Enthusiasm in Search of a Strategy: Road Safety Programs and Needs in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities in Victoria

Warren Harrison

Educational and Forensic Psychologist, Eastern Professional Services Pty Ltd

Dimitra Tapsas

Road User Programs Officer, Royal Automobile Club of Victoria (RACV) Ltd
(Currently: Senior Advisor Road Safety, Motor Accidents Authority)
(Project funded by RACV Ltd)

ABSTRACT

Victoria has a large number of people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and an active intake of new arrivals from developing countries. There is some international evidence that members of CALD communities have a higher risk of involvement in crashes in their new country. This is especially so for new arrivals from less-motorised countries. This paper reports the results of an exploratory study of the road safety needs of CALD community members in Victoria and the current state of program activity in this area. The results indicate that CALD community members face significant road use challenges in Victoria, including accessing the licensing system, obtaining experience and training to enable them to obtain a licence and drive safely, and understanding the regulatory framework for driving in Victoria. There are few programs available to assist CALD community members, and those that are conducted are poorly funded and are developed without significant input from road safety experts. In addition to seeking information from relevant organisations, this study drew on road safety and public health research literature to make recommendations about future directions. A key recommendation was that road safety programs for CALD community members would benefit from the development of a more-strategic approach.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is concerned with road safety and Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) residents. Little is known about the specific road safety issues relevant for CALD groups, but there is now some international evidence suggesting that their risk of involvement in crashes is higher than the same risk amongst longer-term residents.

The focus of this project was the collection of information that might form a context to guide the development of road safety strategies and programs for CALD groups in Victoria. It was intended as a starting point in an area that has received little attention from road safety researchers or policy makers in Victoria.

The project focused on collecting information concerning the general CALD context in Victoria, road safety research and programs relevant to CALD groups, public health research and programs relevant to CALD groups, and the beliefs about road safety issues held by CALD residents and those working in the CALD area. This conference paper summarises some of the findings and conclusions of the project.

VICTORIA'S CALD CONTEXT

Immigration to Victoria after the long period of indigenous settlement has been characterised by waves of arrivals from different regions, with a gradual decline in the proportion of immigrants from the English-speaking countries that comprised the first non-indigenous settlers. The consequence of these waves of immigration and the ongoing arrival of family-reunion immigrants and business immigrants is a complex mix of cultural backgrounds. Analysis of the 2001 population census data indicates the following:

- Twenty-five percent of Victorians spoke a language other than English at home. This compares to 20 percent nationally.

- The most common languages other than English were Italian (3.2%), Greek (2.7%), Vietnamese (1.4%), Cantonese (1.3%), and Arabic (including Lebanese) (1.0%).

- Almost 30 percent of Victorians were born somewhere other than Australia, with the most common countries being England (3.5%), Italy (2%), Greece (1.2%), and Vietnam (1.2%).

- English proficiency amongst people who speak other languages at home varies according to age and sex, with older people and females generally having poorer English skills.

- English proficiency varies by country of birth.

- Socioeconomic status and place of birth are related, with immigrants from some countries having relatively high unemployment rates.

The complexity of the CALD context in Victoria is summarised in Figure 1 – showing the large number of languages spoken at home. This complexity has many consequences for the development and delivery of programs that aim to increase the safety of road users. At the simplest level, the variation in English-language proficiency across the community means that many road safety messages may not reach some target groups.

The complexity of the situation is magnified, however, by the influences of cultural differences across the community. Simple translation of road safety messages into a broad range of community languages is almost certainly insufficient for effective road safety intervention.

Cultural differences and consequent variations in attitudes, personality, and behavioural norms across the community present a serious challenge to the delivery of public education and

behaviour change programs. Immigrants are influenced by the cultural and day-to-day experiences of their lives before settling in Victoria, and these result in differences within the community that would be expected to influence the effect of road safety programs. At a broad level, for example, drink driving public education programs targeting adult males in the Australian-born community (where alcohol consumption is an accepted, widespread activity) are unlikely to be effective amongst middle-eastern-born males (where there are often religious taboos relating to alcohol consumption that change the cultural meaning of alcohol use). The need to ensure that road safety communications are effectively targeted in a multicultural context is a significant challenge.
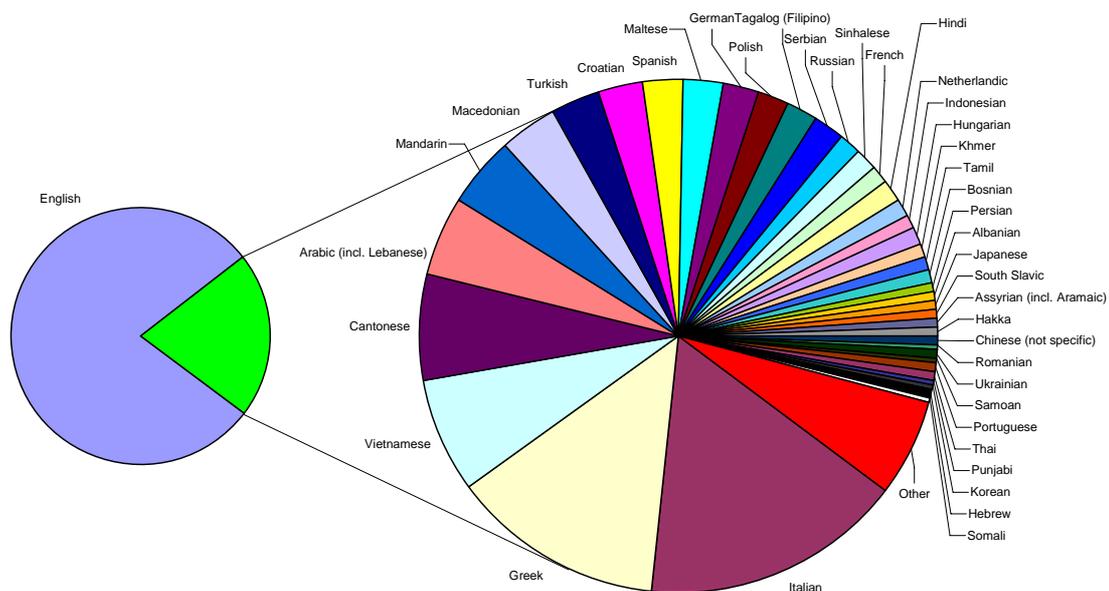

Figure 1: Languages spoken at home by Victorians (2001 Census data)

There is a further complexity for the development and implementation of effective road safety programs that needs to be considered – there are substantial differences within individual CALD groups as well as between CALD groups that will need to be considered. Examples include the following:

- The cultural norms and English language skills of post-war refugee migrants from Italy and Greece will differ substantially from the cultural norms and English proficiency of their adult children and young-adult grandchildren. Their norms will also differ substantially from those of more-recent immigrants from Italy or Greece who may have arrived under family reunion arrangements or as business immigrants.

- The cultural norms and English language skills of different groups from within some countries will differ substantially, and it would be unreasonable to consider them as a

cultural "unit". Muslim immigrants from different religious and cultural traditions, for example, can differ significantly. Similarly, refugees from different parts of Iraq or different parts of some African countries may differ substantially from their compatriots.

The issues confronting authorities and community groups attempting to target members of CALD groups with road safety messages and programs are complex. This project was intended as an initial examination of the practical issues associated with road safety programs in CALD communities. By collating information from a number of sources, it was hoped that future program development and implementation will be better-able to target relevant groups in the community.

ROAD SAFETY AND CALD COMMUNITIES

Locating relevant literature in this project involved a search of relevant research databases and a search of specific road safety research web sites known to provide unpublished research.

There is little relevant Australian research. The New South Wales Roads and Traffic Authority has funded some work in this area based mainly on surveys, and a recent study reported by Dobson et al. (2004) attempted to investigate hospital admissions due to crash involvement for locally-born and overseas-born Australian. The variables included in this study were limited to whether the person was from an English-speaking country or not, and whether the person was from a country where drivers drove on the left or right side of the road, based on an extremely-limited view of the interaction between cultural background and crash risk. The authors claimed:

> There are two possible explanations of why people born in other countries may have higher rates of death and hospitalization due to road crashes. The first is difficulty understanding rules and regulations for road use and road signs. The second is failure to adapt from driving on the right-hand side of the road to the left-hand side. (p. 376)

The authors used population data in place of some measure of driving exposure when calculating crash risks. Given the complexity of the findings reported by Gustafsson and Falkmer (2006) (discussed later) for foreign-born drivers in Sweden, and Dobson et al.'s assumption that road rule knowledge (and therefore language skill) and the side of the road used for driving were the only factors likely to influence crash risk for immigrants, Dobson et al.'s study is of little value here.

Research conducted in other countries suggests that some CALD groups may have road safety problems related to their CALD status. This evidence suggests that road safety authorities need to develop and implement effective strategies and programs to improve the safety of CALD residents.

In particular, Swedish and UK research studies suggest that residents who are less-familiar with busy traffic environments (such as those CALD residents from less-motorised countries) have a higher risk of involvement in a crash than residents who are more-familiar with traffic. A key Swedish study made use of place-of-birth and injury-related data to identify specific

economic/geographic regions of the world associated with high crash rates amongst overseas-born Swedish residents (Gustafason and Falkmer, 2006) .

It is not possible to confirm this research in Victoria given the limited information collected in crash data, but there is sufficient international evidence now to give some priority to the development and implementation of strategies and programs.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND CALD COMMUNITIES

The limited amount of research concerning road safety outcomes and programs for CALD communities led to a decision to review the broader research and program activity in the public health area. It was thought that some research and evaluation outcomes might inform discussion in the road safety area.

Discussion of the interaction between ethnicity and program development and implementation in the public health area is considerably further advanced than any similar discussion in road safety – perhaps reflecting the social or community orientation that underlies some public health programs. Dumas et al. (1999), for example, present a detailed discussion of cultural or ethnic issues in program development in public health and behaviour change. This paper provides a strong background to some of the issues that generally have not been considered in the development and implementation of road safety programs and policy.

The central issue addressed by Dumas et al. is the need to ensure that prevention programs are effective across the broad range of culturally diverse target groups in the community. They argue that programs are sometimes not effective as a result of:

> (a) the inappropriate cultural content of the behavior changes promoted by
> the program; (b) the cultural incompatibility of the manner in which the
> change process is promoted (e.g., failure of getting the approval of
> important community figures, or of employing intervention personnel skilled
> in dealing with diverse cultural groups); and/or (c) the failure to consider the
> influence of other culturally salient factors that, unbeknownst to the program
> staff, maintain the behaviors targeted for change. (p. 192)

These arguments were made in the general context of a discussion of some of the basic issues or principles underlying the adaptation of existing programs or the development of new programs specifically for culturally diverse groups. They summarise their main point by concluding that "cultural issues must form an integral part of intervention projects designed to serve participants from diverse backgrounds…"

Dumas et al. (1999) argue that programs need to ensure that the behaviour changes required by a prevention program are appropriate within the culture of the target group, and that the way in which the program is presented needs to fit with the group's cultural norms. There is little surprising about

these comments as they reflect the issues generally considered when developing public education programs in road public health areas – although their current application to road safety programs with CALD groups may be inadequate. The third point raised by Dumas et al. – the need to consider culturally-relevant factors that maintain unhealthy behaviours – is one that is rarely considered in road safety, even in non-CALD programs.

This point brings Dumas et al.'s psychological focus into consideration in the public health area and raises an important issue for road safety programs. Behaviour occurs because it meets a person's motivational needs in some way. This positive consequence of a potential target behaviour often continues in the presence of a behaviour change program that aims to discourage the behaviour. In the road safety area, for example, speeding occurs because it meets a number of motivational pressures – such as the need to get somewhere on time, or to maintain a sense of mastery over the driving task. Programs to discourage speeding use public education about safety and penalty consequences combined with enforcement programs. The motivational benefits of speeding are not influenced by these programs and so continue to have a positive effect on behaviour – making it difficult to influence speeding drivers. An effective speeding program will need either to remove or limit these positive benefits of speeding, or counter them with significant negative consequences.

The same approach needs to be applied when considering safety-related programs targeting CALD groups. For example, programs to encourage women in humanitarian immigrant groups to obtain a driving licence – to improve mobility while ensuring they are part of the licensing system – will confront culturally-specific factors that will influence the effectiveness of the program. There may be negative attitudes towards women driving in some cultural groups, for example, that will influence participants' engagement at the beginning of the program and throughout its operation and that will interfere with participants' ability to act on the program's content.

Dumas et al.'s (1999) point that programs may fail if they do not take the influence of culturally-specific, non-program factors into account is an important one for road safety program development and adaptation.

The broad review of public health programs and research concerning CALD issues raised some specific issues for road safety programs. In addition to specific recommendations drawn from health-related programs targeting CALD groups, two key issues raised in the literature were the difference between efficacy and effectiveness in program development and evaluation (high program efficacy may not translate to effectiveness as a community-wide behaviour change program) and social validity (the perceived acceptability and utility of a program from the target audience's point of view). As road safety programs start to target smaller groups of high-risk drivers, they may have higher efficacy but reduced effectiveness. As target groups (such as CALD groups) are more-closely defined, programs need to consider the target group's cultural world view

and broader context to maximise the program's social validity.

WHERE ARE WE AT AND WHERE SHOULD BE BE HEADED?

A review of the current situation in relation to programs targeting road safety issues in CALD community groups suggests the following:

- VicRoads translates some documents into languages other than English, but does not appear to take some broader cultural issues into account – some of the older-driver materials available from the VicRoads web site, for example, use photographs that have a low level of social validity for target groups.

- The Transport Accident Commission makes use of some non-English media to promote road safety messages, but does little else to meet the needs of CALD road users.

- The Victoria Police has Police members in each Region with responsibility for broader CALD issues. These members are generally involved in local programs concerned with issues such as safety and licensing, but this commitment is part of a larger commitment to CALD issues across Policing and is not limited to traffic issues.

- Some local governments and locally-based non-government organisations have programs in place to assist CALD group members. These are mostly concerned with licensing rather than safety, although community groups may not perceive a difference between these issues. There is no advice available to community groups to assist them develop evidence-based programs.

Victorian CALD-related road safety programs are characterised by a lack of strategy. There appear to be no general guidelines to assist in the development of evidence-based road safety programs for CALD community members. Programs are conducted at a local level, to meet locally-identified needs, with funding sourced on a one-off basis for each program.

This reflects a general mismatch between the approach taken to funding programs in Road Safety and the approach used to fund CALD or multicultural programs. Road safety programs are generally funded within broad strategic frameworks that identify specific outcome targets and in the context of a research base that guides the development of specific action plans. Local programs can be funded under this approach, but they are implemented as part of a broad strategy. The TAC-funding of locally-planned traffic law enforcement programs is an example of this type of program – it has a local focus (dealing with specific safety-related concerns at a local level), but is conducted in the broader context of a state-wide enforcement strategy and a road safety strategy and research base that emphasises the importance of effective enforcement strategies.

Programs in the multicultural area traditionally have a stronger local-area or specific-community focus, and apart from a broad strategic focus (that the programs should promote cohesiveness,

strengthen communities, etc, or that programs should assist new arrivals in specific areas), there appears to be no over-arching strategy for specific program areas.

The result is that road safety programs for CALD community members are small-scale, conducted at a local level to meet the specific needs of single CALD groups in that area, and developed and implemented without clear access to the evidence-based guidance available in the road safety area that might direct the program. This is so because they have generally been developed outside the broad strategic umbrella that directs road safety programs. There are clear benefits arising from the type of local-program funding used for many multicultural programs:

- The programs are instigated, developed, and implemented to meet a locally-identified need that may not be apparent without direct contact at this level.

- Factors specific to the local area or specific target community that may influence the effectiveness of a program can be taken into account when developing and conducting the program.

- Local ownership of the program, or ownership by the specific CALD community targeted by the program, may improve participation and program completion.

These benefits are offset to some extent by the disadvantages of funding and conducting programs at a local level. These include:

- The absence of a strategic approach that may improve the effectiveness of programs.

- The absence of a central database of information about programs that could be used to assess program effectiveness and accessibility, and that would provide increased opportunities for sharing of resources and knowledge.

The current strategic vacuum is being addressed, in part, through work by the Victorian Multicultural Commission. The Commission has held a number of meetings with road safety stakeholder groups and recently conducted a consultation session on licensing issues with representatives of new-arrival groups. VicRoads has sought advice from the Commission on translation of learner driver materials for the new graduated licensing system and is likely to translate some material into a broader range of languages than may have been planned originally. It is intended that material in additional languages will only be available on-line, however, potentially disenfranchising some new-arrival groups where internet access is less common.

The strategic orientation of the Victorian Multicultural Commission, although including an interest in safety, appears primarily oriented towards meeting the mobility needs of new arrival groups. This focus on mobility is understandable given the quality of life issues relating to access to employment and community services, but there appears to be a perception that assisting new arrival groups to become licensed through driver training and road-rule education programs will also have a

beneficial effect on their safety.

This perception of a link between education or training and safety reflects a broad community perception that education and training programs are likely to improve safety, but is likely to lead to ineffective safety-related policy and program decisions. Improving mobility amongst new arrival groups will result in increases in crash involvement as a result of increases in exposure to crash risk. Culturally-relevant education programs concerning safety-related issues such as speed, tiredness and fatigue, restraint use, and drink driving may help counter the negative effect of exposure, but the development and implementation of effective safety programs will require a broader approach than the current reliance on driver training and workshops.

Conclusions drawn as a result of information collected in this project included the following:

- Victoria needs a road safety strategy for CALD groups. The current *ad hoc* approach to CALD road safety programs is inadequate and unlikely to be effective. Programs are developed and conducted at a local level without any clear supporting research or evaluation evidence to guide them, and there are no over-arching strategies to ensure that programs work towards evidence-based, common goals for CALD residents. An effective strategy would need to include some specific elements:

  - Improved service provision to CALD groups that recognises the importance of providing material and services that are linguistically and culturally relevant for the recipients. Materials that are currently translated for CALD groups are translated into a small number of languages and are not adapted to maximise their cultural relevance. Similarly, services such as the provision of licence testing are perceived as difficult to access by CALD residents with limited English language skills.

  - An emphasis on the following characteristics, based on evaluation outcomes in public health and road safety programs that make use of a strategic orientation and locally-developed program elements:

    - A broad strategic focus that has high-level support within government.

    - A strategy based on needs-identification research conducted with members of CALD communities.

    - Locally-based programs consistent with the overall strategy and relevant research evidence.

    - Implementation that takes into account the complexities of working with CALD groups.

    - Programs with a strong local-community focus, with community-level coordinators

having strong links into the target communities and a good understanding of cultural and local political issues.

- Local community coordinators to make effective and flexible use of already-existing community structures and networks.

- Ongoing evaluation using multiple process and outcome measures.

◆ A funding program that invites applications for funding from community and CALD groups for road safety programs that meet a set of guidelines. The guidelines would be consistent with Victoria's CALD road safety strategy and based on best practice in program development and implementation. This funding program would include top-down and bottom-up elements such as:

- An evidence basis that identifies specific problems and suggests effective solutions.

- Strong involvement from local CALD groups in the development and implementation of programs under the guidance of an evidence-based strategy and relevant research evidence.

- A funding system that ensures the delivery of funding for effective programs at a local or CALD-group level, using an application process that provides strong evidence-based guidance for applicants similar to the process and materials used in the New Zealand CRSP discussed in the report.

- An evaluation component for individual programs that can be used to provide further guidance to program developers.

REFERENCES

Dobson, A., Smith, N., McFadden, M., Walker, M., & Hollingworth, S.. (2004). In Australia are people born in other countries at higher risk of road trauma than locally born people? Accident Analysis & Prevention, 36, 375-381.

Dumas, J.E., Rollock, D., Prinz, R.J., Hops, H., & Blechman, E.A. (1999) Cultural sensitivity: Problems and solutions in applied and preventive intervention. Applied & Preventive Psychology, 8.175-196

Gustafsson, S., & Falkmer, T. (2006) The traffic safety situation among foreign born in Sweden – based on eight road user population zones. Linköping: VTI.