



## Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia

### 2023-2024 Pre-Budget Submission

#### Who we are

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 1,500 community organisations and their members.

#### What we do

For over 40 years, FECCA has proudly worked alongside culturally and linguistically diverse communities, the broader Australian society and the Commonwealth government to build a successful, productive and inclusive multicultural Australia where everyone, no matter their background or how long they have lived in this country, can belong equally and reach their full potential.

FECCA draws on the lived experiences of the people and their descendants that have migrated to Australia and the expertise of its extensive and diverse membership to develop and promote inclusive, innovative and responsible public policy that reflects the needs and perspectives of multicultural Australia to build a strong, innovative and inclusive nation that harnesses its greatest strength, the diversity of its people.

The FECCA network is FECCA's greatest strength. Through our network we can enhance the capacity of governments to strengthen public policy to meet the needs of the diverse Australian population. FECCA is a proven trusted partner to both communities and government, operating as a sophisticated conduit by mobilising communities to work with government to develop and enrich public policy through community-led expertise and action.

This Submission reasserts the **FECCA Policy Platform 2022: Advancing Multicultural Australia** which sets out a foundation for building a strong and inclusive nation that harnesses the diversity of its people. FECCA's Policy Platform can be accessed at: <https://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/FECCA-Policy-Platform-2022.pdf>



*In development of this submission, 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 peoples and organisations. We are committed to continuing to listen, learn and support First Nations peoples in the journey to a more inclusive society.*

## **Building a strong and resilient nation**

Australia continues to face social and economic conditions that present unprecedented challenges for government. The COVID pandemic continues to stretch our health systems and challenge the workforce and broader economy; the war in the Ukraine is significantly affecting global access and costs of essential resources; and the impacts of climate change and natural disasters are continuing to devastate communities across the nation.

Despite this, there is an enduring spirit of hope and resilience across the nation. It is a time for change, a time for innovation and a time to harness Australia's greatest strength, its people.

## **Investing to advance multicultural Australia**

Australia's population is undeniably multicultural and continuing to grow. In 2021, more than half of Australians were either born overseas or had at least one parent born overseas, and 22.3 per cent of people speak a language other than English at home (an increase of 792,062 from 2016). In 2022-23, the permanent migration program planning level rose to 195,000 places from 160,000 in 2021-22 with uncapped temporary places. People from across the world arrive in Australia, bringing with them a rich diversity of backgrounds, life experiences, skills, and strengths.

An essential component of successful migration is building connection, community and a sense of belonging. To continue Australia's successful multicultural legacy and build a strong future where everyone can thrive and reach their full potential, a robust and coordinated whole of government approach is required to inclusive policy settings and system reform to remove unconscious bias and systemic racism. This is why FECCA is calling for the establishment of an Office for Multicultural Australia to coordinate and oversee eight priority areas for government action and investment. The priority areas are based on FECCA's extensive consultation and work alongside its network of over 1,500 multicultural communities across Australia. Whilst many issues were raised, focussing and coordinating unified action across the eight thematic areas presents the greatest opportunities to contribute significantly to a stronger, more resilient and inclusive nation.

## **Recommendations**

### **Office for Multicultural Australia**

Establish and provide ongoing funding to an Office for Multicultural Australia to lead Australia's efforts to build a stronger, more inclusive nation by working across government to provide a cohesive, effective, and efficient approach to multicultural policy.

A renewed commitment to multiculturalism through the Office for Multicultural Australia will benefit all Australians. It will support the government's aim of establishing Australia as a migration destination of choice where everyone in Australia can contribute and benefit from the social and economic wealth of the nation and safeguard the prosperity and social cohesion of Australia for generations to come.

An Office for Multicultural Australia would:

- Work to ensure all people in Australia feel safe and live without fear of discrimination.
- Develop a national Multicultural Framework.
- 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 government programs, laws, regulations, and policies.
- 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 government.
- Embed coordinated impact assessment of decision-making across Departments.
- Establish diversity targets at all levels across the Australian Public Service.

### A fair and inclusive society

- Establish and provide ongoing support to a **First Nations Voice** protected by the constitution. A fair and inclusive society must start with justice for First Nations people. 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.
- Continue work on an informed and resourced **anti-racism strategy** in consultation with multicultural and First Nations Australians. The government should take this opportunity to leave a lasting legacy for all people in Australia to live free from racism and discrimination.
- Maintain commitment and provide investment to **overhaul the Australian migration program** resulting in a 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 and provide the best opportunities to participate and contribute to the social and economic prosperity of the nation ([Attachment A](#) refers).
- Develop a national program that invests in multicultural and ethnic community organisations to deliver connection and coordination **support for non-humanitarian migrants** to access essential information and services to successfully participate in the social, civic and economic realms of Australia such as work rights, childcare, transport, domestic violence, NDIS, education, language support, mygov and First Nations issues and history. Only a very small number of non-humanitarian migrants are eligible for settlement support leaving most migrants with limited support which is not consistently available. Making support available to all new arrivals will provide all migrants, no matter where they come from or on what visa, with equitable opportunities to quickly settle, thrive and contribute to Australian society and the economy.

### Equitable access and outcome from government services

- Implement a **revised Multicultural Access and Equity Policy** that is strong, transparent and includes mandated reporting and data collection across all government departments and agencies. 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 Government must ensure all policies, programs and practices are responsive to the diversity of Australia, including those that are outsourced.
- Invest in developing services and strategies to **address service gaps** experience by multicultural communities, including both multicultural specific and mainstream services such as, but not limited to, emergency preparedness, response and recovery; mental health; and family violence.

### Inclusive policy and practice design

- **Boost funding for multicultural community organisations** to ensure the experiences, perspectives and needs of culturally and linguistically diverse people are meaningfully included and in policy and practice design. 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. 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.

- Develop **nationally consistent data collection on culturally and linguistically diversity**. Inclusive policy and practice occurs when decisions are based on evidence and research. FECCA research *If We Don't Count It ...It Doesn't Count! Towards Consistent National Data Collection and Reporting on Cultural, Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity*<sup>1</sup> 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. 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. A National Working Group that develops consistent and accurate measures of cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity will deliver adequate, appropriate, accessible and useful data collection to ensure research and evidence reflects Australia's cultural diversity. 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; and allow research funding bodies to develop mechanisms to ensure federally funded research demonstrates inclusive and representative research methodology.

### Effective communications 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. 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.
- Implement extensive **digital literacy and online safety programs and strategies** tailored to multicultural communities to protect people from online harms such as scams and hate speech and to support the increased use of online social, education, health, government and other services. 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. For people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, there can be compounding factors that prevent them from accessing information and services including language barriers, low digital and computer literacy, low socio-economic status, limited knowledge and understanding of health system, fear and other factors.
- Increase funding to **public broadcasters to bolster in-language service offering** and capability. Successful communication for multicultural Australia requires ensuring people can connect with each other and to information regardless of their cultural, linguistic, ethnic, or religious background.

## A secure and successful multicultural workforces

- Fund the development and delivery of a national comprehensive **multicultural workers' rights education plan** designed and delivered with multicultural and ethno-specific organisations. 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.
- 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. Access to quality services including healthcare, domestic and family violence services, and aged care is essential to the lives of individuals and their families. 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.

## Access to quality health care for all

- Develop a **Multicultural Health Framework** and mandate its adoption for all States and Territories to underpin structural, policy, and practice reforms necessary to achieve equitable health outcomes for the culturally and linguistically diverse people in Australia. Structural and systemic racism is a key factor underlying inequities and inequalities in health status, access to health care and impact the health workforce. Development of the framework should be informed by relevant data and research, and most importantly, by people with lived experience to ensure the framework delivers real and sustainable outcomes.
- Fund the **Australian Multicultural Health Collaborative**, an initiative of FECCA launched in June 2022. The Collaborative is working at the national level to address health inequities and to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for multicultural communities through advice to Government and through sector development, policy and programs. The Collaborative is representative through its formal membership structure. Members include consumers, health and wellbeing services and practitioners, and researchers. In addition, national health peaks such as the Heart Foundation, National Rural Health Alliance, Palliative Care Australia and Mental Health Australia have joined as affiliates.
- Establish a **Department of a Health specialist multicultural policy unit** to advise and coordinate health policy development, program design and implementation that is inclusive of the needs of multicultural people. A specialist policy unit would provide a much needed coordinated, inclusive and effective approach to health policy in Australia and would embed diversity reflective of Australian society in the foundation of health policy resulting in greatly improved health outcomes for multicultural communities across Australia.
- Make the **'Framework for Mental Health in Multicultural Australia'** mandatory for all **States and Territories**. 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.

- Fund and sustain the **Multicultural Community Health Leaders Network** to support and broaden community engagement and response as Australia continues to face the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and potentially, public health emergencies in the future. An activated, capable, and resourced Community Health Leaders Network can provide a strong base for preventative healthcare to complement the work of bilingual, bicultural health workers. They know and understand their communities. They are able to mobilise members and touchpoints to support health promotion, health literacy, self-care etc. In November 2021, FECCA launched the Multicultural Community Health Leaders Network with the support of Health Minister Mark Butler, Immigration Minister Andrew Giles and Assistant Health Minister Ged Kearney.
- Sustain the **Small Grants Project** to support preventative health. The Multicultural Community Leaders Network, through the CALD COVID-19 Small Grants Project, has formed grassroots communication infrastructures that are meaningful to culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse communities, effectively generating hundreds of 'sites of active health promotion'. The grants can support community-led health interventions to address issues on health literacy, mental health, self-care etc.
- Invest in a **holistic and culturally-appropriate system navigation** to remove current separation of aged, disability, and health care navigation to enable access to services to be truly person-centred and equitable. People require effective interfaces with related systems, particularly health and disability and that same value and emphasis be accorded to social care and community care. Through the EnCOMPASS Multicultural Aged Care Connectors Program and the NDIS Community Connectors Program, FECCA learned that good and effective navigation systems require participation and collaboration by trusted community organisations, assertive outreach, multi-disciplinary orientation, harnessing of community assets, and culturally appropriate professional care. Providing resources to local organisations to function as system navigators contribute significant value to human services due to their community knowledge and understanding, contribution to building social capital, engaging people who are socially isolated, and delivering highly personalised services.

### Culturally responsive aged care for all

- Create a **new Aged Care Act** that is rights-based, needs-based, equitable, non-discriminatory, and where cultural and linguistic diversity is practiced as core business. The Aged Care Diversity Framework and CALD Action Plan need to be integrated in the standards setting, quality regulation and program management of the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health and Aged Care. The sector needs regulators that are capable of using culturally appropriate assessment methods and tools and ensure culturally responsive, trauma-informed and flexible care.
- 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. 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<sup>ii</sup>. FECCA research has shown that barriers include a lack of awareness and knowledge of available services, system complexity, trust issues, health literacy, and a lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate aged care providers<sup>iii</sup>. 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.

- Invest in a **community-based, wellness-oriented system** that will support continuity of care for older people. A community-centric population health approach that will integrate aged care services, residential aged care facilities, acute care, primary care and social services will be crucial in ensuring aged care access is simpler for older persons especially among older persons from multicultural backgrounds. There is a need to reconsider the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) to ensure that culturally and linguistically diverse specialist service capability is not lost and over the long term, engage older people in planning for ageing and aged care at an earlier stage where they can truly exercise choice and control.

### Culturally responsive disability services for all

- **Reform the NDIS infrastructure to ensure equity of outcomes for multicultural people with disability** by applying the learnings from the NDIS Multicultural National Community Connector Program. 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% and that the current form of the NDIS does not equitably meet the needs of multicultural Australians with disability. 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. 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 support at every stage of an individual, family or community's journey with the NDIS.

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<sup>i</sup> If We Don't Count It ...It Doesn't Count! Towards Consistent National Data Collection and Reporting on Cultural, Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity, <https://fecca.org.au/if-we-dont-count-it-it-doesnt-count/>, October 2020.

<sup>ii</sup> Aged Care Financing Authority, Eighth report on the Funding and Financing of the Aged Care Industry, July 2020.

<sup>iii</sup> FECCA, Review of Australian research on older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, March 2015.