

11 October 2023

Committee on the Multicultural Framework (Panel and Reference group)

Re: Improving Australia's Multicultural Framework to ensure better engagement, understanding and social cohesion on a policy, institutional and social level.

Dear Minister, Committee and Reference Group,

Thank you for reaching out to the Asian Australian Alliance (AAA) to provide input into the '*Multicultural Framework Review*'. AAA is committed to promoting a socially inclusive and cohesive society by empowering, advancing and providing a platform for Asians/Asian Australians to have their voices heard on many issues, achievements, initiatives and ideas as well as look at how Asians/Asian Australians can better engage with all levels of Government, civil society and other multicultural/CALD communities in Australia.

According to the 2021 Australian Census, approximately 17.4% of Australia's population identified as having Asian ancestry. This is a significant figure and it demonstrates the changing demographics of Australia. This also is a sign for the need for more cultural dialogue, education and opportunities for multicultural communities to thrive and be heard in Australia.

Given the recent COVID-19 crisis, and the rise of anti-Asian hate, there is no time more critical than now to ensure that we are reaching our CALD communities and that we are doing it in a way that is respectful, and all encompassing. The COVID-19 crisis highlighted the need for a more improved, comprehensive, grassroots, inclusive and accessible multicultural framework in providing tools, mechanisms and ways to promote a better understanding of multicultural Australia to all levels of government, media, civic and general society.

The AAA is pleased to present the below considerations for the Committee to take onboard for the '*Multicultural Framework Review*' to *advance a multicultural Australia, supporting a cohesive and inclusive multicultural society and ensuring settings are fit in harnessing the talents of all Australians.*

a) Creating more opportunities and paths of funding for multicultural communities

- Australia's official funding channels/opportunities for multicultural communities are too few, with those existing opportunities inaccessible due to how complex the application and reporting system is. The amount of paperwork and documentation required, as well as the complexity of the English used in wording the rules, conditions and requirements for applying for the funding is too complex, convoluted and difficult.
- Multicultural community groups/networks/organisations where English is not their first language, will find it difficult to apply for any government funding opportunities due to

how convoluted the application process is. This means that very grassroots groups/networks/organisations who actually reach the multicultural communities in need will not be able to receive the funding and only those 'tokenised' groups will receive it. Unfortunately, many of these tokenised groups do not reach multicultural communities at the most grassroots levels.

- Australia lacks a philanthropic culture, and this needs and should be developed as a collaborative effort between government and society - meaning those who are able to provide funding (non-governmental) need to create another philanthropic pathway which the government can push, promote and foster as part of their funding programs/initiatives.
- Review of current application and reporting structures needs to happen and an analysis of the common groups/organisations/networks who have or are receiving current government funding. This analysis needs to ask the question of how grassroots has the funding provided been dispersed and what impact has it had on the respective multicultural communities.
- There also needs to be an avenue to advocate for government funding for areas such as promoting multicultural media outlets, initiatives and social ventures which help promote greater understanding of various multicultural communities in Australia. This is a way to also combat racism, discrimination and spread awareness of various issues impacting multicultural communities.

b) Enhancing school curriculums to include more education about the issues various multicultural communities face

- Education is key to promoting better understanding and fostering an appreciation of different cultures, languages and religions. This education needs to start early, and where different schools have different initiatives, projects and programs to talk about multiculturalism, there needs to be a more streamlined and state and/or nationwide school programs in the school curriculum.
- This type of state and/or national school curriculum program needs to be more than just talking about different cuisines, festivals and all the fluffy stuff, but also needs to talk about the history of how multicultural Australia came to be. For example, Asian Australian history can be traced back as far as Indonesian fisherman trading with First Nations communities, the Chinese gold miners during the Gold Rush, Sikh Punjabi owning and growing pineapple farms and the incarceration of Japanese people in Australia etc.
- The education also needs to extend to also cover modern issues, such as different periods of racism and discrimination - eg, Islamophobia, anti-Asian Covid racism etc.

c) The creation of an undergraduate and/or postgraduate degree of various multicultural studies at universities

- To have bachelor or postgraduate studies that focuses on learning about different multicultural communities in Australian universities. For example, to have government funded Asian Australian studies to have a more comprehensive understanding of which critically examines the history, issues, sociology, religion, experiences, culture, and policies relevant to Asian Australians.

- The model for this already exists since the late 1960s in the United States of America with various degrees created for both undergraduate and postgraduate studies such as Asian American studies, Latino American studies, African American studies etc.
- Having the opportunity to specialise in these areas allows multicultural communities to take pride in their respective cultures in Australia and to have experts in the area will enhance societal understanding of the multicultural makeup in Australia.

d) To officially declare the creation for various multicultural communities to have a month to celebrate the history of their respective communities

- To celebrate multiculturalism is to provide a platform for multicultural voices. Having a dedicated month each year, acknowledged by the federal government will provide a voice to multicultural communities and create a better sense of social cohesion.
- For example - to have a dedicated month each year to celebrate 'Asian Australian Heritage Month' that recognises the contributions and influence of Asian/Asian Australians to the history, culture, and achievements of Australia.
- This can include launching relevant initiatives, events, film festivals, food events, sporting events, talks etc and will involve all levels of government to also take part, organise relevant events, projects and initiatives to celebrate multicultural Australia.
- To have individual multicultural community 'heritage months' will allow more focus, dedication and education of Australian society to appreciate various multicultural communities and to be able to learn about the respective communities.

e) Creating more accessible paths and opportunities for multicultural communities to engage and have dialogue with government

- This is a very important point because as government/public officials and representatives, it is a duty to understand what grassroots issues and concerns multicultural communities have in Australia.
- This can really be in any form, but to have more accessible channels and ways for engagement is important.

f) Addressing issues around casual, systematic and institutional racism and discrimination

- The conversations about racial barriers multicultural communities face in Australia are not discussed enough at governmental levels. Racism in all its forms is a major problem in Australia and only when it is formally addressed at a government level (local, state and federal) can it be reduced and a better understanding of racial issues can be achieved.
- Casual racism is something which cannot be stopped, but talking about it, condemning it at a state and federal government level is important to lessen the incidences. For example, anti-Asian hate was on the rise from 2020 due to Asian/Asian Australians getting blamed for the pandemic with ignorant views coming out.
- To acknowledge that there is a lack of cultural diversity at an institutional level and in positions of leadership in Australia needs to be looked at, discussed and projects created to spread awareness about.

- Surveys, polls and engagement between government and community can be rolled out to find out answers on institutional racism.

g) The importance of nuance when communicating to multicultural Australia in languages other than English

- Communicating in different languages is extremely important, particularly when needing to out policies etc. This requires grassroots engagement and ensuring the messages have been effectively communicated.
- When translating legislation, policies etc - it requires more than just blanket translation of messages. Translation needs to be tailored to the respective multicultural communities and nuance needs to be given.]doesn't mean a blanket translation of the message itself, but it is about being nuanced.

The AAA thanks you for the opportunity to provide feedback to this Committee, and we look forward to further discussion on this pressing issue.

Should you wish to discuss any aspect of this submission further, you may contact us at info@asianaustralianalliance.net .

Warm regards,

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