



Australian Government

Multicultural Framework Review

Australian Government Response

Introducing the Multicultural Framework Review

The Australian Government is pleased to release the report of the Multicultural Framework Review (available at www.homeaffairs.gov.au/multiculturalframeworkreview).

The Review examines the state of Australia's multicultural society, and recommends changes to laws, policies and institutional settings that build on the strengths of multiculturalism and enable it to respond to contemporary challenges.

A Panel of three eminent Australians – Dr Bulent Hass Dellal AO, Ms Nyadol Nyuon OAM and Ms Christine Castley – conducted the Review.

The Panel was supported by a Reference Group that included people with lived experience in or supporting multicultural communities, along with key non-government stakeholders. Reference Group members were: Mr Osmond Chiu; Ms Swati Dave; Ms Rana Ebrahimi; Mr Bachar Houli; Mr John Kamara; Ms Premila Levaci and Mr Mohammad Al-Khafaji.

Innovation to hear from many voices

The Government and the Panel wanted the widest possible range of Australian voices to contribute to the Review. That meant finding innovative and inviting ways to communicate with the public.

The Government received 90 submissions that helped to shape the Terms of Reference for the Review. It published information about the Review and an invitation to make submissions in texts in 33 languages and in audio format in 35 languages.

As a result of these efforts, the Panel received 796 submissions, 126 of them in languages other than English, which were then translated to inform its thinking.

The Panel also invited young people aged 4 to 24 to express in pictures their experiences and views of our multicultural society. The 103 artworks they contributed can be viewed at the Multicultural Framework Review Online Art Exhibition (available at www.homeaffairs.gov.au/onlineartexhibition).

The Government sincerely thanks the Panel, the Reference Group, and the many organisations and individuals who participated in the Review process.



Sustaining our multicultural success story

For at least 65,000 years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have sustained many cultures on this continent, and built trade and cultural connections between groups and with neighbouring peoples in Asia and the Pacific. First Nations peoples have resisted and survived systemic and sometimes violent attempts to eradicate them from the time of British colonisation in 1788. With thousands of years of culture, language and tradition, First Nations peoples remain a vital part of the national fabric. Successful multiculturalism starts with greater understanding and celebration of First Nations peoples' history and cultures.

While migration to the Australian continent began in 1788, post-World War II immigration programs have greatly shaped Australia's contemporary multicultural society. In just 79 years since 1945, Australia has welcomed 7.5 million migrants, including more than 950,000 refugees and people in humanitarian need. More than half of the population is born overseas or has at least one parent who was born overseas. About 5.5 million Australians speak a language other than English at home.

These profound and rapid changes have occurred peacefully and with little social upheaval. They are a source of national strength, optimism and pride.

But a multicultural society does not succeed by chance. It requires the hard work, collective commitment and goodwill of governments, organisations of all kinds, and ordinary citizens. It requires forethought and planning, an ability to learn the lessons of the past and apply them to the challenges of the present day.

Indeed, in their consultations throughout this review, the Panel identified Australian communities as the driving force behind the success and resilience of multiculturalism. Australians' embrace of acceptance and tolerance showed that multiculturalism was not just a social policy, but a lived experience.

In 1973, 50 years before the establishment of the Review, a paper by Mr Al Grassby, the then Immigration Minister, set out a new vision of Australia. Mr Grassby urged Australians to embrace their growing multicultural identity.

The 1978 Galbally Review of migrant services and programs and the 1989 National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia were two further milestones in the development of multicultural policy and the articulation of how an increasingly diverse society can advance and prosper.

The Multicultural Framework Review follows in the tradition of these and other reviews. Yet Australia has changed profoundly in the intervening years, and the new Review is timely.

Addressing contemporary challenges to a cohesive multicultural society

In the 21st century, the migration program has expanded significantly, with people arriving from countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, among many others, all contributing to Australia's evolving population mix.

The 2023 Mapping Social Cohesion report of the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute found that Australians maintained an overwhelmingly positive view of multiculturalism. Nearly 90 per cent of those surveyed agreed that "multiculturalism has been good for Australia", while 86 per cent agreed that "immigrants are generally good for Australia's economy".

But the report also noted that Australians' sense of national pride and belonging continued to decline. Discrimination and prejudice remained stubbornly common while concern about economic inequality was growing and it was in this context that the review was undertaken.



The power of Australian communities: key findings from the Review

The Panel travelled across Australia to consult more than 1430 individuals and 750 organisations, including community and faith groups, First Nations bodies, local government, business representatives, and service and sports clubs.

Among many insights arising from consultations and submissions, the Panel found:

- Australians are living in a new era of uncertainty, in which beliefs and concepts they once counted on for stability were being put into question.
- While government has a crucial role in establishing laws and policy to prevent discrimination, promote equal opportunities and provide access to strong public services, all people who call Australia home share responsibility for building and sustaining our multicultural society.
- Education and English language learning are vital tools for defining and communicating a shared Australian identity, and promoting understanding and connection between Australia's communities.
- Effective and sustainable language services are essential to providing access and equity to key services, particularly in high-risk health and legal settings.
- Regional, rural and even remote communities are increasingly culturally diverse and an important part of the multicultural story.
- Many factors shape the diverse lives of Australians, including cultural background, gender, sexuality and socio-economic disadvantage, along with barriers to social and economic inclusion. The Government must consider intersecting forms of discrimination when making policy.
- Young people, who will inherit and refine Australia's multicultural future, must be at the heart of policy-making considerations, and were a key focus of the Review.

Dr Dellal, Chair of the Review, has observed that simply being a culturally diverse society is not the same as being a successful multicultural society. Effective government policies and the engagement of all Australians are also essential. The Review creates a foundation on which to develop and communicate such policies.

Foundations for future generations: the Government response

The Panel made 29 recommendations, noting the particular importance of data, research and evaluation to underpin future work. The recommendations emerge from three core principles of the Review:

- **Connection** – setting the foundations of a multicultural Australia through leadership, planning, and accountability between three tiers of government and communities.
- **Identity and belonging** – creating a welcoming Australia through English language programs, citizenship policy, and participation in arts, culture, sports, and media. Experiences of discrimination and racism comprise the second of the top ten themes identified in submissions to the Review.
- **Inclusion** – building cultural capability into public services, modernising grant programs, ensuring digital inclusion, ensuring a sustainable language services sector, and meeting the unique needs of young people and regional areas.

This is among the most substantial reviews of Australian multiculturalism ever conducted. Its comprehensive consultation processes and thoughtful deliberations create the opportunity to strengthen government and community efforts into the future.

The Government commits to the Framework's principles and will be guided by them, as we build on our commitment to ensure Australia's multicultural settings are fit-for-purpose to harness the talents of all Australians.