



**ETHNIC COUNCIL
OF SHEPPARTON AND DISTRICT Inc.**

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DECEMBER NEWSLETTER



**Message from the Ethnic Council President
Maria Brown-Shepherd**

This year has presented unprecedented challenges for the Board, staff and Members as well as the broad range of multicultural communities in our region. Ethnic Council staff have worked extraordinarily long hours without respite for much of the year providing services and support to communities directly impacted by COVID19.

While pandemic restrictions have eased, we must be alert to COVID still being in our community and the potential for renewed outbreaks remains, so we must be vigilant and encouraging of our communities to maintain their vaccination status to protect our families and communities.

The Ethnic Council will continue to provide a full range of support services to our communities and will advocate for enhanced support services where appropriate.

I take this opportunity to wish all communities a safe and merry Christmas and a happy New Year.



ETHNIC COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

Applications are now available for community members to become members of the Ethnic Council. Members get the opportunity to influence the strategic direction of the Ethnic Council, can nominate to become a Board Member and vote for membership of the Board.

For an application form please contact Rhonda on 58312395 or info@ethniccouncil.com.au

The Ethnic Council in 2022

Like many organisations the Ethnic Council has been severely impacted in its role by the ongoing pandemic. Service delivery is an obvious challenge but increasingly pressure is placed on members capacity to contribute as they did pre COVID.

For many years the Ethnic Council has been a peak body promoting and representing the social, cultural and economic well-being of ethnic communities through the provision of

quality and innovative settlement, refugee support, community development and information and advocacy services.

Membership is an issue for services across the country and in 2022 the Ethnic Council will undertake to review its current membership and explore options to expand its membership base.

Victorian Multicultural Awards for Excellence



Victorian Multicultural Awards for Excellence recognise the outstanding achievements of people and organisations who strengthen multiculturalism across multiple categories.

The awards are proudly coordinated by the Victorian Multicultural Commission.

At the awards ceremony at Government House recently Shepparton was recognised with two awards.

Our very own Sam Atukorala was Highly Commended in the Sports Award, and his award citation states:

Sam Atukorala is a well-known community leader in Victoria, a respected mentor to people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and a

professional in the community sector. He is an AFL Diversity Program Ambassador and a Community Ambassador for Cricket Australia. He has organised footy trips, events and several key projects in Shepparton to support young people from new and emerging communities to engage in soccer.

Sam's significant contribution to these projects not only helped break down barriers and build sustainable relationships but also created a smooth transition for young people from new and emerging communities to settle into life in Australia.

The other Shepparton recipient was St Pauls African House for their African Focus study. The award was accepted by Kate Radevski and the citation stated:

The 'Our voices are important in Greater Shepparton' project was the first of its kind to perform an in-depth survey of 255 adults of African background in the Greater Shepparton area. It created a broader understanding and acceptance of different African nationalities and cultures of the team members involved.

Several special reports have also been shared with key stakeholders to provide valuable information and encourage change around particular topics, including COVID-19 vaccination rollout, language and interpreter services through Monash University and tailored support to assist the African community to gain employment.

This project also gave paid employment to newcomers to the workforce who have since gone on to develop their careers in other meaningful employment

Harvest Labour



The annual harvest has begun, and industry is predicting that labour shortages will be an issue in the absence of European backpackers and Pacific Islanders.

The Chief Health Officer has given directions for employment in the horticulture industry – which includes work on farms, picking, packing, and maintenance of farm stock.

The Ethnic Council is working closely with organisations directly invested in the issue such as **Fruitgrowers Victoria, MADEC Harvest Labour Services** and various government departments. There are two issues being addressed which are labour shortages and the requirement for worker vaccination. The Health Department has provided a one-page statement of the legal vaccination requirements for seasonal workers in Victoria. The critical extract from the document states:

Seasonal workers must be vaccinated

- From 26 November 2021, select workers in Victoria must provide evidence to their employer that they have received two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine (unless they have a medical exemption) to attend work.
- All seasonal workers in horticulture and agriculture are included in these rules and must be vaccinated against COVID-19.
- Anyone doing seasonal work in Victoria must be vaccinated – it does not matter whether you currently or usually live in Victoria or are staying over the state border from where you are working in Victoria.

The Ethnic Council has circulated this material to community leadership groups for distribution through regular community communication channels. The documents have been circulated Victoria wide to its membership base by the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria and similarly Australia wide by the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia.

Recent funding by the Victorian Government will enable the Ethnic Council to develop a resource to work with growers, labour contractors and workers to promote the vaccination program. Other funding will enable the development of audio and video resources for Covid messaging to be provided to multicultural communities.

This will be a priority task for the Ethnic Council in the first half of 2022.

Covid Safe Health Messaging

In the second half of 2021 the Ethnic Council joined a consortium with our colleague agencies in Ballarat, Bendigo, Albury-Wodonga and Mildura to provide Covid Safe Health Messaging to multicultural communities.

This funding enabled the employment of part time young bilingual workers from the target communities to undertake work to facilitate testing, vaccination and Covid compliance. These young people did amazing work and were a significant factor in achieving high vaccination levels in these communities.

Sadly, the funding ceased at the end of November and the valuable work being undertaken here and across the consortium has come to an end. Representation is ongoing with government for renewed funding as the workload has not diminished, simply changed with the need to promote the booster program and children's vaccinations.

