

# Multicultural Women's Alliance Against Family Violence

## About us

We are the Multicultural Women's Alliance Against Family Violence, a coalition concerned with the lack of culturally specific and appropriate family and domestic violence services in Victoria. Our members comprise multicultural community leaders and representatives working across the family and domestic violence sector. We formed this Alliance to create a strong body that could advocate for increased investment in culturally and linguistically specific services to meet the growing needs of our communities.

We hope that by combining our separate voices we are able to achieve real and effective change.



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## A Message from our Chair – Dr Sabitra Kaphle

Violence against women knows no borders or boundaries. It is an all-pervasive issue that affects women from all walks of life.

In our multicultural communities, we have the unique opportunity to learn from one another, celebrate our differences, and promote understanding. By fostering a culture of empowerment, we can break the cycle of violence and create a society where women are valued and their rights are protected.

Ending violence against women requires a collective effort. Let us stand together breaking down the barriers that divide us, and work towards a future where violence against women is unthinkable.

We must support and amplify the voices of women from all backgrounds. Empowering women is at the centre of the Multicultural Women's Alliance Against Family Violence. By embracing diversity, we can foster an environment that rejects violence and upholds the principles of equality and respect for women.

I started asking for equal opportunities for women in Nepal as I watched my grandmother, mother, sisters, and sisters-in-law do all the work while the men in the family relaxed.

I thought Australia would be different. But here too, I also heard women tell of abuse, discrimination, and mistreatment. I started engaging with cultural groups and heard of women who had no place to go in the middle of the night. I had to find a safe space for them to escape the violence. This made me passionate and committed to working to empower women to live a life of freedom.

Join our Alliance as we endeavour to end violence against women in multicultural communities. Together, we can create a brighter, safer, and more inclusive world for all.



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## Meet Our Team – The Steering Committee



**Dr. Sabitra Kaphle – Chair**  
Sabi is an academic and public health practitioner. She has extensive experience as a researcher, in education, health-services and policy-development. She has a long history of work in public, private, not-for-profit and international agencies.



**Molina Asthana – Deputy Chair**  
Molina is a lawyer by profession, but her expertise go far beyond. She is the Chair of Gymnastics Victoria, a member of numerous boards across the legal sector. She is also a founder of 'Multicultural Women in Sport'.



**Ruchika Rawat – Secretary**  
Ruchika has a background in healthcare redesign, leading change, community engagement, project management, healthcare innovation, stakeholder engagement, co-design and service delivery improvement.



**Saleha Singh – Assistant Secretary**  
Saleha is a communications professional, with over 20 years experience. She is also the President at IndianCare, board member at PeaceMeals, and the host of her own podcast – Chai, Chat & Community.



**Anasina Gray - Barberio – Treasurer**  
Anasina is a passionate community organiser and advocate, as well as the founder of 'Engage Pasefika' – an organisation committed to advancing Pacific Island health equity.



**Dr. Veena Barsiwal – Assistant Treasurer**  
Veena started her career as a GP before getting into counselling due to her passion to empower her clients and help them lead a fulfilling life.



**Professor Supriya Singh - Executive Member**  
Supriya is a writer and sociologist of money and migration. Her research has focused on abuse across cultures, and ways to prevent and address financial abuse.



**Sophia Sun – Executive Member**  
Sophia is a passionate environmental and political activist. Her commitment has led her to contest in both state and federal elections in the past and she continues to be a dedicated community leader.





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## What We've Done So Far

Since our official launch in Parliament in May 2022, the Alliance hosted our first forum—*Family Violence in Culturally Diverse Communities – Finding Support and Solutions Through Lived Experience*. Attended by more than 50 representatives across multicultural communities, the forum raised awareness of the lack of culturally relevant services in the state. It shone a light on the gaps within our system that need to be addressed.

The central themes of this event were truth-telling and collaboration. We shared real-life case studies to ground our discussions. Our participants identified many barriers facing CALD women when they seek support. The event was a great debut for the Alliance, and a wonderful opportunity to bring community leaders, public sector representatives, and organisations together to discuss this malaise in our community.



On 7th March 2023, the Alliance hosted an International Women's Day panel at the Victorian Parliament. It brought together passionate and experienced women from the sector and parliamentarians. The goal was to identify solutions that could be used by multicultural services to meet the needs of victim-survivors from culturally diverse backgrounds.



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## The consequence of the current funding model - Veena Barsiwal

Due to a lack of funding, earlier this year, Shakti Migrant & Refugee Women's Support Group Inc. Melbourne was forced to close its doors to the Asian, African, and Middle Eastern communities. Shakti Melbourne has been providing culturally-specific services since 2011 just like its 26-year-old parent organisation, Shakti Community Council Inc. New Zealand, which was set up by the migrant women and for the migrant women.

Shakti Melbourne, a social transformation organisation, aimed to become a driver of social change — supporting multicultural communities to live free of violence. It provided casework support, counselling, advocacy, education, and awareness. It also provided expertise to the state and federal governments on culturally-sanctioned abuses such as underage forced marriage, dowry violence, FGM, and honour-based violence.

Due to lack of funding Shakti Melbourne was unable to hire full-time or part-time staff and the role of volunteers became vital. It survived by providing placement opportunities and supervision to international social work Masters

working with family violence victim-survivors. It continued to provide services through the COVID-19 lockdown although international students stopped coming to Melbourne, which threatened its existence.

Applying for grants is a competitive process and the organisation could not afford professional grant writers. Last year, Shakti Migrant & Refugee Women's Support Group Inc. (NSW) also ceased its services due to lack of funding.

Despite these issues, feedback from clients testifies the need for culturally appropriate services where one is understood and heard. Clients said:

*"I do not have (just) somebody to talk to. I have the right person to talk to."*

*"I feel heard and understood after 14 years."*

*"You are the best thing that has happened to me. I can open up to you."*

*"I feel I can see (the situation) now. I was sleeping earlier."*



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## What's Next For Us?

We hope our advocacy will increase funding for grassroots CALD-specific services. Our next event will be a roundtable discussion with Victorian multicultural service providers to understand the current state government funding model for multicultural family and domestic violence services. We aim to identify the current services receiving government support, and the gaps in government funding.

We plan to host this event on the 25<sup>th</sup> of July in Parliament House, with more information being circulated shortly. If you would like to attend (either as an individual or representing an organisation), please contact us at [mwallianceagainstfv@gmail.com](mailto:mwallianceagainstfv@gmail.com).

