

## **Community Sector Statement on the Multicultural Framework Review**

Australia's community sector is an unwavering, strong proponent of multiculturalism. We commend the Federal Government for undertaking the Multicultural Framework Review (the Review) to 'assess and make recommendations on the institutional arrangements, legislative and policy settings required to advance a multicultural Australia and meet the current and future needs of multicultural Australia at the Commonwealth level.'<sup>1</sup>

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 definition of multiculturalism 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% of the population supports multiculturalism, with 87% believing migrants to be good for our economy.<sup>2</sup> The Federal Government must safeguard these aspirations and strengthen our national approach to multiculturalism.

The signatories to this statement urge the Federal Government to use this Review to the fullest extent, and to actively work for a stronger and more inclusive multicultural Australia.

As such, we collectively recommend that the Multicultural Framework:

### **Recommendation 1: Sets a progressive vision for multicultural Australia:**

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

### **Recommendation 2: Be founded on a human-rights approach**

We need a strengths and human-rights based approach to Australia's multiculturalism, consistent with our status as an original signature to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and commitment to other international human rights treaties. This includes looking holistically at the migrant experience in this country, to ensure we support an inclusive and resilient nation.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, Multicultural Framework Review, <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/multicultural-framework-review/about-the-multicultural-framework-review>

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

**Recommendation 3: Be a national framework**

Australia's multicultural framework must be a truly national commitment. Shared obligations to progress multiculturalism should sit across all levels of government, with responsibility for implementing the outcomes of the Review via dedicated, coordinated Commonwealth, State and Territory Government Action Plans based on shared principles and a shared policy platform.

**Recommendation 4: Embeds Australia's migration programs**

As a critical mechanism impacting Australia's cultural and economic diversity and growth, Australia's migration programs must be fit-for-purpose and factored meaningfully into a national multicultural framework.

**Recommendation 5: Recognises the diversity of multicultural communities**

Australia's multicultural framework must be founded on a recognition of intersectionality and that cultural and linguistic diversity are not the only markers of diversity. The experiences and perspectives of people from multicultural backgrounds are also affected also by other intersecting identity markers such as age, gender, sexual orientation, impairment, class, religion, and visa status, as well as factors such as the area in which you live. These identities do not exist independently; each informs the other and can have overlapping and compounding effects on a person's life experiences. This diversity demands strategies across government, civil-society and business, that respond to this through ensuring that multicultural lived experience in all its diversity, is at the heart of policy and program design.

**Recommendation 6: Recognises the importance of multicultural community organisations**

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

**Recommendation 7: Establish suitable machinery-of-government to support implementation**

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 including Action Plans for coordinated implementation.

**Recommendation 8: Significant and sustainable funding**

The Multicultural Framework must be supported by significant and sustainable funding to support its full implementation. This includes funding for Action Plans, machinery-of-government bodies and processes and for multicultural community organisations partner and co-design policies and programs and continue to deliver the extraordinary range of support they provide to multicultural communities across the nation.

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

Organisations signed up to the Sector Statement on the Multicultural Framework

