



2024-2025 Community Sector Pre-Budget Submission

In collaboration and endorsed by:



25 January 2024





Foreword

We thank the Treasury for the opportunity to make this joint call for funding under the 2024–25 Budget from the community sector. The recommendations in this submission have been developed by key community sector organisations including the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia; the Australian Council of Social Services; Settlement Council of Australia; SSI; Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (Australia); Refugee Council of Australia; and the National Ethnic Disability Alliance, are aligned and informed by our Community Sector Statement for Multicultural Framework Review. Born from the strong partnership that exists within the community sector, the Sector Statement demonstrates the commitment and unity of the sector to a path forward for a stronger, more inclusive multicultural Australia. The [Sector Statement](#) has been signed by close to 100 organisations thus far.

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Introduction

One of our great strengths as an advanced democratic nation is that we are a multicultural nation. Cultural and linguistic diversity is inextricably woven into our history, economy and sense of national identity. More than 500 First Nations groups speaking over 250 languages inhabited this land prior to colonisation, and multicultural Australia recognises and sits respectfully alongside the Indigeneity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who represent the oldest continuous living cultures on earth. Diversity is an integral part of the social, cultural and economic fabric of contemporary Australia and it is a part of the nation we must continue to foster.

Australia's success in the future and our ability to thrive during times of uncertainty and instability relies on the social, economic and political strength and resilience of the nation. Australia's people are our greatest asset and how well we live and work together and foster a supportive and inclusive society is the foundation of our future success. A socially cohesive society depends on a contemporary vision of multicultural Australia that is inclusive and empowering and resonates with the nation. As a multicultural nation, we must remain deeply committed to championing diversity and cultivating a society where everyone, regardless of their cultural, religious or ethnic background, what languages they speak, how long they have been in Australia or their manner of arrival, has equal opportunity to thrive, belong, participate and contribute to the rich fabric of the nation.

People living in Australia share this aspiration. Research shows that 88 per cent of the population supports multiculturalism, with 87 per cent believing migrants to be good for our economy.² The Federal Government must safeguard these aspirations and strengthen our shared vision and investment in a progressive, fair and inclusive multicultural Australia.



Recommendation 1:

Invest in the machinery-of-government to support multicultural Australia

Multiculturalism impacts the entire domain of the Federal Government, and machinery-of-government should reflect this reality. Strengthening and deepening multiculturalism should be embedded in a way that delivers a whole-of-government approach with central coordination and appropriate investment in co-design partnerships with multicultural community organisations, policy design, service delivery, and regulatory and other mechanisms. This should include establishing an Office for Multicultural Australia to coordinate and review approaches across the whole-of-government to strengthen multiculturalism and social cohesion; establishing a Multicultural Act enshrining the values and aspirations and benefits of multicultural Australia in law, to assist in addressing the systemic barriers to social, cultural and economic recognition and inclusion; elevating the minister responsible for the multicultural portfolio to Cabinet; and establishing a Multicultural Advisory Council with membership based on nominations from multicultural communities.

Recommendation 2:

Invest in the implementation of the Multicultural Framework

The Multicultural Framework must be supported by significant and sustainable funding for its full 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 (based on the particular needs and priorities of the communities and government in each jurisdiction including for example, translation services, development of a culturally informed mental health and disability strategies, culturally appropriate family violence support, employment services etc), the timeframe for implementation and what investment will be made. The implementation of Action Plans will be essential for ensuring policy, programs and service delivery designs 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. To optimise the effectiveness of the Action Plans, it will be important that the Office for Multicultural Australia coordinate and align them with existing frameworks at the Commonwealth, state, and territory levels to build synergies and avoid any overlaps.

Recommendation 3:

Invest in co-designing and promoting a progressive vision for multicultural Australia

Multiculturalism is a strong pillar of Australian society, thanks to the dynamic arrival of migrants. However, a strategic national focus on multiculturalism and its many benefits has been missing from the political realm. A clear, compelling and inclusive vision for multicultural Australia will provide an overarching framework for our national aspiration as a successful multicultural nation.

It's time to reclaim the narrative and advance a re-imagined progressive multicultural vision for the nation. A progressive vision can define this narrative, celebrate the strengths of multicultural Australia and strengthen social cohesion.

Developing a progressive vision that is truly representative of the aspirations of all Australians cannot be done without community participation from multicultural communities, First Nations communities and the broader Australian community.



The Government must invest in a truly representative co-designed process to develop a progressive narrative to ensure the strengths of the rich diversity of our collective experiences, perspectives and aspirations are reflected and celebrated in our national identity and the benefits of our diverse nation are shared by all.

Recommendation 4:

Invest in multicultural community organisations

Multicultural community organisations are places where people from multicultural communities feel a sense of belonging, support and understanding and are often the first point of contact for many migrants and refugees upon arrival in Australia. Multicultural organisations also play a key role in building and strengthening social cohesion.

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.

In recognition of this important role, the Government must provide sustainable funding for community organisations to support the many needs of multicultural communities. Government investment in capacity and capability building is important for community organisations to respond to growing demands consistently and effectively. Multicultural organisations are often called upon to undertake community consultations and provide detailed feedback, bringing valuable lived experience and expertise to support policy and program development, implementation and evaluation, often without remuneration. As key actors within multicultural communities, investing in capability and capacity building for multicultural community organisations to do this work (e.g. by co-designing as contractual partners rather than just participants in consultations) will deliver a pathway to ensure multicultural communities are better equipped to deal with their specific current and future challenges, and make the most of opportunities that are available.

Recommendation 5:

Invest in support for all migrants under a reinvigorated National Settlement Framework

Settlement is a crucial process for new migrants as they seek to navigate, establish, integrate, and become independent in a new country. The provision of tailored, culturally appropriate, and inclusive services and support measures to make the settlement experience seamless, swift, and efficient will ensure the nation quickly benefits from the extensive economic, cultural and social assets of migration. For migrants, settlement services and support measures will reduce barriers to participation in the workforce and society, increase their sense of belonging and value in Australia, improve social cohesion and make Australian communities stronger and more resilient. To achieve this, we recommend the Government reinvigorate the National Settlement Framework and ensure it is well resourced to support both its development and implementation. To ensure the Framework delivers better outcomes for all Australians, it should be re-developed and implemented in consultation with Commonwealth, State and Territory and Local Governments; service providers; the community sector; and migrant communities. The Framework should align with other relevant government reforms and frameworks such as the National Multicultural Framework; the Migration Strategy; National Anti-Racism Framework; Australia's Disability Strategy and Working Future: The Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities. The reinvigorated Framework should include a focus on the impact of intersectionality, serve the increasing diversity of migrant communities, and meet both the current and future needs of Australia.



Alongside the National Settlement Framework, we call on the Government to develop and fund a national program, co-designed and delivered by multicultural and ethnic community organisations, to deliver coordinated support and connection beyond humanitarian migrants to access essential information and services to assist migrants to successfully participate in the social, civic and economic realms of Australia. These support services and information could include workplace rights and entitlements, childcare, transport, domestic violence, NDIS, education, language support, MyGov and First Nations culture and history. Currently, refugees and only a very small number of migrants are eligible for settlement support, leaving most migrants without the helping hand that would make the transition so much more efficient. 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.

Recommendation 6:

Invest in data and evidence

Data is 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 culture, language and ethnicity, instead focusing on two variables such as country of birth and language spoken at home. These variables by themselves do not accurately measure the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australia, and they can lead to false assumptions and the inadequate allocation of resources. This can have devastating consequences for communities – during COVID-19 inadequate support to CALD communities during the initial stages of the pandemic led to a higher death rate of people born overseas compared to people born in Australia. The limited definition of cultural and linguistic diversity, the inconsistent collection and reporting of data on cultural diversity 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 nationⁱ.

The Government should invest in establishing cross-sector, nationally consistent multicultural data definitions that are 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 7:

Invest in services that meet the needs of people with disability from multicultural backgrounds

Culturally and linguistically diverse people with disability experience disproportionate violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation and face greater barriers accessing information and communicationsⁱⁱ. Consistent with the findings of the Disability Royal Commission, the Government should invest in ensuring policies and programs adequately support the needs of people with disability and are culturally safe, appropriate and trauma-informed. This includes the development of a national plan to promote accessible information and communications for people with disability, and the implementation of recommendations made by the Disability Royal Commission to increase the number of appropriately skilled and qualified interpreters.

In addition, the NDIS Reviewⁱⁱⁱ has strongly recommended bolstering navigation support for all people with disability to mainstream services, community and disability supports and inclusion both within and outside of the NDIS. The Australian Government's response to the findings of these two major policy reviews must be done by ensuring that policies, programs and service delivery designs are co-designed with culturally and



linguistically diverse people with disability, their representative organisations and their supporters. All co-design processes must be inclusive, adequately resourced and provided with sufficient time. Data collection on the specific needs of culturally and linguistically diverse people with disability and their usage of services, must also be enhanced with an intersectional focus on multiculturalism and disability across all areas of government. As such, we support additional funding for systemic advocacy in this space and the call for the establishment of a Disability Reform Implementation Council to oversee Disability Royal Commission and NDIS Review changes, where culturally and linguistically diverse people with disability and their organisations play a crucial role.

Recommendation 8:

Invest in the community sector's capacity to adapt to the challenges and impacts of climate change

The community sector is already experiencing the impacts of climate change. More intense and frequent extreme weather events driven by climate change have led to higher demand for our services during emergencies^v. We are committed to working with our communities to adapt and build resilience to the challenges of climate change. As Australia's response to climate change - electrification and the switch to renewable energy gathers momentum, it is important to ensure communities are not left behind. As the sector that is the conduit between government and communities, advocating for the needs of our communities and delivering crucial information and services, the Government must invest in supporting the community sector to build its own climate resilience and strengthen our capability to operate and support our communities in the climate change context. This investment will be key to ensuring our communities are well placed to respond to the challenges of climate change and optimising the uptake of opportunities provided by the Government for mitigating and responding to climate change.

Recommendation 9:

Invest in developing a comprehensive language policy

Language is central to culture, identity and how 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.^v

For multiculturalism to enjoy the place it deserves in what we stand for and celebrate as a nation, Australia needs a comprehensive official language policy. The Government needs to invest in co-designing with communities, a holistic language policy that provides 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 also 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.



Recommendation 10:

Maintain investment and commitment to building a fair and inclusive society

A fair and inclusive society must start with justice for First Nations people. We urge Governments to respond to the calls from First Nations peoples for action to Close the Gap in outcomes for communities and to deliver on Voice, Treaty and Truth.

We welcome the Government's commitment to developing the National Anti-Racism Framework and call upon the Government to ensure there is appropriate investment in implementing the Framework across all levels of government and society. This commitment is important to create a pathway for all people in Australia to be able to live free from racism and discrimination.

Conclusion

We look forward to continuing to work with the Federal Government together as a sector to deepen our nation's commitment to a thriving, diverse and inclusive multicultural society.

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

ⁱⁱ Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, 2023. *Our Vision for an Inclusive Australia and Recommendations*

ⁱⁱⁱ NDIS Review Working together to deliver the NDIS

^{iv} Climate Governance Initiative, 2023. *Climate Governance for NFP Directors*.

^v <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.](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.)