

Who we are

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.

We draw 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.

Our network is our 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. We are 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.

We wish to thank our members and the broader multicultural community sector partners for their contribution towards this submission and their ongoing work with culturally and linguistically diverse people in Australia. We welcome the opportunity to expand on this submission as required. For enquiries, please contact FECCA CEO Mohammad Al-Khafaji at ceo@fecca.org.au or on (02) 6282 5755.



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. We proudly support the Uluru Statement from the Heart and its call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice protected by the Constitution.

We acknowledge 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.

Introduction

Australia has never been more culturally and linguistically diverse. According to the 2021 census, more than half of the Australian population were either born overseas or had at least one parent born overseas, and 22.8 per cent of people spoke a language other than English at home¹. People from across the world arrive in Australia every year, bringing with them a rich diversity of backgrounds, life experiences, skills, and strengths. An Australia where everyone is included and served equally without barriers, will be an Australia that can reach its full potential as a nation and position itself at the forefront of a post-pandemic global economy.

Australia has a long legacy of successful multiculturalism built on appreciation and celebration of the diversity of our nation. In 1973, Australia's policy of multiculturalism recognised the benefits of cultural diversity and aimed at forging a just, inclusive, and socially cohesive society. 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.

50 years 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 adapt adequately to understand or address the needs of multicultural people in Australia have led to disproportionately poor social, economic and health outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the serious health, economic and social failures of a fragmented and weakened approach to the systems and frameworks necessary to upholding multiculturalism. 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.

Opportunity for Change

The Government's announcement of the Multicultural Framework Review is welcomed. It is an opportunity to assess existing institutional arrangements and policy settings around multiculturalism, and to advise the government on the settings required to build Australia's multiculturalism in the next decade.

To maintain Australia's successful multicultural legacy and build a strong future where everyone can belong and thrive equally, a robust and coordinated whole of government approach is required. We expect the Review to result in strong, effective and inclusive multicultural policy and institutional settings at the Commonwealth Government level, supported by a national commitment to multiculturalism with strong bipartisan support, to help build a nation where the benefits of diverse cultures, languages, life experiences, skills, and strengths are fully unlocked. For this review to be successful, it must be comprehensive and must meaningfully engage with multicultural communities in accessible ways.

¹ [Cultural diversity of Australia, ABS](#)

Recommendations on the Review

We recommend the following considerations to be made in the design and execution of the Review to ensure that the Review will ultimately result in institutional and policy settings that are responsive to the diversity of Australia.

- ***Diversity within diversity, and intersectionality should be core principles of the review process and outcomes.*** Discrimination and disadvantage a multicultural person or community faces 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. It is not these diverse identities that generate vulnerability, but systemic exclusion that creates entrenched forms of disadvantage. Furthermore, in government policies and services, multicultural communities are often grouped together as “culturally and linguistically diverse” and treated as homogenous, overlooking the myriad of differences between communities, and the intersectionality of different political and socio-economic identity markers. This results in services and messages that do not connect with the intended audiences as they are not nuanced to specific differences. In addition to having diversity within diversity and intersectionality as core principles, the Review should also identify how current and future multicultural policies, frameworks and strategies intersect and interact with other federal policies, frameworks and strategies such as the National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality.
- ***The Review should explore national deficits in capturing data around cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity.*** An inclusive and cohesive multicultural Australia needs good policy and practice that is grounded in the reality of Australia’s multicultural population. Our [‘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. Consistent and accurate measures of cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity should be developed to achieve adequate, appropriate, accessible and useful data collection, to ensure research and evidence that is truly reflective of Australia’s cultural diversity is available and used for the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and programs.
- ***The Review should engage with communities in a meaningful, effective and inclusive manner, and should be adequately funded to do so.*** The Review should be informed by people and communities who are affected the most by fragmented and weakened multicultural policies and frameworks. The Review’s community engagement should extend beyond key community consultations and public submissions to include approaches to reach underserved communities who are often not heard, and work collaboratively with all communities to build solutions to challenges faced by them. Some of the possible considerations to ensure that the engagement process is inclusive, meaningful and responsible include:
 - a. The dissemination of information through trusted channels and in-language where appropriate.
 - b. Conducting community consultations in-language where appropriate and supporting community-driven and community-led consultations.
 - c. Accepting submissions from languages other than English through various mediums such as audio and video.

Recommendations on the Draft Terms of Reference

The scope of the draft Terms of Reference is sufficiently broad to allow contributors to the process to raise issues and concerns impacting multicultural communities. We therefore support the draft Terms of Reference, with the following proposed amendments.

ToR item 1: The effectiveness of existing federal:

- ***legislative and regulatory frameworks***
- ***policy settings and programs***
- ***interactions with communities***
- ***services designed to support multicultural Australia and how these interact with state and local government settings.***

Proposed amendments:

- ***The effectiveness of existing federal legislative and regulatory frameworks:***
 - The scope and applicability of existing legislative and regulatory frameworks should also be reviewed to assess whether an expansion of scope is necessary. For example, the current Multicultural Access and Equity Policy is applicable to non-corporate Commonwealth entities even though multicultural communities also engage with corporate Commonwealth entities, such as Cancer Australia. The Review should also consider the applicability and the need for an expansion of scope of legislative and regulatory frameworks to government funded research and independent organisations funded by the government, especially those that impact on access to critical services such as Primary Healthcare Networks (PHNs), aged care service providers, and language support providers.
 - The review of existing federal frameworks should include an assessment of the desirability and feasibility for multiculturalism to be enshrined in federal and state legislation.
- ***The effectiveness of existing federal policy settings and programs:***
 - In addition to existing policy settings and programs, the effectiveness of current institutional settings to advance multiculturalism should also be reviewed.
- ***The effectiveness of existing federal interactions with communities:***
 - The review into existing federal interactions with communities should also consider the extent of government engagement with communities and the level of trust, in addition to the effectiveness, in the design and delivery of policies and programs.

ToR item 2: Roles and functions of government and non-government organisations respectively. They will also consider appropriate relationships between them, ensuring effective planning and provision of programs and services to multicultural communities.

Proposed amendments:

- Roles and functions of government and non-government organisations in embedding and putting multiculturalism into practice should be assessed. The Review should consider the effectiveness of the relationships between them, including inter-department/agency coordination, in ensuring effective design, planning, delivery, and evaluation of programs and services to multicultural communities.

- Assessment of whether a whole-of-government approach to multiculturalism and strategy exists, and how this could be strengthened to serve multicultural communities. This includes effective communication, policy and program design with Federal, state, and local governments.

ToR item 3: The effectiveness of current federal diversity, equity and inclusion strategies. This ensures the Australian Public Service workforce reflects multicultural Australia.

Proposed amendments:

- The review of current federal diversity, equity and inclusion strategies should consider both the Australian Public Service workforce as a whole, as well as the senior leadership, to ensure that multicultural Australia is reflected at all levels of the Australian Public Service. The Review should not be limited to the Australian Public Service workforce and must be extended to include an evaluation of the diversity, equity and inclusion strategies in all commonwealth entities, including those that are not part of the Australian Public Service workforce such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), to name a few.
- The Review should assess the effectiveness of programs and interventions that are in place in the Australian Public Service to build the cultural competency of the workforce.

ToR item 4: Identifying areas for reform to address any systemic barriers preventing people from multicultural communities from participating in Australian society. This includes second generation plus migrants.

Proposed amendments:

- The review should consider identifying areas for reform to address systemic barriers to full economic, political, cultural, and social participation in the Australian society, faced by all generations of Australians from multicultural backgrounds. The review should not be limited to migrants and second-generation Australians, as people from multicultural backgrounds could still face systemic barriers for generations. The review should also take into account the additional systemic barriers faced by refugees and people seeking asylum and should identify reforms to address such barriers.
- The review should also consider the role the private sector can play in recognising, celebrating and advancing multiculturalism in Australia.
- The review should also consider the relationship between First Nations communities and Multicultural and migrant communities, and how that connection can be strengthened to build on the successes of Australia's unique multicultural model. There are many things in common between those communities and the opportunity to learn, collaborate, and support is vital.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this historic review. We look forward to working closely with the review panel and the Commonwealth government to ensure the Review results in tangible and meaningful reform which propels the nation towards a country where everyone is included fairly, equally and without barriers, thereby safeguarding the prosperity and social cohesion of our nation for generations to come.

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