



# Australian Multicultural Framework Review submission

October 2023



The Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this state and nation. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live, learn and work.

We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders past, present and future. We honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique culture and spiritual connection to the land, waters and seas and their contribution to enriching Queensland and Australia's communities.

### **About the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland**

The Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (ECCQ) is the peak body representing culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in Queensland. We have a membership base of over 450 individuals, ethno-specific organisations and multicultural owned businesses. We have been pioneering this work for over 45 years, since 1976.

Our work focuses on strengthening and advocating for the needs of CALD communities throughout Queensland. We do this by building their capacity through the delivery of leadership training, strengthening community associations as well as through the delivery of culturally tailored healthcare programs.

We believe that Australia's systems should allow for every Australian, irrespective of their background, to be able to participate and contribute in all aspects of Australian society. We know that the diversity of our multicultural society is one of Australia's greatest strengths.

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## Introduction

Australia is a multicultural country, a nation which has been built on migration, with almost 50% born overseas, or at least one parent born overseas. In 2020 we were ranked ninth internationally, for the percentage of migrants we had with 7.7 million migrants in our population (29.8%).<sup>1</sup>

“Australians value equal opportunity in our society”<sup>2</sup> is one of the value statements from “Our Common Bond” the document that provides everything a person who is to become a citizen needs to know before taking the Australian Citizenship test. It also states that: “All Australians are expected to treat each other with dignity and respect, regardless of their race, country of origin, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, age, disability, heritage, culture, politics, wealth or religion.” Currently, the policies and legal settings within Australia are making these statements inaccurate. Many first- and second-generation migrants, refugee-background arrivals, international students, asylum-seeker background people and others on various temporary visas who reside in Australia, are not protected or provided equitable access to supports. The statements from the Multicultural Australia Access and Equity Policy guide that “barriers of culture and language should not impede the delivery of Australian Government programs and services to those who are entitled to receive them” and services “should deliver outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse Australians on par with those for other Australians”<sup>3</sup> are untrue and the evidence that government is implementing changes that would bring this into place is rare, if not non-existent.

To ensure that all people in Australia can have a ‘fair go’, the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (ECCQ) make a series of recommendations below to improve:

- the government’s definition and understanding of multicultural
- government’s accountability to implement policies that enable opportunities for multicultural community members
- the engagement between federal and state government and multicultural communities
- the communication policies and practices across government departments and agencies
- education for people of all ages, particularly related to Australia’s history and culturally responsive practices
- supports for various target groups including skilled migrants, established culturally diverse communities and international students and
- pathways to full participation for multicultural communities including employment.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *Australia’s Population by Country of Birth*. ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/australias-population-country-birth/2021>.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Government. (2020). *Australian Citizenship: Our Common Bond*. Retrieved 19 June, 2023 from <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/citizenship-subsite/files/our-common-bond-testable.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Government (2019) *The Multicultural Access and Equity Policy Guide: For Australian Government departments and agencies*. <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/mca/PDFs/multicultural-access-equity-policy-guide.pdf>.

ECCQ held six group consultations to gather input from our members and community stakeholders on the Multicultural Framework Review. These consultations included those who arrived in Australia as a skilled migrant, an international student, on humanitarian visas, those living in metro areas and in regional areas and those from diverse religious backgrounds. Those we consulted expressed a lack of trust in the government systems in place to protect and support, a frustration from being undervalued, and disappointment at the tokenism which is currently displayed in engaging with communities through all levels of government.

We believe a positive future is possible through changes to policies, legislation, and mandatory requirements for government agencies and those who receive funding from government. Proactive policies and legislation within the Multicultural Framework can bring the needed change in the norms which shape social and systemic relationships and practices so that culture and attitudes are changed, and Australia can become a flourishing, unified country.

## The meaning of ‘multiculturalism’

Throughout our consultations a strong theme emerged of the conflicting definitions of ‘multicultural’ and the confusion around the term ‘culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)’. There are a lot of stereotypes made when either of these terms are used. One consultation participant noted that in many of the communications coming from government regarding employment for migrants, it was assumed that they would want to start a coffee shop or a mechanic business, but those who are consultants, scientists and engineers were not represented or addressed.

***“Their understanding of where diverse people fit in is skewed.”***

There are individuals, not just a collective. People who arrive to Australia as migrants, students, refugees, asylum-seekers, or partners, those from established communities or new and emerging communities – are lumped into one bucket by government and the broader community. The lack of information from government to the broader community about skilled migrants, for example, breeds further misunderstanding around what a skilled migrant is or how they come into the country and what they receive when they arrive. Another example given was the perception, which is rampant throughout the broader Australian

***“We need to reorientate public opinion and education. We are talking about the health and wellbeing of the country, of the nation!”***

community, that, as a collective, all Africans come into Australia as refugees, or to be on Centrelink. Media perpetuates this stereotype<sup>4</sup>.

Multiculturalism needs to acknowledge the value in cultural diversity, and support various cultural groups to maintain their language and practices, whilst also ensuring that the human rights of all groups and individuals are upheld.<sup>5</sup> This understanding needs to also take into account that different groups face additional barriers, when compared to others. For example, those from racially marginalised communities face additional discrimination. In order to develop this definition, government needs to engage a large cross-section of the community. How these terms are used and the context they are used in also has an impact. One participant in our consultations gave an example of themselves being a South African, Indian, Australian, Muslim and shared about the need to use these descriptors positively, especially coming from a country where apartheid occurred. Our members shared that due to the current negative connotations associated with multiculturalism, many people don't want to be associated with multiculturalism, so they try to separate themselves from this in their workplace.

***Recommendation: the federal government develop a clear definition of 'multicultural' through engagement with a wide range of communities, which is communicated through all government agencies and in any communications from government to the public.***

***Recommendation: the government regulate the use of terms including multicultural, multiculturalism and other labels for culturally diverse communities, across mainstream media.***

The lack of diversity of staff employed by government departments at a federal, state, and local level is an example of the lack of support for multiculturalism. The government needs to employ more diverse workers to demonstrate how a multicultural society works to build sustainable change. This includes the government having a percentage of members and staff who are from multicultural communities. One of our consultation participants said: "If in my house I say 'Tea is bad for you', but in public I say 'Tea is good for you' everyone in my house won't drink tea". If the government are going to ensure multiculturalism is embraced by Australian society at large, they need to lead the way by

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<sup>4</sup> All Together Now (2021) *Challenging Racialised Discourse Project 2018 - 2021*.

<https://alltogethernow.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Quantitative-Findings-Media-Monitoring-.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Adygezalova, S. (2021). Multiculturalism: its problems and teaching. *International Scientific Journal of Universities and Leadership*, 12, 127–137. <https://doi.org/10.31874/2520-6702-2021-12-2-127-137>

committing to employing staff from diverse cultures and creating a positive diversity climate<sup>6</sup>. This should be less tokenistic and more holistic.

***Recommendation: the federal and state governments meet a minimum percentage of staff and representatives from culturally diverse backgrounds.***

***Recommendation: the federal and state governments implement internship programs for people from migrant and refugee-backgrounds.***

Additionally, the lack of attention and focus on the multicultural policy framework in recent years means that policy and service delivery models do not adequately address the needs of multicultural people in Australia. This has resulted in disproportionately worse health, social and economic outcomes. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for a whole of government approach to multiculturalism and the risks in a fragmented approach. Therefore, a federal Office for Multicultural Australia would be a crucial step forward for Australia's renewed focus on multiculturalism<sup>7</sup>.

***Recommendation: organisations who receive federal funding should be required to have a percentage of staff, including in leadership positions, who are from a culturally diverse background.***

***Recommendation: the federal government establish an Office for Multicultural Australia, which is elevated in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.***

Not only should the representation occur within government agencies, but this should also be reflected in the allocation of funding to various service providers and consultants. If only service providers and consultants led by white men are engaged by government and provided large amounts of funding, the devaluing of multicultural communities will persist in the broader community. Culturally diverse communities are concerned about the lack of transparency of access and equity policies and practices followed by government departments. Reporting diversity targets, similar to the

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<sup>6</sup> Moon, K.-K., & Christensen, R. K. (2020). Realizing the Performance Benefits of Workforce Diversity in the U.S. Federal Government: The Moderating Role of Diversity Climate. *Public Personnel Management*, 49(1), 141–165. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091026019848458>

<sup>7</sup> FECCA (2022) *FECCA Policy Platform 2022*. <https://fecca.org.au/policy-platform-2022/>

Deloitte US Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Transparency Report<sup>8</sup> by government and its contractors should be a requirement.

## Celebrating Achievements

Mainstream media and public spaces reveal a limited and skewed representation of culturally diverse communities<sup>9</sup>. Many of these mainstream media outlets and programs reinforce negative stereotypes of culturally diverse community members. One example of this was during the COVID-19 pandemic, two Congolese young women came into Queensland whilst positive with the virus and they were named and their faces shown across national media outlets. Within weeks of this occurring a couple who were Anglo-background also did not follow self-isolation regulations and went into public whilst positive with the virus, however, media did not share their names or faces.<sup>10</sup> Mainstream media needs to be held to account for the terms and labels that are used and the way that culturally and linguistically diverse individuals and groups are represented.

ECCQ members identified that spaces, such as through social media, at bus stops, in libraries and other public spaces should be used to communicate positive stories of culturally diverse individuals across different sectors. Stories of individuals and groups who are achieving good things and positive messages about multiculturalism need to be seen in common public areas, as well as tangible contributions from multicultural communities to the mainstream community at large. This should

***Recommendation: implement requirements for culturally diverse representation in mainstream media channels and government agency communications, including representation of opinions, voices and images.***

***Recommendation: government supports mainstream media to create more multicultural programs.***

***Recommendation: government use public spaces to promote culturally diverse individuals and groups who have achieved success in a wide variety of fields.***

<sup>8</sup> Deloitte (2022) 2022 Deloitte Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Transparency Report. <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/dei/diversity-equity-inclusion-transparency-report.html>

<sup>9</sup> Screen Australia (2016) Seeing ourselves: Reflections on diversity in Australian TV drama. <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/fact-finders/reports-and-key-issues/reports-and-discussion-papers/seeing-ourselves>

<sup>10</sup> Soon-Tzu Speechley [@speechleyish]. (2020, July, 30). *Hi @bencubby, just wondering why one couple got privacy 'for legal reasons' while these teens have effectively been doxxed in the* [Thumbnail with link attached] [Tweet]. Twitter <https://twitter.com/speechleyish/status/1288632079081562112>

include featuring members of CALD communities who have achieved success in business, science, social interventions and community and are changing society for the better. By amplifying achievements, we can break down barriers. Mainstream media needs to be held to account for their representation of cultural diversity and promotion of positive outcomes from multicultural communities are achieving, especially those that benefit the community at large.

Further, the celebration of cultural festivals, gatherings and events are a prime opportunity to encourage unity within broader community. When people are in close proximity to those from different backgrounds and beliefs, those groups hold equal status and receive institutional support this breaks down prejudice and can improve cohesion<sup>11</sup>. If government actively promoted the broader community to engage in cultural gatherings and festivals, they would be more likely to join and to build understanding, community cohesion and value for culturally diverse groups.

***Recommendation: to strengthen inclusion local and state governments should actively promote and encourage the broader community to attend cultural events and festivals.***

## Meaningful Engagement and Inclusive Policy Design

The current systems in place to engage multicultural communities in Australia leave gaps, which mean that a large number of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, international students and those on other visas do not have their voices heard. There is a lack of leadership from government to ensure that all Australian residents are being heard and considered as policies, programs and budgets are developed. This in turn causes the rights of community members to be ignored. To overcome these issues, the government should include a budget paper specifically addressing the relevant budget line items relevant to CALD community members. ECCQ also propose that a Human Rights Act be implemented at a federal level, to overcome the various rights breaches that occur.

***“Communication and engagement from the Federal level needs to be a priority, not an after-thought or just a check-box. Communities need to feel the engagement is genuine and caring, and it doesn’t feel like that.”***

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<sup>11</sup> Hoter, E., & Shapira, N. (2022). Simulations in virtual worlds: improving intergroup relations and social proximity. *Intercultural Education (London, England)*, 33(4), 435–454. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2022.2080969>



***Recommendation: federal and state government publish a budget paper describing the funding allocated for CALD specific programs and activities.***

Organizations and peak bodies need direct and better access to government. Currently culturally diverse communities are treated as lower tier. Often when government engage with multicultural community leaders and members, there is no compensation for their time, which demonstrates a lack of respect. The community knows that “If it is important to you, you put money on it”. Currently the perception from those we spoke with was that the actions of government demonstrate an attitude of “You guys have a problem, so you need to fix it”. This includes the difference between compensation made for those who speak at government-led events and the overall funding put aside for events targeted at culturally diverse communities.

When the government is developing policies, there needs to be more time and resources allocated to consult a broader range of community members, so that a few individuals are not speaking on behalf of many culturally diverse and different communities. This may require more travel budget and high quality professional interpreting services to be made available or online options. ECCQ has filled this role for federal reviews previously, such as setting up consultations in kind when the national chronic disease action plan was being developed to ensure more voices were gathered.

***Recommendation: government establish culturally diverse community networks nationally, with regular sharing of information from ministers on current and emerging issues.***

***Recommendation: every government department establish a culturally diverse community advisory body, who are compensated for the time they spend providing advice.***

***Recommendation: government allocate more time and resources when developing policies to enable consultation of a broader range of culturally diverse community members.***

During the COVID-19 pandemic, on a federal level, online meetings with the community leaders began to occur. This included representatives from different cultures and states. This allowed information sharing which was firsthand information to communities not thirdhand. This direct communication with community leaders was essential to ensuring safe and accurate information was able to be shared with culturally diverse community members. Moreover, it provided different opportunities for vaccines to be distributed, such as in community centres, places of worship and at community gatherings. More structured connections between government and community leaders through proactive outreach, would provide community leaders and their members with up to date and accurate information about current and emerging issues.

The needs of marginalised communities, such as migrants and refugees, are different in nature and therefore, they require tailored and holistic interventions<sup>12</sup>. In particular, the process for the development of government policies currently lacks sufficient engagement with culturally diverse communities, which would provide preparation for successful implementation through a robust engagement strategy. Programs are developed and they are currently not addressing the needs of the communities they are designed for. Services that are needed are not being provided and communities are not getting better. It is critical that people with lived experience from a variety of cultures, visa types, ages and locations be heard, so that implementation of policies bring positive outcomes for all Australians.

Healthcare, mental health services, aged care services and community services are specific government departments that have an immense impact on culturally diverse communities. During our

***“The generations are experiencing trauma related to the migrant experience.”***

consultations, an example was shared by a member who had arrived in Australia at a very young age as a refugee from Poland. The Polish community is now seen as one of the more established communities, however, intergenerational trauma continues to create issues.

People who were born to migrant parents and grandparents continue to live with the impacts of growing up in a family who faced difficulties integrating into Australia decades prior. This impacts on children, grandchildren and so on.<sup>13</sup> An increase in the number of bilingual health workers and specific multicultural health positions and resources needs to be made in order to improve health outcomes.<sup>14</sup> In order to meet the needs of culturally diverse communities education of this service sector needs to include culturally diverse voices, education and understanding.<sup>15</sup> Not only this, but due to the significant need for mental health and wellbeing support, policies for more accessible and culturally safe mental health support needs to be implemented.<sup>16</sup> Many people for whom English is a second language need support and information in their first language as it increases understanding and engagement. Limited access to health and mental health professionals from CALD Communities who

<sup>12</sup> Finlay, S. (2020). *Engaging the youth: co-designing health promotion messages*. European Journal of Public Health, 30. <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckaa165.1294>

<sup>13</sup> Kelstrup, L., & Carlsson, J. (2022). Trauma-affected refugees and their non-exposed children: A review of risk and protective factors for trauma transmission. *Psychiatry Research*, 313, 114604–114604. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2022.114604>

<sup>14</sup> Abell, Bridget (2022) *Evaluation of the CALD COVID-19 Health Engagement Project (CCHEP) – Prepared for the Refugee Health Network Queensland and project partners*. <https://www.refugeehealthnetworkqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Summary-CCHEP-Evaluation-Final-2022.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Day, L., & Beard, K. V. (2019). Meaningful inclusion of diverse voices: The case for culturally responsive teaching in nursing education. *Journal of professional nursing*, 35(4), 277-281. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2019.01.002>

<sup>16</sup> Aumarah, K, Akbari, H, Louise, K & Keegan, D. (2023) *Cultural Transitions: Migrant Youth and Family Stories of Belonging and Cultural Wellbeing*. [https://www.hostint.org/files/ugd/d958bb\\_a39cd79d5f8d4c2cae7e4ab9c25a73c4.pdf](https://www.hostint.org/files/ugd/d958bb_a39cd79d5f8d4c2cae7e4ab9c25a73c4.pdf)

understand the cultural needs of people influence their acceptance of and engagement with care provided.

***Recommendation: implement co-design processes with culturally diverse community representatives through meaning engagement across government departments.***

***Recommendation: implement a co-designed and community led response to address the lack of accessibility and inequity for multicultural communities to health and mental health services.***

***Recommendation: implement policies that ensure provision of culturally safe and accessible mental wellbeing support is made for all culturally diverse community members.***

## Effective Communication

All Australians deserve to be able to understand and access information and services from government agencies and service providers. For some this requires professional interpreters and translators. Especially for essential areas of services, such as healthcare, aged care, policing and the legal system, professionally translated information that is culturally sensitive in a broader range of languages and modes of communication, especially on services provided, should be a requirement.

Given recent events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for accurate, professionally and culturally appropriate translated resources has been highlighted. Equally important is the need to provide ample levels of access to qualified and / or training interpreters who demonstrate ethical behavior in their work. This need does not just occur within health services, but across other government departments, where there continues to be an inappropriate and unfair use of children or other family members without any qualifications to provide language support for their parents in order for them to be able to navigate government services and systems. This reliance on children and ad hoc bilingual speakers without any specific training to provide this support means that these people carry this burden which causes stress and anxiety.<sup>17</sup> Apart from government agencies and service providers unfair use of children or

***“They are supposed to contract certified interpreters, but the rates of pay are at the level of cleaners, nannies or fast-food services, many certified interpreters have abandoned the profession or are thinking of leaving for better paying work.”***

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<sup>17</sup> Aumarah, K, Akbari, H, Louise, K & Keegan, D. (2023)

family members to fulfil the role of a professional interpreter or translator, there continues to be inconsistent access to interpreting services in various areas, for example – allied health services have access to free interpreters in Brisbane North and Brisbane South Health regions, however rural and regional areas do not have this same access.

Even those services which have language policies, such as health services, courts and police are not being appropriately reviewed, monitored and held accountable to ensure that they are implementing these policies. As a consequence, there is a lack of evidence for the effectiveness of policies that have been set out by government. This is why, despite access to free interpreters, these interpreters are not being engaged in appropriate ways. The risks of not engaging a trained interpreter in many of

***“No one is checking it’s being implemented. For example, an interpreter can come with no qualifications or training and the client will be charged the same as for a NAATI Certified interpreter.”***

these settings, for example in an oncologist appointment, for a medical scan, during an interview with police, may lead to negative outcomes, such as a lack of understanding of a diagnosis and treatment options or even wrongful convictions.<sup>18</sup> Government agencies and services funded by government should be held accountable for the unethical and unfair practices occurring which expose CALD consumers to high levels of risk, as well as exposing the services to high levels of legal liability.

Language services procurement is different in every state, including pay and conditions. This is having an impact upon the sustainability of the workforce. Additionally, the various language service providers engaged by government all have different standards of support for their staff. The language policies at a federal level are ad-hoc and not cohesive and their efficacy is not being monitored or audited. In order to sustain this important workforce and ensure that all Australians have access to

***Recommendation: the federal government conduct a review of language policies and implement a new holistic language policy.***

***Recommendation: establish a collaboration between federal and state governments to work with language providers, interpreter and translator representative bodies and community services on this important area.***

***Recommendation: ensure that government agencies and service providers are fulfilling their requirements to provide interpreters and are being held accountable.***

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<sup>18</sup> Sandra Hale, Jane Goodman-Delahunty & Natalie Martschuk (2019) *Interpreter performance in police interviews. Differences between trained interpreters and untrained bilinguals*, The Interpreter and Translator Trainer, 13:2, 107-131, DOI:10.1080/1750399X.2018.1541649

the information and services they need, a review of the language policies at a federal level is necessary and a collaboration is needed to support this essential sector.<sup>19</sup>

## The education we need

If we are going to ensure that Australia becomes a successful, multicultural society, we need to educate our young people about cultural diversity and the true history of Australia. This should include education from an indigenous perspective of Australia's history, as well as the ongoing impacts of colonisation. Our education system impacts on raising awareness within young people of being a unified country from many cultural backgrounds. We need to build

***“If you want to water a tree, which part of the tree do you water, the leaves or the roots of the tree?”***

understanding that not all multicultural communities are the same. ECCQ's consultees gave the example of the lack of awareness of Afghan cameleers who, from the 1870s, carried food, building materials, water, mail and medicine to the miners and pastoralists in Australia's central lands.<sup>20</sup>

***Recommendation: embed the multicultural framework into the curriculum and education system across Australia.***

***Recommendation: ensure Australia's school curriculum is reviewed on a regular basis, to include a variety of culturally diverse perspectives.***

***Recommendation: a national Anti-racism policy for schools be implemented across all states.***

Currently, there are large differences in curriculum in different states of Australia. Although the Australian Curriculum includes general capabilities, one of which is 'Intercultural Understanding', our consultations with community leaders and members revealed that the implementation of these capabilities is not sufficient<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> FECCA (2016) Australia's Growing Linguistic Diversity: An opportunity for a strategic approach to language services policy and practice. <https://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/feccalanguagesreport.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Stevens, Christine. (2011) *Australia's Afghan cameleers*. Australian Geographic.

<https://www.australiangeographic.com.au/topics/history-culture/2011/07/australias-afghan-cameleers/>

<sup>21</sup> Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (2023) *Australian Curriculum: General capabilities (ver 8.4)* <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/>

Numerous reports of racism in schools have been made to ECCQ. In New South Wales, the Department of Education has an Anti-racism policy<sup>22</sup> and has commissioned an Anti-racism Program in schools, which is being delivered by lived-experience trainers. This does not exist in Queensland and should be included across all states. These policies need to support staff and students to feel safe in schools and to be equipped to respond to instances of racism. In addition, more education on human rights, linked to a Human Rights Act is recommended.

Key service industries (including teachers, doctors, nurses, aged care workers, police, transport, tertiary educators) receive much training and professional development, but there are currently no compulsory and ongoing training requirements for learning about cultural diversity. ECCQ applaud the work that has been done to implement training on understanding First Nations peoples and cultures and propose that multicultural training be conducted alongside this. Additionally, multicultural awareness should be a compulsory component of all tertiary courses so that all students are equipped with intercultural skills to work in Australian society.

As mentioned earlier, government leaders and all public servants need to understand culturally responsive practice, so that they can implement it every day in their workplace. In particular awareness of unconscious bias is essential for those representing government, so that policies and programs delivered by government are reflective of Australian society and provide equitable outcomes.

***Recommendation: implement mandatory cultural awareness training for all government staff, funded service provider front line staff, key industries including healthcare, education, legal, aged care and transport.***

***Recommendation: require all tertiary education courses to include a unit on culturally responsive practice to build understanding of culture and unconscious bias.***

## Empowered Communities

Migrants to Australia may not have an understanding of the responsibilities of different levels of government and the service systems in Australia when they arrive. Government services and systems are not explained to many migrants on arrival. ECCQ acknowledges the provision of information to

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<sup>22</sup> NSW government (2022) *Anti-racism policy*. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/pd-2005-0235>

humanitarian entrants, however, information for skilled migrants, international students and those on other visas is not routinely provided. Social disadvantage and disparity between migrants and the broader Australian community is apparent in the areas of employment, health, mental health and housing. For example, despite the support offered by government institutions, the employment rate for migrants and refugee-background people is 33.3% for men and only 7.5% for women. These rates are strikingly lower than those of the Australian-born population where respectively 81.1% and 69.6% of men and women are employed<sup>23</sup>.

Skilled migrants, international students and those on other visas need more support to navigate different bureaucratic systems on arrival. ECCQ heard from community leaders of the Afrikaans and German communities who explained that people coming from South Africa and Germany don't understand the processes. They expect things work a certain way and when it doesn't, they are sent from one government department to the next, despite strong English language skills. The government should use all available resources, including community assets and invest more in multicultural-focused organisations who support social cohesion. There are already strong peak bodies and community organisations across Australia.

The government should build on what is already existing. Peak bodies, such as ECCQ and other members of the Federation of Ethnic Community Councils of Australia (FECCA) network are perfectly positioned to provide service system navigation support to all culturally diverse communities. These people need a place to go to be directed and receive information, advice and referrals to various government agencies and service providers. Additionally, grass-roots communities feel undervalued because of the significant contributions they make to supporting their community members without any funding. Community-led initiatives should be funded and supported by government. Community organisations know what their members need and can provide culturally appropriate support and a direct response. If this support is provided, trust in institutions will be developed, belonging and engagement will increase.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Perales, F., Xiang, N., Hartley, L., Kubler, M., & Tomaszewski, W. (2022). *Understanding access to higher education amongst humanitarian migrants: an analysis of Australian longitudinal survey data*. Higher Education, 84(2), 373–397. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-021-00772-x>

<sup>24</sup> Scanlon Foundation Research Institute (2023) *The Australian Cohesion Index Report*. <https://aci.scanloninstitute.org.au/>

Faith affiliation is extremely important for many migrant communities as it offers spiritual comfort, companionship, moral guidance, hope, and a sense of belonging and familiarity to settlers in new countries. In order to foster religious harmony and interreligious dialogue it is recommended that the role of national and state faith-based organisations and multifaith peak bodies should similarly be recognised and adequately supported by government.

***Recommendation: service system navigation hubs be implemented which are accessible for all migrant, refugee background, international students and other visa holders.***

***Recommendation: additional funding support for grassroots, community-led initiatives, including ethno-specific and faith-based organisations should be allocated.***

ECCQ has heard from numerous skilled migrants or recently qualified international students and skilled migrants seeking employment in Australia. These groups face the challenge of obtaining employment due to either: the requirement to have “Australian experience”, or the difficulty in getting their qualifications and skills recognised. If the government could provide bridging support to transition into the Australian work context and make transference of skills and qualifications for migrants easier to access, we would have a huge boost to our economy. Due to the challenge of migrants and refugees having their skills and experiences unrecognised, Queensland alone is losing \$250 million in the next 10 years.<sup>25</sup> ECCQ heard from our consultees that even those international students who were studying in Australian universities were told by their lecturers that Australian employers will only employ those from their culture.

***Recommendation: that a qualification recognition program which provides support and advice be implemented at a federal level.***

***Recommendation: provide navigation and funding support to those who are pursuing qualification recognition in workforce areas that have a high need for staff.***

***Recommendation: that mainstream businesses be provided incentives, such as tax cuts for engaging newly arrived skilled migrants or newly qualified international students and increasing the diversity in their workforce.***

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<sup>25</sup> Deloitte (2018) *Seizing the opportunity: Making the most of the skills and experience of migrants and refugees: A research report for Multicultural Affairs Queensland*. <https://www.des.qld.gov.au/multicultural-affairs/programs-initiatives/research-report>



Even those who are successfully able to gain employment face discrimination and violations of their rights in the workplace. Many migrants and international students do not report the incidences of discrimination because they don't want to lose their job and they need to pay their bills. They don't report to Fair Work for a number of reasons, including the lack of culturally diverse staff within the reporting system.

***Recommendation: implement stronger accountability for employers who take advantage of migrant-background staff including international students.***

***Recommendation: better supports for culturally diverse people to report discrimination and fair work violations.***

## Summary

ECCQ and its members call for the government to demonstrate a genuine value for multicultural Australians, through implementing policies to promote recognition and representation of multicultural Australians throughout government, government funded services and broader society. This would require allocation of funding to support broader, truly effective engagement and consultation with community leaders, more time and funding to co-design programs with community members, and more grassroots funded projects. Support for the interpreting and translating sector and changes to language services policies and contracting processes are essential to ensure equitable access to services and risks to be reduced. Improvements are needed in education of Australia's true history and culturally responsive practice in schools, tertiary education and in workplaces. Also, incentives to encourage businesses to engage migrant workers enabled by improvements in the qualification recognition system are needed. These changes would enable a truly accessible, equitable, inclusive and cohesive multicultural Australia.

## List of recommendations

- the federal government develop a clear definition of 'multicultural' through engagement with a wide range of communities, which is communicated through all government agencies and in any communications from government to the public.
- the government regulate the use of terms including multicultural, multiculturalism and other labels for culturally diverse communities, across mainstream media.
- federal and state governments meet a minimum percentage of staff and representatives from culturally diverse backgrounds.

- federal and state governments implement internship programs for people from migrant and refugee-backgrounds.
- organisations who receive federal funding should be required to have a percentage of staff, including in leadership positions, who are from a culturally diverse background.
- the federal government establish an Office for Multicultural Australia, which is elevated in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.
- implement requirements for culturally diverse representation in mainstream media channels and government agency communications, including representation of opinions, voices and images.
- government supports mainstream media to create more multicultural programs.
- government use public spaces to promote culturally diverse individuals and groups who have achieved success in a wide variety of fields.
- to strengthen inclusion local and state governments should actively promote and encourage the broader community to attend cultural events and festivals.
- federal and state government publish a budget paper describing the funding allocated for CALD specific programs and activities.
- government establish culturally diverse community networks nationally, with regular sharing of information from ministers on current and emerging issues.
- every government department establish a culturally diverse community advisory body, who are compensated for the time they spend providing advice.
- government allocate more time and resources when developing policies to enable consultation of a broader range of culturally diverse community members.
- implement co-design processes with culturally diverse community representatives through meaning engagement across government departments.
- implement a co-designed and community led response to address the lack of accessibility and inequity for multicultural communities to health and mental health services.
- implement policies that ensure provision of culturally safe and accessible mental wellbeing support is made for all culturally diverse community members.
- the federal government conduct a review of language policies and implement a new holistic language policy.
- establish a collaboration between federal and state governments to work with language providers, interpreter and translator representative bodies and community services on this important area.

- ensure that government agencies and service providers are fulfilling their requirements to provide interpreters and are being held accountable.
- embed the multicultural framework into the curriculum and education system across Australia.
- ensure Australia's school curriculum is reviewed on a regular basis, to include a variety of culturally diverse perspectives.
- a national Anti-racism policy for schools be implemented across all states.
- implement mandatory cultural awareness training for all government staff, funded service provider front line staff, key industries including healthcare, education, legal, aged care and transport.
- require all tertiary education courses to include a unit on culturally responsive practice to build understanding of culture and unconscious bias.
- service system navigation hubs be implemented which are accessible for all migrant, refugee background, international students and other visa holders.
- additional funding support for grassroots, community-led initiatives, including ethno-specific and faith-based organisations should be allocated.
- that a qualification recognition program which provides support and advice be implemented at a federal level.
- provide navigation and funding support to those who are pursuing qualification recognition in workforce areas that have a high need for staff.
- that mainstream businesses be provided incentives, such as tax cuts for engaging newly arrived skilled migrants or newly qualified international students and increasing the diversity in their workforce.