

ADVANCING MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA

Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia

POLICY PLATFORM 2022





In development of this policy platform, we pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders past and present and recognise that the land we live and work upon was never ceded. FECCA proudly supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart and its call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice protected by the Constitution.

FECCA acknowledges that our work on behalf of multicultural Australia has learnt from and been enriched by First Nations people and organisations. There is so much more to do, and we are committed to continuing to listen, learn and support First Nations people in the journey to a more inclusive society.

ADVANCING MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA: The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia Policy Platform 2022

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is the national peak body representing people from multicultural communities and their organisations across Australia. Through the membership of state, territory, and regional councils, we represent over 1500 community organisations and their members.

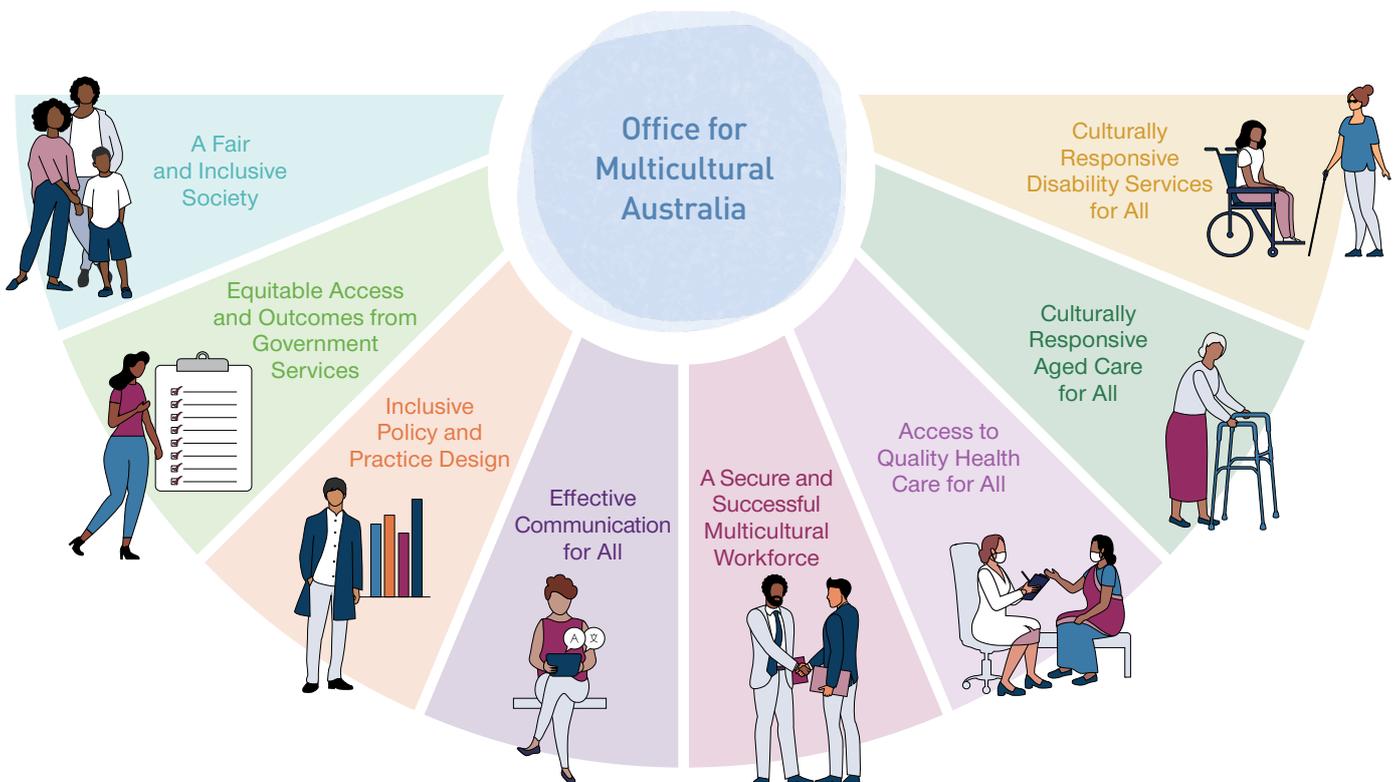
For over 40 years, FECCA has proudly worked alongside multicultural communities, broader Australian society and both Coalition and Labor governments to help build an Australia where everyone, no matter their background or how long they have lived in this country, can belong equally and without barriers. The past success of multiculturalism must not be taken for granted.

To maintain Australia's successful multicultural legacy and build a strong future where everyone can belong and thrive equally, we require a robust and coordinated whole of government approach.

This is why in 2022, FECCA is calling for an Office for Multicultural Australia.

As well as the Office, FECCA has identified eight priority areas for action. These areas are based on FECCA's extensive work alongside multicultural communities across Australia. However, these areas, and accompanying recommendations, should not be tackled in a piece-meal manner.

The Office for Multicultural Australia would lead Australia's multiculturalism by working across government to provide a cohesive, effective, and efficient approach to multicultural policy, including in FECCA's eight identified areas for action.



An Office for Multicultural Australia

In 1973, Australia's policy of multiculturalism recognised the benefits of cultural diversity and aimed at forging a just, inclusive, and socially cohesive society. This was a vision set by Al Grassby, the then Minister for Immigration, in a paper entitled '*A multicultural society for the future.*'

The path towards Australia's multicultural success was built on a strong bipartisan vision for a multicultural nation and a sound policy framework - coordinated by the then Office of Multicultural Affairs, established in 1986.

Decades on, while Australia continues to welcome a dynamic influx of migrants, the federal multicultural policy framework has not had the focus it deserves.

Policy frameworks and service delivery models that do not adequately understand or address the needs of multicultural people in Australia have led to disproportionately worse social, economic and health outcomes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further revealed the serious health, economic and social failures of a fragmented and weakened approach to the systems and frameworks necessary to upholding multiculturalism. The pandemic has also presented an opportunity to review how governments and communities can work collaboratively.

In learning from the consequences of COVID-19 as well as the reality of Australia's increasing diversity, Australia cannot afford to overlook the benefits of investing in a whole of government approach to multiculturalism, or the risks in a fragmented approach.

A federal Office for Multicultural Australia is a crucial step forward for Australia's renewed focus on multiculturalism.



A Weak Multicultural Policy Framework

Language loss
Exclusionary policy
Ineffective practice
Mental illness
Poor health outcomes
Racism
Poor communication in crisis
Women overlooked
LGBTIQ+ people omitted
Low feelings of belonging
Reduced disability rights

An Office for Multicultural Australia in Action

An Office for Multicultural Australia, elevated in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, will ensure a renewed focus and the continued success of multiculturalism in Australia.

Among other functions, the Office would:

- embed diversity reflective of Australian society in the foundation of policy making
- ensure consistency and coherence of Australia's multiculturalism framework through co-ordination across relevant programs, laws, regulations, and policies across all government departments and agencies
- design and implement consistent and accurate measures of cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity across government data collection
- strengthen the Multicultural Access and Equity Policy and ensure mandatory implementation throughout service delivery across all departments and agencies

- embed coordinated impact assessment of decision making across Departments
- ensure all people in Australia feel safe and live without fear of discrimination or violence
- establish diversity targets in the Australian Public Service.

A renewed commitment to multiculturalism through the Office for Multicultural Australia will benefit all of us. Tasked with making Australia the most successful multicultural nation in the world, it will help ensure all people in Australia are included fairly, equally and without barriers. It will safeguard the prosperity and social cohesion of our nation for generations to come.

As a nation, we are for multiculturalism. We need a renewed bipartisan commitment to multiculturalism through support for a federal Office for Multicultural Australia.

Intersectionality statement

FECCA recognises that all work on multiculturalism must be implemented in a way that acknowledges and addresses the diversity within multicultural Australia.

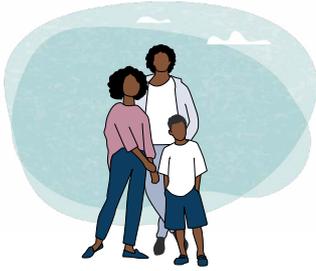
The discrimination and disadvantage a multicultural person or community face is often affected by their cultural identity and other identity markers such as their age, gender, sexual orientation, impairment, class, religion, and visa status.

These identities do not exist independently; instead, each informs the other and can have overlapping and compounding effects.

These effects can also be influenced by other factors – for example, living in a rural or remote area. It is not these diverse identities that generate vulnerability, but systemic exclusion that creates entrenched forms of disadvantage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on extensive work with multicultural communities FECCA has consolidated many challenges and barriers into eight areas for action across society to advance multicultural Australia. These are best coordinated by a federal Office for Multicultural Australia. We acknowledge there are many other important policy areas which must also be addressed, however FECCA has focused on these eight areas based on feedback from communities and stakeholders.



1. A Fair and Inclusive Society

- Establish a First Nations Voice protected by the constitution.
- Commit to an informed and resourced anti-racism strategy.
- Create a whole of government mechanism to overhaul the Australian migration program resulting in a fair, timely and transparent pathway to citizenship.



2. Equitable Access and Outcomes from Government Services

- Implement a revised Multicultural Access and Equity Policy Framework that is strong, transparent and includes mandated reporting and data collection from all government departments and agencies.



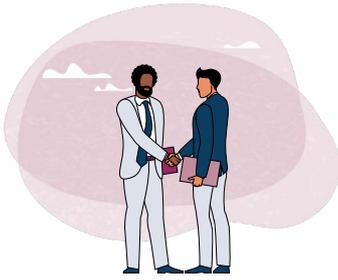
3. Inclusive Policy and Practice Design

- Boost funding for multicultural community organisations to ensure the voices of culturally and linguistically diverse people are meaningfully included in policy and practice design.
- Establish a national working group on culturally and linguistically diverse data collection.



4. Effective Communication for All

- Fund and sustain a package of language support to include translations; interpreting; a Community Review Panel; in-language and in-culture support options and community engagement.
- Implement extensive digital literacy programs tailored to multicultural communities to support the increased use of online services.
- Boost funding for the public broadcasters to bolster their in-language service offering and capability.



5. A Secure and Successful Multicultural Workforce

- Develop a national comprehensive multicultural workers' rights education plan designed and delivered with multicultural and ethno-specific organisations.
- Pilot a language allowance model to recognise and remunerate bilingual aged care workers and apply findings to other sectors to support the delivery of culturally responsive care



6. Access to Quality Health Care for All

- Fund the Australian Multicultural Health Collaborative to support the voice of people from culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse backgrounds to provide advice and guidance to the Australian Government.
- Establish within the Department of Health a specialist policy unit to advise and coordinate health policy development, program design and implementation that is inclusive of the needs of multicultural people.
- Make the 'Framework for Mental Health in Multicultural Australia' mandatory for all States and Territories



7. Culturally Responsive Aged Care for All

- Develop a multicultural-specific aged care navigator service based on full evaluation of the EnCOMPASS program within the Care Finder model, and support and sustain it with core funding.



8. Culturally Responsive Disability Services for All

- Apply the learnings from the NDIS Multicultural National Community Connector Program to reform the NDIS infrastructure to ensure equity of outcomes for multicultural people with disability.



1. A Fair and Inclusive Society

In Australia, everyone should be included equally and without barriers. Australia has a long legacy of successful multiculturalism built on appreciation and celebration of the diversity of our nation.

People from across the world arrive and settle in Australia, bringing with them a diversity of backgrounds, life experiences, skills, and strengths. The opportunity for all to live as full members of society, free from racism and discrimination forms the basis of a fair and inclusive society where everyone can belong.

A fair and inclusive society is achieved by actively recognising the value of diversity and ensuring inclusion for all regardless of culture, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, sexuality, disability, visa status, gender identity or age.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Establish a First Nations Voice protected by the constitution.**
- **Commit to an informed and resourced national anti-racism strategy.**
- **Create a whole of government mechanism to overhaul the Australian migration program resulting in a fair, timely and transparent pathway to citizenship.**

First Nations Voice Protected by the Constitution

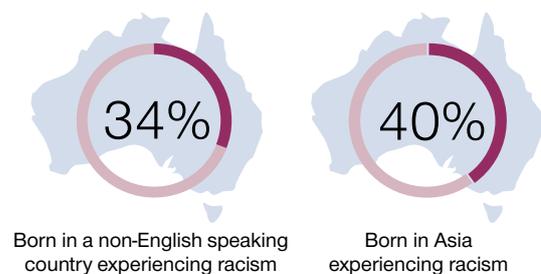
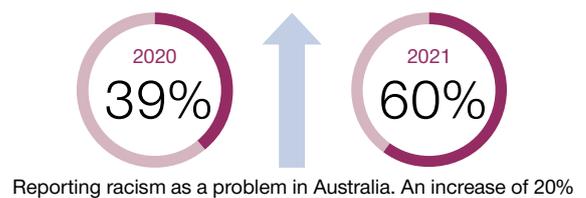
A fair and inclusive society must start with justice for First Nations people. FECCA supports the [Uluru Statement from the Heart's](#) call for a First Nations Voice protected by the Constitution. Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the structures that govern this country is essential to self-determination within a fair and inclusive society.

Multicultural communities wholeheartedly support First Nations' communities and stand in solidarity in the pursuit for a voice to parliament.

Anti-Racism Strategy

The opportunity for all to live free from racism and discrimination forms the basis of a fair and inclusive society that encourages full participation from its members. Racism continues to be a problem in Australia and impacts on people's wellbeing, sense of belonging, and their connection to society.

The 2021 *'Mapping Social Cohesion'* report¹ from the Scanlon Foundation found an increase of 20% of respondents reporting racism as a problem in Australia – from 39% in 2020 to 60% in 2021. Further, 34% of people born in a non-English speaking country reported they had experienced racism, including 40% of all respondents born in Asia. It is time for a holistic and comprehensive approach to addressing racism at all levels of society, led by government.



¹ https://scanloninstitute.org.au/sites/default/files/2021-11/Mapping_Social_Cohesion_2021_Report_0.pdf

The Australian Human Rights Commission has launched a plan to develop a National Anti-Racism Framework but has not been adequately resourced to complete this task in true partnership with people who experience racism. FECCA calls for a bipartisan commitment to a national anti-racism strategy. The strategy must be grounded in the experience and knowledge of people who experience racism in Australia including First Nations people. It must be well-resourced to ensure it can be designed and implemented in partnership with people and communities who experience racism.

FECCA emphasises the importance of addressing interpersonal racism, including online, as well as systemic racism which creates barriers for people to access:

- meaningful employment
- services they are entitled to
- leadership roles
- political careers
- fair and equitable treatment across all levels of society.

We have an opportunity to tackle racism as a nation by working with all levels of government to design and implement a national strategy.

The resourcing and development of this strategy is essential to ensure everyone in Australia can feel safe and proud to express their culture and language free from discrimination in a fair and inclusive society.

Fair, Timely and Transparent Pathway to Citizenship

A pathway to permanent residency allows people who migrate to Australia certainty for themselves, their families, and their future.

This certainty helps people develop a sense of belonging and allows people to call Australia home and plan their future. In Australia, permanent residency and citizenship have been used as a means of nation building and fostering inclusivity to create our multicultural Australia, where diverse cultures and languages are celebrated and embraced.

For decades, Australia had a highly inclusive immigration system where virtually all migrants were granted permanent residency with full access to employment and social rights. However, in recent years, the balance between permanent and temporary migrants has changed and the pathway to permanency and citizenship has become inconsistent, unfair, lengthy and, in some cases, indefinite, resulting in major consequences for individuals and missed opportunities for the nation.

For many seeking to make Australia home, the prolonged uncertainty and ever-changing requirements have clear and significant mental health implications. Cohorts of people seeking asylum have been blocked from gaining permanency indefinitely; prolonged temporary visas create additional reliance upon sponsoring partners resulting in vulnerability to domestic and family violence; people migrating to Australia from New Zealand after 2001 have no clear pathway to permanency; prolonged temporary visas create additional reliance upon sponsoring employers resulting in vulnerability to exploitation in the workplace like wage theft, sexual harassment, and other illegal practices.

According to 2016 Census data people are 'temporary' for longer with the number of people living in Australia on temporary visas for a period of 8 years or more being three times greater than during the previous census.

The number of temporary entrants in Australia increased from 1.605 million in December 2011 to 2.433 million in December 2019 (increase of over 0.8 million) and dropped to 1.7 million in January 2022.

As of January 2022, there were almost 330,000 people holding bridging visas, which is the highest number on record (up from 110,900 in December 2019).

The number of people waiting for their application for permanent residency has not been published but growth in the number of bridging visa holders indicates a large number and long wait times for visa processing.

The inefficiency, inconsistency and unfairness of the Australian migration program and the solutions have been well documented in public inquiries such as '[Migrant Intake into Australia – Productivity Commission 2016](#)', '[Select Committee into Temporary Migration Report 2021](#)', '[Select Committee into The efficacy, fairness, timeliness and costs of the processing and granting of visa classes which provide for or allow for family and partner reunions Report 2021](#)', and '[Report of the Inquiry into Australia's Skilled Migration Program 2021](#)'.

The recommendations from these processes must be used to overhaul the migration system including all migration programmes, laws, regulations, and policies across departments and restoring the alignment between temporary and permanent migration.

This overhaul will result in a fairer, more transparent, and timely pathway to citizenship so everyone is free to participate and belong equally.



2. Equitable Access and Outcomes from Government Services

A successful multicultural Australia means that all people in Australia are able to access government programs and services equitably. This includes identifying and removing barriers to participation and contribution for everyone irrespective of their cultural, ethnic, religious, or linguistic background and ensuring inclusion and equity for all.

The federal Multicultural Access and Equity Policy is a key mechanism to achieving these goals, but currently has limited impact. As Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity continues to grow, access and equity are more important than ever to ensure individuals can actively take part in communities and fully engage in a fair and inclusive society.

RECOMMENDATION

- **Implement a revised Multicultural Access and Equity Policy Framework that is strong, transparent and includes mandated reporting and data collection from all departments and agencies.**
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FECCA has observed a decreasing commitment to multicultural access and equity across Government departments, and a notable decline in priority and in transparency of reporting. The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted major gaps in communication and engagement with Australia's multicultural communities. Years of insufficient attention paid to the needs of multicultural communities and limited attempts to build trust between communities and government, has led to an inability to reach and support diverse communities throughout the pandemic.

This has resulted in poorer economic, social and health outcomes for multicultural people throughout this period.

In 2020, FECCA released its latest [Multicultural Access and Equity Report](#). Based on community voices, the report demonstrated that numerous barriers still exist for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in accessing government services, including:

- lack of information in plain English
- lack of accessible information in languages other than English
- increases in online and limited face to face service provision
- limited awareness and use of the national Translation and Interpreting Service (TIS) and other interpreting and translating services
- limited cultural competency among front-line staff.

These barriers significantly impact the foundational supports of society and create disadvantage for multicultural communities. They highlight a serious deficit in the building blocks of access and equity and contribute to poorer outcomes across lifespans and generations.

If the federal Multicultural Access and Equity Framework is not strengthened, the future of Australia as a successful multicultural country is at risk.

Strengthening Multicultural Access and Equity

The Government must ensure policies, programs and practices are responsive to the diversity of Australia. FECCA calls for a renewed commitment to a well-informed, strong, and transparent Multicultural Access and Equity Policy implemented across all government department and agencies, including services that are outsourced.

Diversity within diversity, or intersectionality must be central to this policy framework as the discrimination and disadvantage a multicultural person or community face is often affected by their cultural identity and other identity markers such as their age, gender, sexual orientation, impairment, class, religion, and visa status. These identities do not exist independently; instead, each informs the other and can have overlapping and compounding effects.

These effects can also be influenced by other factors – for example, living in a rural or remote area. It is not these diverse identities that generate vulnerability, but systemic exclusion that creates entrenched forms of disadvantage.

A well-informed, strong, and transparent Multicultural Access and Equity Policy must include:

- accountability measures to ensure commitment and action from leadership at all levels across departments and agencies
- engagement with diverse communities and multicultural/ethnic organisation to understand specific barriers and gaps
- design of policies and programs in collaboration with people who will be using them
- intersectionality as a core principle of policy development
- strategies to improve recruitment and retention of bilingual and bicultural workers throughout government
- mandated data collection and analysis to better identify outcomes for culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse people in Australia
- improved inter-department/agency coordination on these issues.

Responsive and inclusive multicultural access and equity policy will help to ensure that all people in Australia are given the support to reach their full potential.



3. Inclusive Policy and Practice Design

An inclusive and cohesive multicultural Australia needs good policy and practice that is grounded in the reality of Australia's multicultural population. This requires inclusion of everyone irrespective of their cultural, ethnic, religious, or linguistic background in research, engagement, and co-design opportunities to embed diversity at the heart of program and service design.

Improved health, employment, education, disability, ageing and other social outcomes across society will result from inclusive policy and practice designed with culturally and linguistically diverse people at the centre based on representative data and research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Boost funding for multicultural community organisations to ensure the voices of culturally and linguistically diverse people are meaningfully included in policy and practice design.**
 - **Establish a National Working Group on culturally and linguistically diverse data collection.**
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Multicultural Communities Left Out and Left Behind

Culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse people in Australia deserve to have government policies, programs and services designed with them at the centre.

Too often, policies and practices across all levels of government are designed with limited or no consideration of people from multicultural backgrounds. When they are considered, often as an afterthought, policies and programs have struggled to serve all communities when help is needed most.

The COVID-19 response clearly demonstrated that for multicultural Australia it is insufficient and ineffective to merely translate information about a service that has not built cultural diversity into its core design. This approach is tokenistic, unfair, and inequitable resulting in multicultural communities being left out and left behind.

This has caused serious social, economic and health consequences at all levels, but the consequences are more severe when the issue is more serious and/or culturally sensitive. For example -

A survivor of family and domestic violence who is unable to ask for help when engaging with government services because the warning signs that they display are culturally specific and therefore misunderstood.

A person with disability who is not able to access the NDIS because they describe their disability through a cultural lens that is disregarded by the person reviewing their application.

A family experiencing an environmental emergency who is unable to receive the information

Building Evidence through Community Engagement

Genuinely inclusive policy and practice can only be created alongside multicultural communities at the very beginning, with further engagement throughout the design process. However, given the breadth of diversity within multicultural Australia, it is equally important to invest in existing multicultural organisations. These organisations have wide networks and deep relationships built over time with their communities based on trust and deep cultural understanding. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these organisations were crucial in facilitating engagement between communities and government.

Due to the critical importance of trust when engaging with multicultural communities, these organisations offer a level of access and insight that government structures simply cannot replicate. Multicultural community organisations serve as a bridge between government and community and require sufficient funding and resources to be able to continue to play this vital role.

We must embed these organisations at the heart of successful and equitable program design and delivery. Investing in multicultural organisations allows them to facilitate meaningful engagement with communities and participate in co-design to ensure the diversity within multicultural Australia as well as intersectionality are adequately reflected.

Designing policies and practices in partnership with multicultural organisations and their communities will lead to more equitable access to the services and programs that all people in Australia need to participate fully in society.

National Deficits in Capturing Data Capturing for Cultural, Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity.

Inclusive policy and practice occurs when decisions are based on evidence and research. FECCA's *'If We Don't Count It ...It Doesn't Count! Towards Consistent National Data Collection and Reporting on Cultural, Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity'* paper demonstrates that administrative reporting, survey data and research methodology is impacting the generalisability of research findings and compromising the validity of many studies by not accurately reflecting the diversity of the Australian population.

Current data inadequacies impact on research and on inclusive policy and practice in areas such as dementia prevention and care where cultural or ethnically diverse participants are actively excluded resulting in poorer outcomes for patients. This exclusion of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in clinical trials also leads to poorer health outcomes as seen in the Australian response to COVID-19.

Across program and service design the most collected criteria for identifying people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are country of birth and language spoken at home/preferred language. This approach excludes significant numbers of people who should be counted for purposes like medical genealogy, mental health stigma or appropriate care but were born in Australia or are proficient in English.

National Working Group on Data Collection Capturing Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

To ensure research and evidence reflects Australia's cultural diversity, FECCA calls for the establishment and resourcing of a National Working Group to develop consistent and accurate measures of cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity to achieve adequate, appropriate, accessible and useful data collection.

These measures must:

- ensure the inclusion of culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse populations
- be mandated and used by all Commonwealth and State/Territory Government departments and agencies
- allow research funding bodies to develop mechanisms to ensure federally funded research demonstrates inclusive and representative research methodology.

Consistent and accurate measure of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity will contribute to inclusive policy and practice in health, social services, disability, and aged care and across society to improve outcomes for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in Australia.



4. Effective Communication for All

Through effective communication we can ensure all people in Australia can access the information relevant to them about available services and support, events, health, emergencies, and opportunities to connect. Accessing relevant information and communicating effectively with important services allows people to maintain their safety and connection to broader society.

As Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity continues to grow, methods of information provision and language policy must be strengthened to ensure all people in Australia can experience equitable access to timely information and improved communication with services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Fund and sustain a package of language support to include translations; interpreting; a Community Review Panel; in-language and in-culture support options and community engagement.**
 - **Implement extensive digital literacy programs tailored to multicultural communities to support the increased use of online services.**
 - **Boost funding for the public broadcasters to bolster their in-language service offering and capability.**
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Communication Support

Successful communication for multicultural Australia requires measures to ensure people can connect with each other and with government services regardless of their cultural, linguistic, ethnic, or religious background.

A successful multicultural society must allow people to receive information and communicate in the language with which they are most comfortable. This is particularly important during emergencies such as fires or floods, and when discussing complicated health and legal matters such as domestic and family violence, mental health, disability assistance planning, and end of life care.

Ensuring all people in Australia receive crucial information regardless of their linguistic background cannot be an afterthought. It must be a core component of government communication strategies.

The rapid government updates throughout the COVID-19 pandemic further demonstrated the importance of timely messaging. The lack of good, timely translations resulted in people not receiving the important information they needed and worse health and social outcomes.

Without accurately translated information about emergencies, laws, health and other services, people who have low levels of English or who are most confident using another language, are disadvantaged and at risk.

Feeling safe and confident enough to discuss complicated and sensitive topics is a challenge, especially when a person speaks a language other than English.

Professional, knowledgeable interpreters are essential to ensure people who are most confident in a language other than English fully understand important information such as a medical diagnosis, medication instructions or legal options and responsibilities.

Interpreters must be equipped with the necessary knowledge to interpret both cultural nuance and subject matter complexity.

A package of communication support for a strong multicultural Australia must include:

- expanded access to quality translations for information on migration and family law, government services, emergency services, aged care and health care
- expanded access to knowledgeable and professional interpreters
 - additional Medicare Benefits Schedule items for extended consultations using interpreters
- the creation of a community review panel to improve the processes of creating in-language content
- bilingual and bicultural support to enhance accessibility of service delivery
- community engagement strategies to inform policy and practice.

This improved access to information and services will ensure all people, regardless of their cultural or linguistic backgrounds can remain connected and safe.

Digital Literacy

Recent advances in digital technology allows people across the country to stay connected, take part in conversations, and access information like never before. Increasingly, government information and services are moving online such as Telehealth, My Aged Care, myGov, emergency services apps and online distribution of COVID-19 information.

Telehealth

During COVID-19 restrictions, one GP practice reported to FECCA that it successfully transitioned to Telehealth and has continued with a hybrid model. Such a hybrid model works well with e-prescriptions/ telemedicine and online consultations for continuity of care in times of uncertainty.

but

The Digital Nation Australia 2021 report² shows one in four Australians feel ill-equipped to use technology; and it is widely agreed that culturally and linguistically diverse groups in Australia are underrepresented in the telehealth field.

The increased importance of digital communication of essential health information during the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in unequal delivery of important messages with dire health impacts. Online information and services provide exciting benefits and opportunities, but more must be done to ensure people are not left behind.

For people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, there can be compounding factors that prevent them from accessing information and services. These factors include: language barriers, low digital and computer literacy, low socio-economic status, limited knowledge and understanding of health system, fear and other factors.

FECCA calls for an extensive digital literacy program to be implemented to ensure effective communication for people, their families, and carers.

This program must ensure services:

- conduct usability testing with multicultural teenagers, young people, and older adults to enhance the accessibility and acceptability of platforms and systems
- redesign existing models of care to incorporate new technology whilst maintaining a high standard.
- implement online interpreters like telehealth proactively to generate better long-term benefits
- upskill and equip people to access online information and services
- proactively develop solutions on how to engage isolated multicultural people.

Rapid uptake and upskilling of people in Australia will ensure connection is not lost and people are not left behind with the increased use of digital service provision.



5. A Secure and Valued Multicultural Workforce

A secure and successful multicultural workforce is integral to Australia's prosperous and multicultural future. For multicultural workers, secure employment empowers individuals and improves self-confidence and feelings of stability. Workers must be empowered through policies and practices that recognise their value and prioritise their safety and wellbeing.

Migrant and multicultural workers bring a diversity of backgrounds, life experiences, skills, and strengths to Australian society. A workforce which reflects Australia's multicultural diversity ensures better outcomes across service delivery, academia, and industry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Develop a national comprehensive multicultural worker rights education plan designed and delivered with multicultural and ethno-specific organisations.**
- **Pilot a language allowance model to recognise and remunerate bilingual aged care workers and apply findings to other sectors to support the delivery of culturally responsive care.**

Workplace Safety

Everyone should feel safe and valued in their workplace. When workplaces are safe, employees can exercise choice and work toward their goals.

Despite migrants and refugees being some of the most educated, driven, and entrepreneurial members of our society, circumstance pushes many migrants into jobs

where they are at the mercy of the employer. Exploitation, wage theft and sexual harassment can occur when a disproportionate power dynamic exists, which is often caused by:

- power of employer over employment and visa status
- difficult entry into the job market due to discrimination
- lack of understanding of complicated worker rights and compliance system.

Australia's employment legislation contains many protections for workers. However, Australia's Fair Work Act and associated regulations, rules and awards are complex. For people who may have limited knowledge of government mechanisms and where to find worker rights information—it is very difficult to navigate systems and processes to realise these rights. Even with this knowledge, the disproportionate power dynamic diminishes people's ability to report illegal practices due to an understandable and often justified fear of consequences.

In some cases, workers have known they were being exploited and that there were mechanisms to pursue their rights but were prevented from doing so because of threats made by their employers.² If complaints are not made and employers not held accountable, illegal practices in employment will continue.

FECCA calls for a national comprehensive workers' rights education plan to ensure migrants from multicultural backgrounds are given information on workers' rights, and complaints mechanisms, and are empowered to pursue their rights. This education plan must be developed and delivered in partnership with multicultural and ethno-specific organisations to ensure it effectively reaches

² McKenzie, M. 'Slavery claims as seasonal workers from Vanuatu paid nothing for months' work' The Sydney Morning Herald 27 March 2017; Fair Work Ombudsman v Maroochy Sunshine Pty Ltd & Anor [2017] FCCA 559 per Jarret J at [48] and [57]

and empowers intended audiences. This workers' rights education plan will ensure people are able to pursue their rights and hold exploitative employees accountable.

Bilingual and Bicultural Workforce Recognition

Access to quality services including healthcare, domestic and family violence services, and aged care is essential to the lives of individuals and their families. In the context of Australia's increasing diversity and the lessons learnt during COVID-19, access to appropriate, quality, and safe care is more important than ever to ensure individuals can actively take part in communities as part of a fair and inclusive society.

Currently people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds seeking mental health support, aged care services, disability support, health care and other social services are often misunderstood by providers and become discouraged from seeking the support they need. The employment of bilingual and bicultural workers increases trust in services and enables providers to offer tailored approaches and improve outcomes for all.

The vital role of bilingual and bicultural workers for delivering culturally responsive care has been raised in FECCA's ongoing consultations on aged care. Consultations held by FECCA revealed bilingual and bicultural aged care workers are frequently relied upon to provide informal interpreting when their language proficiency matches those of an older person in care. Yet the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety recognised language skills and proficiency are unrecognised and unremunerated, further contributing to the undervaluing and economic insecurity of aged care workers.

FECCA calls for the development and piloting of a language allowance model to recognise and remunerate bilingual aged care workers and apply findings to other sectors to support delivery of culturally responsive care. This would result in better outcomes for multicultural communities utilising health, aged and other services.



6. Access to Quality Health Care for All

Access to quality healthcare is a fundamental human right and essential to the lives of people and their families. A successful multicultural Australia must ensure everyone in Australia has access to appropriate, quality, and safe health care regardless of their cultural, linguistic, ethnic, or religious background.

In the context of Australia's increasing diversity and COVID-19, access to appropriate, quality, and safe health care is more important than ever to ensure individuals can actively take part in communities as part of a fair and inclusive society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Fund the Australian Multicultural Health Collaborative to support the voice of people from culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse backgrounds to provide advice and guidance to the Australian Government.**
- **Establish within the Department of Health a specialist policy unit to advise and coordinate health policy development, program design and implementation that is inclusive of the needs of multicultural people.**
- **Make the 'Framework for Mental Health in Multicultural Australia' mandatory for all States and Territories.**

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, disproportionately poor health and mental health consequences were experienced by multicultural communities. This crisis has further indicated that health equity for multicultural communities needs focus and attention.

People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can face barriers to accessing quality health care due to:

- information often not provided in plain English or languages other than English
- Australia's healthcare system being difficult to navigate
- limited awareness and use of interpreting services
- limited availability of culturally appropriate care
- limited health research representative of Australia's diversity.

These barriers lead to misdiagnosis or underdiagnosis, inaccurate prescribed medication levels, decisions being made without adequate, understandable information being provided and ultimately poorer health outcomes for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

For example: For a person experiencing a complicated medical condition like diabetes, it is important that relevant research has been conducted to ensure treatment is specific to their needs. Their care must be culturally appropriate and in language that is understandable. Without addressing these barriers, many people in Australia will be at risk. This can severely hinder their health outcome.

For example: When seeking support for a mental illness, often people new to Australia do not know how to navigate the medical system as it is different to the system they are used to. The patient may not know that mental health plans exist or the regular pathway to referral and treatment. This severely impedes their health outcomes.

Equity of quality health care can be progressed by funding the Australian Multicultural Health Collaborative, establishing a specialist multicultural policy unit within the Department of Health and making the Framework for Mental Health in Multicultural Australia mandatory.

Australian Multicultural Health Collaborative

The Collaborative will represent broad multicultural health and wellbeing issues at the national level through a formal membership structure. Membership will include multicultural consumers, health and wellbeing services, health and social care practitioners, researchers, organisations, and institutions for whom the primary focus is multicultural health.

The Collaborative also welcomes as members 'mainstream' services and organisations with a significant commitment to multicultural health and wellbeing and will enter partnerships with relevant national organisations. FECCA believes the Collaborative will be instrumental in providing national leadership and advice on policy, research, and practice, to improve access and equity and achieve better health outcomes for multicultural communities in Australia.

The Collaborative will provide advice and guidance on policy and budget matters while advocating for community-developed health solutions that contribute to the quality of life and improved health outcomes for people from culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse backgrounds in Australia.

This initiative will increase the provision of understandable information to consumers leading to more accurate diagnosis and treatment. The Collaborative will provide an efficient mechanism for government and others to consult on multicultural health issues.

These changes will ultimately improve health outcomes for multicultural communities across Australia.

Specialist Policy Unit

A specialist multicultural policy unit within the Department of Health would provide a much needed coordinated, inclusive and effective approach to health policy in Australia.

The policy unit would embed diversity reflective of Australian society in the foundation of health policy by coordinating and advising across all areas of work and relevant programs in the Department of Health.

Establishing this specialist unit within the Department of Health will greatly improve health outcomes for multicultural communities across Australia.

Framework for Mental Health in Multicultural Australia

The Framework for Mental Health in Multicultural Australia³ (the Framework) was developed by the Embrace Multicultural Mental Health Project through co-design with a consumer and carer lived experience group as well as mental health services, practitioners and Primary Health Networks.

The Framework addresses barriers faced by multicultural people when seeking mental health support by addressing Australian mental health services, practitioners and Primary Health Networks. By allowing organisations and individual practitioners to evaluate and enhance their cultural responsiveness and providing a range of support and resources, the Framework ensures all people in Australia can access mental health care that meets their needs. The Framework aims to improve cultural responsiveness of services and increase diversity of the mental health workforce.

The Framework for Mental Health in Multicultural Australia must become mandatory to ensure mental health services become more culturally responsive.

Culturally responsive mental health services will ensure all people in Australia receive appropriate, quality, and safe mental health care regardless of their cultural, linguistic, ethnic, or religious background.

³ <https://embracementalhealth.org.au/service-providers/framework>



7. Culturally Responsive Aged Care for All

A successful multicultural Australia requires measures to ensure people in Australia can access appropriate, quality, and safe aged care services and supports, regardless of their cultural, linguistic, ethnic or religious background. In the context of Australia's increasing diversity and ageing population, access to appropriate, quality and safe aged care is more important than ever to ensure people can live dignified, healthy and fulfilling lives as they age.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **Develop a multicultural-specific aged care navigator service based on full evaluation of the EnCOMPASS program within the Care Finder model, and support and sustain it with core funding.**

lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate aged care providers.⁵ These barriers often result in older people, eligible for a Home Care Package, but living without support because they do not understand how to navigate the complex system or do not have the required knowledge or services. COVID-19 has further highlighted the need for health promotion strategies which are tailored to multicultural communities. These challenges demonstrate the need for aged care navigation which is tailored to overcome the barriers encountered by older people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

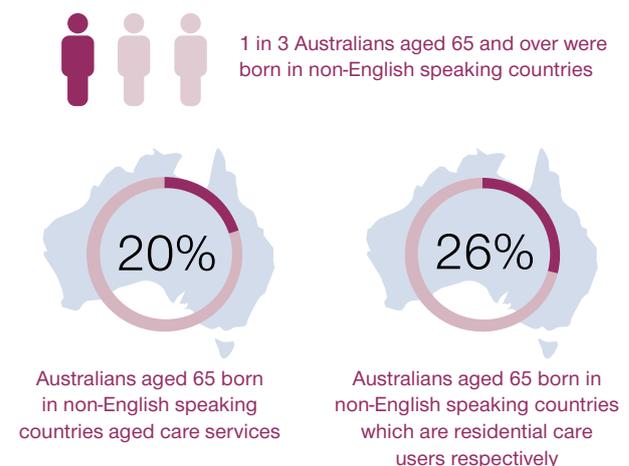
However, the [Final Report](#) of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety was woefully quiet on the changes needed to the aged care system to ensure it is culturally responsive. Further commitments are required to ensure that the aged care system meets the needs of Australia's growing older multicultural population.

Barriers to Culturally Responsive Aged Care

Approximately 1 in 3 Australians aged 65 and over were born in non-English speaking countries, and this number is expected to grow. While 1 in 3 older Australians were born in non-English speaking countries, they remain under-represented in their use of aged care services at 26% of home care users and 20% of residential care users respectively.⁴

Many older Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are therefore less likely to use supports and services that could contribute to better health outcomes.

FECCA research has shown that barriers include a lack of awareness and knowledge of available services, system complexity, trust issues, health literacy, and a



⁴ Aged Care Financing Authority, Eighth report on the Funding and Financing of the Aged Care Industry, July 2020.

⁵ FECCA, Review of Australian research on older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, March 2015.

Support for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse-specific aged care navigation

In 2019, the need for an aged care navigation program tailored for cultural and linguistic diversity was recognised by an election promise of \$10 million to deliver such a program. In 2021 FECCA was funded to deliver the *EnCOMPASS: Multicultural Aged Care Connector* program for 18 months to December 2022 in partnership with 22 local organisations.

At the same time, the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety recommended the establishment of the Care Finder aged care navigation program. Care Finder will begin in January 2023 and will be commissioned by the Primary Health Networks.

Within these timelines less than 12 months of data from the *EnCOMPASS* program can be incorporated into the Care Finder program before it begins operations in 2023. This means there will be limited insights on navigation needs of multicultural communities shaping the design of the Care Finder program. Without tailored navigation, older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds will have less opportunities to access aged care services reducing their ability to lead dignified, healthy and fulfilling lives as they age.

FECCA calls for commitment and further resourcing to ensure the Care Finder program is adequately resourced to meet the needs of older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, their families and their communities, including by incorporating the full learnings and resources developed from the *EnCOMPASS: Multicultural Aged Care Connector* program. This commitment will ensure all people in Australia are able to access appropriate, quality and safe aged care regardless of their cultural, linguistic, ethnic or religious background and retain their ability to lead dignified, healthy and fulfilling lives as they age.



8. Culturally Responsive Disability Services for All

Australia's multicultural success story must include multicultural Australians with a disability.

People from culturally, linguistically, ethnically, or religiously diverse background with a disability must have full access to the services and support systems they need in order to participate fully in Australian society, exercise choice and work toward their goals.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **Apply the learnings from the NDIS Multicultural National Community Connector Program to reform the NDIS infrastructure to ensure equity of outcomes for multicultural people with disability.**

Barriers to Culturally Responsive Disability Support

Multicultural people with disability experience significant and compounding barriers to rights, recognition, and participation across Australian society. Without access to tailored disability supports, many culturally and linguistically diverse Australians with a disability are prevented from fully taking part in society.

This is illustrated starkly in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) where only 9.5% of NDIS participants have a diverse background which is less than half of the stated benchmark of 20%.

There are numerous, intersecting barriers that prevent many multicultural Australians with disabilities engaging with NDIS information and opportunities and accessing and utilising the scheme to its full potential. These barriers include a lack of awareness of the Scheme, cultural beliefs about disability, language barriers and a lack of

language services, the complexity of the Scheme, trust in the Scheme specifically and trust in Government services generally.

It is evident that the current form of the NDIS does not equitably meet the needs of multicultural Australians with disability.

Multicultural disability systems navigation

In 2020/21, FECCA worked alongside the National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA) to deliver the National Community Connector Program on behalf of the NDIS. In partnership with community organisations in all states and territories, this program provided culturally nuanced systems navigation support at every stage of an individual, family or community's journey with the NDIS.

Despite its short duration, the Program showed that the complexity of barriers faced by multicultural people with disability can be overcome with culturally specific navigation support.

One of the key learnings from the Program is the value of trust as a key driver in the way people from multicultural communities process information, as well as access and receive supports and services when they need them.

Learning from the National Community Connector Program, the NDIS must be revamped to ensure equitable outcomes, including in NDIS access, plan size and plan utilisation. To achieve this, the NDIS must include:

- individual navigation for people being provided, supports and services from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and their carers and families
- partnerships with community members and community organisations who understand the cultural context of disability and disability support

- a strengths-based, no-wrong-door case management approach
- culturally appropriate, tailored information about accessing support
- building the capacity of multicultural people seeking supports and services, their loved ones and communities on engaging with the disability system
- building an evidence base on the issues and barriers affecting people seeking disability supports and services from multicultural backgrounds in navigating the disability system, including collecting data.

A commitment to a more equitable NDIS will ensure all people in Australia are able to access tailored disability supports regardless of their cultural, linguistic, ethnic or religious background and participate fully in Australian society, exercise choice and work toward their goals.

FECCA MEMBERS

ACT Multicultural Council
Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW
Multicultural Communities' Council of Illawarra
Multicultural Council of Griffith
Multicultural Council Wagga Wagga
Young & District Multicultural Association
Hunter Multicultural Communities
Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory
Ethnic Communities Council of Logan
Multicultural Communities Council Gold Coast
Multicultural Communities' Council of South Australia

Multicultural Council of Tasmania
Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria
Albury-Wodonga Ethnic Communities Council
Diversitat (Geelong Ethnic Communities' Council)
Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council
Ethnic Council of Shepparton & District
North East Multicultural Association
Gippsland Ethnic Communities' Council
Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities' Council
Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services
Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia



FECCA acknowledges that this Policy Platform does not cover all issues of importance to multicultural Australia. We encourage readers to refer to the important work of the following organisations:

[Settlement Council of Australia](#)

[Refugee Council of Australia](#)

[Harmony Alliance – Migrant & Refugee Women for Change](#)

[National Ethnic Disability Alliance](#)

[Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network](#)

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