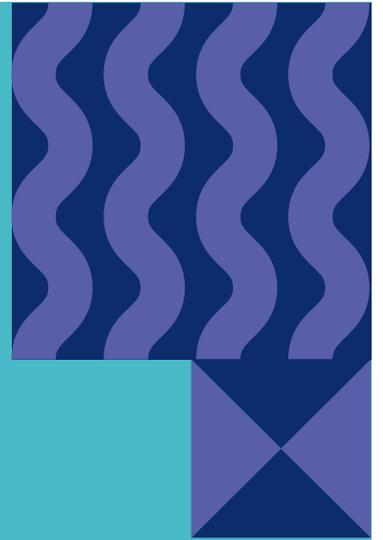
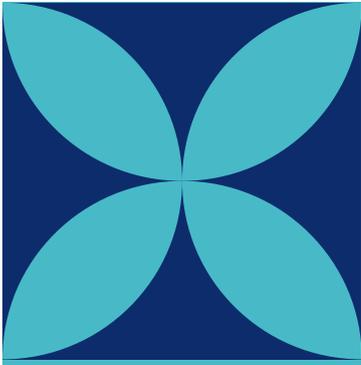


Acknowledgment of Country

FECCA pays its respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, past and present, and recognises the land we live and work upon was never ceded. FECCA acknowledges that our work on behalf of multicultural Australia has learnt from and been enriched by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations. We are committed to continuing to listen, learn and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the journey to a more inclusive and equitable society.

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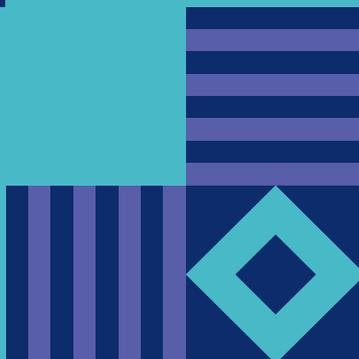
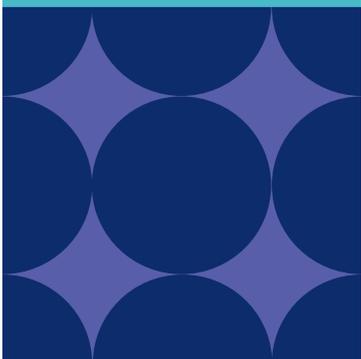


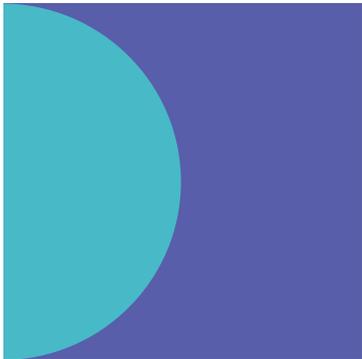
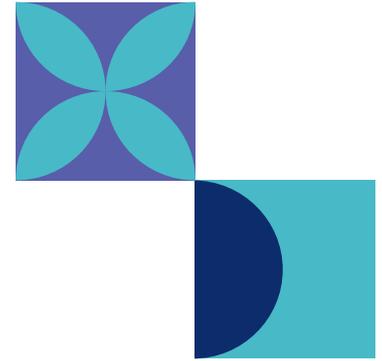
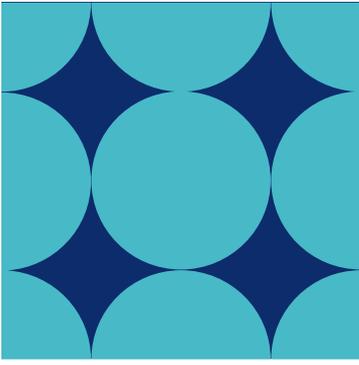
Who we are

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 45 years, FECCA has proudly worked alongside culturally and linguistically diverse communities, the broader Australian society, and the 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, has opportunities to reach their full potential and contribute to the Australian nation. 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.





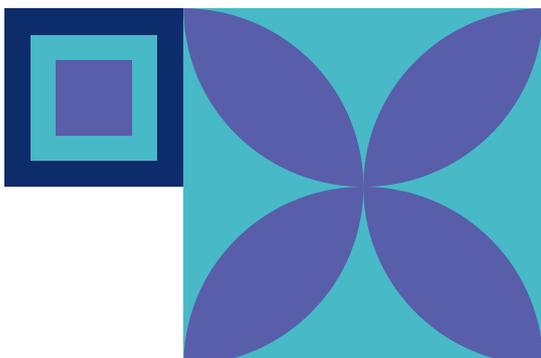
Introduction

Cultural diversity is a defining aspect of the Australian nation. It is woven into our colonial and post-colonial history, our economy, our culture, and our national identity.

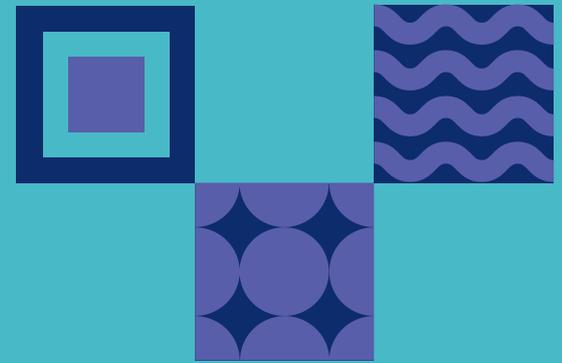
The 2021 Census shows that more than half of Australian residents (51.5%) were born overseas, or have at least one parent born overseas, and over 5.5 million Australians speak a language other than English at home.¹ To ensure Australia's strong and vibrant democracy, the perspectives, needs, and aspirations of all citizens must be embedded into the nation's governance.

This document provides advice to political candidates and current Members of Parliament on key areas of focus for investment for a more inclusive and prosperous multicultural nation in the context of the 2025 Federal Election.

We call on all candidates and Members of Parliament to rise above divisive narratives and support a multicultural nation that brings people together and generates social cohesion.



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



FECCA Recommendations



Conduct a fair and inclusive election campaign

Australian democracy is based on active and engaged citizens, an inclusive and equitable society, free and franchised elections, and the rule of law. An election is an important time for all Australians, giving citizens the opportunity to be part of decision-making and the future of Australia.

1.1 Lead by example with positive narratives of multicultural Australia

Social cohesion is integral for a fair, inclusive, and well-functioning society. It involves building shared values, reducing disparities in opportunities, wealth, and income, and enabling people to feel they are engaged in a common enterprise, facing shared challenges, and are members of the same community. This is difficult to achieve if groups of people are treated and viewed differently from others or blamed for the troubles and challenges faced by society.

We call on all candidates and Members of Parliament to rise above divisive narratives and support a multicultural nation that brings people together and generates social cohesion.

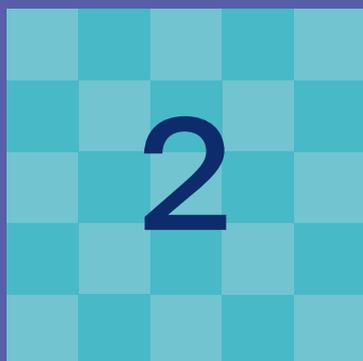
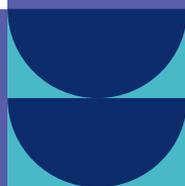
1.2 Build stronger cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity in political representation

Political representation of cultural and ethnic minorities is vital to having their interests heard and reflected in the decisions that affect them. The 2022 Federal Election saw record-level ethnic minority candidates elected; however, the representative proportion remains much lower than the relative share of the population.² This results in a lack of voice and influence of people from multicultural backgrounds in the political system.

FECCA calls upon all political parties to build a candidate base that reflects the diversity of Australian society.

This requires creating political and party environments that welcome and support people from diverse backgrounds to become successful political candidates. It also requires promoting a strong public and political narrative on the importance and value of cultural and linguistic diversity across all political representations.

2 Guan, Q., & Pietsch, J. (2023). Representing diversity in a liberal democracy: a case study of Australia. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Volume 50, Issue 12, 3069-3090.) <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2290446>



Commit to human rights for all

2.1 Legislate an Australian National Human Act

Australian society values freedom, respect, fairness, compassion, dignity, and equality. These principles form the basis of human rights, which apply to all people regardless of race, colour, sex, age, religion, language, disability, sexual orientation, or belief. In Australia, racism makes it difficult for migrants, refugees, and people from multicultural communities to participate fully in society, including when trying to access medical treatment. This was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, where COVID-19 death rates were three times higher among migrants than those born in Australia.³

To ensure the protection of the rights and freedoms of all people in Australia in the future, FECCA calls upon the Government to act upon the recommendation of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights Inquiry to legislate an Australian Human Rights Act.

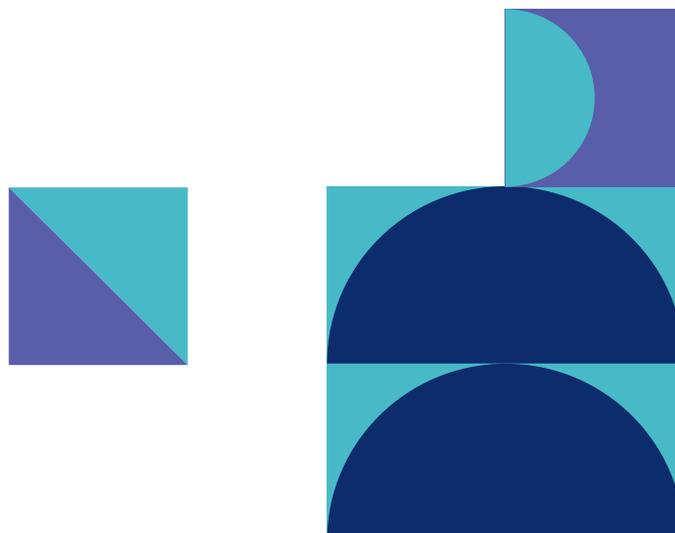
Enshrining these rights in law at the national level will ensure that these values underpin government decision-making, laws, and policies so that everyone in Australia can uphold their rights and stand up for what we value as a society. A Human Rights Act would promote a better understanding of the rights of all Australians and empower people to seek justice if their rights are violated. It will also ensure governments at all levels deliver better, more human-focused laws, policies, and services, including health, education, and housing.

2.2 Maintain a commitment to First Nations' self-determination

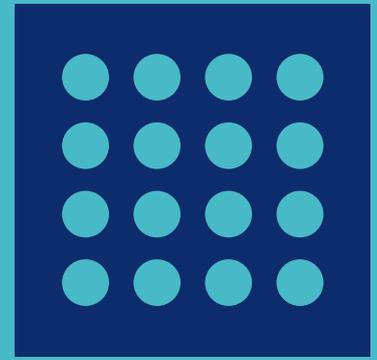
FECCA urges the Government to remain committed to self-determination for First Nations peoples as an integral element of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We call for action to Close the Gap in outcomes for First Nations peoples and deliver on Voice, Treaty and Truth.

As with multicultural communities, First Nations communities are best placed to recognise and communicate their needs and aspirations, and Government policy and action must genuinely engage and reflect what First Nations Australians have asked for. We commend the government's commitment to pursuing the first reform of voice and call for continued support for the self-determination and sovereignty of First Nations people.



3 <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/covid-19-mortality-wave>



Develop a national anti-racism strategy

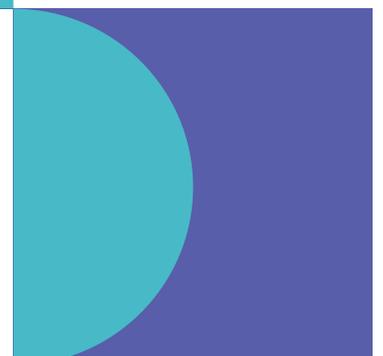
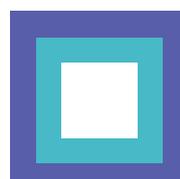
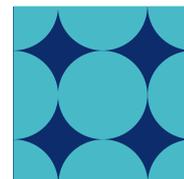
Interpersonal and institutional racism exists in Australia, which is deeply connected with the history of colonisation and First Nations dispossession. Racism deeply affects the lives of multicultural Australians in many ways, including those compounded by other forms of intersecting discrimination, such as disability, gender, and caste discrimination.

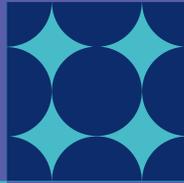
In October 2024, FECCA launched a report on *An Anti-Racism Framework: Experiences and Perspectives of Multicultural Australia*. Commissioned by the Australian Human Rights Commission, the report drew upon 40 consultations with 860 participants across all states and territories and an online survey with over 400 responses. The report showed clearly that racism is systemic, taking place in schools, workplaces, and public spaces. In November 2024, the Australian Human Rights Commission launched the National Anti-Racism Framework, reflecting years of solid work and consultations.

FECCA calls on the Australian Government to invest in a National Anti-Racism Strategy, informed by the Commission's National Anti-Racism Framework, with long-term funding to enable planning, monitoring and evaluation of actions in partnership with multicultural communities.

In addition to cultural safety training, these actions should include better data collection and better processes, mechanisms and redress systems to report and address racism.

By calling for a National Anti-Racism Strategy, FECCA remains committed to ensuring that all Australians – irrespective of their backgrounds – feel respected and included, with full access to participation in economic, political, and social life. It also acknowledges key interdependencies of a National Anti-Racism Strategy with the Multicultural Framework Review, which recommends Australia observe the UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on 21 March and FECCA's human rights advocacy.





Commit to implementing the recommendations from the Multicultural Framework Review Report

The Multicultural Framework Review (MFR) is the first major examination of multiculturalism in Australia and represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to advance and strengthen our nation. The MFR explores our institutions and policy settings to ensure they deliver social and economic inclusion and benefits for all Australians.

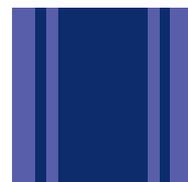
The MFR Report "Towards Fairness - A Multicultural Australia for All," released in July 2024, outlines a clear and progressive roadmap for delivering a strong foundation to support the diversity, inclusion and economic prosperity of the Australian nation. The actions outlined in the roadmap strongly align with FECCA's long-term advocacy platform and our recommendations to the MFR and joint Community Sector Statement representing around 100 organisations.

We commend the Panel for highlighting the need to apply an intersectional lens to understand the reinforcing vulnerabilities faced by individuals from multicultural backgrounds. The report examines the specific barriers and gaps experienced by young people, women and gender-diverse people, communities living in regional and rural Australia, and people with disabilities from multicultural backgrounds. We urge governments to consider intersectionality across all policy and program designs to ensure policies and programs are tailored to respond to the specific needs of those most in need.

We welcome the Panel's recognition of inclusive policy design as a key pillar for connection. Inclusive policy design is built on partnership and collaboration with communities and their representatives, enriching decision-making with lived experience, expertise, and localised knowledge. Inclusive policy design leads to better outcomes and stronger, more inclusive policies, programs, and services.

We urge all Members of Parliament and political candidates to commit to supporting the full implementation of the MFR recommendations developed on a strong foundation of lived experience and expertise.

The recommendations focus on connection, identity, and belonging, as well as addressing barriers to inclusion, supported by data, research, and reporting. Specifically, we highlight the following actions for immediate implementation.





4.1 Establish a strong institutional foundation to support multicultural Australia

A strong foundation is needed to build and sustain a more inclusive nation that works across government to provide a cohesive, effective, and efficient approach to serving the needs and aspirations of multicultural communities. This should include:

- A bipartisan national commitment to a progressive vision of multiculturalism based on social cohesion, cultural identity, and equality of opportunity.
- Strong leadership and accountability, including a Multicultural Australia Commission to lead the implementation of the Multicultural Framework.
- Strategic planning and coordination through a dedicated Office for Multicultural Australia or Department of Multicultural Affairs, Immigration, and Citizenship, led by a Cabinet Minister for greater influence over decision-making across government.
- Collaboration across the country with all levels of government and community, including a Multicultural Ministerial Forum and a Multicultural Community Advisory Council.

4.2 Update CALD data standards

Data is critical for developing and implementing effective policies, programs, and practices and strengthens evidence-based decision-making, benefitting all Australians regardless of their backgrounds. The Australian Government recognises the need for updating CALD data standards and, in 2022, committed to introducing whole-of-government CALD data standards for measuring Australia's diversity to improve policy design and resource allocation.⁴ Currently, there is not a nationally consistent approach to CALD data, with data often collected on variables such as country of birth and main language spoken at home, which do not accurately measure the many nuances of cultural, racial and ethnic identity and put people into a broad group defined as culturally and linguistically diverse. This inhibits the ability to identify those with the greatest need and allocate appropriate resources and hinders the ability 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.⁵

FECCA calls for the development of cross-sector, nationally consistent data definitions situated within a robust data ecosystem covering data definitions, collection, storage, analysis, and dissemination.

4.3 Support and partner with the multicultural sector

Multicultural organisations provide more than community services; they are the backbone of multicultural communities and play a central role in Australia being a successful multicultural nation. Multicultural community organisations are places where people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can find connections and develop a sense of belonging to community. They provide a suite of tangible and intangible supports and benefits, including harnessing the protective factors of culture and community, providing culturally safe and accessible assistance to navigate the social, civic and economic institutions of Australia, and are trusted sources of information. They also play an important role in building social cohesion across culturally and linguistically diverse communities and the broader Australian community.

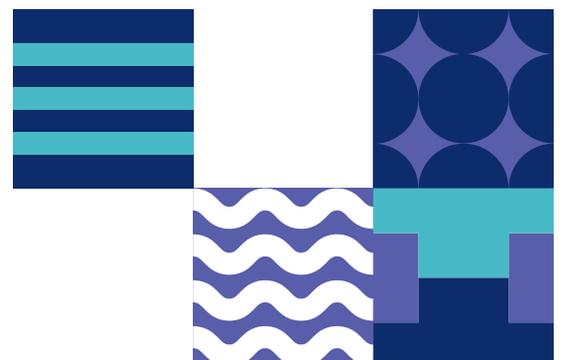
Multicultural community organisations serve as a bridge between government and communities. They can effectively pass on official information to their communities and are best placed to provide advice and work with the government to embed the experiences, perspectives and needs of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in policy and practice design.

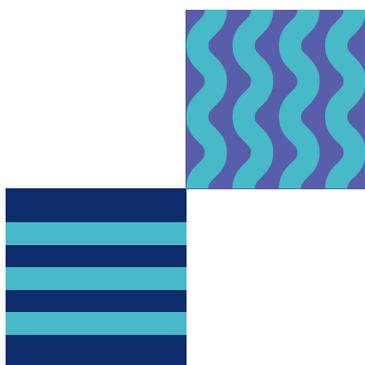
FECCA calls for government investment in partnership with multicultural community organisations to facilitate genuine engagement and co-design with communities.

This requires sustainable and sustained funding for multicultural community organisations and peak bodies. Funding must go beyond service delivery to include investment in organisation capability and capacity-building to ensure communities' current and emerging needs are continuously met and to support genuine co-design for successful outcomes.

4 <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/immigration-minister-pledges-to-collect-more-data-on-diverse-communities-to-better-understand-their-needs/iz6g0iv1>

5 The Lack of Race and Ethnicity Data in Australia—A Threat to Achieving Health Equity - PMC (nih.gov)





4.4 Develop a National Language Policy

Australia is not just an English-speaking nation; we are a truly multicultural nation with over 400 languages spoken across the country.⁶ In 2021, 22.8 per cent of Australia's population spoke a language other than English at home, up from 21.8 per cent in 2016.⁷ Maintaining, developing, and using one's own language is essential for preserving and practising culture. Beyond culture, language is also crucial to ensuring equitable access to support and services, understanding of public services and institutions, and ensuring active civic participation. Linguistic rights are human rights that apply to everyone. Despite the many important and compelling arguments for language diversity and access to language support, multicultural communities continue to experience language loss and face discrimination and disadvantage, particularly for those who do not have proficiency in English.

For many years, FECCA has partnered with peak and non-peak organisations in the translation and interpretation services sector, advocating for greater support to organisations delivering and removing barriers to accessing this critical service. We welcome the Panel's report highlighting the importance of quality language services and its recommendations to support a thriving language support system, including ensuring the sustainability and quality of language services (interpreting and translating), establishing a fully funded TIS National capacity within the existing business unit, and boosting National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) funding.

FECCA calls for a comprehensive national language policy.

Such a policy would provide a holistic approach to developing effective, appropriate, and accessible communication resources, going beyond translations. It would offer a framework for implementing second language education, supporting community language schools, professional language standards, facilitating quality, responsive in-language services, an appropriately remunerated workforce encompassing community and professional interpreting, and a strong bilingual bi-cultural workforce.

4.5 Commit to access and equity across all government services

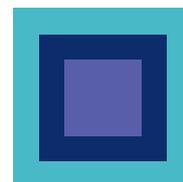
Access and equity are essential for providing services that meet the needs of diverse groups and support people to participate fully in their communities and economies. This must include identifying and removing barriers to participation and contribution for all citizens, irrespective of their cultural, ethnic, religious, or linguistic background.

Australia's Multicultural Access and Equity Policy sets out to ensure government programs and services meet the needs of all Australians and be responsive to the needs of culturally diverse communities. People from multicultural backgrounds continue to face barriers to accessing services across government agencies. Barriers can include a lack of or inadequate in-language information; lack of information in plain English and distributed in formats that are accessible; increased reliance on online provision of services as opposed to face-to-face service provision; limited awareness and use of the national Translation and Interpreting Service (TIS) and other interpreting and translating services by users and mainstream service providers; and limited cultural competency among front-line staff, among other challenges.

FECCA calls for commitment to a renewed, strengthened, well-informed, strong, and transparent approach to multicultural access and equity.

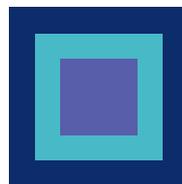
This commitment must be implemented across all areas of government and extend to outsourced services. The approach must include a comprehensive:

- Access and Equity Framework
- Access and Equity standards
- Access and Equity accountability mechanisms



⁶ Diversity of language - Australia's cultural diversity (racismnoway.com.au)

⁷ Ibid. 17



4.6 Apply an intersectional gender lens

The Panel reported that migrant and refugee women are less likely to report the violence they experience due to language barriers, limited knowledge of their rights and existing laws, cultural stigma, and concerns about their visa and residency status.⁸ As noted in the Report, this can result in gendered forms of prejudice and discrimination that may compound barriers to social and economic inclusion. This intersection of gender equality, gender-based violence and multiculturalism indicates that the government, along with non-government organisations, should play a key role in strengthening multiculturalism and gender equality in society.⁹

FECCA calls for the application of an intersectional, gender-equality lens to multicultural policy and services, including filling the knowledge and research gaps on:

- how intersecting forms of inequality and disadvantage, including culture-specific gender norms and relationships, interact with humanitarian migrant women's settlement experience and outcomes, the impact of domestic and family-based violence on humanitarian migrant women and the economic potential of recently arrived humanitarian migrant women.
- the influence of geographic location, particularly in relation to settlement in regional areas, on humanitarian migrant women's settlement outcomes.
- humanitarian migrant women's experiences in accessing mainstream support services and programs in Australia and the impact on their socio-economic and health outcomes.

4.7 Establish a Multicultural Aged Care Unit within the Department of Health and Aged Care

Establishing a Multicultural Aged Care Unit will enable better coordination and a targeted approach to ensuring that ageing and aged care policies incorporate evidence and are designed to include the needs of older persons from Australia's ageing and increasingly culturally, linguistically, and religiously diverse population.

As a leading voice for multicultural Australia, the Government should provide funding to FECCA to develop and implement an integrated adult education initiative to increase the knowledge and capabilities of bicultural/bilingual workers, as well as multicultural communities, about the reforms in the aged care system, with critical attention to education on rights, support channels, and navigability from access to actual management of services.

4.8 Reform overseas skills and qualifications recognition system

Numerous consultations and submissions to the MFR emphasised the underemployment of migrants and the underutilisation of their skills.¹⁰ Despite having higher qualification levels than their Australian counterparts, almost half (44 per cent) of migrants and refugees in Australia are working below their skill level.¹¹ Reforming the overseas skills and qualifications recognition system is not only productive for Australia's economy, but it also fosters a greater sense of inclusion and belonging for all by leveraging the strength of Australia's multicultural workforce and recognising the contributions of migrant communities.

Persistent underemployment is a product of systemic barriers and hinders Australia's ability to address skills shortages. Research indicates Australia has the skills it needs. However, existing overseas skills and qualifications assessment processes are often time-consuming, expensive, and confusing – with duplicating pathways for employment and migration purposes and multiple variations depending on the migrant's occupation and geographical location (in a state or territory).¹² Such underemployment not only inhibits full participation and integration of newly arrived skilled migrants in Australian society but also represents missed opportunities for employers to harness the potential of the multicultural population.

FECCA calls on the government to commit to a comprehensive reform of Australia's overseas skills and qualifications recognition system to leverage the untapped potential of Australia's multicultural workforce and ensure full participation in society.

Consistent with Activate Australia's Skills Campaign, this includes the removal of cost and access barriers to skills and qualifications recognition by creating a national online portal for navigating the end-to-end system and place-based migrant employment pathway hubs to guide individuals through the process. Additionally, FECCA endorses the call to establish a national governance system with an Ombudsman to provide regulation, independent oversight, and transparency over the skills and qualifications recognition process.

8 www.homeaffairs.gov.au/multicultural-framework-review/Documents/report-summary/multicultural-framework-review-report-english.pdf

9 Ibid 110

10 Towards Fairness: a Multicultural Australia for All, Multicultural Framework Review Report, p 91

11 Billion Dollar Benefit | SSI

12 Billion Dollar Benefits: The economic impact of unlocking the skills of potential of migrants in Australia, Report," June 2024, p 33

4.9 Support 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.

We call for the development of a fully funded national program under a reinvigorated National Settlement Framework to provide coordinated support and connection for non-humanitarian migrants to access essential information and services.

The program should be co-designed and delivered by multicultural and ethnic community organisations and would deliver better outcomes for migrants to successfully participate in the social, civic and economic realms of Australia. The support services and provision of 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. 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.

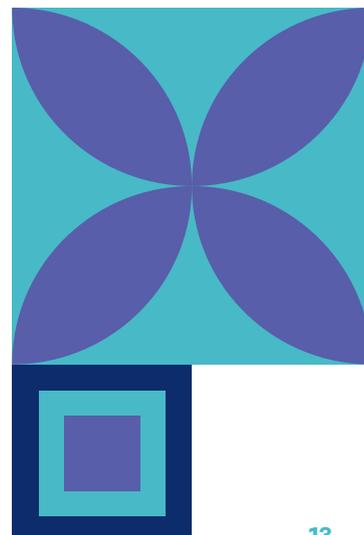
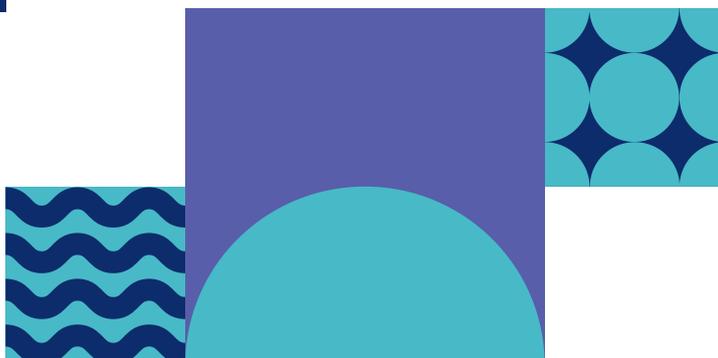
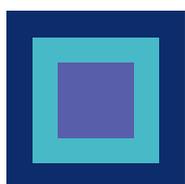
4.10 Recognise the importance of family reunification

Family reunification is central to the well-being and success of multicultural communities in Australia. FECCA has long advocated and continues to call for a holistic and humanitarian approach to migration. This approach must focus beyond economic considerations, addressing skill shortages and recognising family reunification, which are important elements of successful settlement. We note the consistent number of places reserved for partner visas in the 2024-25 planning cycle and draw attention to the finding in the 2023 Final Report of the Review of the Migration System that the demand for family migration exceeds the number of places available.

FECCA calls for planning figures that meet the needs of the growing multicultural population and the Australian economy.

We also call for the Government to address the neglect of visas reserved for parents and other family members, noting the Review of the Migration System Final Report identified an unmet demand for parent visas, with an application backlog increasing from 35,000 to 120,000 in the last 12 years and a waiting period of 30-50 years. Highlighting the importance of parent migration, the report adds that 'an opportunity for people to apply for a visa that will probably never come seems both cruel and unnecessary'.¹³

13 www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/files/review-migration-system-final-report.pdf





5

Address the disproportionate impacts of rising cost of living on multicultural communities

The rising cost of living is a major challenge for Australians, with multicultural communities facing disproportionate financial pressures. Many struggle to access stable housing, secure employment, and essential services, increasing risks of financial stress and homelessness.

5.1 Housing and Homelessness

Many migrants experience housing stress due to rising rents, rental discrimination, and limited access to social housing. Without action, more families will face housing insecurity and homelessness. Addressing these challenges requires stronger investment in affordable housing and targeted support for diverse communities.

5.2 Fair and Secure Employment

Skilled migrants often face barriers in having their qualifications recognised, pushing them into low-paid jobs despite their expertise. Workplace discrimination and wage disparities worsen financial hardship. Ensuring fair employment opportunities means recognising overseas skills and strengthening worker protections.

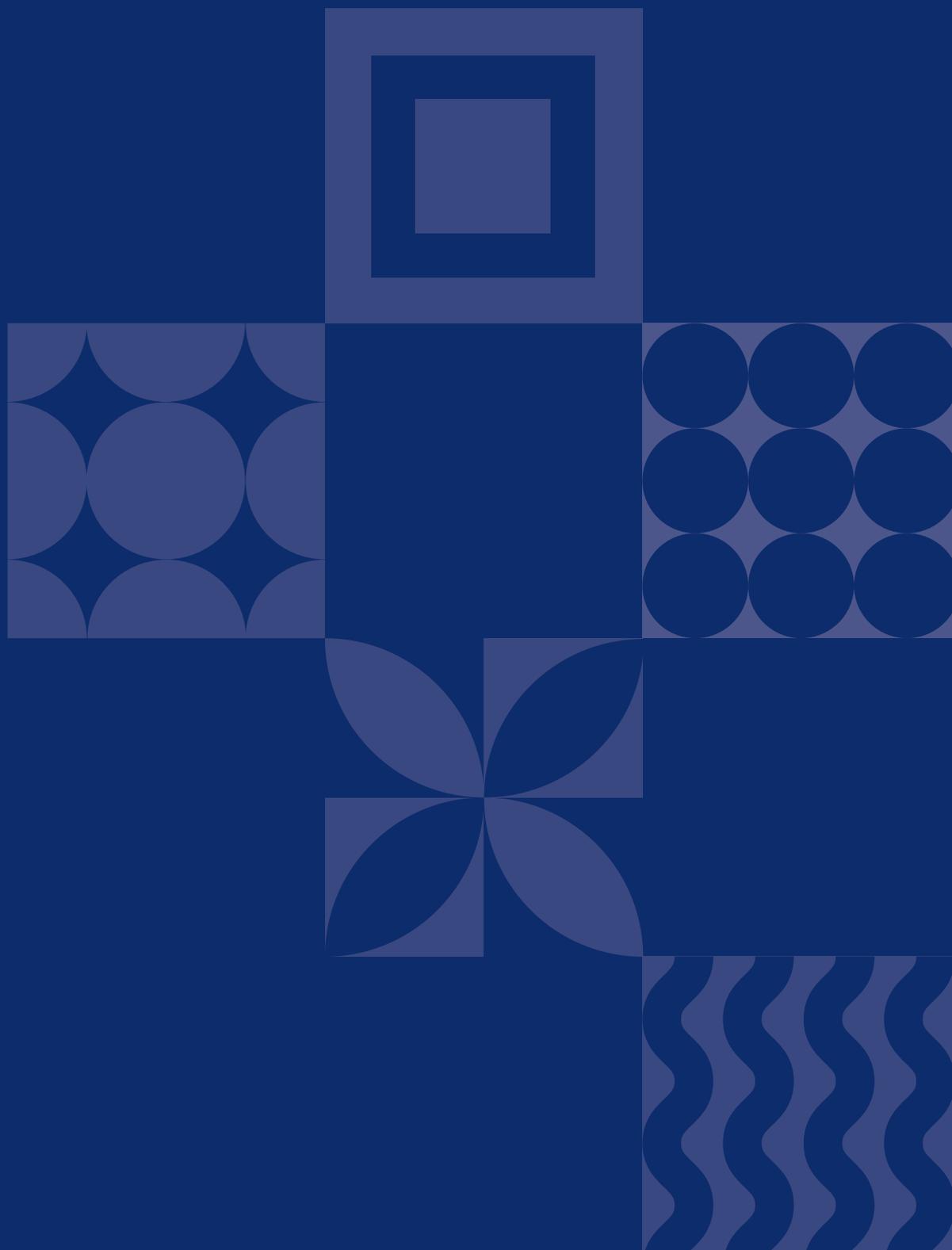
5.3 Access to Essential Services

The rising cost of healthcare, childcare, and education is leaving many multicultural families without adequate support. Language barriers and a lack of culturally appropriate services make access even harder. Expanding multicultural health and social services is essential to ensure that no one is excluded.

5.4 Community-Led Solutions

Multicultural organisations provide critical support, including food relief, financial counselling, and employment services. Sustainable funding is essential to ensure they can continue meeting community needs and delivering culturally responsive services.

A fair and inclusive economy must work for all Australians, ensuring financial pressures do not disproportionately affect multicultural communities.





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