficiency differ among birthplace groups and are related to age at migration and the length of time resident in Australia.