



# Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia

Submission into the Multicultural Framework Review

13 October 2023



*FECCA pays its respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present and recognise 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.*



## 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 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 who 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. We are committed to building 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.

## Foreword

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) thanks the Panel for the opportunity to provide input into the Multicultural Framework Review (the Review) to develop a National Multicultural Framework. As a strong and enduring voice for multicultural Australia we embed the knowledge, experience and expertise of culturally and linguistically diverse communities into our advice to government and this important Review.

This submission outlines a high-level model for the National Multicultural Framework for achieving a strong, equitable and inclusive multicultural Australia. The model consists of 3 parts which include overarching recommendations, a multicultural policy approach based on 8 foundational pillars for adoption and implementation by Federal, State and Territory Governments and the infrastructure/machinery-of-government required to support and deliver the framework and take Australia into the future as the most successful multicultural nation in the world. A one-page outline of the proposed model for the National Multicultural Framework is at **Attachment A**.

FECCA has worked with community sector partners including the Australian Council of Social Services; the Refugee Council of Australia; Settlement Services International; and Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (Australia) to develop a Community Sector Statement for the Multicultural Framework Review. The Statement, based on the recommendations in this submission has 31 organisations signed up after being released only three days prior to this submission. We will continue accepting organisations signing on to the Statement and will provide an updated version to the Government at a later date to demonstrate the commitment and unity of the sector to a path forward for a stronger more inclusive multicultural Australia. The Statement is provided at **Attachment B**.

We would also like to inform the Government that FECCA will submit further advice outlining some of the measures and investment needed to support the proposed model for a strong and inclusive National Multicultural Framework.



We thank our members for their contribution to this submission and to the broader community sector for their strong support for the Sector Statement and their ongoing work to support a more inclusive and equitable Australia.

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## **Introduction**

Cultural diversity is an important and defining aspect of the lived reality of the Australian nation. It is inexplicably woven into our colonial and post-colonial history, our economy, our culture and our national identity. Multiculturalism must be a central focus to our future as a thriving, resilient and inclusive nation.

Migration is the cornerstone of our vibrant and successful multicultural society. Successive waves of migration continue to contribute to Australia's economic success and to shape our society and our place in the world. People from across the globe continue to arrive in Australia every year, bringing with them a rich diversity of backgrounds, life experiences, skills, and strengths. The 2021 Census reveals more than half of Australian residents (51.5%) were born overseas or have at least one parent born overseas; and over 5.5 million Australians speak a language other than English at home<sup>1</sup>.

Australia embraces its growing diversity, with research showing that a very high proportion of the Australian population supports multiculturalism (88%) and believe that migrants are good for the Australian economy (87%).<sup>2</sup> We must embed this support in a national vision and strategy for a strong and inclusive multicultural Australia.

## **A National Multicultural Framework to advance Australia**

The Multicultural Framework Review (the Review) has been established to “assess and make recommendations on the institutional arrangements, legislative and policy settings required to advance a multicultural Australia and meet the current and future needs of multicultural Australia at the Commonwealth level.”<sup>3</sup> The Review is an important opportunity to advance and strengthen our nation and ensure our institutions and policy settings deliver social and economic inclusion and benefits for all Australians. To achieve this objective the Review will take into account the needs, perspectives and lived experiences of Australia's current multicultural community. A comprehensive understanding of the migrant experience is not possible without also examining the policy settings of Australia's migration system and the structures and processes migrants navigate on their journey to and after arriving in Australia. This will deliver a thorough understanding of the migrant experience and provide a strong foundation for creating migration and settlement settings that will support Australia being a migration destination of choice and the most progressive and successful multicultural nation in the world.

Australia's 1989 National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia stated that ‘the challenges of a multicultural society do not simply resolve themselves. Government action – in the form of multicultural policies – is needed in certain areas to promote social harmony, ensure a fair go, and harness our human resources in the most productive way for Australia's future.’<sup>4</sup> This still rings true in 2023. To take us into a prosperous multicultural future we require a framework consisting of a national multicultural vision, legislative change and government bodies dedicated to a collective and coordinated approach and implementation of inclusive policy and programs across all levels of government. The Review must result in achieving this through the establishment of a comprehensive, fully funded National Multicultural Framework (Framework).



## Part 1 - Overarching recommendations

### Recommendation 1.1: Setting a progressive vision for multicultural Australia

We need a progressive multicultural vision for the nation that provides a shared national bipartisan commitment across all levels of government, civil-society and business sectors to a strengths-based, human-rights based multicultural nation, informed by lived experience and expertise. It must also embed a strong acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the First Peoples of Australia and embed reconciliation into Australia's multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism is a set of norms or principles for a society in which the human rights of all are respected, protected and promoted.<sup>5</sup> Multiculturalism supports a notion of equality that enables everyone to participate fully in the social, cultural, economic and political life of the nation irrespective of race, religion, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin. Australia has a long legacy as a successful multicultural society and as far back as 1973, had an official multicultural policy recognising the benefits of cultural diversity and setting out a national approach for a just, inclusive, and socially cohesive society.

Fifty years on, while Australia continues to welcome a dynamic influx of migrants, a strategic national focus on multiculturalism has been missing from the political realm. It's time to reclaim the narrative and advance a re-imagined progressive multicultural vision for the nation enacted through a National Multicultural Framework to lead Australia into the future as an inclusive and resilient nation.

### Recommendation 1.2: The Multicultural Framework must be founded on a human-rights approach

Australia's Multicultural Framework must embed a re-envisioned multicultural narrative informed by a lived-experience and expertise, be strengths-based, human-rights based and look holistically at the life-course of migrants to ensure it supports an inclusive and resilient nation.

As an original signatory to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and a number of other international human rights treaties and conventions, the multicultural framework should adhere to human rights principles in order to foster a fairer, more inclusive Australia. This means government should consider human rights when making laws, developing policies, and providing services where people have the freedom to enjoy their culture, their language and their religion.<sup>6</sup> Basing the Framework on a human-rights approach would support Australia's reputation as a global multicultural leader.

### Recommendation 1.3: Australia's Multicultural Framework must be a *national* framework

Australia's multiple levels of government work together to provide the Australian people with the services we need. Each level of government has its own roles, responsibilities and funding, however these often overlap and are strongly interconnected in delivering on the needs and aspirations of the Australian people. It is therefore vital that the Commonwealth, states and territories all work together with a coordinated and united approach to building a stronger and more inclusive multicultural Australia.

A commitment from all levels of government to a national multicultural framework will also protect multiculturalism from political co-option or monopoly, political changes and the challenges of political cycles. In essence, a joined-up commitment and approach makes it harder for any change in government to result in the undermining or dismissal of a national commitment to multiculturalism.

Australia's multicultural framework must therefore be a national framework, signed up to and implemented by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments.

### Recommendation 1.4: Australia's migration programs must be embedded into the Multicultural Framework

As the primary mechanism impacting Australia's cultural and economic diversity and growth, Australia's migration programs must be fit-for-purpose and factored meaningfully into the Multicultural Framework. The Migration and Humanitarian programs have long been a feature of Australia's engagement with the wider



work and have enormous opportunity to define the future of the nation. Currently the Migration Program is designed to primarily serve economic purposes, sharply focused on the need to address persistent and emerging skills shortages and attract people with specialist skillsets that are difficult to find or develop in Australia. This is evident in the planning levels, where approximately 72 per cent of the permanent migration program is allocated to skilled visas, as opposed to only 4 per cent for parent visas, and 2 per cent for child visas<sup>7</sup>.

While a strong economy is essential for a cohesive, vibrant society, the Multicultural Framework should factor in the Migration and Humanitarian Programs and shift away from a primary economic focus to migration programs that balance economic and social considerations and actively promote the nation-building vision of a fair and inclusive multicultural Australia.

**Recommendation 1.5: The Framework must recognise the diversity of multicultural communities**

Australia's multicultural framework must be founded on a recognition of intersectionality and that cultural and linguistic diversity are not the only markers of diversity. The experiences and perspectives of people from multicultural backgrounds are also affected by other intersecting identity markers such as age, gender, sexual orientation, impairment, class, religion, and visa status, as well as factors such as the area in which you live. These identities do not exist independently; each informs the other and can have overlapping and compounding effects on a person's life experiences.

As a nation built on migration, many of our multicultural communities are multigenerational. The experiences of first-generation migrants and new and emerging communities differ significantly from those born in Australia, as do the challenges they face and the social and cultural assets they bring to the nation.

Despite the diversity across and within multicultural communities, they are often grouped together under the category of 'culturally and linguistically diverse' and treated as a homogenous cohort. This overlooks the myriad of differences between communities and results in services and messages that do not connect with the intended audience as they are not nuanced to difference. Diversity demands strategies across government, civil-society and business, that respond to this through ensuring multicultural lived experience in all its diversity is at the heart of policy and program design.

**Recommendation 1.6: The Framework must recognise the importance of multicultural community organisations and that co-design is central to a successful multicultural Australia**

An essential component of successful migration is building connection, community and a sense of belonging. Multicultural organisations are places where people from multicultural communities find this support and understanding and are often the first point of contact for many migrants and refugees upon arrival in Australia. They provide a suite of tangible and intangible supports and benefits to multicultural communities and individuals such as building and harnessing the protective factors of culture and community and providing culturally safe and accessible assistance to navigate the social, civic and economic realms of Australia. They play a vital role linking people to services, welcoming new migrants and refugees and the overarching task of assisting community members to settle in their new country. As community organisations have the trust and confidence of their communities, they often have the important role of being the primary source of information to community members, including disseminating important official information, such as during COVID-19 or during other disaster and emergency situations.

The Multicultural Framework must recognise the central role played by multicultural community organisations and embed this social infrastructure into our approach to creating a more successful multicultural nation. This includes governments supporting multicultural organisations and working in meaningful partnership to co-design policy and programs and embed lived experience and expertise to reflect the needs and aspirations of multicultural Australia across the work of governments. The Multicultural Framework must recognise the central role of multicultural community organisations and embed this into



Australia's approach to multiculturalism including supporting and partnering with multicultural organisations and working with them to co-design and deliver policies and programs.

**Recommendation 1.7: The Framework must be forward looking and intergenerational**

The concept of intergenerational responsibility and extending care and consideration to future generations beyond the horizon is a fundamental philosophical value embedded in many cultures around the world. At a moment when we are defining and determining the future of our nation, we must look beyond the next decade and develop a Multicultural Framework that unlocks the potential and benefits of multiculturalism for current and future generations.

As Australia transitions to being a top 10 digital economy and society by 2030<sup>8</sup>, and a net zero economy by 2050<sup>9</sup> we must proactively engage with the significant changes this will have on our society, including the way we work, and the way we interact and connect with each other. The Framework must ensure that these significant societal and economical changes have a positive impact on our nation, empower our communities and do not exacerbate existing inequalities and inequities. Australia must protect, foster and harness our greatest asset, the strength, knowledge and diversity of its people to be equipped to address any unique, new challenges created in the process of transitioning to a digital, net zero economy and society, and ensure the benefits of these changes are shared equally across the nation.

**Recommendation 1.8: Significant and sustainable funding for the Multicultural Framework**

The Government must back its commitment to multicultural Australia with significant and sustainable funding for the Framework. This includes for fully funded Action Plans, for supporting multicultural community organisations and for the machinery-of-government to support the Framework.

## **Part 2 – Machinery-of-government to support multicultural Australia**

**Recommendation 2.1: Establish an 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 implementing the Multicultural Framework.

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 an Office of Multicultural Affairs established in 1987. In 1989 the Office published the 'National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia' which formally set out Australia's first multicultural framework. After a change of government in 1996 the Office was abolished and the framework abandoned.

A renewed commitment to multiculturalism through the establishment of a standalone Office for Multicultural Australia will reaffirm the Government's genuine commitment to building a successful nation where everyone in Australia can contribute and benefit from the social and economic wealth of the nation and safeguard the social cohesion and prosperity of Australia for generations to come.

An Office for Multicultural Australia would:

- Develop a national Multicultural Framework.
- Ensure consistency and coherence of the implementation of Australia's Multicultural Framework and Action Plans across all government portfolios through coordination across the design and implementation of policies, programs, laws and regulations.
- Work across government to mainstream consideration of the needs and perspectives of multicultural Australia into decision-making.
- Develop annual Multicultural Budget statements.
- Fund and support a community-led Multicultural Advisory Council.



- Support regular Multicultural Ministers Meetings consisting of State and Territory ministers, led by the Commonwealth.
- Strengthen the Multicultural Access and Equity Policy and ensure mandatory government implementation across all service delivery.
- Design and implement consistent and accurate measures of cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity across data collection.

To successfully fulfill its purpose, the Office for Multicultural Australia must be extrapolated from the Home Affairs department and its focus on national security. The Office must have independence to coordinate and review approaches across the whole of government without having to negotiate and navigate its purpose and role within a huge portfolio for which the focus and structure is spread across a vast range of issues, many of which are externally focussed, rather than working with the whole of government, civil society and the Australian community to foster social harmony.

### **Recommendation 2.2: Establish a Multicultural Act**

As a multicultural nation, Australia has several instruments to support an inclusive society that protects its citizens regardless of cultural or ethnic background. Existing anti-discrimination laws such as *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* and the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1999* however have proven inadequate to addressing institutional prejudice and barriers to ensure a truly inclusive Australia. It is important to recognise the role of unconscious racial bias that permeates policy frameworks and practices negatively affecting policy outcomes for multicultural communities.<sup>10</sup> While laws cannot completely drive social change, they can reflect the values that inform our actions and goals as a society.<sup>11</sup> Establishing a multicultural Act that enshrines in law the values, aspirations, and attitudes of multicultural Australia would assist in addressing systemic barriers to social, cultural and economic recognition and inclusions many multicultural communities face, and lead to a more productive and cohesive Australia. The National Multicultural Act will set out to establish the Multicultural Commission, the Multicultural Policy and Action Plan and the National Multicultural Advisory Council.

Several states and territories have enacted legislation and/or policies to promote multicultural values. A Federal Act would provide an overarching national legal framework for multiculturalism, which would deliver a nationally consistent approach to multicultural Australia. Enacting a Federal Multicultural Act would be in line with recommendation 9 by the Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism 2017 report, which recommended developing and implementing a Federal Multicultural Act to enshrine agreed principles of multiculturalism and support and frame multiculturalism in Australia.<sup>12</sup> The enactment of the Act will reaffirm Australia's official support for multiculturalism.

Australia could look to Canada's Multiculturalism Act of 1998 which affirms the government's commitment to preserve and enhance multiculturalism in Canada. The Act recognises multiculturalism as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian heritage and identity, and it guarantees the right of all Canadians to preserve and promote their cultural heritage. The act also commits the government to promoting full and equitable participation of all Canadians, regardless of their cultural background.<sup>13</sup>

### **Recommendation 2.3: Elevate the minister responsible for the multicultural portfolio to Cabinet**

The Cabinet is the focal point of the decision-making process of the Executive Government and is composed of a specified group of Ministers selected by the Prime Minister. The group of Ministers known as the Cabinet is not explicitly provided for in the Constitution nor by any other law.<sup>14</sup> This allows flexibility around which Ministerial positions sit within Cabinet and the ability for the Prime Minister to elevate the minister responsible for multiculturalism to be positioned within Cabinet.

Elevating the minister responsible for the multicultural portfolio to Cabinet would allow them to have greater influence over decision-making across government rather than just within their own portfolio. This



would also support mainstreaming consideration of the needs and aspirations of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds across all areas of government.

#### **Recommendation 2.4: Establish an independent Multicultural Commission and Commissioner**

To promote multiculturalism as a core Australian value, the Federal Government should establish a Multicultural Commission and appoint a Multicultural Commissioner. This would demonstrate political leadership and commitment at the highest level to multicultural Australia being central to the future growth of a fair and prosperous nation, where everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential and contribute and belong, regardless of their cultural or ethnic background.

In establishing the Commission, it will be important to consider existing structures to avoid duplication and unnecessary administrative burden. For example, whilst the Australian Human Rights Commission and the Race Discrimination Commissioner may have some overlapping responsibilities, Commissions can be successfully established without duplication, as demonstrated by the recent establishment of the Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Commission. Additionally, several states and territories have established Multicultural Commissions without overlap with Commonwealth functions, such as children's commissioners. In fact, a dual federal/state focus provides stronger and more visible leadership and supports better services.<sup>15</sup>

Establishing a Multicultural Commission would align with recommendation 11 of the 2017 report *Strengthening Multiculturalism: Ways of Protecting and Strengthening Australia's Multiculturalism and Social Inclusion*. The Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism recommended that the commission be sufficiently resourced to promote and protect multiculturalism throughout Australia, ensuring that all Australians recognise that multiculturalism is essential to the fabric of the Australian nation.<sup>16</sup>

Commissioners provide leadership, raise awareness and understanding, raise the profile of challenges and strengths and facilitate coordination and cooperations across sectors and governments to achieve better outcomes. The Multicultural Commissioner would liaise between the public and government to progress the issues and vision of multicultural communities. They would lead the coordination of implementation of the Multicultural Framework across Commonwealth and State, Territory and Local Governments, the private sector and the wider community and play a role in monitoring and reporting on progress and where necessary, making recommendations.

#### **Recommendation 2.5 The Multicultural Framework must be implemented through Action Plans**

To truly advance multicultural Australia we need more than a vision, more than a commitment, more than leadership, more than a comprehensive multicultural policy approach and more than the machinery-of-government or infrastructure to support it. We need implementation across all levels of government through dedicated, coordinated, fully funded Action Plans.

Action Plans will clearly articulate what they intend to achieve, what activities will be undertaken, the timeframe for implementation and what investment will be made. The implementation of Action Plans will be essential for ensuring policy and programs are inclusive and responsive to the needs and aspirations of the Australian population.

The Action Plans must be developed and delivered at the Commonwealth, State, Territory and Local Government levels. They must be based on the overarching recommendations and the multicultural policy approach consisting of the 8 pillars outlined in this submission. To optimise the effectiveness of the Action Plans, it will be important to coordinate and align them with existing frameworks at the Commonwealth, state, and territory levels to build synergies and to avoid any overlaps.





### **Recommendation 2.6: Significant funding to support the Multicultural Framework and implement Action Plans**

Strong leadership and support by the Commonwealth Government in the form of significant funding to implement the Multicultural Framework and Action Plans across all Commonwealth agencies is required to make the change needed to achieve a truly inclusive multicultural society. Strategic investment in targeted efforts to respond to Australia's multicultural diversity, reduce barriers to access, and focus on national priorities such as addressing employment gaps and eliminating institutional racism will deliver results and be far more effective than ad hoc, piecemeal and reactive measures such as funding, for example, small diversity programs on health and cultural festivals.

A National Multicultural Framework and fully costed Action Plans will play an essential role in building a fair and harmonious Australia. With adequate investment, the nation can harness the full economic and social benefits of our multicultural diversity.

### **Recommendation 2.7: Multicultural Budget Statements**

Identified Budget Statements are a well-established strategy for achieving better outcomes for a particular group or particular issue. For example, gender budgeting, such as the Women's Budget Statement in Australia, assists in efforts to achieve equality between women and men by focusing on how public resources are collected and spent. The intention is that gender equality is improved when fiscal policies and administrative procedures are structured to address inequality. The Women's 2023-24 Budget Statement stated: "Our budget investments are designed to create a fairer go for Australian women and a better country for all Australians. In everything from health to housing to safety to pay – the Albanese Labor government is determined to address inequality for women".<sup>17</sup>

The same approach can be adopted to design inclusive budgets targeted at addressing inequalities for multicultural communities in all new government measures. Annual Multicultural Budget Statements that align to the Multicultural Framework would demonstrate effort made towards multicultural communities, as well as providing a mechanism for early identification of any unintended consequences from potential Budget measures. A Multicultural Budget Statement would work towards ensuring the needs and aspirations of multicultural communities are embedded across the work of all Commonwealth portfolios. By shining a light on its economic and social policies and budgetary decisions that support multicultural communities, the Government will demonstrate its commitment to an inclusive multicultural nation.

### **Recommendation 2.8: Community-endorsed Multicultural Advisory Council**

People from multicultural backgrounds are often underrepresented in the decisions made about and for them. This has significantly impacted on the ability of policies and programs to provide sustainable outcomes for multicultural communities. Establishing an independent, community-endorsed Multicultural Advisory Council to provide advice to government would ensure the lived experience and expertise of multicultural Australia is embedded into the work of the Government. A Multicultural Advisory Council would be made up of representatives from across multicultural Australia, including community leaders, academics, and business leaders, all of whom have the respect, trust and authority of their communities.

A Multicultural Advisory Council would play an important role in ensuring that the Government's policies and programs are inclusive and responsive to the needs of all Australians, regardless of their cultural or linguistic background. It would also provide a platform for multicultural communities to have their voices heard and demonstrate the Government's commitment to multiculturalism and its recognition of the importance of diversity to our nation.

The Multicultural Advisory Council will build on the work of previous multicultural advisory bodies which have been instrumental in shaping Australia's multicultural policies and programs. The first National Multicultural Advisory Council was established in 1994. This was followed by the establishment of the



National Multicultural Advisory Council (NMAC) in 1997 and the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council (AMAC) in 2008. Whilst these councils played an important role in multicultural Australia, they faced several challenges including inadequate resources, limited independence and lack of bipartisan support.

The establishment of a community-endorsed Advisory Council is an opportunity to learn from the past and address these challenges. By ensuring that the Advisory Council has adequate resources, independence, and a clear mandate, the government can create a body that is truly representative of multicultural Australia and can provide valuable advice to the government on how to build a more inclusive and equitable society.

### **Part 3 – Multicultural policy pillars**

#### **Recommendation 3.1: National multicultural policy approach based on 8 strategic pillars**

##### ***Pillar 1 - Fair and inclusive society***

Australia has had a vision and agenda under previous Labor Governments for a fair and inclusive nation where all Australians are entitled to equality of treatment and opportunity, enabling everyone to contribute to the social, political and economic life of Australia, free from discrimination.<sup>18</sup> A fair and inclusive Australia needs good policy and practice that is grounded in the reality of Australia's multicultural population.

A nation that actively recognises the value of its diversity and ensures that everyone, regardless of their culture, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, sexuality, disability, visa status, geography, class, gender identity, or age, has equal rights and opportunities is a nation that puts its best foot forward to being fair and inclusive. To achieve this, policies, practices and institutions must work together to guarantee non-discrimination and equal treatment for all.<sup>19</sup> To progress a fairer and more inclusive Australia we should focus on some key areas including but not limited to:

- A National Anti-racism framework - 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.
- Awards and recognition - Raising awareness and nominations of national awards and recognition to celebrate the contributions of multicultural communities to Australia.
- Migration reforms - Reforms of Australia's migration system to make it fairer and more welcoming to people from all backgrounds. This could include measures to reduce the number of temporary visas and make it easier for people to become permanent residents and citizens.
- Citizenship - Make the pathway to become an Australian citizen easier, faster and more equitable. This could include reducing the length of time that people need to live in Australia before they can apply for citizenship and making the citizenship test more accessible.
- Culture - Provide support for people of all cultures to maintain, express and celebrate their cultures. This could include funding for community cultural festivals, and arts programs.

Responsibility for achieving a fair and inclusion society rests with the entire nation, including public and private institutions and with individuals, and must have strong and sustained leadership from all levels of government.

##### ***Pillar 2 - Inclusive policy design***

Inclusive policy-making means enriching decision-making with lived experience and expertise and localised knowledge. Inclusive policy design leads to better outcomes and stronger, more inclusive policies, programs and services.

In recognition of Australia's growing diversity, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds should be at the centre of policy design to reflect and respond to their diverse needs and aspirations. This requires the inclusion of the full diversity of multicultural Australia in research, engagement, and co-design opportunities. Participatory policy making must be more than about making sure a diverse group of people



are present, it must be about co-design and genuine partnership with shared decision-making based on the needs and aspirations of communities.

Given the large population and breadth of diversity within and across multicultural Australia, multicultural organisations can play an important role in inclusive policy design. These organisations have wide networks and deep relationships built over time with their communities based on trust and deep cultural understanding. 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. During the COVID-19 pandemic for example, these organisations were crucial in facilitating important communication and engagement between communities and government.

Multicultural community organisations serve as a bridge between government and communities. Investing in partnership with these organisations allows them to facilitate meaningful engagement with communities and participate in co-design. Designing policies and practices in partnership with multicultural organisations and their communities will lead to more equitable access to the services and programs needed for a thriving, resilient and successful nation.

### ***Pillar 3 - Access and equity to support and services***

Australia's Multicultural Access and Equity Policy sets out to ensure that Australian Government programs and services meet the needs of all Australians, regardless of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It acknowledges that Government services and programs must be responsive to the needs of our culturally diverse communities.

People from multicultural backgrounds continue to face barriers to accessing services across government agencies. Barriers to access can include a lack of or inadequate in-language information; lack of information in plain English; increased online services 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; and limited cultural competency among front-line staff.

Accessibility and equity are essential for providing inclusive services that meet the needs of diverse groups and help people fully participate in their communities and economies. This must include 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, as well as boosting the cultural safety and appropriateness of services. It must also look at the eligibility for accessing support and services including social security services.

There has been a decreasing commitment to multicultural access and equity across Government departments, and a notable decline in priority and transparency of reporting on the Access and Equity Policy. A commitment to a renewed, strengthened, well-informed, strong, and transparent approach to multicultural access and equity must be implemented across all levels of government, including Commonwealth, State and Territory and Local Governments, and extend to outsourced services. The approach must include a comprehensive:

- Access and Equity Framework
- Access and Equity standards
- Access and equity accountability

### ***Pillar 4 - Effective communication***

Effective communication is a two-way process that involves clear messages, delivered via appropriate platforms, tailored for diverse audiences, and shared by trusted people. Effective communication is not merely about messaging, it is an interactive process of exchange of information among individuals, groups, and institutions and requires ongoing engagement with communities.<sup>20</sup>



Effective communication has not been achieved unless the information has reached the intended audience and has been understood as intended. Multicultural Australians have varying levels of English proficiency, and some rely on in-language resources and translations to engage with mainstream information including written, audio, video and digital service platforms. This means that their understanding of information attempting to be communicated can depend upon the availability and quality of in-language resources and translations.

The Government's increasing use of digital platforms as alternative communication channels, particularly in communication important information during emergencies, has increased access for many in the Australian population. However, for some, it has also created a barrier, particularly people from multicultural backgrounds with limited English, barriers to accessing technology and limited understanding of digital platforms.

Reliance on translations can also create issues, whether it be on digital platforms or more traditional media. Poorly translated information can cause important health and safety messages to be misunderstood or missed, putting entire communities at risk of harm. The serious harm caused by poor translations creating misinformation was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many translations of important public health messages were not natural or fluent, and sometimes did not make sense in the target language. This contributed to disproportionately negative outcomes for multicultural Australians throughout the pandemic, including higher rates of virus transmission and virus-related death, which also led to increased experiences of racial hatred, discrimination and harassment.

National media plays a vital role in connecting our nation, shaping our national identity and reflecting the diversity of Australian society. By providing in-language news, fair representation of diverse communities, and inclusion of community perspectives, media can foster social belonging and participation. However, studies show that multicultural identities and perspectives are underrepresented in Australia's media landscape. For example, a 2022 study found that while 25 per cent of Australians have a non-European background, non-European presenters accounted for only 6 per cent of television appearances. This underrepresentation can make multicultural audiences feel misrepresented or underrepresented, and less likely to feel at home in Australia or participate to their full capacity in the social and political life of the nation.<sup>21</sup>

Effective communication and engagement must be founded on a comprehensive and holistic approach that offers multiple points and multiple formats for connecting and communicating. These frameworks must be designed alongside people from multicultural backgrounds and multicultural organisations to ensure they are designed to offer effective, culturally sensitive and accessible information (including language accessibility). Investment should be made in multicultural public broadcasting including increased and sustainable funding; media literacy and digital literacy and a national focus given to inclusive media representation.

### ***Pillar 5 - Full participation***

To build and maintain strong and inclusive societies, it's crucial to create conditions that support the active participation of all members in the civic, social, economic, and political realms of the nation. activities at the local, state, and federal levels regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. Increased participation can lead to improved outcomes and promote social cohesion and sense of belonging.<sup>22</sup>

While most countries have improved their migrant policies over the past five years, as evidenced by the rising average Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) score, Australia is a notable exception, with its MIPEX score declining significantly. This means that migrants in Australia now face more challenges and fewer opportunities than they did in 2014.



To harness Australia's greatest asset, its people, Australia must better understand the barriers that prevent people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds from full participation in every aspect of Australian cultural, social and economic life.

A secure and successful multicultural workforce is essential for the full participation and successful settlement of many migrants and for Australia at large. However, migrants experience many barriers to full economic participation including recognition of academic and other qualifications, and racial discrimination, to name just two. People from multicultural backgrounds are also underrepresented in leadership roles, with many employers showing bias and offering leadership positions to applicants with English names for example.<sup>23</sup> To address these and other barriers, deliberate efforts and strategies need to be implemented, such as creating a Multicultural Workplace Equality Ranking for organisations and businesses with over 100 employees, similar to that administered by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency.<sup>24</sup> Such a ranking would place an emphasis on addressing systemic and unconscious bias in workplaces and ensuring multicultural representation in leadership roles reflective of Australia's diversity.

### ***Pillar 6 - Empowered communities***

Strong families are an important aspect of a strong and sustainable society. Empowered families and communities are associated with higher levels of social cohesion and stronger economies and support a resilient and prosperous nation.

Networks of social support within communities is the basis for community agency and empowerment and it is multicultural community organisation that are the backbone of community support and connection. Multicultural community organisations play a critical role, particularly for new immigrants in the early stages of their settlement journey. These networks foster feelings of belonging and social connectedness and serve as the first point of contact for community members. They have the understanding and trust of their communities and can respond to a full range of needs by providing or connecting people to a range of services, including assistance to navigate Australia's systems such as accessing housing, employment, and health services.

Multicultural community organisation play a role that cannot be replicated by government. Community organisations have the trust, respect and a cultural understanding of their communities, which are vital to meeting the needs and of multicultural communities and are important assets to draw upon and strengthen.<sup>25</sup> <sup>26</sup> They provide a wealth of information on the lived experiences and expertise of multicultural communities and this knowledge makes them best placed to co-design better government service and practice. Partnering with multicultural communities works towards building capable, resilient and empowered communities.

Multicultural community organisations serve as a bridge between government and community and require adequate funding and resources to deliver their important work of building strong and empowered communities. Greater investment and capability building to established and new and emerging communities is needed to get the best outcomes for government and communities by effective co-design of policies and systems that deliver equitable outcomes for all Australians.

### ***Pillar 7 - Language***

Language is central to culture, identity and the way in which we view and experience the world. Language is also central to allowing people to participate fully in family life, the community and the nation. Australia is not just an English speaking nation made up of English speaking communities and families. Australia is truly a multicultural nation with over 400 languages spoken across the country.<sup>27</sup> In 2021, 22.8% of Australia's population spoke a language other than English at home, up from 21.8% in 2016. Of those who spoke a language other than English at home, 71.8% were first-generation Australians.<sup>28</sup> Apart from English, the



most spoken languages at home are Mandarin (2.7 per cent), followed by Arabic (1.4 per cent), Vietnamese (1.3 per cent), Cantonese (1.2 per cent) and Punjabi (0.9 per cent).<sup>29</sup>

Maintaining, developing, and using one's own language is essential for preserving and practicing culture. It is more than a communication tool; it is the embodiment of a culture's soul, traditions, and community. Across Australia, for many families, language is a key part of their cultural identity, when language is lost, it becomes a loss of their identity.<sup>30</sup> For many migrants, language is what has preserved their memories, identities and resilience.<sup>31</sup>

Linguistic rights are human rights that apply to everyone. The 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, a foundational human-rights treaty, states that people who belong to linguistic minorities have the right to practice their culture and use their language.<sup>32</sup> Language preservation remains a challenge, with language advocates identifying that language neglect in Australia has caused a strain on families and communities by creating a generational disconnect and a loss of cultural asset and continuity.

Language diversity delivers greater outcomes for migrants. Feeling safe and confident to discuss complicated and sensitive topics is a challenge for many people, especially when a person speaks a language other than English. It is important that languages other than English are viewed as an asset and an important part of access and equity to services and information. Measures to value and embrace diverse languages will foster inclusion and a sense of belonging for their speakers.

Within Australia there has, and in some instances still does, exist the attitude that migrants should possess a high level of English language proficiency and that languages other than English have limited value to the nation. This attitude seriously misrepresents the value of diverse languages and the importance they play in providing a significant increase of knowledge, skills, expertise and perspectives to the nation.

To achieve a more successful multicultural nation, Australia needs a comprehensive official language policy. A holistic language policy would provide a comprehensive approach to fostering effective, appropriate and accessible communication resources, including English as a common and shared language and support and foster languages other than English. It would provide a framework for implementing second language education, supporting community language schools, professional language standards and facilitating quality and responsive in-language services encompassing community and professional interpreting and a strong bi-lingual, bi-cultural workforce.

### ***Pillar 8 - Evidence and data***

Research is important to developing evidence and understanding. Currently research into issues impacting and shaping multicultural Australia is ad hoc and uncoordinated, and leaving gaps in our evidence and understanding. Australia must meaningfully recognise and integrate lived experiences and expertise within the evidence base to ensure a comprehensive and holistic understanding of Australian multiculturalism.

There have been previous calls to the Government to lead the development of a national multiculturalism research agenda and establish an independent and well-funded body to provide strategic and coordinated research in all areas of multiculturalism. Such measures would affirm the Government's commitment to the multiculturalism agenda and help to inform better policy and practice.<sup>33</sup>

Data is also critical for developing and implementing effective policies, programs, and practices, and it strengthens evidence-based decision-making that benefits all Australians regardless of their backgrounds. Currently the Government does not collect comprehensive data on race and ethnicity, instead focusing on variables such as country of birth and language spoken at home. These variables do not accurately measure race and ethnicity, and they can lead to false assumptions and the inadequate allocation of resources. For example, the term culturally and linguistically diverse is often used to refer to a wide range of people from



different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. However, this term can be misleading, as it does not consider the diversity within this group. The inconsistent collection and reporting of data on race, culture and ethnicity across all levels of government and sectors makes it difficult to track the progress and outcomes of programs and policies aimed at reducing ethnic socio-economic disparities and creating a more resilient and inclusive nation.<sup>34</sup>

All multicultural data should have cross sector, nationally consistent data definitions and be situated within a robust data ecosystem covering data collection, storage, analysis, and dissemination and include concepts of data sovereignty to ensure people have ownership and control over the data that could identify them and a say in how it is used and presented.

### **Recommendation 3.2: Cross-cutting consideration of intersectionality**

As outlined in recommendation 1.5 of this submission, multicultural communities are not homogenous. Multicultural communities are incredibly diverse with a myriad of differences within and across them. The experiences and perspectives of people from multicultural backgrounds are not just affected by their cultural identities, the language they speak, their country of origin or how long they have been in Australia. The way someone experiences the world is also affected by other intersecting social and political identity markers such as age, gender, sexual orientation, impairment, class, religion, as well as factors such as the area in which you live or your visa status. These identity markers do not exist independently; each informs the other and can have overlapping and compounding effects on a person's life experiences – this is what is often referred to as intersectionality. This is related to cohorts which are a groups of people that share similar characteristics, such as their birth place or year and can cause a group of people to experience similar experiences, however intersectionality allows us to understand the impact of the overlaying of multiple cohorts and how they can create multiple differences in experiences.

This is why consideration of intersectionality should be given across all 8 pillars of the multicultural policy approach outlined above. Cross cutting considerations should include: new and emerging communities; regional and remote communities; women; children; young people; older people; people with disability; faith, religion and caste systems and people who identify as LGBTQIA+.

### **Recommendation 3.3: Policy focus areas**

To truly advance multicultural Australia we need more than a vision, more than a commitment, more than leadership, more than a comprehensive multicultural policy approach and more than the machinery-of-government or infrastructure to support it. We need implementation across all levels of government through dedicated, coordinated, fully funded Action Plans.

Policy focus areas within Action Plans would differ across each Action Plan depending on the existing policies, programs and services within each jurisdiction, the demographic make-up of jurisdictions, the existing community needs, strengths and assets and the issues and aspirations identified by communities. Policy areas need to be flexible and to respond to changing needs and new and emerging issues. Policy areas are therefore not pre-determined by this broader multicultural framework. Policy areas could include, but not limited to: health and wellbeing; mental health; aging and aged care; disability; education; employment; jobs and skills; disaster preparedness, response and recovery; housing; cost of living; racism; family violence; child protection; gender equality; scams, misinformation and disinformation, or whatever issues are raised by communities and jurisdictions.

All, policy and program focus areas and actions in the Action Plans should address all 8 pillars in the policy framework, consider the cross-cutting areas of intersectionality and embeds a human-rights, strength-based approach that is based on lived experience and expertise of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and co-designed with communities.



## Conclusion

The Review must result in the adoption of a progressive National Multicultural Framework that is adopted and implemented across all levels of government, civil-society and business sectors. The Framework must be based on a progressive multicultural vision, a human-rights approach, and recognise the extraordinary diversity within and across multicultural communities and the lived experience and expertise that exists within them. The Framework must establish machinery- of-government to support the implementation of the vision and co-design with communities, Action Plans based on the 8 policy pillars outlined in this submission.

FECCA remains committed to working with its members, civil society, government, the business sector and broader Australian public to advance multicultural Australia and deepen our national commitment to a diverse, inclusive and prosperous future.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/2021-census-nearly-half-australians-have-parent-born-overseas>

<sup>2</sup> Scanlon Foundation Research Institute's 2022 'Mapping Social Cohesion'

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/multicultural-framework-review/about-the-multicultural-framework-review>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/doc/multoff\\_3.pdf](http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/doc/multoff_3.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/racial\\_discrimination/multiculturalism/multiculturalism2007.pdf](https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/racial_discrimination/multiculturalism/multiculturalism2007.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/race-discrimination/publications/multiculturalism-position-paper-acting-race>

<sup>7</sup> [Migration Program planning levels \(homeaffairs.gov.au\)](https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/migration-program-planning-levels)

<sup>8</sup> [Digital Economy Strategy 2022 Update Released, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet](https://www.pmc.gov.au/digital-economy-strategy-2022-update)

<sup>9</sup> [Net Zero, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water](https://www.pmc.gov.au/net-zero)

<sup>10</sup> [https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/Conference%20Papers\\_Publication%20layout%20Final\\_0.pdf](https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/Conference%20Papers_Publication%20layout%20Final_0.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <https://doi.org/10.1177/002218569203400408>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Strengthening\\_Multiculturalism/Multiculturalism/~media/Committees/multiculturalism\\_ctte/Final\\_Report/report.pdf](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Strengthening_Multiculturalism/Multiculturalism/~media/Committees/multiculturalism_ctte/Final_Report/report.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> <http://news.unm.edu/news/what-we-can-learn-from-canadas-multiculturalism-policy>

<sup>14</sup> [Cabinet – Parliament of Australia \(aph.gov.au\)](https://www.aph.gov.au/Cabinet-Parliament-of-Australia)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid 8

<sup>16</sup> Ibid 8

<sup>17</sup> [https://budget.gov.au/content/womens-statement/download/womens\\_budget\\_statement\\_2023-24.pdf](https://budget.gov.au/content/womens-statement/download/womens_budget_statement_2023-24.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/doc/mcc\\_1.pdf](http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/doc/mcc_1.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/multiculturalism-paper-annexure-2>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-020-00701-w>

<sup>21</sup> Park, S., Griffiths, R., McGuinness, K., Nguyen, T. & Lee, J. (2023). Sense of Belonging Among Multilingual Audiences in Australia. Canberra: University of Canberra & Special Broadcasting Service

<sup>22</sup> [https://en.unesco.org/inclusivepolicylab/sites/default/files/analytics/document/2022/7/IPL\\_framework1.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/inclusivepolicylab/sites/default/files/analytics/document/2022/7/IPL_framework1.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1048984322000583>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.wgea.gov.au/reporting-guide>

<sup>25</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ilene-Hyman/publication/265236030\\_The\\_Role\\_of\\_Multiculturalism\\_Policy\\_in\\_Addressing\\_Social\\_Inclusion\\_Processes\\_in\\_Canada/links/564f3b6208ae4988a7a81a4b/The-Role-of-Multiculturalism-Policy-in-Addressing-Social-Inclusion-Processes-in-Canada-The-Role-of-Multiculturalism-Policy-in-Addressing-Social-Inclusion-Processes-in-Canada.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ilene-Hyman/publication/265236030_The_Role_of_Multiculturalism_Policy_in_Addressing_Social_Inclusion_Processes_in_Canada/links/564f3b6208ae4988a7a81a4b/The-Role-of-Multiculturalism-Policy-in-Addressing-Social-Inclusion-Processes-in-Canada-The-Role-of-Multiculturalism-Policy-in-Addressing-Social-Inclusion-Processes-in-Canada.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> <https://humanrights.gov.au/about/news/speeches/social-cohesion-multicultural-australia-importance-human-rights>

<sup>27</sup> <https://racismnoway.com.au/about-racism/australias-cultural-diversity/diversity-of-language/#:~:text=Languages%20other%20than%20English,-While%20English%20is&text=Collectively%2C%20Australians%20speak%20over%20400,and%20Torres%20Strait%20Islander%20languages.>

<sup>28</sup> [Census of Population and Housing](https://www.census.gov.au/population/housing)





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<sup>29</sup> Ibid 17

<sup>30</sup> [https://www.multilingualaustralia.org.au/files/ugd/ea439e\\_c8c9e16d11a545858f5d0c749e00643d.pdf](https://www.multilingualaustralia.org.au/files/ugd/ea439e_c8c9e16d11a545858f5d0c749e00643d.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> [https://www.multilingualaustralia.org.au/files/ugd/ea439e\\_2bd363d98e63427f8609c663d65fefe1.pdf](https://www.multilingualaustralia.org.au/files/ugd/ea439e_2bd363d98e63427f8609c663d65fefe1.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>

<sup>33</sup> [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Strengthening\\_Multiculturalism/Multiculturalism/~media/Committees/multiculturalism\\_ctte/Final\\_Report/report.pdf](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Strengthening_Multiculturalism/Multiculturalism/~media/Committees/multiculturalism_ctte/Final_Report/report.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10138746/#:~:text=In%20Australia%2C%20the%20government%20is,and%20language%20spoken%20at%20home>