



## **FECCA 2019 Pre-Election Policy Paper #3**

### **Measures of Cultural and Linguistic Diversity - Data and Reporting**

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is the national peak body representing Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and their organisations. FECCA provides advocacy, develops policy and promotes issues on behalf of its constituency to government and the broader community. FECCA strives to ensure that the needs and aspirations of Australians from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds are given proper recognition in public policy.

FECCA supports multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice and the rejection of all forms of discrimination and racism so as to build a productive and culturally rich Australian society. FECCA's policies are developed around the concepts of empowerment and inclusion and are formulated with the common good of all Australians in mind.

#### **Key Messages**

FECCA calls for all parties to commit to a national project to develop consistent and more accurate measures of cultural and linguistically diversity (CALD) to ensure adequate, appropriate and useful data collection. Data must be collected in line with agreed data standards and used by all Commonwealth and State/Territory Government departments (such as the Departments of Health, Social Services and Home Affairs) and agencies (such as the National Disability Insurance Agency) to ensure access and equity is achieved. These disaggregated data collected by agencies must be available externally for the purposes of analysis and research.

FECCA calls on all parties to recognise that current CALD data and reporting, particularly in relation to human services (including health, mental health, aged care and disability) is inadequate.

The most commonly collected CALD measures are country of birth (excluding the so-called main English-speaking countries) and/or language spoken at home. As a consequence, significant numbers of people who may have been born in Australia, who may have English language proficiency, or who continue to identify strongly with a particular cultural or religious group are excluded from CALD data sets. In addition, the exclusion of people from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds who were born in the main English-speaking countries (the populations of which are increasingly diverse) means that Australian data may underrepresent CALD populations.



The collection and analysis of these data, which should be nationally consistent, comparable and compatible, is essential to inform important decisions around policy change and resource allocation and ensure services are accessible, inclusive and respond to the needs of all people in Australia.

## **Background**

### **National Standards**

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) [Standards for Statistics on Cultural and Language Diversity](#) (1999) were developed in response to a widely recognised need for a nationally consistent framework for the collection and dissemination of data on cultural and language diversity.

Endorsed by the then Council of Ministers of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in April 1999, it was intended that the Standards be used by government, academic and private sector organisations in all relevant data collection activities to improve the compatibility and comparability of data derived from different sources.

The Minimum Core Set of Cultural and Language Indicators includes four variables: Country of Birth of Person; Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home; Proficiency in Spoken English; and Indigenous Status.

The Standard Set of Cultural and Language Indicators includes additional variables: Ancestry; Country of Birth of Father; Country of Birth of Mother; First Language Spoken; Languages Spoken at Home; Main Language Spoken at Home; Religious Affiliation; and Year of Arrival in Australia.

The Standards include: recommended questions; classifications; coding structures; and output for categories. The ABS has made minor updates to the document, most recently in April 2017. These amendments have been predominantly updates of links to other related ABS Standards.

Implementation of the Standards by Commonwealth Government departments and agencies was supported by the release of [The Guide – Implementing the Standards for Statistics on Language Diversity](#) (the Guide) in June 2001. The Guide was developed by the then Commonwealth Interdepartmental Committee on Multicultural Affairs and contains practical advice on how to improve statistical practices in relation to CALD, whilst not mandating any indicators. The then Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs encouraged all departments and agencies to implement the Standards.

### **Current practice**

There is a body of evidence that CALD data is not collected consistent with the Standards.

For example, in the annual Reports on Government Services (ROGS), [most recently in 2019](#), CALD recipients of aged care services are defined simply as *‘those born overseas from countries other than the United Kingdom, Ireland, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa and the United States of America’*. This definition also appears in the current version of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare’s (AIHW) *National Aged Care Data Clearinghouse*



### *Data Dictionary.*

The National Disability Insurance Agency uses a similar definition, with the addition of a language indicator: 'CALD is defined as country of birth is not Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada or South Africa; or primary language spoken at home is not English'.

The need for consistent, comparable and compatible CALD data was raised by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) in its 2014 working paper [Cultural and linguistic diversity measures in aged care](#). The paper presented findings from an evaluation of CALD measures identified in 43 data sets and assessment instruments, and recommendations for implementing the 'top-10' measures in aged care data sets.

The paper found that only 1 in 3 data sets used the very basic and minimal ABS indicators of country of birth and language spoken and that other measures of linguistic diversity, including main language spoken at home, or English language proficiency were collected inconsistently, or not at all.

The paper recommended that:

- Data sets **without** CALD measures should employ, as a minimum, the ABS measures 'Country of birth' and 'Main language spoken at home', augmented with 'Interpreter required', 'Preferred sex of interpreter' and 'Preferred language', where the main language is other than English.
- Data sets **with** selected ABS measures should ensure they comply with ABS data collection methods, and where possible, augment the measures to include 'Interpreter required', 'Preferred sex of interpreter' and 'Preferred language', where the main language is other than English, 'Proficiency in spoken English' and 'Year of arrival', along with 3 linked measures that are associated with spirituality, are also recommended for supplemental inclusion.

FECCA is unaware of any progress made in relation to implementing the AIHW recommendations. In 2016, a further AIHW working paper '[Exploring the aged care use of older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds: a feasibility study](#)' again found considerable inconsistencies and gaps in accurately reporting on CALD data.

### **CALD data collection within the current Australian Government Multicultural Access and Equity Policy**

The Policy aims to ensure that departments and agencies take primary responsibility for identifying, understanding and responding to the needs of their clients. The associated [Policy Guide](#) (2018) offers guidance to non-corporate Government agencies in implementing the policy. It should be noted that corporate Government agencies, such as the National Disability Agency, are out of scope of the Policy.

The Policy mandates that each department or agency should have a Multicultural Access and Equity Plan and report on outcomes on an annual basis to the Department of Home Affairs.

There are, however, no mandated data requirements. Examples of guidance in relation to data include:



- Use CALD client data collected by your department or agency to measure the effectiveness of multicultural access and equity initiatives.
- Collect CALD data for the programmes and services you manage (whether you interact directly with them or through a contracted service provider). **Key indicators of diversity could include country of birth, ancestry and/or language preferences.**

## Research

Current inadequacies in relation to CALD data impacts on research. In addition, many study designs for qualitative social research into issues affecting all Australians (such as dementia) actively exclude CALD voices by insisting on English language proficiency as an inclusion criteria. The validity of many studies is therefore compromised by not accurately reflecting the diversity of the Australian population.

## FECCA's call for action

FECCA calls for:

- All parties to acknowledge that the collection of CALD data is currently inadequate. In the absence of the consistent application of agreed measures, the data is not complete, comparable or compatible.
- The establishment of a national CALD data project to:
  - include representatives of Commonwealth and State/Territory governments and agencies, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, appropriate academics and researchers, and peak multicultural organisations such as FECCA
  - develop recommended CALD measures to be applied
  - propose mechanisms (including through legislation and/or accreditation systems) to mandate their application where appropriate, particularly in government and non-government human services
  - seek endorsement of the recommended measures by the Council of Australian Governments to ensure national consistency.
- The national CALD data project to be led by a new Office for Cultural Diversity and Inclusion, proposed by FECCA in its 2019 Election Policy Platform.
- The National Health and Medical Research Council, the Australian Research Council and other research funding bodies, including universities, to develop mechanisms to ensure that research, particularly qualitative social research, is actively inclusive of CALD people to ensure that research reflects the diversity of the Australian population

## FECCA NATIONAL OFFICE

FECCA House  
Unit 1, No.4 Phipps Close  
Deakin ACT 2600  
Phone 02 6282 5755

Email [admin@fecca.org.au](mailto:admin@fecca.org.au)  
twitter @iFECCA  
facebook @iFECCA  
web [www.fecca.org.au](http://www.fecca.org.au)

