

Rebuilding Trust

For a Multicultural Victoria

Victoria Multicultural Review | Final Report

George Lekakis AO, Dr Bulent (Hass) Dellal AO, Carmel Guerra OAM, Miriam Suss OAM & Mark Duckworth PSM

Acknowledgement of Country

The Review Advisory Group proudly acknowledges the First Peoples of Victoria. We acknowledge their ongoing strength in practising the world's oldest living culture. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners' lands, waters, and skies on which we live, and we pay respects to their Elders past and present.

A note of Appreciation

We would like to sincerely thank every Victorian who participated in the Review – your honest and fearless contributions, and your trust in us, are deeply appreciated.

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A Letter to the Premier and Minister for Multicultural Affairs

Dear Premier and Minister,

This is the Final Report of the Victorian Multicultural Review (the Review).

The Review arrives at a turning point in Victorian history.

Over the past five years, Victoria's multicultural and multifaith communities have been severely tested by the pandemic, economic uncertainty, and global conflicts. The convergence of these complex challenges has placed extraordinary strain on social cohesion.

Victoria's reputation as a safe place of diversity and inclusion — a reputation built by generations of post-War migrants—is at a crossroad.

Our community's future safety and prosperity will be determined by how we respond to these challenges.

With that in mind, the Advisory Group was asked to examine how effectively Victoria's multicultural policies, programs, and institutions serve our diverse communities.

To inform this work, the Advisory Group engaged widely with Victoria's multicultural and multifaith communities, as well as key organisations. We met with stakeholder organisations, held public consultations across metropolitan and regional areas, and hosted online forums. We also received more than 150 written submissions from individuals and organisations.

The community response to the Review was strong. Victorians from all backgrounds were candid about the issues and barriers they faced, as well as their aspirations for a better life.

Community feedback went beyond the multicultural affairs portfolio, touching on a range of policies across government that profoundly impact multicultural communities. As a result of that feedback, the Advisory Group unanimously believes it is critical to elevate the Multicultural Affairs portfolio within the government.

Multicultural Affairs must be elevated and made a whole-of-government responsibility. All government services—not just the Multicultural Affairs portfolio—must reflect and serve the diversity of the Victorian community.

Taking this action will meet the needs of a dynamic and diverse Victoria. It will also signal to the rest of Australia and the world that Victoria leads by example.

Now is not the time for half measures. Proactive and sustained action is needed by governments, institutions and communities. Everyone must stand together to ensure all Victorians feel safe, heard, valued and respected.

The state needs to commit to a deliberate refresh and long-term strategy—rather than reactive, piecemeal measures—in order to remain a vibrant, inclusive society.

With that in mind, the Advisory Group made **41 recommendations** for action, as well as **17 additional actions** for consideration.

These actions are significant. If implemented, they will ensure Victoria's multicultural communities remain Victoria's greatest strength—and, in turn, fuel social, cultural, and economic progress and serve as our best protection against division and adversity.

Now is a time for leadership.

We look forward to the Government's response to the Review and its recommendations.

Let's build a better Victoria together.

Yours sincerely,

George Lekakis AO, Chair |

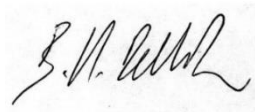


Dr Bulent (Hass) Dellal AO

| Carmel Guerra OAM

| Miriam Suss OAM

| Mark Duckworth PSM



Advisory Group

The Review has been led by George Lekakis AO, a respected multicultural leader. A targeted advisory group consisting of community experts was established to support Victoria's Multicultural Review.

George Lekakis AO, Chair



George Lekakis AO is a long-standing champion of multicultural communities, with decades of social work experience supporting and advocating for the social, economic and political inclusion of diverse multicultural and multifaith people.

As the longest serving Chairperson of the VMC and former Chairperson of the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV), his leadership was instrumental in shaping key multicultural policies, including the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001* and the *Multicultural Act 2004*. He has forged strong partnerships across sectors, elevated diverse voices, supported individuals and communities, and continues to be a driving force for social justice, inclusion and representation. Now leading the Review of Multicultural Affairs, George brings a deep commitment to ensuring that the Victorian Government is responsive to its culturally diverse society and that every community has a seat at the table and a voice in shaping Victoria's future.

Hass Dellal AO



Dr Bulent (Hass) Dellal AO is the Chair of the Australian Multicultural Foundation, Former Executive Director of the Australian Multicultural Foundation (1989-2024) an organisation established in 1989 to promote a strong commitment to Australia as one people drawn from many cultures.

Former Chair of SBS Television (Special Broadcasting Service) and the Australian Multicultural Council and served as Panel Chair for the Commonwealth's Multicultural Framework Review, May 2023.

He has over 30 years of experience in multicultural affairs and serves on a number of boards and councils including the Australian National Maritime Museum, Emeritus Patron of the Islamic Museum of Australia, is Co-Chair of the Victoria Police Multifaith Council and is a fellow of the Williamson Leadership Program.

Internationally, he established the European Multicultural Foundation. He also introduced the biannual Diversity Matters Conferences for Commonwealth Nations and has promoted the Australian multicultural experience internationally on many occasions.

Carmel Guerra OAM



Carmel Guerra OAM is the founding CEO of the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY), the first organisation in Australia to work exclusively with migrant and refugee young people. CMY is recognised both within Australia and internationally as an industry leader on multicultural youth and family issues, which are now at the forefront of national social policy agendas.

For over 30 years, Carmel has built and strengthened partnerships between young people, support services and local communities across Victoria. She has led the development of innovative ways of meeting challenges in the community and established MYAN Australia, the national body for multicultural youth issues. She has been recognised through numerous accolades including: a Deakin Honorary Doctorate, a Medal of the Order of Australia, the Victorian Premier's Award for Community Harmony, the Harvard Non-Profit Fellowship, and the Victorian Women's Honour Roll.

Miriam Suss OAM



With over 30 years of experience as a social worker and community development professional, Miriam Suss OAM has dedicated her life to supporting others. Today, she continues to give back through her leadership and service as a Board Director, including Jewish Care Victoria, LanguageLoop, Alfred Hospital, and the University of Melbourne Social Work Alumni Associations, championing inclusive and compassionate communities.

Mark Duckworth PSM



Mark Duckworth PSM FIPAA (Vic) is the Co-Director of the Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies, and a Senior Research Fellow at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation and in the Faculty of Health, Deakin University.

Before joining Deakin University in 2019 he had more than 30 years' experience in the Victorian and New South Wales public sectors leading significant policy and legislative reform initiatives on intergovernmental relations, multicultural affairs, veterans' affairs, public administration, security and emergencies and community resilience.

He held a number of senior executive roles in the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet and previously worked at the New South Wales Cabinet Office, The University of Sydney Law School and the Victorian Law Reform Commission.

His current research focus is on building resilience to social harms, disaster resilience, co-design and strategies for trust building between government and communities.

Executive summary

Victoria has always been a place of great diversity and difference—and, at our best, a place of great inclusion.

Before colonialism, Aboriginal Victorians spoke around 40 different languages. At the height of the Gold Rush one-in-four adult males were Chinese. John Joseph, the first miner put on trial after fighting for democracy at the Eureka Stockade, was African-American.

Now we are one of the world's greatest multicultural successes. A place where citizens come from 300 different cultural backgrounds, speak more than 290 languages and dialects, and follow almost 200 faiths, but all share the same rights and responsibilities.

Every Victorian belongs. Every Victorian is equal. Every Victorian matters.

That acceptance and celebration of difference is the secret of Victoria's strength—and it is under sustained attack.

Ignorance and intolerance are growing. Acts of hatred are spreading. And many Victorians are rightly outraged.

But outrage alone will not make people safe.

Governments, private and public sector institutions, NGOs, multicultural and multifaith communities, and individuals must come together and confront racism and vilification at every turn.

In December 2024, the Premier announced a suite of measures to strengthen social cohesion and ensure all communities felt safe and supported. The measures included the delivery of a Multicultural Review and consideration of a social cohesion pledge.

In April 2025, the Advisory Group was established to lead the Review, examining Victoria's multicultural policies, institutions, and personnel. The overarching aim of the Review was to better respond to current challenges and position Victoria to address future social cohesion issues and crises more effectively.

The Advisory Group conducted extensive desktop research. It also invited public submissions and carried out targeted and public consultations across Victoria. Despite the Group's tight timeframe, it engaged with more than 600 Victorians and received more than 150 written submissions.

The Review is informed by those public consultations. It contains 41 recommendations and 17 additional actions for the government's serious consideration.

Key findings include:

- Elevating government leadership on multicultural affairs is critical to the portfolio's success. This includes prioritising a structural reform of the multicultural affairs portfolio and the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC).
- Developing a new whole-of-government multicultural affairs policy framework, noting that the last one was released in 2017.

- Addressing longstanding systemic issues, such as representation on decision-making bodies and workforces, that reflect the community and consistent multicultural data collection across departments and funded agencies.
- Addressing racism and social cohesion challenges requires strong leadership, ongoing and increased resourcing and coordination by the government.
- Support for community capacity building and collaboration is needed to strengthen the work of multicultural organisations and their engagement with governments and Victorian communities.
- The provision of interpreting and translating services in government settings is crucial and warrants review.

One of the Review's recurring themes is the erosion of trust in government institutions and agencies. This finding is consistent with a broader global trend.

The initial scope of the Review was limited to the Multicultural Affairs portfolio. However, the Advisory Group's findings confirmed the need for action to go beyond the portfolio. In fact, the Advisory Group strongly believes that there is an urgent need for a whole-of-government approach to multicultural affairs because the diverse needs and contributions of Victoria's multicultural communities intersect across multiple areas, including health, education, justice and housing. Systemic change cannot be achieved or sustained without shared responsibility and collaborative action across all government agencies.

Although progress has been achieved, the Review emphasises the urgent need for a more coordinated, inclusive and community-led approach. Building social cohesion and restoring trust will require ongoing effort, cultural competence within institutions, and a clear dedication to collaborating with Victoria's multicultural and multifaith communities.

“Don’t just ask us to apply—ask us to shape. Don’t label us as ‘vulnerable’—see us as visionary. Respect our intelligence, our time and our voice. Invite us into the conversation—because a policy not built with us cannot serve us.

To every government leader in this room: speak plainly, act boldly and listen deeply. Translate your systems into our languages—not just linguistically, but culturally. Trust that we hold ancient and modern wisdom and walk with us in partnership—not power over.

We are not asking for charity. We are calling for social justice. We are not asking to be saved. We are offering to help transform community.”

(Open Community Consultation – Geelong, May 2025)

Recommendations

Government leadership in Multicultural Affairs is critical

1. Elevate the Multicultural Affairs portfolio by:
 - a) The Premier leading a whole-of-Government multicultural affairs strategy to lead and monitor the implementation of the recommendations of this Review.
 - b) Appointing a stand-alone Minister for Multicultural Affairs.
 - c) Appoint a Multicultural Affairs Coordinator General to lead the implementation and coordination of the whole-of-Government multicultural affairs strategy.
 - d) Require all Cabinet submissions to include an impact statement on multicultural affairs, inclusion and social cohesion.
 - e) Require, where relevant, that all Ministerial submissions incorporate a multicultural impact statement.
 - f) Ensure the Multicultural Affairs portfolio stays within the Department of Premier and Cabinet, with ongoing oversight by the Premier.
2. Appoint a Parliamentary Secretary to assist the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in the delivery of portfolio functions.

Reform the VMC's governance

3. Amend the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011* to establish a new statutory entity, Multicultural Victoria, and replace the existing VMC, which should:
 - a. Appoint Commissioners (a Chair and two Deputy Chairs) to lead the new statutory authority,
 - b. Establish a Multicultural Community Advisory Group (MCAG) appointed by the Premier and/or the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, to advise the new authority,
 - c. Remove the requirement for Regional Advisory Councils, instead utilising the proposed MCAG and existing regional and metropolitan-based ethnic communities' councils and their networks and strengthening their role.
4. Merge the functions of the Multicultural Affairs portfolio and current VMC into Multicultural Victoria, bringing together community engagement, needs identification, research, policy programs and grants management.
5. Amend the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011* to make Multicultural Victoria:
 - a. Responsible for coordinating rigorous whole-of-government strategic planning and reporting for Multicultural Affairs, including an ongoing annual consultation process with multicultural and multifaith communities across Victoria.
 - b. Prepare and table in Parliament a State of Multicultural Affairs report every two years, following the whole-of-government multicultural consultation processes.

A new whole-of-government policy framework

6. Update whole-of-Victorian-Government reporting requirements for Multicultural Affairs, incorporating an updated outcomes framework with new measures to better gauge equitable outcomes, inclusion and representation.
7. Require that board and committee appointments reflect community demographics, and include the requirement of multicultural diversity in appointment submissions.

8. The Victorian Government should establish and implement a minimum multicultural data set across government and funded agencies to enable comparative analysis with community demographics to monitor access and equity.
9. Victorian Government departments and agencies should develop data-driven multicultural inclusion plans to better monitor accessibility and equitable outcomes over time.

Anti-racism and social cohesion

10. Increase funding to deliver *Victoria's anti-racism strategy 2024-29* to ensure initiatives are delivered and have an impact across all relevant portfolios.
11. The Victorian Government should fund and coordinate a whole-of-government data and evidence collection point on reported incidents of racism and hate crimes, using collated data to inform investment as well as the design of place-based responses in partnership with communities.
12. Embed a requirement that—following adverse local or international events—the new statutory entity, Multicultural Victoria, undertakes community safety planning with multicultural communities in partnership with Victoria Police, Emergency Management Victoria and other relevant government departments and agencies.
13. Support funding for intercultural and interfaith networks and initiatives through the proposed Community Capacity Building and Collaboration grants program.

Community capacity building and collaboration

14. The Multicultural Affairs portfolio should review its grant programs guidelines and procedures—ensuring they are accessible and responsive to multicultural and multifaith communities and do not unintentionally disadvantage groups or activities that support intercultural initiatives. This review includes but is not limited to:
 - a. Considering additional grant application avenues, especially for groups that may have less digital capability and/or resources to dedicate to these processes;
 - b. Ensuring reporting requirements are not overburdensome and commensurate with grant amounts and community organisations' capabilities and capacity;
 - c. Conducting regular scheduled outreach and engagement with communities on grant programs and helping build the capabilities of multicultural and multifaith organisations to meet grants application, management and reporting requirements; and
 - d. Ensuring grants' application and assessment processes do not disadvantage smaller organisations who may have limited experience in applying for government funding.
15. Establish a new Capacity Building and Collaboration funding stream (estimated at \$20 million per year) to facilitate large, community-led grants for community-specific and multicultural peak bodies and local governments, as well as smaller grants of up to \$5,000 for multicultural community organisations.
16. Establish a \$10 million community infrastructure and Multicultural Hub grants program to operate over a three-year grants cycle, exclusive of pre-election commitments.
17. Provide:
 - a. increased multi-year funding support to multicultural seniors' community organisations, enabling them to provide continuity of service and increased social support to seniors; and

- b. additional investment towards a community-led education program to raise awareness of elder abuse, uphold the rights of multicultural seniors, and connect them to culturally safe support services that protect their safety and dignity.
- 18. Develop a calendar of events that provides funding between \$100,000 and \$200,000 for approximately 20 to 30 multicultural and multifaith events and between \$50,000 and \$100,000 for roughly 50 to 60 events—enhancing their impact and increasing their reach.
- 19. Develop an online Victorian Multicultural Directory emanating from the grants database with the approval of grant recipients.

Interpreting and translating services

- 20. As part of the current refresh of the Victorian Government’s Language Services Policy, the Victorian Government should declare language services an essential service. As a result, the government should only engage NAATI credentialed interpreters and translators and invest in training and accreditation pathways to improve interpreter availability and quality.
- 21. Review the delivery of language services to assign critical service areas to LanguageLoop, cease its status as a state-owned enterprise, and administratively transfer it to the proposed new entity, Multicultural Victoria.

Social cohesion pledge

- 22. Strengthen existing contractual mechanisms in funding contracts to ensure all organisations receiving government funding are upholding the state’s laws and contributing positively to social cohesion and community harmony.

Arts, heritage and multicultural media

- 23. Elevate the Immigration Museum as a cultural icon and a place of profound significance in Victoria by allowing it to pursue governance autonomy with a platform to preserve the heritage of immigrant communities.
- 24. Support the ongoing core coordination activities of Multicultural Museums Victoria through the proposed Community Capacity and Collaboration Fund.
- 25. Review the Victorian Government’s actual spending outcomes on and engagement protocols with independent multicultural media—ensuring it reflects the essential role it plays in the dissemination of essential information to multicultural communities. Independent multicultural media’s training and development should be supported through the proposed Capacity Building and Collaboration grants program.

Victoria Police

- 26. Prioritise and elevate multicultural community engagement within Victoria Police’s command structure.
- 27. Assist in the provision of expertise and support with the development of community safety plans for communities affected by overseas conflicts and global displacement.
- 28. Increase visitation to and engagement with English language schools for new arrivals across Victoria, introducing teaching on Victorian laws and the role of police.
- 29. Maintain positive community relationships with multicultural and multifaith community organisations across Victoria, delivering community education about crime prevention.

Education

30. Re-establish the Ministerial Multicultural Education Advisory Committee. The Committee should review the efficacy of and, where appropriate, make recommendations on the enhancement of multicultural inclusion, anti-racism, community language and new arrival programs.
31. Fund settlement support services and transitional programs at community English language schools to ensure newly arrived children and families are connected to necessary supports and can successfully transition into other educational institutions.
32. Ensure language preservation by increasing funding for community language initiatives, including community language schools, multilingual story-time programs, bilingual kindergartens.
33. The Department of Education should:
 - a) Enforce and increase the minimum number of language learning hours (currently 150 minutes) to strengthen language learning in the Victorian public school system.
 - b) Consult multicultural education providers and review the possibility of adopting a standardised scaling for completing any language at VCE level.
 - c) Introduce scholarships for language teachers and recognise overseas teaching qualifications to fill the current gaps.

Multicultural young people

34. Prioritise a youth-focused anti-racism action plan as part of Victoria's Anti-Racism Strategy.
35. Commit \$3 million to establish a Multicultural Youth Worker Program, funding 20 locally-based multicultural youth workers across Victoria to work with multicultural young people and communities of greatest need, especially those in growth corridors and in rural/regional Victoria.
36. Expand and extend the Community Support Group program to address the immediate challenges and emerging issues facing young people and their families.
37. Establish a new multicultural youth-led, lived-experience grants program to enhance multicultural youth participation and leadership capabilities, sourced through proposed community capacity building and collaboration grants program.
38. Extend funding to grassroots community associations, enabling them to grow their capability to initiate intergenerational activities and support young people's needs and aspirations.

Sport and recreation

39. Establish a multicultural sports inclusion framework that addresses participation, cultural responsiveness, and community cohesion.
40. Fund a multicultural sport and recreation inclusion hub, increasing access to mentoring and other forms of leadership development, as well as organisational leadership and capability building. Sport and recreation are recognised as invaluable in supporting young people's community participation as well as growing their leadership skills and experience.
41. Establish a multicultural sport inclusion officer program for staff to work across many sports and multicultural communities to increase participation of young people from multicultural backgrounds with sporting clubs and associations

Additional Actions

Health

1. Reestablish the Multicultural Health Education Unit.
2. Ensure that health sector boards reflect the diversity of the Victorian population as a matter of priority.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

3. Release the Diverse Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework and Blueprint for Action as soon as possible — disseminating the Blueprint to all service providers, along with guidance on the implementation requirements.
4. Establish a Multicultural Capacity Building and Responsiveness Grants Program of \$6.5m per annum. The funding should be in addition to grants currently provided to some multicultural service providers.
5. Establish a dedicated Multicultural Advisory Committee (MAC) to advise the Department for Health and the Chief Officer for Mental Health and Wellbeing.
6. Develop a multicultural mental health research and evaluation agenda and program, at a cost of \$250,000.

Family Violence

7. Increase core and program funding for ethnic-specific, multicultural and faith-based organisations to strengthen prevention, early intervention and crisis responses. This should include multi-year, flexible funding to enable community-led innovation, as well as the practical application of lived experience, gender equity and cultural knowledge.
8. Provide long-term funding to expand and strengthen InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence as the statewide specialist service for multicultural communities. Invest an additional \$8 million to \$10 million over four years to:
 - Build InTouch's service footprint across regional and metropolitan Victoria.
 - Enhance InTouch's crisis response, casework, legal, therapeutic and systemic advocacy functions.
 - Deliver sector-wide capacity-building in partnership with Safe and Equal, with a focus on cultural responsiveness, intersectionality and workforce upskilling.
9. Establish a dedicated multicultural prevention funding stream under the family violence primary prevention investment strategy. Prioritise long-term, place-based and community-driven prevention initiatives that are informed by cultural knowledge and shift harmful norms and drivers of violence.
10. Fund the Driving Cultural Diversity in the Family Violence Workforce pilot at RMIT's Workforce Innovation and Development Institute, investing \$2.5 million over two years to:
 - Recruit and support a cohort of multicultural women into the family violence sector.
 - Deliver a culturally adapted Fast Track induction aligned to the Family Violence Core Functions Framework and the Australian Qualifications Framework.
 - Create employment pathways that enable workers to achieve minimum qualifications through earn-and-learn models.

- Strengthen supervision, professional development, and wellbeing systems within host organisations.
- Evaluate outcomes to inform long-term, scalable workforce strategies.

11. The existing family violence service system should establish service models that respond to the needs of young people.

Child Protection

12. Child Protection protocols should ensure that advice from the relevant multicultural or faith community is sought in guiding the implementation of an intervention or protection plan.
13. Designated Practice Leaders should be appointed in each regional office (metropolitan and rural) with multicultural and/or refugee and trauma expertise.
14. Review existing cultural competency training to ensure its efficacy and appropriateness and ensure training does not reinforce stereotypes.
15. Aim to recruit child protection staff to reflect community demographics.

Economic Opportunity – Small Business

16. Pilot a multicultural small business project involving a partnership between a multicultural non-government organisation and the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Voting & Electoral System

17. The Victorian Electoral Commission is commended for its efforts to date but is called upon to deliver a more developed education package. To ensure greater understanding of the electoral system and reduce the proportion of informal votes, the education package should be developed in partnership with the community and multicultural media.

Part 1: Introduction & Context

Introduction

Victoria is a proud multicultural, multi-faith community.

We're proud of the diversity of places where we come from and proud of what generations of migrants have built: a state of social cohesion and community harmony.

Our commitment to social cohesion is a social contract. It is binding. It means we share a responsibility to promote respectful dialogue and understanding.

It's important to remember that, although Victorians come from every corner of the world, we share this part of the world—and have a responsibility to protect each other.

We must not let global events divide us as a multicultural, multifaith community, otherwise we play into the hands of those agents of intolerance and terror—such as white supremacists—who want to destroy all our multicultural communities.

Victoria's social cohesion is being tested by a convergence of challenges, ranging from the aftermath of the Coronavirus pandemic and subsequent economic crisis to ongoing global and local events. The impact of the pandemic was profound, exacerbating inequality, deepening divisions and undermining community trust in government and institutions. The pandemic also disproportionately impacted multicultural and multifaith communities, causing economic instability, limited or inequitable access to health services, and heightened social isolation.

Due to the pandemic, Victoria's social cohesion was already strained before the recent escalation of the long-standing Israel-Gaza conflict. Its impact on local communities has been devastating, triggering disturbing rises in antisemitism and Islamophobia, as well as a fracturing of interfaith partnerships. Despite multiple attempts by government and community leaders, community harmony, safety and social cohesion have continued to deteriorate. Acts of hate, racism and discrimination against diverse communities and peoples are also on the rise, with Victorians of African, Asian and Indian backgrounds often targeted by racist attacks.

On 17 December 2024, the Premier of Victoria announced a suite of measures to address the increasing challenges to social cohesion and strengthen community harmony. This included two commitments to be led by the Minister for Multicultural Affairs:

- delivery of a **targeted multicultural review**, to examine Victorian multicultural policies, institutions and personnel. The Review will provide recommendations to the government on how these mechanisms can be equipped to reject division, build bridges and resolve conflict to bring people together; and
- development and implementation of a '**social cohesion pledge**' (the Pledge) that multicultural organisations must observe to apply for government grants.

The Review provided an opportunity to understand how multicultural institutions and policies are faring and how they may be strengthened to respond to current challenges and address future social cohesion issues and crises.

Community consultations and submissions to the Review showed that the current challenge is not confined to the Multicultural Affairs portfolio. Instead, a whole-of-government response is

needed. Therefore, the Advisory Group decided to go beyond the bounds of its terms of reference and address a range of issues across government.

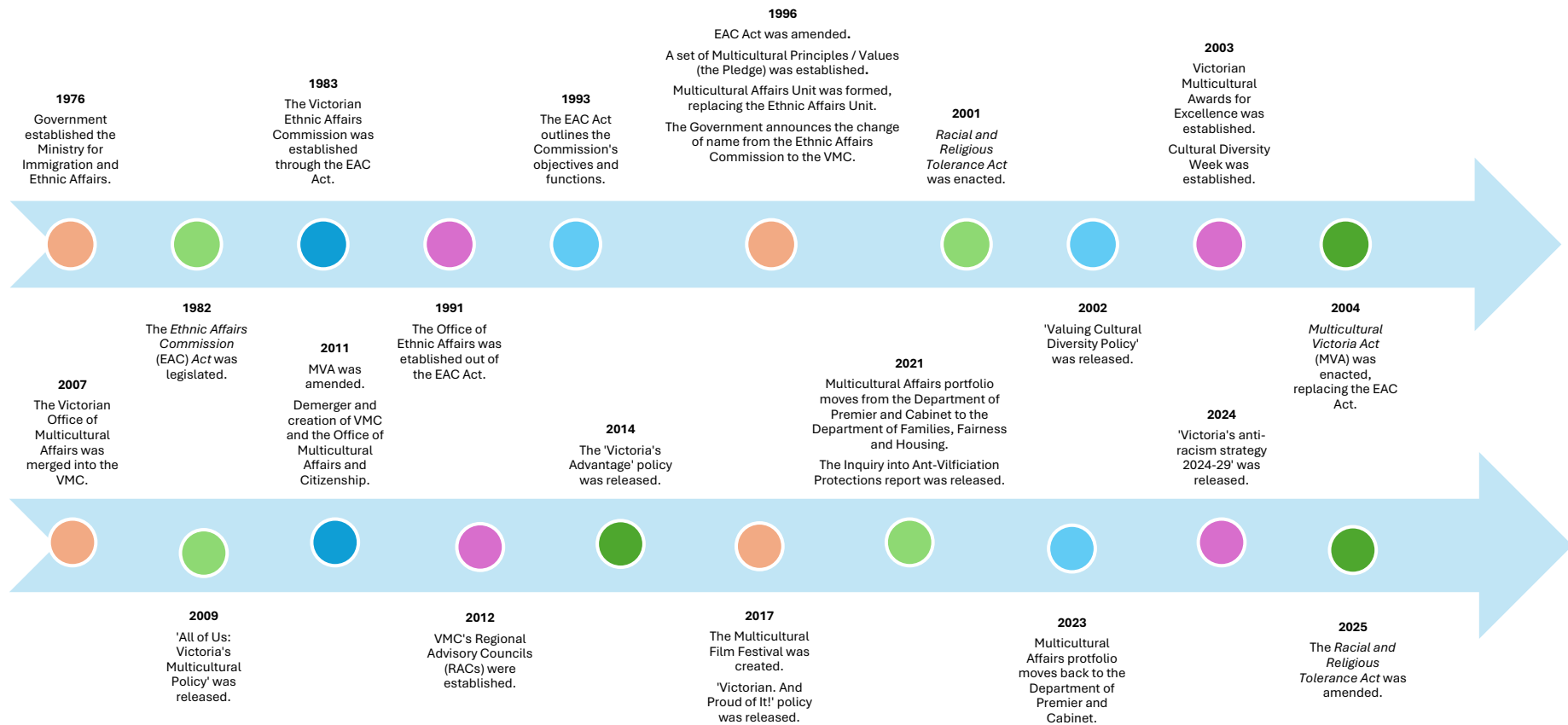
The purpose of the Review is to recommend actions to the Victorian Government that will respond to the current challenges facing Victoria's multicultural and multifaith communities and build a more cohesive and resilient multicultural Victoria.

History of multicultural policy in Victoria

1960 – 1965: Assimilation “White Australia” Policy

1966 – 1973: Integration Policy

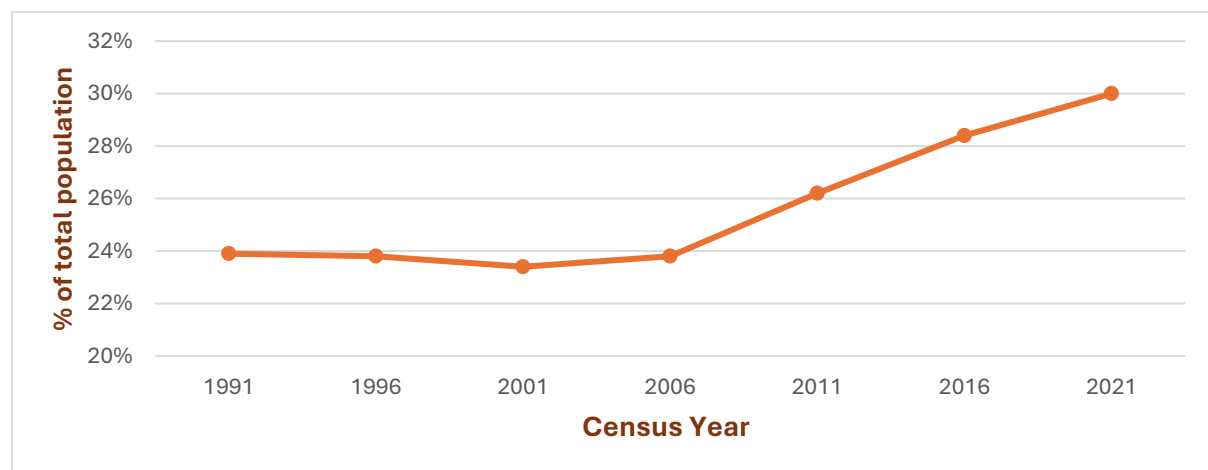
1973 – Current: Multicultural Policy



Victoria's demographic landscape

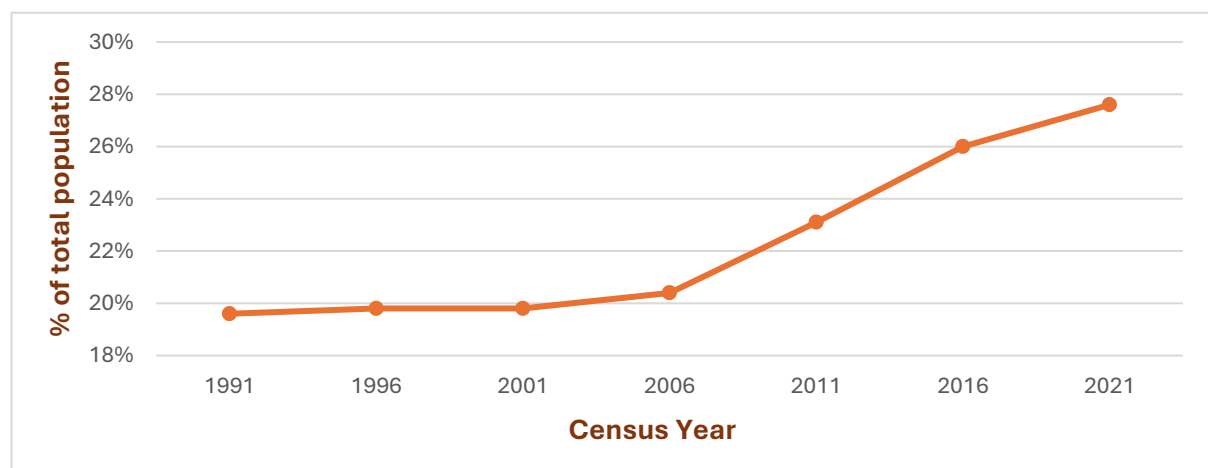
Victoria is home to people who speak 290 languages, have more than 300 ancestries, and follow almost 200 faiths.¹ Successive waves of immigration have shaped Victoria's demographic landscape. As a result, our multicultural diversity is a core part of the Victorian identity, character and way of life—from the state's established and ageing multicultural communities to more recently arrived migrants who are working to establish themselves and their families, as well as diaspora communities that support, maintain and share cultural and linguistic traditions.

Figure 1: Overseas-born residents as a percentage of Victoria's total population



(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021)

Figure 2: Language other than English speakers as percentage of Victoria's total population

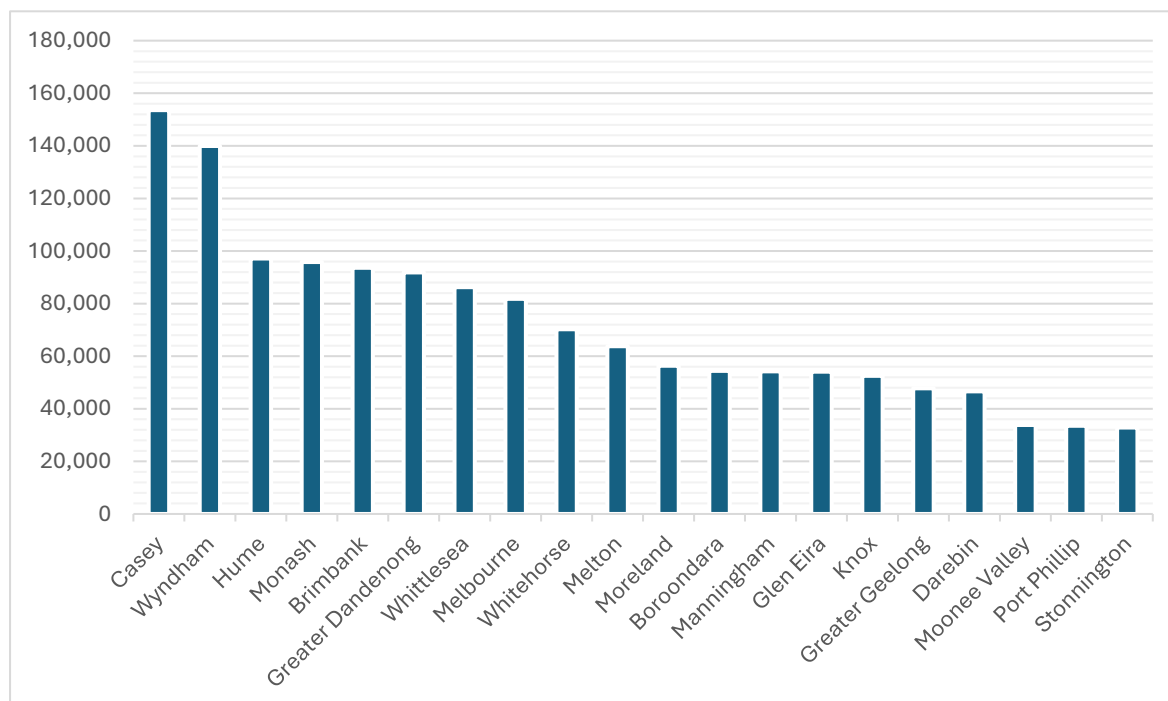


(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021)

Melbourne's population increased by 2 million since 2000—compared to a 1.2 million increase in population during the last population boom, between 1947 and 1971. The diversity of Melbourne and Victoria has increased as the population has grown. Now, more than half of Victorians population were either born overseas or have a parent who was born overseas. In addition, more than 50 per cent of Victorians are affiliated with a religion and almost one-in-three Victorians speak a language other than English at home². In addition, Victoria's diversity is

projected to increase even more. As a consequence, multiculturalism is now a defining characteristic of Victorian society that needs to be a core part of government business.

Figure 3: Top 20 Victorian local government areas (LGAs) with the highest overseas-born population

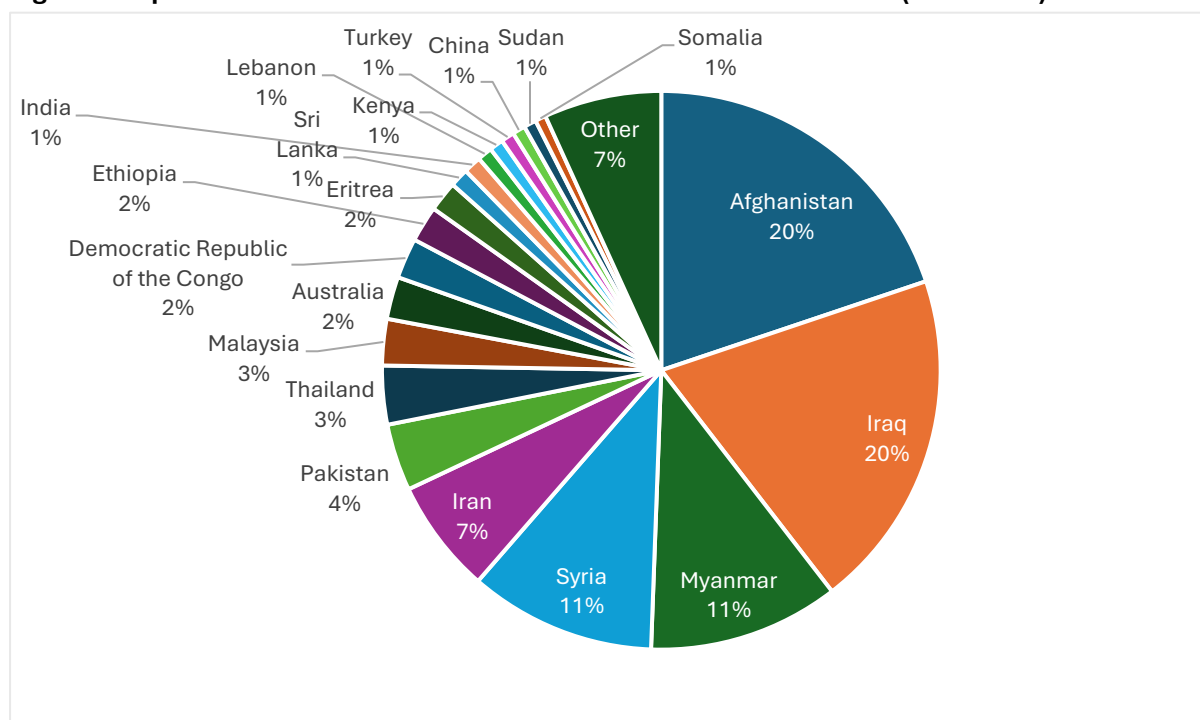


(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021)

Humanitarian entrants

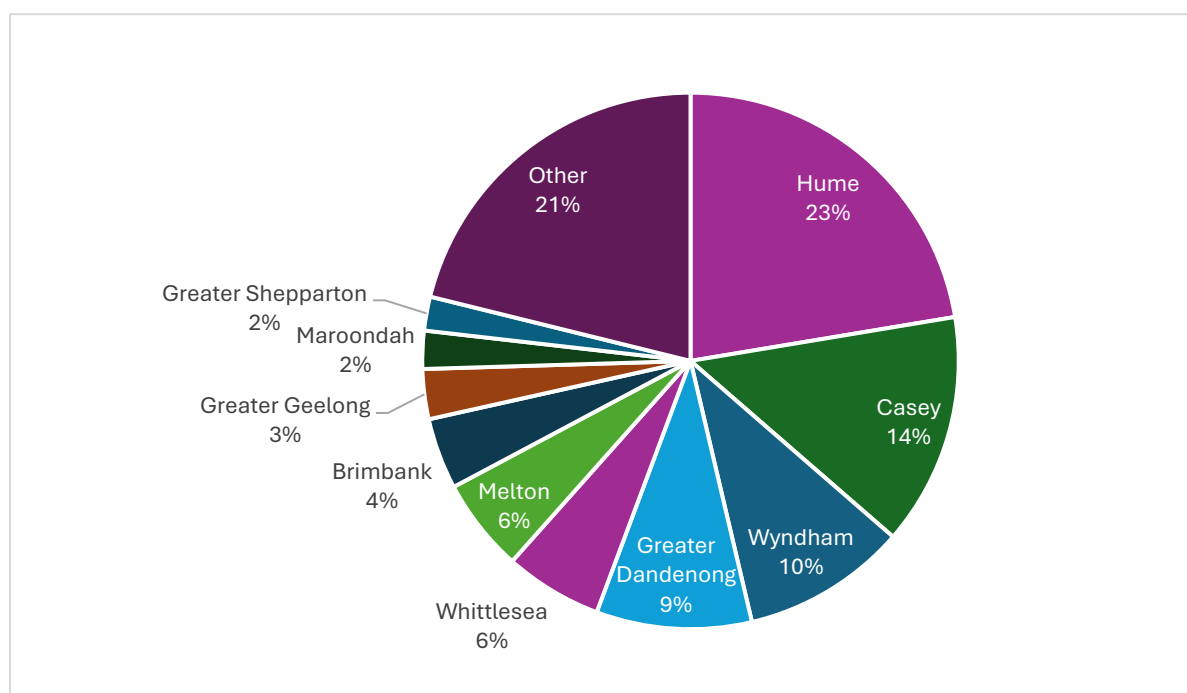
Over the past 10 years Victoria has welcomed more humanitarian entrants than any other state or territory, including 30 per cent more than New South Wales in 2024. The majority of Victoria's humanitarian arrivals are aged between 18-44, and half arrive with no proficiency in English. Given pre-migration experiences and, in many cases, prolonged exposure to danger and a lack of essential services, newly-arrived humanitarian entrants are vulnerable and require targeted and responsive services to help them achieve positive settlement outcomes.

Figure 4: Top 20 countries of birth for humanitarian entrants to Victoria (2015-2024)



(Department of Home Affairs, Settlement Programs 2015-2024)

Figure 5: Top 10 local government areas for humanitarian entrants to Victoria (2015-2024)



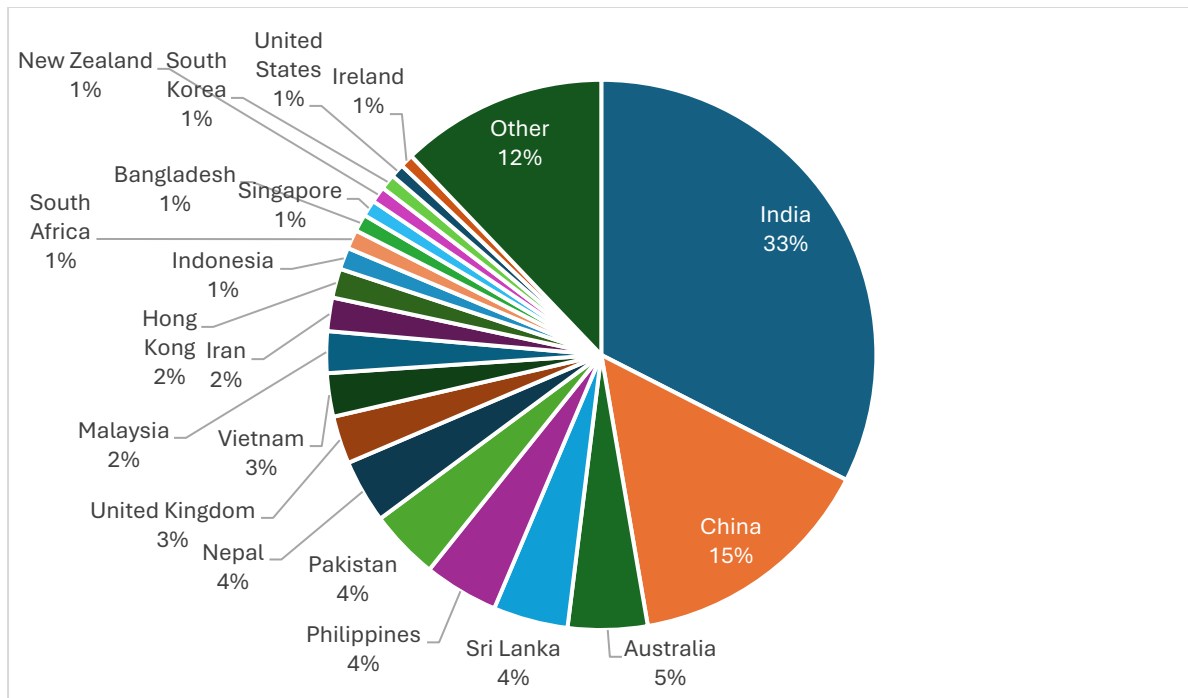
(Department of Home Affairs, Settlement Programs 2015-2024)

Skilled migrants

From 2014 to 2024, Victoria had the second-highest overall intake of skilled migrants in Australia (1 per cent less than New South Wales), but the highest intake of migrants on temporary skilled graduate visas, skilled regional visas, and business innovation and investment

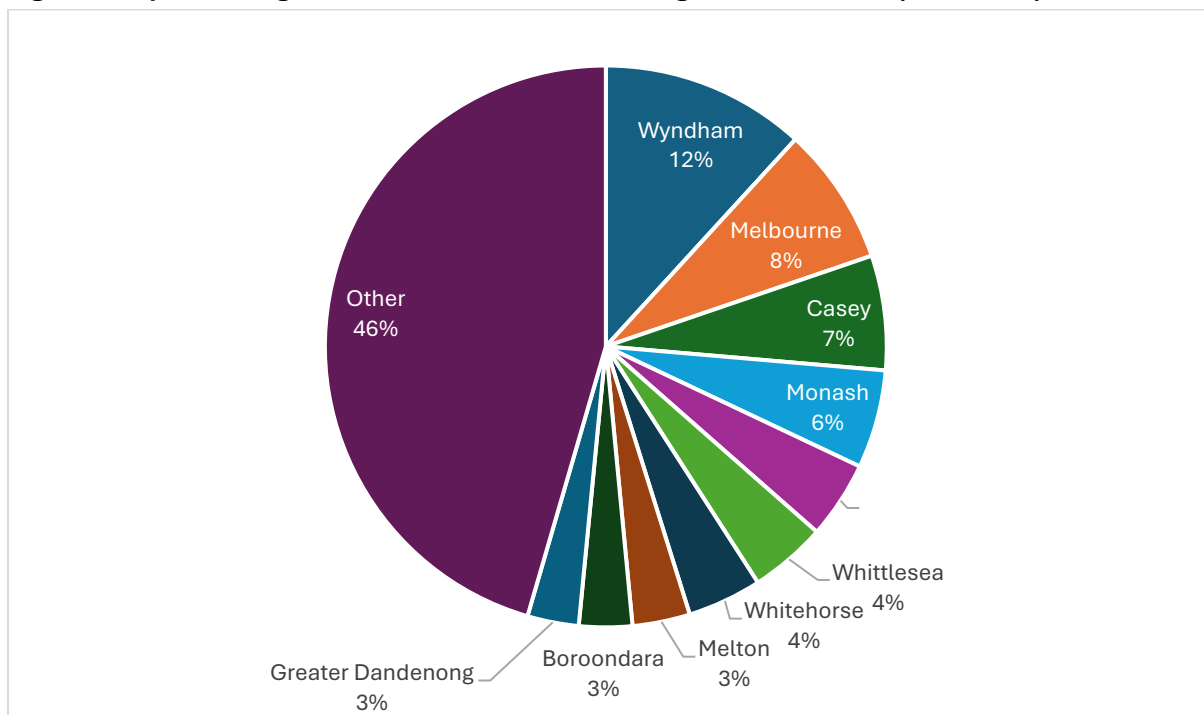
visas. Although English language skills are generally higher for skilled migrants, compared to other entrants, skilled migrants often experience issues relating to social isolation and discrimination. They also have limited access to settlement support services or a social safety net from the government or the community.

Figure 6: Top 20 countries of birth for skilled migrants to Victoria (2015-2024)



(Department of Home Affairs, Settlement Programs 2015-2024)

Figure 7: Top 10 local government areas for skilled migrants to Victoria (2015-2024)



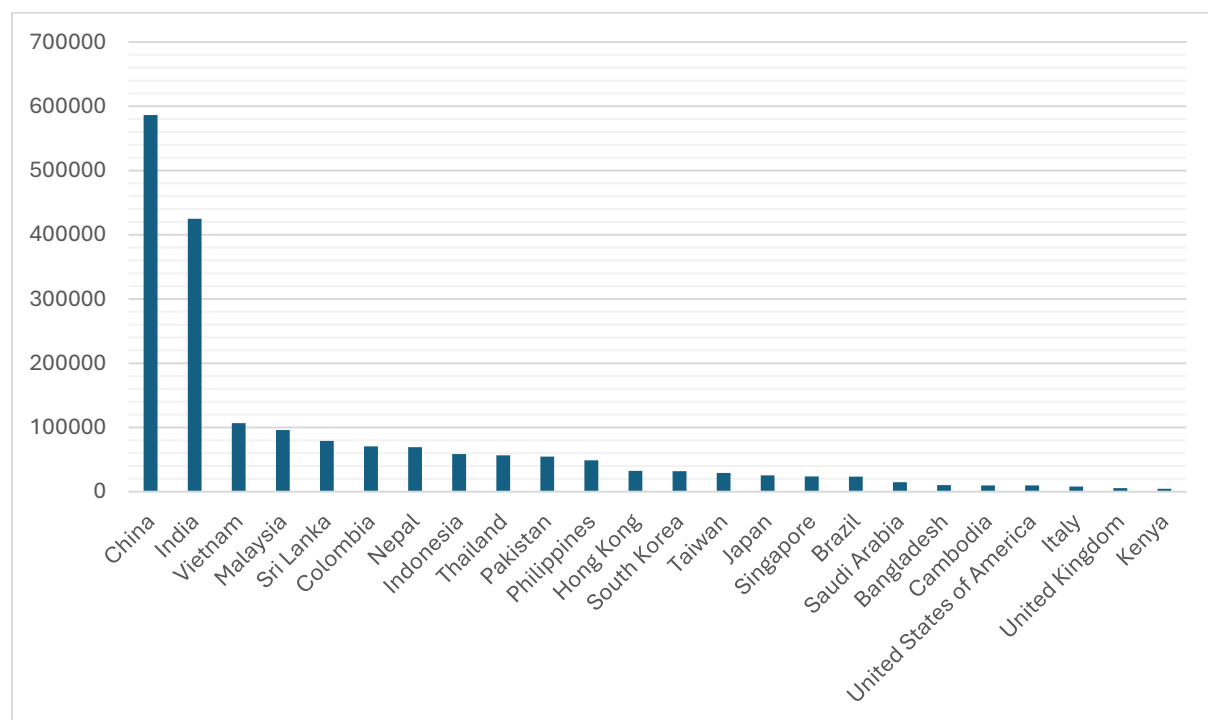
(Department of Home Affairs, Settlement Programs 2015-2024)

International students

Over the past decade, Victoria has been the study destination for more than 30 per cent of Australia's international students.

The majority of international students come from China and India³. Like skilled migrants, international students often have higher English proficiency but can find it difficult to access government services and adapt to life in Australia. Social isolation and financial hardship are often experienced by this cohort.

Figure 8: Top 20 countries of origin for international students in Victoria (2015-2024)



(Australian Government, Department of Education 2015-2024)

Multicultural community sector

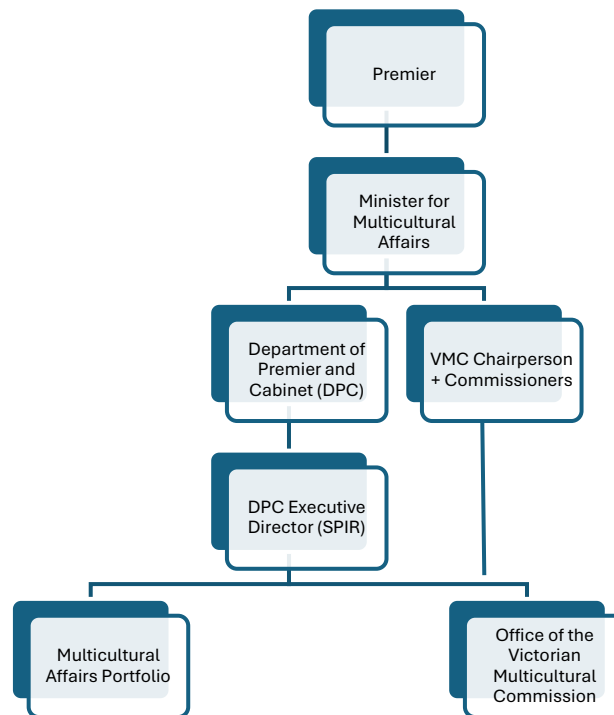
Historically, migrant and humanitarian arrivals created faith and community organisations that promoted social connectedness and community support. Many migrant and refugee community organisations collaborated to improve awareness of common problems and issues, as well as strengthen cultural and social ties.

In 1974, Australia's first ethnic communities' council was established in Victoria. For more than half a century, the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria—created by a generation that survived such hardships as the Depression, World War Two and the Cold War—has advocated for human rights, freedom, respect, equality and dignity for culturally diverse communities.

According to the Victorian Multicultural Commission annual report, more than 4,000 ethno-specific, multicultural and faith-based community organisations currently exist within Victoria, including a host of issue-specific, place-based or specialist service providers/organisations:

Peak Umbrella Body	
Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria	
Regional Ethnic Communities' Councils	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Albury-Wodonga Ethnic Communities Council Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council Inc. Cultura (Geelong) Gippsland Multicultural Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services (Bendigo) Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities' Council (Mildura) Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District
Metropolitan-Based Ethnic Communities' Councils	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Darebin Ethnic Communities Council Council on Ethnic Issues (Eastern Metro) Voice of the Outer South East, etc. 	
Specialist Service Providers/Organisations	
Migrant, refugee, asylum seeker services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AMES Australia Asylum Seeker Resource Centre Migrant Workers Centre Refugee Legal Settlement Services International VICSEG New Futures
Disability services	Action on Disability within Ethnic Communities
Family violence services	InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence
Health and wellbeing services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centre for Culture, Ethnicity & Health Foundation House Victorian Refugee Health Network
Migrant resource centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne) Migrant Resource Centre North West Region Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre Spectrum
Youth programs and initiatives	Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY)

Victoria's current multicultural affairs' structure



Multicultural Affairs	Victorian Multicultural Commission
<p>The Multicultural Affairs branch in DPC supports the Victorian Government to achieve its multicultural vision and priorities. The Multicultural Affairs branch works with the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and the VMC to foster an inclusive, engaged and harmonious multicultural Victoria. This is guided by various frameworks, guidelines and legislation including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victorian Multicultural Policy Statement • Multicultural Affairs grant program guidelines • Multicultural communications better practice guide; and • <i>Multicultural Victoria Act 2011</i> <p>The Multicultural Affairs branch also oversees the following advisory groups, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-Racism Taskforce • Victorian African Communities Committee • Multicultural and Multifaith Law Reform Consultative Committee 	<p>The VMC, established in 1983, operates under the <i>Multicultural Victoria Act 2011</i> and acts as a vital conduit between multicultural communities and the Victorian Government. VMC aims to promote cultural diversity in Victoria through consultation, advocacy, celebration, and promotion.</p>

Multiculturalism, social cohesion, trust and interculturalism

According to the Scanlon Foundation, there is no agreed-upon definition of social cohesion.

Canadian researcher Jane Jenson has said social cohesion describes “a process more than a condition or end state, while it is seen as involving a sense of commitment, and desire or capacity to live together in some harmony.”⁴

The Victorian *2015 Strategic Framework to Strengthen Victoria’s Social Cohesion and the Resilience of its Communities* defines social cohesion along the lines of the Scanlon Foundation model’s five domains:

1. **Belonging:** Shared values, identification with Australia, trust.
2. **Social justice and equity:** equality of opportunity and trust in institutions.
3. **Participation:** Voluntary work, political and co-operative involvement.
4. **Acceptance and rejection, legitimacy:** Experience of discrimination, attitudes towards minorities and newcomers.
5. **Worth:** Life satisfaction and happiness, future expectations.

Social cohesion is like trust; it is built on relationships. Trust is the glue that holds society together, and social cohesion is a consequence of trust. That is why it is essential to view social cohesion as an ongoing process rather than an end state.

The 1989 National Agenda for Multicultural Australia gave a definition of multiculturalism that continues to be supported today and is referenced in the Commonwealth’s current Multicultural Framework Review. That definition of multiculturalism is based on three key dimensions:

- The right to cultural identity (within limits).
- The right to equal opportunity and fair treatment (social justice).
- The need to recognise and utilise the diverse skills and talents of migrants (economic efficiency).

The definition also encompasses principles and obligations that should accompany multicultural policies—a commitment to Australia, and an acceptance of Australian principles, and rights and responsibilities, including an adherence to Australian laws.

The Review acknowledges that social cohesion and multiculturalism can evolve over time and are multilayered and contextual. The Review’s framing of social cohesion and multiculturalism are guided by historic definitions, as well as it the preamble and principles within the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011*.

As previously stated, Victoria’s population has become more diverse since 2000 and is projected to become even more diverse in the future. As a result, the concept of interculturalism, which emphasises the importance and benefits of interactions and dialogue between cultures, has emerged.

While *multiculturalism* focuses on the coexistence of multiple cultures within one society, the focus of *interculturalism* is to celebrate differences, increase social connections, and promote

a united Victoria bonded by the many cultures .⁵ However, as recently noted by academics Fethi Mansouri and Amanuel Elias, “While Multiculturalism and Interculturalism were historically conceived as distinct approaches, they overlap across key normative features, notably sharing strong emphasis on issues of cultural plurality.”⁶

Incorporating an intercultural lens within a multicultural framework is important, particularly in the current environment where rising polarisation, inequality, cultural tensions, and the ongoing global conflicts test social cohesion within Victoria.

Review scope and methodology

Scope

The Advisory Group was tasked with delivering a targeted review, which assessed specified mechanisms and their ability to:

- deliver on their legislated/agreed functions and objectives,
- address and prevent racism and discrimination,
- promote community harmony and reject division in the context of local and global events,
- rebuild interfaith dialogue,
- address local issues and community crises in a timely and strategic way, and
- engage the broader Victorian community in matters relating to social cohesion.

The table below outlines the mechanisms in scope for the Review.

Multicultural Affairs Policies and Programs	Victorian Multicultural Commission
Victoria's Multicultural Policy Statement	<i>Multicultural Victoria Act 2004 & 2011 (the Act) *</i>
Multicultural Affairs Outcomes Framework	Role and function of the VMC, including organisational structure
Multicultural Affairs grant program guidelines	VMC strategic plan and annual workplan, including Ministerial Statement of Expectations
Better practice guide for multicultural communications	VMC affiliate networks and groups, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multifaith Advisory Group • Multicultural Youth Network • Multicultural Chambers of Commerce • Regional Advisory Councils (RACs)
Multicultural Affairs advisory groups, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-Racism Taskforce, • Multicultural and Multifaith Law Reform Consultative Committee; and • the Victorian African Communities Committee 	VMC annual reports

** It should be noted that the Act also provides an overarching legislative framework relevant to the operations of entities, policies, and programs within the multicultural affairs portfolio, and, where appropriate, across the Victorian public service.*

During consultations, multicultural and multifaith communities and sector organisations raised needs, issues and challenges outside the Multicultural Affairs portfolio. The areas covered during consultations included—but was not limited to—education, heritage and the arts, seniors, mental health, family violence, sports, and youth. With that in mind, the Advisory Group recognises the need for a wider, whole-of-government response to address the challenges and opportunities identified during consultations. Consequently, the Review makes recommendations that are outside the scope of the Multicultural Affairs portfolio.

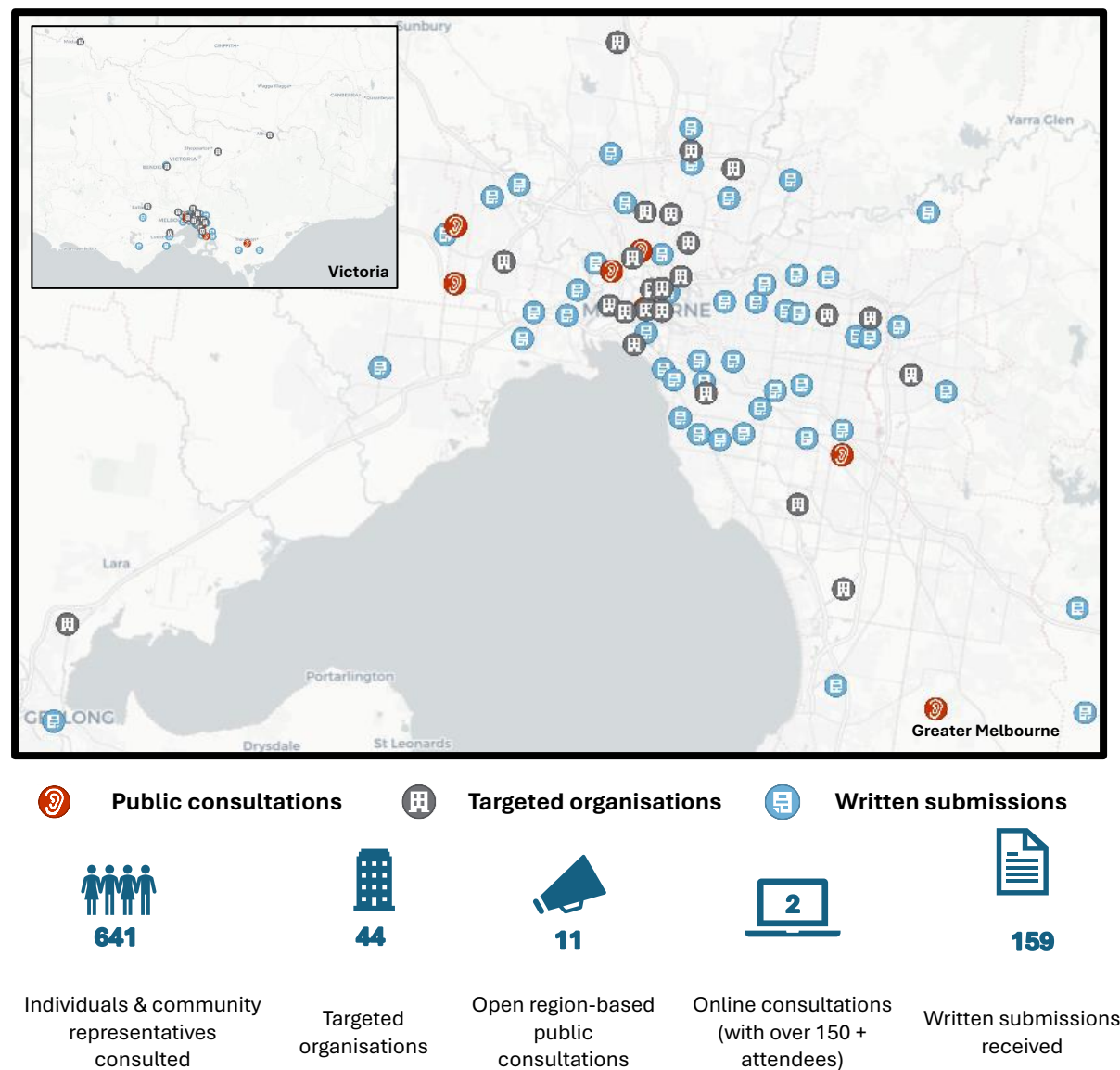
Methodology

The Advisory Group reviewed existing policies and frameworks and carried out a series of consultations to determine the effectiveness and responsiveness of the Victorian Government's multicultural policies, programs, and institutions.

Consultations included targeted stakeholder meetings, open public consultations held across metropolitan and regional Victoria, online consultations, and opportunities for input through written submissions. The Advisory Group prioritised community experience, particularly from people with lived experiences and key sector organisations. Appendix A provides an overview of the stakeholder engagement.

The Advisory Group also analysed the Victorian Government's key multicultural policies, frameworks and work to date. Contemporary literature and research on multicultural affairs and social cohesion, including the recently released Commonwealth Multicultural Framework Review, was also taken into consideration.

Figure 9: A map of consultations and submissions received for the Review



Part 2: Findings

Part 2A: Multicultural Affairs Portfolio

Victorians were open and frank when sharing their experiences and views of how the Victorian Government supports multicultural communities and social cohesion across the state.

The community's response to the Review was generally positive, with many people expressing support and appreciation for the Government's commitment to understanding and improving the experiences of Victoria's multicultural communities. However, community representatives also highlighted deficiencies and a lack of consideration when responding to emerging needs and aspirations.

More than 25 themes were identified during the consultation process. The key themes included:

- The effectiveness of existing multicultural systems and structures within the Victorian Government,
- Concerns about community harmony, safety and security, and anti-racism,
- Challenges around engagement and access to government services,
- Community capacity building,
- Strengthening interfaith and intercultural dialogues, and
- The need for funding support.

Many of the issues raised during the community consultations mirrored the findings of the Commonwealth Multicultural Framework Review, lending strength to the recommendations formulated in this Review report.

Following careful consideration of all available information and data, the Review made findings and recommendations in the following key areas.

1.1. Strengthen multicultural affairs settings

Community representatives acknowledged the Government's commitment to multiculturalism, which is reflected in existing legislation, policies, programs and institutions such as:

- *The Multicultural Victoria Act 2011*, which enshrines in law the state's valuing and promotion of the cultural, religious, racial and linguistic diversity of the people of Victoria;
- Victoria's Multicultural Policy Statement, promoting principles of equality, belonging, participation and respect for diversity;
- The Victorian Multicultural Commission, which seeks to strengthen cultural diversity in Victoria through consultation, advocacy, celebration and promotion; and
- The establishment of various advisory groups, including the Anti-Racism Taskforce, the Multicultural and Multifaith Law Reform Consultative Committee, and the Victorian African Communities Committee.

In 2024, Victoria also became the first state in Australia to launch an Anti-Racism Strategy, reinforcing its commitment to tackle racism and discrimination and make Victoria safer, fairer, and more inclusive.

Despite this progress, the Review found that further reforms to Victoria's multicultural institutions, programs and policy settings are required.

During consultations, it was clear that multicultural communities want to contribute to social cohesion in Victoria, but are losing faith in government institutions. A range of factors are behind this trust deficit, including a lack of clear leadership on the issues affecting their communities, feeling unsafe, having limited access to essential services, not receiving support for community strengthening initiatives, and not being meaningfully engaged on decisions that impact their communities. To rebuild trust and goodwill, the Victorian Government and agencies must undertake genuine and meaningful engagement with multicultural communities.

During consultations, many community members strongly felt that—due to the local impact of increased and ongoing tensions overseas—the government needed to consistently demonstrate through action its commitment to inclusion and equity.

Words are not enough. In addition, some community members remarked that a perception of bias and injustice was created when one atrocity is strongly condemned while another is largely ignored. Perceptions of bias can undermine the government’s credibility, erode trust and create division. That’s why fair and balanced responses to atrocities are needed to demonstrate respect for all and ensure that all communities feel seen, heard and valued.

Communities said the call for strong leadership that unites rather than divides needs to come from the highest offices in government. Between 1992 and 2010, three consecutive Premiers—Jeff Kennett, Steve Bracks and John Brumby—held the Multicultural Affairs portfolio. This gave the portfolio symbolic value and substantial authority across government, and unofficially encouraged a whole-of-government approach to Multicultural Affairs.

The Advisory Group does not believe the Premier needs to take on Multicultural Affairs. Instead, we believe the portfolio should be elevated across government via several structural mechanisms that could embed and deliver enhanced outcomes over time. These proposed changes are captured within the following recommendations.

Recommendations

1. Elevate the Multicultural Affairs Portfolio by:
 - a. The Premier leading a whole-of-Government multicultural affairs strategy to both lead and monitor the implementation of the recommendations of this report.
 - b. Appointing a stand-alone Minister for the Multicultural Affairs portfolio.
 - c. Appoint a Multicultural Affairs Coordinator General to lead the implementation and coordination of the whole-of-Government multicultural affairs strategy.
 - d. Requiring all Cabinet submissions to include an impact statement on multicultural affairs, inclusion and social cohesion.
 - e. Requiring, where relevant, that all Ministerial submissions incorporate a multicultural impact statement.
 - f. Ensuring the multicultural affairs portfolio stays within the Department of Premier and Cabinet, with ongoing oversight by the Premier.
2. Appoint a Parliamentary Secretary to assist the Minister in the delivery of portfolio functions.

1.2. Reform the VMC's governance

During consultations many stakeholders acknowledged the Victorian Multicultural Commission's many past achievements, as well as the dedication and professionalism of its current Chair, Commissioners and staff. However, questions were raised about whether the VMC remained fit for purpose, given increased social cohesion challenges from local and overseas events, as well as the evolving needs of multicultural communities.

Multicultural and multifaith organisations, as well as broader community stakeholders, consistently expressed frustration and dissatisfaction with the VMC's functioning, efficacy and lack of strategic leadership. The following is a summary of the key issues, themes, and recommendations that emerged from consultations, including those related to the VMC's structure and core statutory functions of supporting government priorities, community engagement, and promotion and advocacy.

1.2.1. VMC structure and Commissioners

Stakeholders are supportive of the foundational notion of the VMC as an entity and its purpose of promoting and supporting multicultural diversity. However, there are growing concerns that the current structure does not adequately meet the changing needs of Victoria's multicultural and multifaith communities.

"Multiculturalism should be about fairness, support and real inclusion—not just celebration."

(Written Submission No. 22)

Overall, there was a call for structural reform to ensure the VMC is more aligned with the current multicultural and multifaith communities' priorities and challenges. The Review also found that the current arrangement (outlined in figure 9)—with the VMC separate from the Multicultural Affairs arm and the functions of DPC—has resulted in an inconsistent and fragmented approach to the portfolio, as well as a lack of understanding among communities and organisations about the role and function of each.

"We are very supportive of the foundational notion of the VMC. This is a building block for any future course. However, is it fit for purpose for the current environment? Do you need less commissioners? Is there a sufficient focus on youth?"

(Targeted Stakeholder Consultation - April 2025)

Streamlining the two entities (VMC and the DPC's Multicultural Affairs branch) will reduce duplication; strengthen the government's community engagement, program, and policy functions; and eliminate confusion in the community and among the public about the roles of the existing two entities.

1.2.2. Commissioners

The composition of the VMC commission has raised questions about whether the structure is sustainable, accurately represents the community, and is fit for purpose in the current environment to meet present and future challenges.

There is a significant gap in communication and accountability. Community members are dissatisfied with the Commissioners' selection process and unclear about their key roles and

responsibilities. Regional stakeholders also questioned whether the VMC represented all of Victoria, given the absence of any regional Commissioners.

“Out of the 12 Commissioners on the VMC, not even one of them lives in regional Victoria but I would like to see regional representation on the Commission.”

(Open Community Consultation - Shepparton, May 2025)

“The current reliance on personal connections and relationships for selecting community representatives must be replaced by a transparent, merit-based, and diversity-sensitive approach. Young people, diverse community members, and previously excluded experts should actively be recruited and included, ensuring broader representation and meaningful contributions.”

(Written Submission No. 23)

Having reflected on community input, the Review proposes establishing of a new statutory authority led by three Commissioners (a Chair and two Deputy Chairs). Having one Chair and two Deputy Chairs will enable the new entity to play a more strategic and financially viable role while maintaining its position as a trusted independent conduit between the community and government.

Commissioners should be supported by establishing a Multicultural Community Advisory Group (MCAG) comprising community, faith, and organisational leaders; regional representatives; academics; researchers; and sector representatives with lived experience. Making the MCAG a structural component of Multicultural Victoria will embed a genuine and efficient co-design component to the development of policies, programs, services, priorities and research—adding depth and credibility to the advice provided to the government on matters concerning multicultural affairs and social cohesion.

1.2.3. Community engagement and advocacy

In line with the current Ministerial Statement of Expectations (the Statement), the VMC is charged with leading best-practice community engagement. This includes ensuring communities are consulted in a purposeful, systematic way that supports clear identification of needs, service gaps and strategic advocacy to government.

The VMC’s Regional Advisory Groups (RACs), established under the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011*, are a key mechanism through which the VMC can deliver advocacy and community engagement.

While the VMC is engaging the RACs, there is consistent and strong feedback from the community questioning their effectiveness and impact. Feedback has highlighted that:

- While the RACs are made up of passionate community advocates and quality talent, there is a lack of accountability.
- RACs are valued amongst some stakeholders as they serve as a platform for members to build connections and could be used as a pool to identify potential future VMC Commissioners.
- RACs often fall short of facilitating meaningful discussion or producing tangible policy reforms and considered responses by government agencies.
- For some regional stakeholders, RACs are not the conduit to regional communities that they are intended to be, given that they are not on the ground on an ongoing basis.

“The Regional Advisory Council meetings are not for meaningful discussions with tangible outcomes but rather treated more as a social event, and for people to use it to raise their own profiles in their communities and get tickets to the gala dinner.”

(Open Community Consultation - Kensington, April 2025)

Many stakeholders believe that the VMC’s time and resources would be better spent engaging directly with regional and metropolitan ethnic communities’ councils rather than operating and servicing the RACs.

Community members and RAC members also raised concerns about the lack of funding allocated to the RACs. Stakeholders noted that the frequency of RAC meetings has decreased, restricting opportunities for the kinds of productive and meaningful discussions needed to make a meaningful impact in the community.

“RACs only meet three times a year now and are not able to do anything meaningful. It has become tokenistic. RACs are not funded enough to be able to meaningfully address issues such as support from women, access to housing and disability services.”

(Open Community Consultation - Brunswick, April 2025)

Many stakeholders believed that the VMC’s time and resources would be better spent engaging directly with regional and metropolitan ethnic communities’ councils rather than operating the RACs to reduce duplication and confusion within the community.

“The creation of the RACs was a strong slap to the regional ethnic communities’ councils (ECCs) and has created confusion in the regions. Communities do not understand the difference between VMC and Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) let alone the RACs and the regional ECCs.”

(Open Community Consultation - Springvale, April 2025)

The Advisory Group recommends discontinuing the RACs. Instead, the new statutory authority should engage and consult directly with the MCAG, ECCV, regional ethnic communities’ councils, key service providers and communities.

Recommendations

3. *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011* to be amended to establish a new statutory entity, Multicultural Victoria, and replace the existing VMC, which should:
 - a. appoint Commissioners (one Chair and two Deputy Chairs) to lead the new statutory authority,
 - b. establish a Multicultural Community Advisory Group appointed by the Premier or Minister for Multicultural Affairs, to advise the new authority,
 - c. remove the requirement for Regional Advisory Councils, instead utilising the existing regional ethnic communities’ councils and their networks and strengthening their role.

These actions require legislative change and new governance arrangements. Therefore, in the short term, the government should:

- **establish interim arrangements to support the transition to a new entity**, including removing all existing Commissioners and identifying two suitable appointees to deliver the roles of Chair and Deputy Chair for a short-term period. In addition, the current recruitment of nine Commissioners should be suspended.

1.2.4. Influence within government

Stakeholders and community members acknowledged VMC's outstanding work during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly its efforts to support the communication vital public health messages to multicultural and faith communities. The VMC also helped bring together community leaders, fostered collaboration and mobilised communities to ensure a greater vaccination rate across the state. It was also acknowledged that, historically, much of the VMC's work with departments and agencies occurred outside the public eye, including representation on interdepartmental committees, ministerial and departmental advisory committees, grant panels, and advocacy on specific issues and policies.

Over time, though, stakeholders and community members felt that the VMC's ability to influence government, particularly in relation to social cohesion, had significantly diminished.

Stakeholders and community members were concerned about the VMC's recent lack of robust research, needs identification, analysis, and policy development. They also noted that the VMC had not publicly released policy or research submissions since 2021.

There was concern that, the VMC—the government's lead agency in multicultural affairs—had shifted its focus away from addressing community needs, as well as advocating for improved access to government services. Many community members were unaware of VMC's current role and activities. Many stakeholders said that the VMC lacked power and influence within government structures and was increasingly seen as **partisan** and **ceremonial**. In addition, there was strong feedback that the VMC was heavily focused on celebration and, as a result, lacked a strategic emphasis on policy development, research and advocacy.

The community clearly wants an independent entity that genuinely supports, represents and advocates for all multicultural and multifaith communities across Victoria. **There is also a fundamental need for the entity to maintain neutrality.** As a result, a new Code of Conduct enshrining neutrality should be developed to guide the conduct of future commissioners. A future commission needs to demonstrate a leadership role in an unstable international environment that has created community tension.

“To ensure impartiality and genuine effectiveness, the VMC must be granted greater independence, stronger powers to hold stakeholders accountable, and the mandate to serve as the central evidence-based resource for multicultural policy and community engagement.”

(Written Submission No. 23)

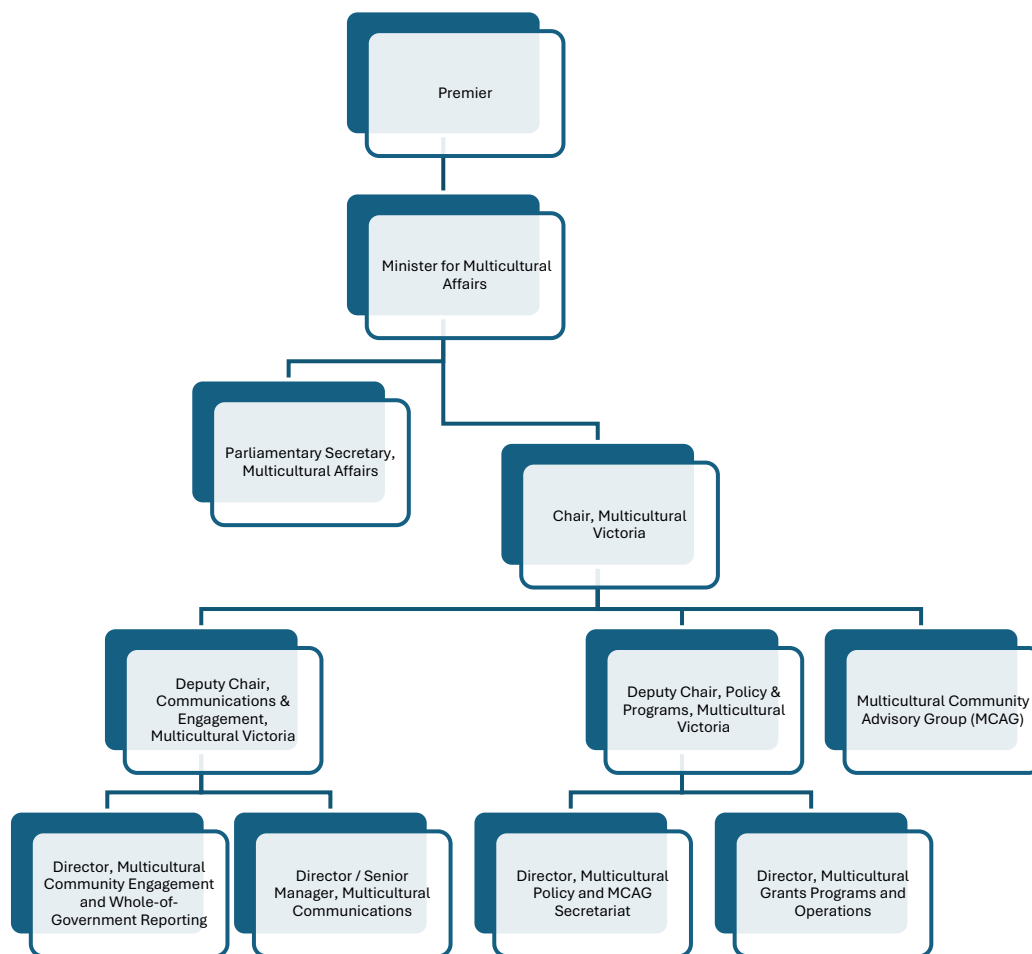
There is also a clear desire for the VMC to have more impact by playing a more strategic role and acting as a key conduit between the community and government. The community wants the VMC to advocate for their needs and priorities, contribute to policy development, and provide leadership and funding to support the community's needs and aspirations—all areas that stakeholders and community members currently see as lacking. This key feedback emphasises the need for the VMC to broaden its scope beyond events, festivals and gala dinners, and take on a stronger, more influential and bipartisan role in shaping policy outcomes that matter to multicultural and multifaith communities.

Bringing together VMC and multicultural affairs departmental functions and resources under the one entity will strengthen the Victorian Government's ability to coordinate community

engagement, needs identification and analysis, policy and program delivery, community grants, and the coordination of whole-of-government responses to the needs of multicultural communities, including language services. Having the capacity to deliver informed and strategic advice that the government can trust is critical.

As shown in Figure 10, the proposed structure recommended by the Advisory Group would enhance the importance of the Multicultural Affairs portfolio, boosting its visibility and independence, as well as delivering independent, timely, community-informed advice to government.

Figure 10. Proposed structure for the new statutory entity - Multicultural Victoria



Adopting a new leadership structure of one Chair and two Deputy Chairs will enable Multicultural Victoria to play a more strategic role and become a trusted conduit between the community and government. The responsibilities of the Deputy Chairs roles include leading community safety plans, engaging with and liaising across the community in Victoria, responding to community needs, and leading the development of major initiatives—including whole-of-government reporting. The Chair and Deputy Chairs will be supported by:

- Establishing a Multicultural Community Advisory Group (MCAG) comprising community and faith representatives and leaders, regional representatives, academics and researchers, and sector representatives. As per the requirements outlined in the MVA 2011, MCAG membership will take into account gender balance and youth representation, and be weighted towards skill sets and subject-matter expertise.
- Strengthening collaboration between the Chair and Deputy Chairs and staff to deliver better programs and policies.
- Removing RACs to engage and consult directly with ECCV, regional ethnic communities' councils, key service providers and communities.

The Advisory Group believes that incorporating a MCAG as a structural component of Multicultural Victoria will embed a genuine and efficient co-design component to the development of policies, programs, services, priorities and research, as well as adding depth and credibility to the advice provided to government.

Recommendation

4. The Multicultural Affairs portfolio's departmental and current VMC functions be merged into Multicultural Victoria, bringing together the community engagement, needs, identification, research, and current policy, programs and grants management functions.

1.3. Strengthen whole-of-government reporting on multicultural affairs

There is an urgent need for more data collection, research, analysis, and reporting. This information is needed to ensure government policies and programs are evidence-based and meet the community's needs.

Currently, under the Multicultural Victoria Act 2011 requires Multicultural Affairs to table in parliament an annual report with an overview of activities across government for multicultural communities. The Act outlines the activities that departments are required to report on, including the use of interpreting and translating services, the department's progress under its cultural diversity plan, and the representation of diverse backgrounds on the department's boards and committees (see Appendix B). An audit was conducted for the 2020-21 report, and indicators not aligned with the Act's reporting activities were retired. Since then, departments have been increasingly asked to report against self-identified indicators, particularly outcomes-based measures. Departments have not supplied this information.

Community members, including many RAC members and VMC Commissioners, are frustrated with the lack of reporting and accountability. This failure to report reinforces the critical need for a stronger strategic direction and outcomes framework, as well as more precise guidance across the whole of government. The current practice of departments reporting against self-identified indicators delivers inconsistent results. There is also a risk that reporting may become a tick-a-box exercise. Without a standardised framework and robust measurement tools, including a minimum data set requirement, there is limited accountability. This lack of accountability undermines efforts to drive real, measurable improvements in equity, inclusion, and community wellbeing.

Currently, the community sees engagement with government as largely one-way, with a lack of feedback. Many stakeholders and community members feel that their concerns are raised but never addressed, with no communication about what, if any, actions were taken. This lack of transparency and accountability has left many frustrated and disengaged.

“Agencies must close the feedback loop. When communities participate, they need to see how their input is used. Publishing reports, updates, and outcomes in community languages builds trust and accountability.”

(Written Submission No. 26)

“The government should commit to closing the loop by reporting back on how feedback was used, what actions were taken, and where ongoing dialogue is needed. This reinforces trust and encourages ongoing participation.”

(Written Submission No. 39)

Meaningful consultation with multicultural and multifaith communities must be a core part of government planning and reporting. Engaging directly with communities ensures that lived experience, cultural insights and local knowledge informs policies and programs. Up until 2010, this approach was effectively carried out. It has not been maintained. If government wants to build community trust it must prioritise meaningful consultation and accountability.

Recommendations

5. *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011* be amended to:

- a. embed the coordination of rigorous whole-of-government multicultural affairs strategic planning and reporting into Multicultural Victoria’s operations, including an ongoing annual consultation process with multicultural and multifaith communities across Victoria,
- b. embed Multicultural Victoria to prepare and table to Parliament a State of Multicultural Affairs Report every two years following the whole-of-government multicultural consultation processes.

1.3.1 A new whole-of-government multicultural affairs policy framework

Victoria needs a new whole-of-government multicultural affairs policy framework.

Previous whole-of-government multicultural policy frameworks were regularly reviewed and updated. The last three frameworks were ‘Victorian. And Proud of it!’ (2017), ‘Victoria’s Advantage’ (2014), and ‘All of Us’ (2010). The 2017 statement did not include a requirement to evaluate its outcomes or update its strategic goals.

In the eight years since the release of the last framework, Victoria has had two state elections, a pandemic, four ministers, and several notable machinery-of-government changes. The state has also seen a rise in racism and a considerable deterioration of social cohesion.

“Strengthening data collection on the needs and experiences of diverse groups would also allow for more tailored, evidence-based interventions.”

(Written Submission No. 54)

A new framework is long overdue. There is an urgent need to ensure that issues impacting multicultural and multifaith communities are actively addressed and monitored. Delivering a new framework would also demonstrate the government’s commitment to improving outcomes

for multicultural Victorians. In addition, a new framework would strengthen whole-of-government collaboration on multicultural issues and better inform the allocation of resources across government agencies.

The current practice of departments reporting against self-identified indicators has led to inconsistent approaches across the government. Without a standardised framework and robust measurement tools, there is limited accountability or ability to compare progress across departments. This undermines efforts to drive real, measurable improvements in equity, inclusion and community wellbeing.

“The development of planning frameworks that are focused on community engagement in shaping real change seems to have been lost in well-meaning but mis-directed bureaucratic processes and poorly designed organisational structures that impede rather than encourage full stakeholder engagement.”

(Written Submission No. 73)

In line with the Commonwealth’s Multicultural Framework Review’s ‘Towards Fairness’ report, there is an urgent need to tackle longstanding systemic issues. Numerous recommendations have been proposed in various reviews and reports, championed by communities and leading advocacy groups for over 40 years. However, they have not been prioritised or implemented.

A new whole-of-Victorian-Government multicultural policy framework provides an opportunity to address longstanding systemic and emerging issues by embedding:

Area of Focus	Description
Multicultural community representation	<p>There is a need for representation that reflects the community within decision-making bodies (boards, committees, task forces, and parliament) and across the public service. The current representation does not accurately reflect the population, particularly at senior management and executive levels.</p> <p>The government should promote value processes that specifically require, as it does for gender and First Nations peoples, appointments that reflect the multicultural demographics of the community. If not, a plan should be formulated over the subsequent one or two appointment cycles to achieve that objective.</p>
A consistent data collection approach	<p>To provide the necessary evidence base for assessing service utilisation rates, access, and outcomes, as well as guiding improvements in service delivery, community engagement, and communications, the government should implement a minimum multicultural data set across all Victorian Government departments and funded agencies. Without a reliable minimum data set, the outcomes framework risks redundancy as the data required to measure, analyse, and evaluate progress will be unavailable.</p> <p>A potential minimum data set should correlate with ABS census questions. It could include at least birthplace, language spoken at home, and proficiency in English, and be implemented across all departments within a reasonable timeframe (e.g. within 2 – 3 years). Additional ABS questions, such as ethnicity, religion, and parents' birthplace, could be included where appropriate.</p>

Multicultural and multifaith inclusion plans	<p>Cultural diversity, access, and equity plans have been in place in one form or another for more than 40 years. While they have produced some positive outcomes, equity has not been achieved across most reasonable measures, and in some instances, progress has been minimal or stagnant.</p> <p>Stronger guidance or requirements for departmental inclusion plans are needed. Producing extensive publications with visions and objectives, along with a few case studies, without robust outcomes-based data, will only repeat the mistakes of the past. Concise documents with clear goals, data-driven measures, and responsibilities will enhance outcomes.</p>
Multiculturalism as core business	<p>One contributing factor to not achieving optimal outcomes over the past 50 years is the mindset that views our multicultural diversity, despite well-intentioned policies and commitments, as a marginalised or “minority” issue concerning policy, program, and service design and delivery.</p> <p>This diminishes the significance of the issue and often relegates multiculturalism to token references or consideration late in a process or completely ignores it and leads to the release of policies or programs that make scant or no reference to a substantial portion of the population and fails to provide adequate guidance, requirements or resources for multicultural communities.</p> <p>Our multicultural diversity, which accounts for more than 50% of the population, needs to be embedded within the core business of all departments, agencies, and government-funded organisations and service providers.</p>
Multicultural community social capital	<p>The inadequacy of engagement and genuine co-design with Victoria’s multicultural communities is surprising, given the presence of a robust multicultural community infrastructure that includes thousands of incorporated and active ethno-specific, faith-based, multicultural organisations, service providers, peak bodies, and multicultural media outlets.</p> <p>These organisations play a critical, often undervalued and insufficiently utilised, role in our society’s social and service delivery architecture. The recent pandemic clearly illustrated that better outcomes were attained when community and faith leaders, trusted influencers, and organisations were trusted, resourced and utilised.</p> <p>Government should value the existing multicultural community infrastructure (including ethno-specific and multicultural organisations and service providers) as a complementary part of the service delivery ecosystem, particularly for educational and preventive programs, and where appropriate, service delivery and referral roles. With proper support, these organisations can deliver services more efficiently and generate better social and economic outcomes, which include alleviating pressure on existing “universal” services and benefiting the budget bottom lines of all jurisdictions.</p>
Partnership with multicultural and	<p>Engaging community organisations, leaders, and influencers – especially at the local level – is crucial for co-designing and delivering</p>

multifaith communities	<p>policies and services that lead to more efficient and effective programs and better outcomes.</p> <p>While this may require some initial investment, the long-term savings and benefits will far exceed these costs. For example, in regional and rural areas, ethnic and multicultural communities' councils provide an obvious conduit for more effective engagement, particularly around emergency management.</p> <p>Embedding representation within the planning, response and recovery teams will deliver better outcomes, but will also require some level of capacity building and better resourcing of such organisations.</p>
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Recommendations

6. Update the whole-of-Victorian-Government reporting requirements, incorporating a new multicultural affairs outcomes framework to better gauge equitable outcomes, inclusion and representation.
7. Require board and committee appointments to reflect community demographics. Include a specific question about whether the composition of the Board is reflective of the multicultural diversity in appointment submissions.
8. The Victorian Government should establish and implement a minimum multicultural data set across government and funded agencies to enable comparative analysis with community demographics to monitor access and equity.
9. Victorian Government departments and agencies should develop data-driven multicultural inclusion plans to better monitor accessibility and equitable outcomes.

2. Community, harmony and safety

The foundations of multiculturalism in Victoria are strong multicultural values, inclusive policies and a deep commitment to cultural diversity. However, these foundations have been tested since the pandemic.

With the world more digitally connected, global crises and conflicts have a more significant impact on Victorians' sense of safety and cohesion. The COVID-19 pandemic and conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza and the Middle East have shown that global crises often lead to increases in local community tension, racism and discrimination. The localisation of global troubles can create divisions—undermining social cohesion and making it harder for multicultural and multifaith communities to feel accepted.

Support for multiculturalism has declined over the last two years, as illustrated by the Scanlon Foundation's 2024 Social Cohesion Survey report. The annual report identifies warning signs, including:

- Overarching community concerns about racism (63 per cent of survey respondents in 2024 said that racism is a very big or a fairly big problem in Australia, up from 39 per cent in 2020).
- An unacceptably high negative disposition towards specific cohorts within the community.
- An overall downward trend in the social cohesion index since the Survey's commencement in 2007.

Social cohesion is arguably at its most strained point in more than 30 years. This strain is due to a combination of local and global geopolitical and economic factors.

The challenges Victoria and Australia face are not unique. Other nations face similar issues. The globalisation of hate reflects the global reach of social media, which can be used to spread pandemics of misinformation and intolerance, creating digital echo chambers that foster polarisation and isolation.

These issues and trends cannot be ignored, especially in light of the ongoing geopolitical climate, the threat of foreign interference, and the potential for hatemongers to use divisive strategies for short-term gain.

The Victorian Government must do more to promote and maintain social cohesion. Its actions should focus on engagement and policy-making that fosters inclusion, tackles racism, and supports intercultural and interfaith dialogue.

2.1. Anti-racism, discrimination and hate

Multicultural and multifaith communities are on the frontlines of racism, discrimination and hate. In 2024, almost one-in-six (17 per cent) Australians surveyed by the Scanlon Foundation reported they had faced discrimination in the previous 12 months because of their skin colour, ethnic origin or religion. Experiences of discrimination were much higher for Australians born overseas, with one-in-three (34 per cent) reporting they experienced discrimination in the previous 12 months.⁷

In Victoria, reports of racism surged during and after the pandemic, disproportionately affecting Asian, African, Muslim and Jewish communities.

The Islamophobia in Australia Report (Third National Report, 2023) documented a 50 per cent increase in verified Islamophobic incidents compared to the previous reporting period, with nearly half of all incidents occurring in public spaces and many targeting women wearing visible religious attire. These attacks on multiculturalism corrode social trust and fuel isolation. Slogans are not enough to combat prejudice requires—sustained action and investment are urgently needed.

Antisemitism has also escalated to alarming levels. The Executive Council of Australian Jewry's 2023 report recorded a 35 per cent rise in antisemitic incidents in one year, including threats, harassment, and vandalism targeting Jewish schools and places of worship. These trends are consistent with broader international patterns but require a tailored, local response grounded in intercultural and interfaith dialogue. If racism and religious intolerance go unchallenged, they embolden extremist narratives and fracture community cohesion. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that empowers communities, strengthens protective legislation, and embeds cross-cultural understanding.

Actions addressing racism and discrimination are now critical for all Victorians, especially multicultural and multifaith communities. The Advisory Group applauds the Victorian Government's commitment to combating racism and protecting Victorians from vilification through the launch of *Victoria's Anti-Racism Strategy 2024-29* in late 2024, as well as the introduction of the *Anti-Vilification and Social Cohesion Act 2024* in early 2025.

The legislation was developed following extensive consultation with communities and stakeholders, drawing on the recommendations from the Parliamentary Committee's 2020 report. A critical aspect of ensuring the effectiveness of this legislation is that sufficient funding is allocated toward:

- **An education campaign.** Initially, a broad-based and multi-layered awareness campaign will be developed and implemented, followed a sustained, ongoing education campaign.
- **Additional resources for the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission** are essential. The finding is needed to fulfil the VEOHR's proposed responsibilities, including education, investigation and reporting. The inadequacy of dedicated funding for VEOHRC towards these responsibilities contributed to the ineffectiveness of the previous *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001* legislation. The 2001 Act reflected the public discourse and debate of the time, which endeavoured to balance various perspectives, and resulted in laws that were arguably compromised and not sufficiently empowered to achieve their objectives.
- **Additional resources to community organisations** for the various groups covered by the proposed legislation—including multicultural, faith-based, women's, LGBTIQ+, and disability cohorts—for community education, reporting and representation.
- **Additional funding should be allocated for community-led initiatives**, such as local anti-racism projects and community leadership programs. The recently released anti-racism strategy committed \$4 million over two years. Given the rise in racism and increased strains on social cohesion, funding needs to be significantly higher and sustained over a longer period. Ideally, the funding will be ongoing. For instance, previous local anti-racism funding allocated more than \$3 million over 12 months to more than 30 projects across the State. Addressing community awareness, building relationships and trust, and generating behavioural change takes time.

"The government must take a consistent stance against racism and discrimination, not only through statements but through how it allocates resources and holds institutions accountable. This means rejecting and challenging divisive narratives, ensuring systems like education, media, and policing address racial harm, and recognising that police should not be a first response in communities they have historically targeted and harmed."

(Written Submission No. 36)

The Anti-Racism Strategy provides a five-year plan for preventing and addressing race and faith-based discrimination in Victoria. The launch of the Strategy is welcome, but its actions and recommendations must be fully resourced and implemented.

A significant barrier to effectively addressing racism and hate crimes is the lack of data collection, which severely limits the government's ability to make informed and evidence-based decisions.

Public consultations and written submissions reported that data related to racism or hate crimes were not always collected or easy to access. Some organisations are actively collecting data on incidents of racism and hate crimes. However, data is not widely collected in other community groups, such as the Muslim community. As a result, we do not have a

comprehensive picture of racism and hate crimes in Victoria, making it difficult to make the best investment or design the right policies to combat racism.

The Government should coordinate the collection and sharing of data from all relevant community organisations, including the Community Security Group, the Islamic Council of Victoria, Victoria Police and VEOHRC. Taking this action will enable the government to develop evidence-based policies, programs and investments that are targeted and effective.

2.1.1. Community education campaigns

Instead of contesting differing opinions, we should focus on sharing stories, facilitating connections, fostering understanding and empathy, and building trust and a sense of belonging, particularly at the local level. Local engagement should be complemented by state and federal messaging and support designed to overcome isolation, division and intolerance.

There is a need to tell a story that spells out the social, cultural, and economic benefits of multiculturalism and explains why every Victorian should embrace and support diversity and inclusion. Given community concerns about the cost of living and housing, the multicultural narrative must explain its economic benefits.

Multiculturalism is all about making Victoria more prosperous and ensuring no one is left behind.

Key points on communication, misinformation and disinformation

1. Avoid undermining or disparaging individuals, which risks further polarisation and erodes connection, understanding and trust.
2. Build broad-based alliances focused on problem-solving and reconciliation—encourage in-person interactions rather than relying solely on online platforms.
3. Use profiles, storytelling and narratives to engage audiences—including influencers.
4. Campaigns should emphasise the economic benefits of multiculturalism, such as its potential to enhance economic prosperity and address the cost of living.
5. Campaigns should also be mindful of or incorporate:
 - promoting a positive, respectful, strength-based narrative;
 - highlighting diverse profiles from the community;
 - acknowledge and celebrate our multicultural diversity;
 - balancing rights with responsibilities;
 - promoting fairness and equality of opportunity for all;
 - recognising and addressing existing barriers to ensure equal opportunity for all; and
 - better utilising multicultural media, community and faith leaders and influencers.

Recommendations

10. Increase funding to deliver the Victoria's anti-racism strategy 2024-29 in order to ensure initiatives across all relevant portfolios are delivered and have impact.
11. The Victorian Government should fund and coordinate a whole-of-government data and evidence collection point on reported incidents of racism and hate crimes in the community, including from Community Security Group, Islamic Council of Victoria, Victoria Police, VEOHRC and schools. This collated data should be used to inform investment and the design of place-based responses in partnership with communities.

2.2. Community safety and security

Feeling safe is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of individual and collective wellbeing. When people feel safe, they are more likely to engage with others in the community, access services and participate fully in community activities.

When safety is compromised—whether through discrimination, systemic neglect or the absence of bold leadership—social cohesion can break down, leading to fear, isolation and division, particularly amongst people who may already feel vulnerable or marginalised.

This concern was consistently raised by key stakeholders. Community members also expressed frustration at the government's tendency to respond too slowly and/or reactively to issues affecting multicultural communities. There is a growing call for bold leadership. Stakeholders and community members want the government to take decisive, values-based positions on global and local issues impacting Victoria's community safety and wellbeing. Communities also want government departments and agencies to work collaboratively to achieve impactful outcomes for the community.

Many stakeholders referenced COVID-19 as a case study. The pandemic highlighted the critical need for proactive planning to ensure the safety and security of multicultural communities during a crisis. One of the key lessons learned was that, in the absence of pre-existing community safety and security plans tailored to Victoria's multicultural and multifaith communities, the government had to develop strategies from scratch and come up with solutions in real time. This lack of planning led to delays, miscommunication, gaps in support, confusion and a feeling of neglect within some communities. This reactive approach is still in place, with no clear community safety and security plans in place to support, inform or reassure affected multicultural communities during times of global conflict.

There is an urgent need for proactive planning with key stakeholders. Committing to proactive planning will strengthen trust, promote inclusivity and uphold the right of all Victorians to feel safe and supported. With the establishment of a new recommended entity, community safety and security planning should be undertaken with key stakeholders, including government and non-government bodies.

Recommendation

12. Require the new statutory entity, Multicultural Victoria, to undertake community safety planning with multicultural communities in partnership with Victoria Police, Emergency Management Victoria and other relevant government departments and agencies following adverse local or international events.

2.3. Interfaith and intercultural dialogue

Interfaith and intercultural dialogue is crucial, especially in times of increased division and rising hate crimes.

Intercultural dialogue is a process of contact, interaction and exchange of views between individuals or groups from diverse backgrounds that are based on equality, respect and mutual understanding.⁸ When different communities come together to share their beliefs, traditions and experiences, it builds understanding and trust. It also breaks down stereotypes and challenges prejudices by showing people that, despite differences, everyone shares common values such as respect, kindness and a desire for a cohesive society.

Interfaith advisory councils and committees have influenced social cohesion, emergency responses, education, and wellbeing initiatives at local and statewide levels. Interfaith dialogue and relationships provide spiritual leadership in building inclusive communities.

Throughout public consultations, stakeholders and members of the community emphasised the importance of strengthening interfaith and intercultural dialogue initiatives because they play a crucial role in fostering mutual understanding, collaboration and trust, as well as ensuring long-term social cohesion within the community.

“In our view, the Government’s multicultural policies, organisations and systems broadly overlook the faith and religious aspects of many multicultural groups. For many such groups, faith and culture are inseparable—their religion is inherently connected to their cultural identity.”

(Written Submission No. 80)

Many participants in public consultations recalled that local governments had established interfaith networks across Victoria to promote social harmony in local communities. In addition, they said interactive activities in councils, schools and workplaces had raised awareness of different cultural practices—fostering a deeper understanding of differences and promoting social cohesion.

“Faith-based organisations are not just spiritual hubs but also provide essential community services. Their voices should be equally valued in decisions around mental health, family support, youth services, and crisis response.”

(Written Submission No. 28)

However, recent events overseas have had a detrimental effect on interfaith networks. In some cases dialogue has ceased altogether. Dedicated multifaith advisory groups—comprising leaders appointed and endorsed by their communities—must receive support to provide input into policies, community services, and community safety and wellbeing.

Recommendation

13. Support funding for intercultural and interfaith networks and initiatives through the proposed Community Capacity Building and Collaboration grants program.

3. Community Capacity Building and Collaboration

3.1. Stronger collaboration between government and community

Engagement between all levels of the Victorian Government and multicultural community organisations must be strengthened. Strong engagement ensures that policies reflect the needs and experiences of Victoria’s multicultural communities. In addition, collaborative engagement can improve policy outcomes, increase public trust and active participation, and, most importantly, strengthen community relationships and social cohesion.

Recent research by the Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies, in partnership with the Australian Multicultural Foundation, highlights the importance of a co-design approach in fostering community-government partnerships, especially in areas such as youth engagement, social cohesion and resilience to harm.⁹

Under the traditional model, professionals plan and deliver a service, often consulting with communities during the planning and design phases. Under the cooperative model, other methods—such as co-design—combine user and professional knowledge to develop and deliver services. This partnership approach ensures communities have agency and are not just “consulted” on program development and delivery.¹⁰

According to research, co-design is effective when communities lead and trusted local organisations are resourced to act. Trust is key to effective co-design. Trust must be earned and built through long-term relationships, cultural responsiveness and a genuine shift in power.

“Partner with local councils for place-based implementation instead of delivering one-size-fits-all programs. The government should work in partnership with local councils to coordinate funding and co-design processes in a place-based manner.”

(Written Submission No.23)

Place-based initiatives work when they are led by the community. For that to happen local communities need genuine ownership of a place-based initiative. Local community leadership makes sense—after all, local people and organisations are experts in their own experiences and potential solutions.

Local governments with high cultural diversity have implemented best-practice strategies to ensure full participation of ethnic communities by including diverse voices in decision-making. These kinds of local government initiatives should be encouraged. Steps should be taken to ensure local governments are eligible for funding to implement place-based, community-led initiatives that promote social cohesion, address racism and facilitate the active participation of multicultural communities in local areas.

3.2. Building capacity and strengthening collaboration

“It is our hope that this Review paves the way for meaningful, systemic change—change that recognises the immense contribution multicultural organisations make [...] and ensures that contribution is backed by stable, secure and fair funding into the future.”

(Open Community Consultation—Geelong, May 2025)

Community feedback strongly emphasised the need for long-term, strategic funding to drive meaningful change, build capacity and deliver sustainable outcomes. Many new and emerging

communities face challenges meeting complex grant reporting requirements—lacking the resources or support to comply. There is a clear need for dedicated capacity-building funding to help organisations—particularly newly-established grassroots organisations—grow and build their operational capacity. Operational funding is equally important for community organisations because it provides stability—empowering organisations to scale and support their transition towards greater self-sufficiency and better community outcomes.

It was evident from the consultations that many community groups felt overwhelmed and unsupported by government. They said the demands placed on them by government agencies and their own communities had escalated, particularly due to the heightened social polarisation influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and global events.

There is an urgent need for additional support in capacity building and collaboration within communities—particularly new communities. Support should be provided to enhance community understanding of government funding requirements and procedures.

In addition, many stakeholders said multicultural events and festivals tended to be highly segregated, with each cultural group primarily catering to its respective community. While these celebrations hold great significance, there was a strong desire among community members for more inclusive, intercultural and multicultural events that unite diverse groups.

Multicultural community members and sector stakeholders expressed a clear interest in opportunities to connect across cultures, foster mutual understanding and social cohesion, and bridge gaps.

“Beyond cultural celebrations, the government should actively facilitate dialogue and cooperative projects that unite communities, creating deeper intercultural understanding and genuine social harmony.”

(Written Submission No. 23)

3.3 Multicultural Grants

Portfolio grant programs can be improved by having clearer and more strategic objectives that align with the Act, social cohesion objectives and government priorities. In addition, the programs require additional funding to meet increased levels of need.

Core base funding for many long-standing grant programs within the Multicultural Affairs portfolio have not increased for more than 10 years. Those unfunded programs include the Community Infrastructure program, the Festivals and Events program, and the Community Support Groups program.

3.3.1. Multicultural infrastructure

Core funding for the Community Infrastructure program has remained unchanged for more than 10 years, but demand has increased exponentially. As a result, the maximum grant possible has decreased from \$1 million to \$0.4 million at a time when construction costs have risen significantly.

This underfunding is a missed opportunity. The Community Infrastructure program should be leveraged to build multicultural hubs in partnership with local governments and large NGOs—creating multi-purpose facilities for a variety of local ethno-specific, faith-specific, language-

specific multicultural organisations and communities, as well as youth-specific groups and women's organisations. These facilities could include meeting rooms, classrooms and event spaces, while also hosting outreach services from local providers. Additional funding could be targeted at several metropolitan (North, South, West, East) and regional centres in collaboration with regional ethnic communities' councils and local government.

3.3.2. Multicultural festivals and events

Core funding for Festival and Events Grants program has been stagnant for over a decade, resulting in the maximum grant decreasing from \$100,000 to \$50,000.

This reduction in maximum grants has come at a time when venue, event and insurance costs have increased significantly. A handful of events, such as the Pako Festival in Geelong and the Antipodes Lonsdale Street Greek festival, have received \$200,000 per year for four years until 2026-27. Most events receive less than \$50,000, with the average amount less than \$5,000.

There is an urgent need to develop a calendar of events that provides funding between \$100,000 and \$200,000 for 20 to 30 events (including, for example, Diwali, Chinese/Lunar New Year, Eid, Chanuka and African festivals) and between \$50,000 and \$100,000 for 50 to 60 events. Investing in multicultural festivals and events would generate significant local economic activity, as well as regional, national and international tourism. It could also strengthen Victoria's trade engagement (soft diplomacy) with nations such as India and China and regions such as South-East Asia and the Middle East.

3.3.3. Multicultural seniors support

During consultations, the Advisory Group heard from many members of Victoria's multicultural seniors' communities. These vulnerable community members were concerned, distressed and confused about the funding they received through the Multicultural Seniors Program.

More needs to be done to cater to the needs of multicultural seniors. The number of multicultural seniors is rising, with 51 per cent of older Victorians born overseas. They are at increased risk of depression, and social and emotional loneliness, depression. They also suffer from isolation, which often leads to increased health and mental health issues, reduced quality of life, heightened risk of elder abuse, which requires further attention and additional resourcing, and increased rates of mortality.

The Multicultural Seniors Support program, established in 2002, is critically important. The program offers support services for multicultural senior communities, aiming to reduce isolation, promote social connections and strengthen ties to the community. Significantly, the program also provides funding to cover public liability insurance, without which small organisations could not arrange activities and events to bring multicultural seniors together.

After the lapsing of the 2021-25 program, which had provided four-year security of funding for more than 1,000 multicultural seniors' organisations, the 2025-26 State Budget has only allocated on-going funding for one year. The lack of secure funding for this vulnerable cohort is short-sighted and negligent. Judging by the number of distressed community members seen by the Advisory Group, this funding insecurity is also causing significant and unnecessary anxiety for some of Victoria's most at-risk older citizens.

As previously mentioned, the role of ethno-specific and multicultural organisations is underappreciated. Making these organisations a complementary part of the service delivery system would deliver better outcomes and reduce community unrest. For that to happen, the administrative burden faced by ethno-specific and multicultural organisations needs to be lifted. Currently, they are forced to apply for multiple grant programs, sometimes pursuing grants based on what is offered rather than their community's needs.

Targeted grant programs can play a role. However, combining various grants to create a larger, more flexible funding pool would be more effective. Under a combined grants model, government could identify priority areas or issues—such as youth engagement, mental health and wellbeing, family violence, leadership training and employment—and communities could submit proposals that address their specific needs. The grants program would then have the flexibility to support and better the delivery of programs on a needs basis.

Multicultural Victoria should have a primary responsibility to educate and build the capacity of multicultural communities on the grant's requirements and responsibilities. Responsible staff should organise public meetings and consultations and make themselves available in public forums to provide information about grant guidelines and requirements on an annual basis.

Recommendations

14. Review the Multicultural Affairs portfolio's grants programs, guidelines and procedures to ensure they are accessible and responsive to multicultural and multifaith communities and do not unintentionally disadvantage certain groups or activities that support intercultural initiatives. This should include but is not limited to:
 - a. considering additional grant application avenues, especially for groups that may have less digital capability and/or resources to dedicate to these processes;
 - b. ensuring reporting requirements are not overburdensome and are commensurate with grant amounts and community organisations' capabilities and capacity;
 - c. scheduling regular outreach and engagement with communities on grant programs and supporting the building of multicultural and multifaith organisational grants application, management and reporting capabilities; and
 - d. ensuring grant application and assessment processes do not disadvantage smaller organisations who may have limited experience in applying for government funding.
15. Establish a new Capacity Building and Collaboration funding stream (estimated at \$20 million per year) to facilitate large community-led grants for community-specific and multicultural peak bodies, as well as smaller grants of up to \$5,000 for multicultural community organisations.
16. Establish a \$10 million community infrastructure and Multicultural Hub grants program to operate over a three-year grants cycle, exclusive of pre-election commitments.
17. Provide:
 - a. increased multi-year funding support to multicultural seniors' community organisations, enabling them to provide continuity of service and increased social support to seniors; and
 - b. additional investment towards a community-led education program to raise awareness of elder abuse, uphold the rights of multicultural seniors, and connect them to culturally safe support services that protect their safety and dignity.

18. Develop a calendar of multicultural events to enhance their impact, reach, and cross-promotion.
19. Develop an online Victorian Multicultural Directory emanating from the grants database with the approval of grant recipients.

3.4. Language services

The provision of professional interpreter services—particularly within key essential service areas such as hospital/health care, mental health services, family violence services, education and legal (court and policing)—is critically important.

In 2017, the last reform in this area by the Victorian Government partially addressed the issue of workforce sustainability. Specifically, over approximately 15 years, remuneration levels had decreased by over 50 per cent. The 2017 changes provided a 20 per cent increase in remuneration rates. Plans to incorporate CPI increases didn't occur. As a result, there has been a depreciation of remuneration levels (particularly given higher inflation figures over recent years).

This issue needs to be addressed, particularly given the tendency of departments and agencies to propose savings, such as reducing minimum booking times. Cuts to remuneration and minimum hours force interpreters to leave the profession. This false economy can lead to interpreter shortages, delays in the judicial process, a lack of informed consent and subsequent litigation, and errors in medication and healthcare.

Interpreting services are an essential service in critical areas such as health, policing, courts/justice, education and emergency management. Given the potential for harm, interpreting services in critical areas should not be subjected to competitive tender processes that undermine equity and service delivery. Interpreting services must be considered part of frontline service delivery and, as such, exempt from government savings measures.

With that in mind, the government should reconsider LanguageLoop's position as a state-owned enterprise. LanguageLoop could be integrated into the Multicultural Affairs portfolio—similar to current machinery-of-government arrangements in New South Wales—and be made responsible for the delivery of essential interpreting services.

Improved outcomes from this reform could include:

- set minimum professional standards,
- set minimum interpreter remuneration benchmarks that consider recent inflationary impacts,
- enhanced workforce sustainability and supply,
- the delivery of professional training for interpreters, as well as cultural competency training and advice about how to best-use interpreters for the public service and beyond (local government, NGOs and private sector),
- deliver equitable and better health, legal and education outcomes for people with low or no-English proficiency,

- ensure government and agency programs build an adequate budget for interpreting and translating services, and
- offer non-essential service delivery areas through competitive processes, allowing private-sector language service providers to bid for work.

Advances in artificial intelligence are expected to impact this industry over time. In critical and essential services, though, it is critically important to have a professional and skilled interpreter who is aware of their clients' cultural nuances and belief systems.

Recommendations

20. As part of the current refresh of the Victorian Government's Language Services Policy, the Victorian Government should declare language services an essential service and require that NAATI credentialed interpreters and translators are always engaged for government work. Furthermore, the government must invest in training and accreditation pathways to improve interpreter availability and quality.

21. Review the delivery of language services to assign critical service areas to LanguageLoop, cease its status as a state-owned enterprise, and administratively transfer it to the proposed new entity (Multicultural Victoria).

4. Social cohesion pledge

At the request of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, the Review canvassed views and responses to the Social Cohesion Pledge (the Pledge) announced by the Premier in December 2024. The announcement—a measure to strengthen community harmony—stated the Allan Government would “introduce a ‘social cohesion pledge’ that multicultural organisations must observe to apply for government grants”.

The Review consulted a targeted group of organisations and peak bodies, including the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, the Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and the Victorian Council of Social Services. A complete list of organisations consulted is in **Appendix C**.

Summary

Most of the organisations consulted about the Pledge were supportive of the government's intention to ensure that organisations receiving government funding were held accountable and undertook funded activities lawfully, in ways that support community cohesion and harmony. However, there were significant concerns and opposition to the approach announced by the Premier to achieve this intention.

Overwhelmingly, community and sector stakeholders questioned the **fairness, effectiveness and enforcement** of the proposed Pledge. Many said the issues and objectives the government sought to address with the Pledge could be achieved in more constructive and straightforward ways, without singling out multicultural communities as the sole contributors to—or detractors from—social cohesion. As the new Federal Minister for Multicultural Affairs stated, “Multiculturalism isn't solely about social cohesion and multicultural communities aren't solely responsible for social cohesion”. (SBS News, June 2025)

4.1. Applying the Pledge exclusively to multicultural communities is seen as discriminatory, reactive, and punitive.

The majority of organisations consulted argued that it would be unfair for the Pledge to apply only to the multicultural portfolio. If introduced, they said the Pledge should be a funding requirement across all government portfolios. The proposed approach was seen to be at odds with the values outlined in the Victorian Government’s own Multicultural Policy Statement, *Victorian! And Proud of It*—particularly the values of “one law for all” and “a fair go for all”.

Further, many organisations said that the proposed approach sent a message to the broader community that only multicultural communities perpetrated acts of racism or hate.

“We have concerns about the idea of a social cohesion obligation to fall specifically on multicultural organisations. There is no reason why this obligation should only apply to multicultural organisations.”

(Victorian Council of Social Services—April 2025)

“Many of the groups that are spreading hate at the moment do not receive multicultural funding and are not multicultural communities.”

(Municipal Association of Victoria—April 2025)

The approach was considered a “punitive and a knee-jerk response” to current social cohesion issues and tensions that fails to understand or address underlying community tensions and issues.

“Trying to address issues of racism, vilification and social cohesion requires a deeper response embedded in a sound understanding of issues and strong engagement with communities at the local level.”

(Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission—April 2025)

There were concerns also that the Pledge would unfairly result in multicultural organisations and community members feeling that they had to refrain from speaking out on issues that affect them for fear of losing access to necessary government funding. As a consequence, it could diminish the important role they play as advocates for their communities. In addition, multicultural communities’ rights to free speech could be hampered. For many migrants and humanitarian entrants, perceived or practical restrictions on civil rights are deeply alarming.

“If we go back to foundations of social cohesion and social justice, civil society and community organisations play a critical independent advocacy role and a mechanism like this has a chilling effect especially if there is concern/uncertainty about who is making decisions about breaches, etc.”

(Victorian Council of Social Services—April 2025)

Communities are also concerned that the Pledge could be weaponised. Muslim communities in particular hold strong fears that the Pledge could be used to prevent them from being able to call out and respond to events overseas for fear of impact on funding.

“These are very subjective concepts and leave significant room for differences of opinion and at worst may retard the advocacy, openness and work that some orgs may want to do with their communities in order to represent them.”

(Victorian Council of Social Services—April 2025)

“It would be very easy for an organisation that takes issue with another to say they are undermining my sense of belonging and cohesion.”

(Islamic Council of Victoria—May 2025)

4.2. Implementation, monitoring and enforcement will be challenging and administratively burdensome.

The majority of organisations consulted about the Pledge were concerned by the complex and fraught repercussions of enforcing adherence to “a simple, powerful and universal statement” (Media Release: Premier’s Speech on Social Cohesion, 17 December 2024). Respondents questioned who would decide what was offensive and who would police the Pledge.

The Victorian Council of Social Services, the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission and the Social Services Regulator said that placing expectations on behaviours outside what organisations were being funded to deliver was problematic and difficult to enforce. Stakeholders also argued it could be legally complex and challenging to prevent access to funding for different groups—leading to court challenges.

“Where does the obligation start and end? Organisations receive funding from multiple sources, not just the Victorian Government.”

(Victorian Council of Social Services—April 2025)

It was argued that if people break laws, they should be investigated and processed through police and legal channels. The Advisory Group was told it should not and cannot be the role of a government department to undertake investigations and attempt to recoup funds from organisations for breaches not related to the intended purpose of a funding grant. They believed government departments that enforced the Pledge could face legal action. In addition, attempting to recoup funds from small community-based organisations was unrealistic.

The government’s stated intention to extend the Pledge to apply to staff, leaders and volunteers was also considered highly problematic. Many people volunteer or work for multiple community organisations and enterprises. If an individual is believed to have breached the Pledge the department would find it difficult to determine which organisation that person was representing at the time of the possible breach of the Pledge. There is also the inherent injustice of punishing an entire community due to the actions of a single individual.

The Pledge could be misused for political or inter-community motives—leading to witch hunts to attempt to find something that could be labelled as offensive and punished.

“An alternative would be if the Government made a social cohesion pledge on behalf of Victorians that committed to striving for unity, social justice and equity to support a Victoria that is proudly diverse and inclusive where everyone’s rights matter equally.”

(Centre for Multicultural Youth—April 2025)

Policing the Pledge could undermine rather than strengthen social cohesion.

4.3. Government’s existing laws and funding arrangements should be strengthened to achieve the intended aims and objectives of the Pledge

Some organisations consulted about the Pledge argued that the government already had the laws, mechanisms and processes in place to tackle racism and hate speech and promote social cohesion. Therefore, they pointed out, a new process was not warranted or justified.

“We do not want to see things like racism, however there is recourse in the law already for someone who is a victim to take action.”

(Victorian Council of Social Services – April 2025)

VCOSS, which helps review the terms and conditions of the Victorian Common Funding Agreement (VCFA) every four years, has said there is no need for any additional conditions of funding. VCOSS noted that the VCFA included an explicit expectation that organisations spend Victorian Government funding in line with Victorian Government Values and comply with all applicable laws. VCOSS argued that the VCFA this was more than sufficient to address the types of concerns that the Pledge sought to address. They also said it was problematic that the departments had so much discretion to arbitrarily decide whether the Pledge had been breached. For an outline of existing relevant clauses, terms and conditions in the VCFA, see Appendix C.

There was some support for the Pledge from a small number of stakeholders who welcomed a more punitive approach to organisations associated with repeated acts or public statements believed to vilify other groups. They argued the government make an example of these repeat offenders by actively investigating allegations and, if they are proven, withdrawing support. The Review believes that the government can already has the power to investigate problematic organisations or incidents using legislation such as anti-vilification laws. Another option is to strengthen contractual requirements relating to the conduct of funded organisations. Implementing and policing a Pledge would be overkill and potentially counterproductive, not to mention difficult to enforce.

Finally, stakeholders overwhelmingly rejected the use of the word ‘pledge’. The term was considered paternalistic and culturally inappropriate, singling out and infantilising multicultural communities. Almost all of those consulted advised strongly against using this term. Suggested alternatives included embedding terms such as ‘an undertaking’, ‘a commitment’ or ‘a requirement’ in funding contracts.

The Advisory Group is of the firm opinion that, as currently described and announced, the Pledge will not meet the intended aims of government. In fact, the Pledge is more likely to discriminate against multicultural and multifaith communities, disadvantage and punish organisations and communities for the actions of associated individuals, escalate tensions amongst communities, undermine social cohesion, increase the administrative burden on government departments and agencies, and risk legal action against the government.

Recommendation

22. Rather than instituting a stand-alone or new ‘pledge’, strengthen existing contractual mechanisms in funding contracts across all government portfolios to ensure all organisations receiving government funding uphold the state’s laws and contribute positively to social cohesion and community harmony.

It is advised that the government can achieve this by taking the following actions:

- a. Ensure funding recipients across all government portfolios commit to requirements in funding contracts that relate to lawful and respectful conduct
- b. Update/replace the current Values Statement attachment to VCFA's with requirements to be embedded in the funding agreement on the expected conduct of funded organisations, including:
 - nurturing opportunities for shared understanding and celebration,
 - engaging in respectful discussion with open minds where different views or perspectives are held,
 - fostering an inclusive environment where all people can experience a sense of belonging, and
 - carrying out daily conduct free from racism, vilification and discrimination in all forms.
- c. Make explicit in funding agreements the processes and consequences of any breaches of any requirements, terms and conditions, including:
 - organisations to be barred from receiving any further government funding,
 - organisations to be required to release a public statement condemning and distancing themselves from any individual/s and behaviours in breach of requirements or risk being barred from receiving government funding, and
 - the potential for the relevant government department to cancel or recoup funding (pending further legal advice).

Part 2B: Other Government portfolios

The Advisory Group is of the view that the issues impacting Victorian multicultural and multifaith communities extend well beyond the scope of the Multicultural Affairs portfolio and the scope of this Review.

With that in mind, this section of the Review outlines the issues raised by stakeholders and community members in other portfolio areas, including the arts, media, Victoria Police, education and sports.

5.1. Arts, heritage initiatives and the Immigration Museum

5.1.1. Immigration Museum

The Immigration Museum is more than a cultural institution. It is a vital platform for intercultural dialogue, civic inclusion and the integration of Victoria's migrant communities.

There is a lack of a trusted space for shared storytelling in Victoria, heightening the risks of racial vilification and discrimination, youth disengagement from life, as well as disinformation, increased social fragmentation and polarised social discourse.

That is why the role of the Immigration Museum should be strengthened and expanded.

The Immigration Museum holds symbolic significance for immigrant communities in Victoria. It could be used to uphold Melbourne and Victoria's international standing as a cultural and creative state. However, due to perceived neglect, the state of the Immigration Museum can be interpreted as a retreat from support for multiculturalism.

Within government, concerns have been raised about the financial sustainability and possible closure of the Immigration Museum. The mere suggestion of closure reveals a troubling lack of institutional commitment to the Immigration Museum's mandate and historical value—not to mention a fundamental lack of understanding about the social and economic importance of multiculturalism. The Advisory Group believes the Immigration Museum is not currently under safe stewardship within Museums Victoria.

There is an urgent need to rescue the Immigration Museum. It needs a new structural model which embraces the lived experiences of immigration in Victoria and fosters community connection and trust.

The museum is an irreplaceable part of Victoria's civic, cultural and moral landscape. Rather than questioning its existence, Museums Victoria should be engaging the support of ethnic communities and philanthropy, as well as increasing school visitations as part of multicultural awareness and anti-racism education.

Currently, the Immigration Museum is being allocated fewer resources and support than other museums. As a result, it is less able to attract or develop the new exhibitions it needs to improve visitor numbers and income. Effectively, it is being set up to fail.

The Immigration Museum holds deep historical significance within the old Customs House, where generations of newcomers once passed through Melbourne's gateway into a new life in Victoria. As such, the museum is uniquely positioned to evolve into a safe place that preserves

the heritage of Victoria's immigrants physically and digitally, placing local stories in a global context and local stories in a global context. It is a sacred civic space for Victorians of all cultural, linguistic, faith and migration backgrounds—a place of dignity, reflection, education, and joy.

The Immigration Museum must have its own governance arrangements and funding from the Victorian Government.

Recommendation

23. Victoria's Immigration Museum should be elevated as a cultural icon and a place of profound significance in Victoria. The Immigration Museum must be prioritised and fortified through:

- a. Pursuing governance autonomy and independence from Museums Victoria,
- b. Providing a platform for the preservation of the heritage of immigrant communities to Victoria, intercultural dialogue, civic inclusion and representation of the state's multicultural communities,
- c. Implementing a new structural model and vision that embraces the lived experience of immigration to Victoria. Key features of a future vision can include, but are not limited to:
 - A hybrid museum model that blends in-person programming with a robust digital presence,
 - Leadership by people with lived experience of migration, displacement and cultural differences – ensuring authentic storytelling and ethical curatorial practice,
 - Community held trust,
 - A historical precinct within the historic Old Customs House—a gateway through which countless migrants first arrived in Victoria—activated through public programming, and
 - A living museum with an emphasis on providing opportunities for emerging multicultural artists.

5.1.2. Multicultural museums

Successive Victorian governments have recognised the importance of preserving and showcasing diverse cultures and faiths in Victoria. For more than 40 years governments have partnered with multicultural and multifaith communities to establish and maintain 'community museums' that express this diversity of culture, faith, history and heritage. Victoria currently has seven museums representing communities and faiths, including Greek, Italian, Chinese, Jewish and Islamic museums. A Vietnamese museum is currently under construction.

These museums play an important role in raising awareness and appreciation of Victoria's rich and diverse cultural heritage, enhancing inclusion and cohesion.

Multicultural Museums Victoria Inc plays a significant coordination role, supporting collaboration on exhibitions and events and increasing the visibility of these community museums and building capacity to sustain them. Following many years of financial support of

community museums, Creative Victoria ceased most funding in 2023, leaving a significant resource gap. Given the significant contribution made to our state's multicultural and multifaith communities by community museums, the Advisory Group recommends continued financial support for the strategic and coordination role played by Multicultural Museums Victoria Inc.

Recommendations

24. That Multicultural Museums Victoria Inc be supported in the provision of ongoing core coordination activities which could be accessed through the proposed Community Capacity and Collaboration Fund.

5.2. The role of independent media to strengthen multiculturalism

Independent multicultural media foster inclusion, information sharing and belonging within the Victorian community. These platforms create space for underrepresented voices, cultures and stories that often go unnoticed in the mainstream media—and, as a result, promote social cohesion and inclusion.

In consultation with the Independent Multicultural Media Agency (IMMA), the Advisory Group calls for a renewed multicultural policy framework, grounded in access and equity, where multicultural media outlets foster informed dialogue and civic connection—countering misinformation and focusing on core services and engagement efforts.

Up until the recent federal government funding announcement, independent multicultural media had received minimal sustained support from state or federal governments over the past decade. By comparison, “media agency booking data” shows governments spend up to 70 per cent of ad budgets on digital tech giants. A significant portion of that digital spend should be invested in independent multicultural media. After all, IMMA members have digital capacity as well as a strong social media presence.

The Advisory Group believes multicultural media can play an important role in promoting social cohesion, civic education, and emergency communication. We believe the following actions should be considered:

- **Advertising commitment:** Review the actual spending outcomes of the minimum 15 per cent government advertising spend commitment to multicultural markets. Currently, most of the spending is directed to Meta and Google, bypassing independent multicultural media. Spending on Meta and Google needs to be capped within this segment to ensure independent multicultural media is included in advertising campaigns. Continue to keep expenditure on translation services outside this commitment.
- **Digital Transformation and Sustainability Fund:** Establish a dedicated fund to support digital development, skills training and income-generating innovation across independent ethnic media. A key aspect of this would encompass digital skills development and income generation. These outlets typically operate with small teams, ranging from two to five staff and contributors, and between 20 to 40 individuals. As part of the transformation, IMMA can also provide advice and support to independent media outlets from emerging and small communities in areas such as digital transformation, training, and development (where possible), through forums and referrals to existing media training providers.

- **Whole-of-government communication strategy:** Develop communication protocols across all government departments to ensure effective engagement with multicultural media and IMMA, disseminating essential information on health, emergency response, transportation, public safety, culture, and the arts.
- **Community engagement advisory role:** When seeking to communicate with specific ethno-cultural, linguistic, and faith communities, the government should consult multicultural media, IMMA as well as not-for-profit community organisations.

Recommendation

25. Independent multicultural media is a critical partner in achieving Victoria's social cohesion and effective policy delivery and requires appropriate and sustained support from government for its continued contribution. Specifically, the state government should:
- a. Review the actual spending outcomes of the minimum 15 per cent government advertising spend commitment to multicultural market and redirect expenditure to multicultural markets and if required, redirect expenditure to ensure independent multicultural media is receiving an allocation that is commensurate with the role it plays in ensuring multicultural communities have equitable access to information and news they require for active civic participation and informed decision making.
 - b. Allocate funding to support digital development, skills training, and income-generating innovation across independent multicultural media. This can be funded through the proposed Capacity Building and Collaboration grants program.
 - c. Develop communication protocols across all government departments to ensure effective engagement with independent multicultural media, disseminating essential information on health, emergency response, transportation, public safety, culture, and the arts.

5.3. Victoria Police

In the past, the relationship between multicultural communities and Victoria Police has had its challenges. Victoria Police has addressed these past issues by initiating strategies and programs designed to strengthen relationships and trust. Examples of those initiatives include the establishment of community and faith-based committees, recruitment designed to ensure workforce diversity is reflective of the community, cultural competency training, and the appointment of designated-sworn personnel.

With global events heightening local tensions, the Advisory Group believes there is a need to prioritise and elevate multicultural affairs within Victoria Police.

For example, multicultural liaison and building relationships and trust is a whole-of-police-force responsibility. The Advisory Group suggests that it might be time to assign the primary responsibility to engage with communities to dedicated sworn personnel—and coordinate this new approach through central command.

Recommendations

26. Prioritise and elevate multicultural community engagement within Victoria Police command's structure.
27. Assist in the provision of expertise and support with the development of community safety plans for communities affected by overseas conflicts and global displacement.
28. Increase visitation to and engagement with English language schools for new arrivals across Victoria and introduce Victorian laws and the role of police.
29. Maintain positive community relationships and provide community education about crime prevention to multicultural and multifaith community organisations across Victoria.

5.4. Education

Schools and universities can promote multicultural inclusion by creating environments where acceptance of diversity, understanding of different cultures, and awareness of global and local issues are encouraged. They can also help address racism and help new arrivals—particularly those arriving through humanitarian programs or as asylum seekers—integrate into the education system while maintaining their language.

Community consultations raised concerns about racism and fears within the education system. Recent overseas conflicts have heightened worries that racism can significantly impact students' mental health and wellbeing, leading to marginalisation and isolation. As a result, there is a need to review and further enhance the training programs.

Re-establishing the Ministerial Multicultural Education Advisory Committee (previously chaired by a Parliamentary Secretary for Education or Multicultural Affairs) would be timely given the current landscape. Representation on the Committee should include academics with specific expertise in anti-racism, social cohesion, vocational pathways and language tuition, as well as teachers, principals, and key community, faith and education stakeholders.

Teaching Languages Other Than English (LOTE) is not just an educational add-on—it's a strategic investment in the state's future. Learning additional languages sharpens students' cognitive abilities, improves literacy and drives better academic results. Bilingual and multilingual graduates are better prepared to compete in the global economy, engage with international partners and seize opportunities in Victoria's multicultural society.

LOTE teaching is also vital for social cohesion, fostering a sense of belonging and respect. It helps young Victorians maintain cultural identity, build intergenerational connections and gain a deeper understanding of cultural diversity. Supporting language learning is a clear demonstration of Victoria's commitment to inclusion, prosperity, and the shared future we are building together, and aligns well with the Multicultural Victoria Act 2011.

Delivering targeted English language training for newly arrived students is critical to their success in Victorian schools and to the strength of our broader community. English Language Schools play a crucial role by offering intensive, tailored programs that enable students to develop the language skills necessary to access the curriculum and fully participate in school life. These transition programs lay a strong foundation in literacy and learning strategies,

ensuring students are confident and well-prepared when they transition into mainstream classrooms.

Early investment in English language support can have a dramatic impact on educational outcomes. Students who receive structured language training settle faster, engage more successfully with peers, and perform better academically. This not only benefits individual learners but also supports teachers and schools by reducing the barriers that can lead to disengagement or underachievement. English Language Schools equip students to thrive, rather than merely cope, as they adjust to a new educational system and community.

Importantly, delivering high-quality English language programs demonstrates Victoria's commitment to inclusion, equity and opportunity. Many newly arrived students have experienced disruption, displacement, or trauma, and dedicated language support is a clear signal that they are valued and welcomed. By investing in their success from day one, we strengthen social cohesion, unlock potential, and uphold the values at the heart of Victoria's multicultural identity. However, to maximise the gains, English Language Schools also need additional support to provide broader settlement support for the students and their families.

Recommendations

30. Re-establish the Ministerial Multicultural Education Advisory Committee to review the efficacy of and, where appropriate, make recommendations on the enhancement of:
 - a. existing multicultural inclusion and anti-racism programs,
 - b. support for newly arrived students from overseas, including civic education, and
 - c. community language education.
31. Fund settlement support services and transitional programs at community English language schools to ensure newly arrived children and families are connected to necessary supports and can successfully transition into other educational institutions, including:
 - a. funding for one Settlement Support Worker at each of the five English Language Schools to ensure newly arrived children and families are being connected to necessary supports; and
 - b. a specialised transitional program to support newly or recently arrived students under 18 in successfully transitioning from English Language Schools and other secondary education institutions to local TAFE colleges, thereby preventing disengagement from education.
32. Increase funding for community language initiatives, including community language schools, multilingual story-time programs, bilingual kindergartens, to ensure language preservation, including:
 - a. increasing Community Language School funding from \$260 to \$350 per student annually to ensure the preservation of community languages and the sustainability of community-based language schools,
 - b. expand bilingual kindergartens to be expanded from the current levels, and

- c. promote and expand multicultural story-time programs across local libraries and community settings.

33. The Department of Education should consider:

- a. increasing the minimum number of language learning hours (currently 150 minutes) to strengthen language learning in the Victorian public school system,
- b. consulting with multicultural education providers and reviewing the possibility of adopting a standardised scaling for completing a language at VCE level, regardless of which language is chosen, and
- c. introducing scholarships for language teachers and recognise overseas teaching qualifications to fill current gaps.

5.5. Multicultural Young People

All community and stakeholder consultations, including written submissions, raised issues experienced by multicultural young people.

Multicultural young people are not a homogenous group. They belong to a generation that are at the frontline of significant social, environmental, cultural, technological and economic generational change. The additional challenges they face depend on a variety of factors, such as whether they are newly arrived or Australian-born, whether they or their family were migrants, refugees or asylum seekers.

Many multicultural youth live in an uncertain, complex world where traditional assumptions are butting up against new ways of doing things. Social media has also given rise to a widening gap between the generations that is experienced by all age groups and is vastly different to previous generations. “The biggest divide in Australia is the intergenerational divide”¹

As multicultural young people navigate this complex world, their families and cultural communities can help them build resilience and a sense of belonging. That’s why Victoria needs strong, supported communities and social infrastructure.

“As a young Greek person in Melbourne, I don’t think the Victorian Government’s multicultural policies are working well for people like me. Most support seems to focus on festivals or older generations, but it doesn’t really address the needs of young diaspora communities today.”

(Written Submission No. 22)

Numerous research, including the Federal Government’s Multicultural Framework Review report, have shown that “despite youth programs demonstrating that they foster cultural connection and identity, a glaring disconnect remains; young people’s voices are largely under-represented in policymaking and systemic reform”. In addition, research and other consultations have demonstrated that racism is still pervasive and a corrosive issue for young people. It undercuts their participation in all facets of their lives—from enjoying public spaces to participation in education, work, sport and recreation, and the arts and civic life.

Giving young people a voice and a role in designing solutions for the future is vital in how Victoria operates as a vibrant, cohesive multicultural state. We know in Victoria, despite significant progress made, there are still cohorts of multicultural young people who are being

left behind or at high risk of falling through the cracks in the system. Some of the key issues for multicultural young people include:

- Better access to mainstream youth services and supports.
- Certain groups of multicultural youth are still overrepresented in the youth justice system.
- Multicultural young people can face multiple challenges accessing culturally-appropriate mental health support, coupled with experiences of racism, discrimination and the challenges of navigating a multicultural identity.
- Multicultural young people are at increased risk of homelessness due to the refugee and migration experience and the impact this has on individuals and families.
- Multicultural young people face additional barriers to full civic participation, with some wary of civic participation due to prior experiences in their countries of origin.
- Grassroots community organisations are often led by adults, with young people's opinions and ideas are not necessarily heard and their leadership capacity not fostered.

The needs of multicultural young people is demonstrated through the funding community support groups, the Refugee Minor Program, multicultural youth crime pilot programs and programs delivered by the Centre for Multicultural Youth.

But more needs to be done.

Recommendations

34. Prioritise a youth-focused anti-racism action plan as part of Victoria's Anti-Racism Strategy.

35. Commit \$3 million to establish a Multicultural Youth Worker Program funding 20 locally-based multicultural youth workers across Victoria to work with multicultural young people and communities of greatest need, especially those in growth corridors and in rural/regional Victoria.

Multicultural youth workers present an opportunity for mainstream services and organisations to better connect with multicultural young people, families and communities, building cross-cultural connections and strengthening relationships that improve social cohesion. The program would also include a practitioners' network to provide specialist capability building and support to workers.

36. Expand and extend the Community Support Group program to address the immediate challenges and emerging issues facing young people and their families.

CSGs are known to improve access to services, increase participation, strengthen communities, build resilience and promote intercultural connections. These programs provide a critical bridge to helping young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds navigate the service system, while working alongside local services to build their capacity to work effectively with multicultural young people and their families. At the same time, bicultural youth workers provide young people with role models from cultural

backgrounds like their own—something young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds say is important for identity, confidence, and belonging.

37. Establish a new multicultural youth-led/lived-experience grants program to grow multicultural youth participation and leadership capability to be sourced through the proposed community capacity building and collaboration grants program.
38. Support and extend funding to grassroots community associations to grow their capability to initiate intergenerational activities and support young people's needs and aspirations.

5.6. Sports and recreation

Victoria has a vast network of sport and recreation infrastructure.

Sporting clubs can become central hubs for local multicultural and multifaith communities, building bonds and contributing to the community's cohesion and health.

Major sporting codes have also, to varying degrees, embraced multicultural inclusion and initiated various programs designed to increase participation.

For many community members, the cost of membership, registration, equipment and transportation are significant barriers to participation. These economic barriers can exclude many young people from accessing the benefits and advantages of sports and recreational activities.

The Victorian government has a range of programs designed to boost participation, but barriers still exist.

Recommendations

39. Establish a multicultural sports inclusion framework that addresses participation, cultural responsiveness, and community cohesion.
40. Fund a multicultural sport and recreation inclusion hub to build the capacity of the sport sector. This should include access to mentoring and other forms of leadership development, as well as organisational leadership and capability building. Sport and recreation are recognised as invaluable in supporting young people's community participation as well as growing their leadership skills and experience.
41. Establish a multicultural sport inclusion officer program for staff to work across sport and recreation sectors to increase participation of multicultural young people & families to sporting clubs & associations.

Part 2C – Additional issues for further consideration

This part of the report addresses broader issues affecting multicultural communities in Victoria, noting that they were not explicitly included in the Review’s scope and were not widely consulted. However, the Advisory Group acknowledges that their long-standing role in improving access, equity, and fostering social cohesion within the Victorian community remains vital.

6.1. Health

The recent COVID-19 pandemic provided valuable lessons on how to engage more effectively and communicate with multicultural communities. Part of the Victorian Government’s approach was the establishment of a dedicated but small team to engage with multicultural communities—conveying accurate information on the testing and vaccination programs while at the same time addressing misinformation. The unit delivered in-person and online presentations to communities across the State, which were incredibly effective in increasing the take-up of testing and vaccinations. However, after the pandemic phase, the unit was one of the first to be shut down, despite the sector recommending that it be retained and re-purposed to cover other health issues, such as diabetes, breast screening, and cardiovascular disease.

A targeted health promotion role, designed to better inform communities about health messages and prevention of illness or hospitalisation, would deliver better health outcomes—saving lives and resources.

Suggested Government Actions

1. Reestablish the Multicultural Health Education Unit.
2. Ensure that health sector boards reflect the diversity of the Victorian population as a matter of priority.

6.2. Mental health and wellbeing

The Royal Commission into Mental Health identified several issues relevant to multicultural communities. Mental Health and Wellbeing (MHW) has been a long-standing issue within multicultural communities, with underrepresentation in both the use of services and in the representation of these communities within governance and decision-making bodies and processes.

Some of the issues have included:

- Underutilisation of MHW services due to a variety of factors, including design and systemic barriers, inadequacy of demographic data collection, inadequately skilled mental health professionals and service agencies, and attitudinal and stigma-related issues within communities.
- Cultural barriers within communities hindering access to mental health services. It is essential to collaborate with communities to break down taboos and promote engagement and dialogue about mental health, encouraging individuals to seek help and obtain effective

treatment. If barriers and stigma-related issues are not fully addressed, the problems highlighted by the sector over the past 30 years are likely to persist.

- The underrepresentation and systemic exclusion of multicultural communities from mental health research, resulting in insufficient evidence about existing inequities.

While there is an appreciation of the work that has been undertaken to implement the MHW reforms, the Advisory Group believes more needs to be done to ensure that:

- multicultural communities are fully engaged in the design and implementation of the new mental health system,
- attention to cultural and linguistic diversity is a core feature of mental health programs and services,
- mental health professionals and agencies have the necessary skills to provide equitable and effective services to multicultural communities, and
- multicultural community organisations are supported to provide mental health promotion and illness prevention programs, and mental health support services, to their communities.

The Royal Commission's recommendation 34 emphasised the importance of working in partnership with and improving accessibility for diverse communities. It also highlighted that, at a minimum, improving mental health and wellbeing outcomes for Victoria's diverse communities requires:

- 1.3.1 *a reduction in all forms of stigma, discrimination, hate speech and vilification*
 - 1.3.2 *strategies to promote mental health and wellbeing and prevent mental illness that recognise and respond to the needs of diverse communities*
 - 1.3.3 *acknowledgment of the capacity of existing and emerging community leaders and community-led organisations to engage and support the mental health of their communities and to facilitate access to mental health services*
 - 1.3.4 *a mental health and wellbeing system that is safe, inclusive and responsive to all communities*
 - 1.3.5 *the availability of ethno- or cohort-specific specialist services to provide tailored mental health and wellbeing responses where required*
- (p261, Vol2).

The Royal Commission also proposed the development of a framework and blueprint for action to address the mental health and wellbeing of diverse communities (p. 261, Vol. 2). The Advisory Group understands that these documents were developed but not released.

The failure to release the framework and blueprint for action to address the mental health and wellbeing of diverse communities makes it likely that inequitable access and systemic barriers will be maintained rather than removed.

Suggested Government Actions

3. Release the Diverse Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework and Blueprint for Action as soon as possible and disseminate it to all service providers, along with guidance on the implementation requirements.
4. Establish a Multicultural Capacity Building and Responsiveness Grants Program of \$6.5m per annum (noting that this is in addition to grants currently provided to some multicultural service providers).

5. Establish a dedicated Multicultural Advisory Committee (MAC) to advise the Department for Health and the Chief Officer for Mental Health and Wellbeing.
6. Develop a multicultural mental health research and evaluation agenda and program (\$0.250m)

6.3. Family violence

Family violence is a pervasive and complex issue across Victoria, disproportionately impacting women and children from multicultural, migrant and refugee backgrounds.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence and successive government action plans have acknowledged the specific barriers multicultural communities face, including visa dependency, language barriers, racism and limited access to culturally safe services.

However, those barriers to community safety still remain.

Multicultural children and young people (aged 10-20) consistently fall through the net of mainstream family violence services. Young people have shared that the family violence sector is geared either for “young children” or for “women as adult victims/survivors”. The lack of awareness, accessibility and relevance of these adult services to the unique intersecting needs of young people isolates them, placing them at greater risk.

A growing concern is also the rise of adolescent family violence in the home (AVITH), which involves the use of violence by a young person against family members. While it remains an under-researched issue, there is a clear need for more effective responses, including prevention programs, adequate housing and data collection, to understand the prevalence and nature of AVITH in multicultural communities.

The Victorian Government has made significant and commendable investments in building a more responsive and integrated family violence system. However, for multicultural communities, critical unmet needs remain across primary prevention, early intervention, crisis response and long-term recovery. Current service models do not consistently reflect or respond to the lived realities, cultural dynamics or structural inequalities faced by multicultural communities.

An intersectional approach—recognising the impacts of race, gender, class, migration status, faith and disability—is essential to drive effective, just and inclusive responses. This approach must be embedded across all levels of policy, service design and workforce development.

Importantly, intersectionality must never come at the expense of specialisation. Instead, the system must be strengthened to uphold both the specialist expertise of multicultural and ethno-specific services and the capacity of mainstream services to deliver culturally safe, accountable and inclusive responses.

To meet the objectives of the Family Violence Reform Rolling Action Plan and the 10-Year Industry Plan, urgent action is needed to strengthen specialist multicultural responses, build a diverse and capable workforce, and invest in culturally responsive prevention strategies.

Suggested Government Actions

7. Increase core and program funding for ethnic-specific, multicultural, and faith-based organisations to strengthen their roles in prevention, early intervention, and crisis response. This includes multi-year, flexible funding that enables community-led innovation and the integration of lived experience, gender equity and cultural knowledge into practice.
8. Provide long-term funding to expand and strengthen InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence as the statewide specialist service for multicultural communities. Invest an additional \$8 million-\$10 million over four years to:
 - Build InTouch's service footprint across regional and metropolitan Victoria.
 - Enhance InTouch's crisis response, casework, legal, therapeutic, and systemic advocacy functions.
 - Deliver sector-wide capacity-building in partnership with Safe and Equal, focused on cultural responsiveness, intersectionality, and workforce upskilling.
9. Establish a dedicated multicultural prevention funding stream under the family violence primary prevention investment strategy. Prioritise long-term, place-based and community-driven prevention initiatives that centre cultural knowledge and shift harmful norms and drivers of violence.
10. Fund the Driving Cultural Diversity in the Family Violence Workforce pilot (WIDI and RMIT) with an investment of \$2.5 million over two years to:
 - Recruit and support a cohort of multicultural women into the FV sector.
 - Deliver a culturally adapted Fast Track induction aligned to the Family Violence Core Functions Framework and the Australian Qualifications Framework.
 - Create employment pathways that enable workers to achieve minimum qualifications through earn-and-learn models.
 - Strengthen supervision, professional development, and wellbeing systems within host organisations.
 - Evaluate outcomes to inform long-term, scalable workforce strategies.
11. The existing family violence service system establishes service models that respond to the needs of young people.

6.4. Child protection

Child Protection has been a longstanding issue for multicultural communities, particularly newly-arrived communities not familiar with the laws of the land and the role government agencies play—including agencies with a responsibilities to safeguard the community and specific authorities that have responsibility for child protection and family violence.

Being aware and mindful of cultural factors is critical to developing a holistic intervention plan when dealing with child protection and family violence, particularly if a child needs to be removed for safety reasons from the parents and/or family. Placing a child with a family of the same or similar culture and faith, and seeking advice from community leaders, should be part of standard protocols. Protocols similar to those implemented for First Nations communities should be applied.

Additionally, recruitment programs for Foster Care should be targeted towards multicultural and faith-based communities. Such a recruitment strategy would need to provide information sessions—in-person and through trusted mediums and leaders—explaining the role that Foster Care families can play.

Suggested Government Actions

12. That Child Protection protocols ensure that advice from the relevant multicultural or faith community is sought in guiding the implementation of an intervention or protection plan.
13. That designated Practice Leaders be appointed in each regional office (metro and rural) with multicultural and/or refugee and trauma expertise.
14. That existing cultural competency training be reviewed to ensure its efficacy and appropriateness, ensuring that such training does not reinforce stereotypes.
15. The recruitment of child protection staff aims to reflect the community demographics.

6.5. Economic Opportunity – Small Business

A significant proportion of small business owners and managers come from multicultural backgrounds. According to the *National Small Business Strategy (2025)*,¹¹ 34 per cent of small business owners were born outside of Australia. That figure is likely to be significantly higher if the second-generation migrants are included. Further, the Strategy states found 22.9 per cent of small business owners spoke a language other than English at home. The Strategy also referenced a 2017 study,¹² which found that 83 per cent of migrant business owners did not own a business before coming to Australia.

The appeal of small businesses stems from several factors, including:

- difficulty getting recognition of overseas qualifications, skills and/or work experience;
- difficulty finding work for various reasons, including “lack of local experience” and conscious and/or unconscious bias; and
- previous experience in the country of origin.

Whilst existing initiatives to support multicultural precincts are excellent, tapping into existing programs with a tailored and better-targeted strategy would provide even better outcomes for the whole state. A dedicated multicultural program for small businesses—both in terms of starting up and developing existing enterprises—would generate numerous benefits, including:

- providing multicultural businesses with guidance, services, and skills to successfully start, run, and transform their operations;
- assisting in growing and developing multicultural businesses, including export-oriented and import-replacement industries; and
- creating jobs, both direct and indirect.

Highlighting and promoting success stories will aid social cohesion and can be utilised within broader community education campaigns.

Business Victoria and Victorian Chamber of Commerce & Industry (VCCI) already offer a range of excellent programs and training modules that can be accessed, including grants, training

courses and mentorship support. Tailoring these initiatives towards specific communities and locations, including cultural precincts and in-language, will raise awareness and increase the likelihood of success for small businesses.

The program would target specific communities, collaborate with multicultural chambers of commerce and distinct multicultural business precincts, and promote through networks and multicultural media. Priority communities will include refugee and newly emerging groups.

A small but tailored program that supports existing small businesses and those looking to start one could deliver significant benefits.

Upskilling existing and new businesses will reduce failure rates, boost employment and economic activity, and contribute to positive narratives and examples that promote social cohesion.

The VCCI and the Australian Multicultural Foundation Research Trust have both made proposals to develop a pilot program.

Suggested Government Actions

16. Pilot a multicultural small business project involving a partnership between a multicultural non-government organisation and the VCCI.

6.6. Voting & Electoral System

State and federal electoral commissions have done exceptional work in communicating with and engaging multicultural communities.

However, community education needs further refinement and development. It needs to go beyond teaching “how to vote” to a deeper understanding of Australia’s voting system, including the benefits of a compulsory and preferential voting system, as well as the importance of having an independent electoral commission.

A deeper understanding of the system will enhance voting practices and reduce informal voting, which is higher in electorates with larger populations of low-English speakers.

The informal vote in Australia remains too high (over 5 per cent), which can affect the outcome in close marginal seats and potentially determine who forms the government in tight elections.

Education on civics, rights, and responsibilities in our democratic, multicultural society, including the rationale behind our preferential voting system and its benefits, will provide the foundational understanding and knowledge necessary to understand how to vote and complete a ballot paper more easily.

Suggested Government Actions

17. That the Victorian Electoral Commission be commended for its efforts to date but call upon it to deliver a more developed education package, in partnership with the community and multicultural media, to ensure greater understanding of the electoral system, and to reduce the proportion of informal votes more effectively.

Part 3: Conclusion

The way forward

In conclusion, the Advisory Group wants to thank the Victorian Government for establishing this Review. This Review was a rare opportunity to directly consult with communities at a turning point in Victoria's multicultural history.

We also want to thank the individuals and organisations across Victoria for sharing their candid and frank assessments and recommendations. The Review is a testament to their strength, resilience, commitment and determination to promote social cohesion.

We hope the recommendations in this report receive the full support of the Victorian Government and the Victorian people. After all, it is in everyone's interests to make Victoria a safe, more inclusive multicultural state.

A final thought.

Victoria is one of the world's great multicultural success stories. Generations of migrants, together with Indigenous Victorians, have created a place unlike any other place in the world: a place where everyone is equal and everyone belongs.

Together we have created a place populated by people from every part of the world; and our great diversity—our ability to speak the languages of and understand the cultures of the world—is a competitive advantage. It attracts new people and ideas, new investments and jobs.

But the broad and deep foundations of our multicultural success are being undermined by troubles beyond our shores and our control, and by rapid and radical changes in the ways in which we live and work right here.

We cannot change what's happening on the other side of the world, but we can—and must—change what's happening in Victoria.

All Victorians must face the fact that overseas developments and conflicts have significantly impacted our social cohesion. And we must take action to repair the damage.

We are not powerless in the face of global unrest. We can make plans and foster connections and networks that counter racism, intolerance and hate. And we can take actions that rebuild social cohesion and create a path to a fairer, more inclusive future for all Victorians.

That's why Victoria needs to plan and invest for a population expected to increase by more than 50 per cent by 2065. That's why we need to plan and invest for our community becoming even more diverse than it is now. That's why we need to be prepared for more geopolitical upheaval. That's why we need to encourage more civic participation. That's why we need to combat misinformation and disinformation—especially on social media. That's why we need to reject all forms of racism and bigotry. That's why we need to remove the barriers that stop some Victorians from living the life they deserve as a human right.

Creating that kind of future won't happen overnight. Building understanding and trust takes time. Establishing relationships and mutual understanding takes time. Implementing a whole-of-government approach to multiculturalism takes time. That is why there is no time to waste.

At its heart, multiculturalism is all about people. Their human rights, social justice and dignity—regardless of background, race or religion. The recommendations in this report are for every Victorian. You are our future.

Part 4: **Appendices**

Appendix A – Multicultural Review consultations

Research and policy analysis –

Multicultural Affairs policies and programs

- Victoria's Multicultural Policy Statement
- Multicultural Affairs Outcomes Framework
- Multicultural Affairs grant program guidelines
- Communicating with multicultural communities – better practice guide
- Multicultural Affairs Advisory groups including:
 - Anti-Racism Taskforce
 - Multicultural and Multifaith Law Reform Consultative Committee (MMLRCC); and
 - Victorian African Communities Committee (VACC)

Victorian Multicultural Commission

- Multicultural Victoria Act
- Role and function of the VMC including organisational structure
- VMC strategic plan and annual workplan including Ministerial Statement of Expectations
- VMC affiliate networks and groups
- VMC Annual Report
- Other VMC Commissioner and Office of the VMC policies

Map of consultation and submission locations

Figure 9a: A statewide map of consultations and submissions received for the Victorian Multicultural Review.

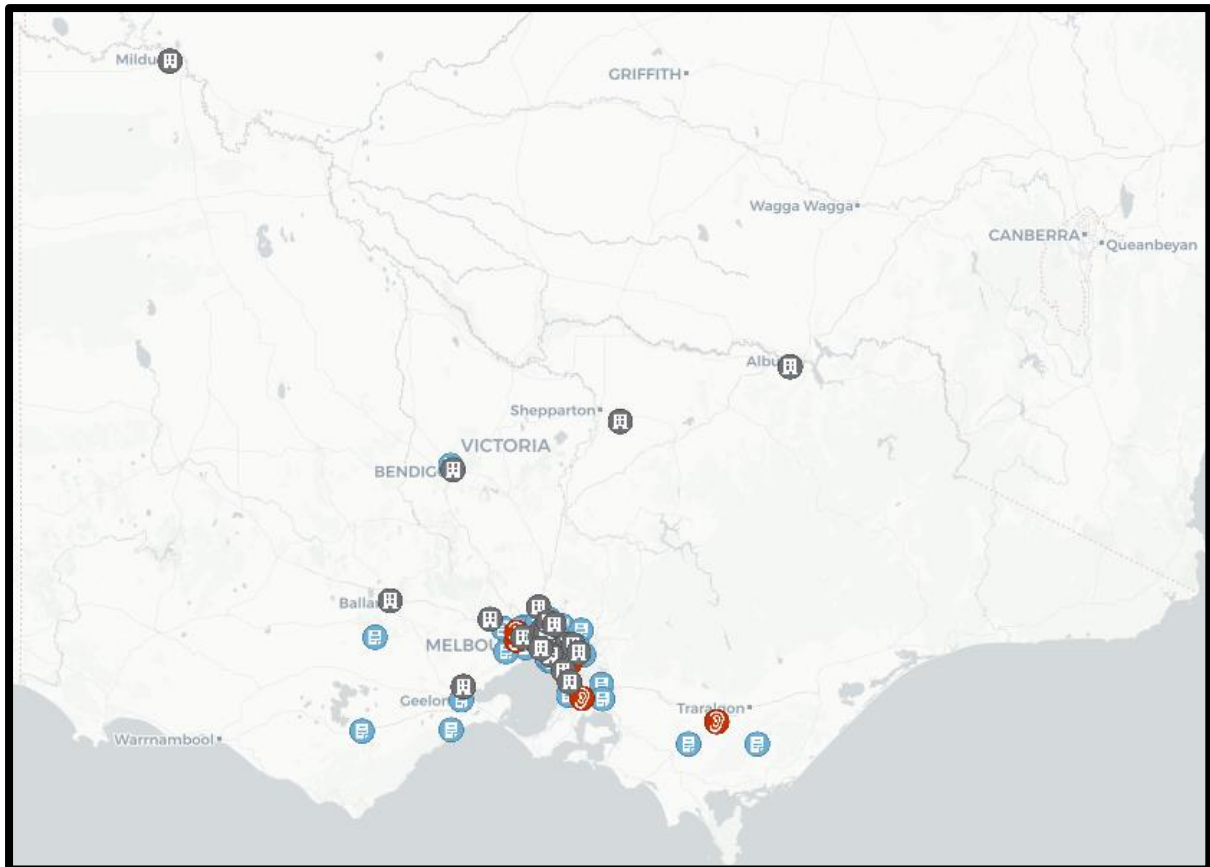
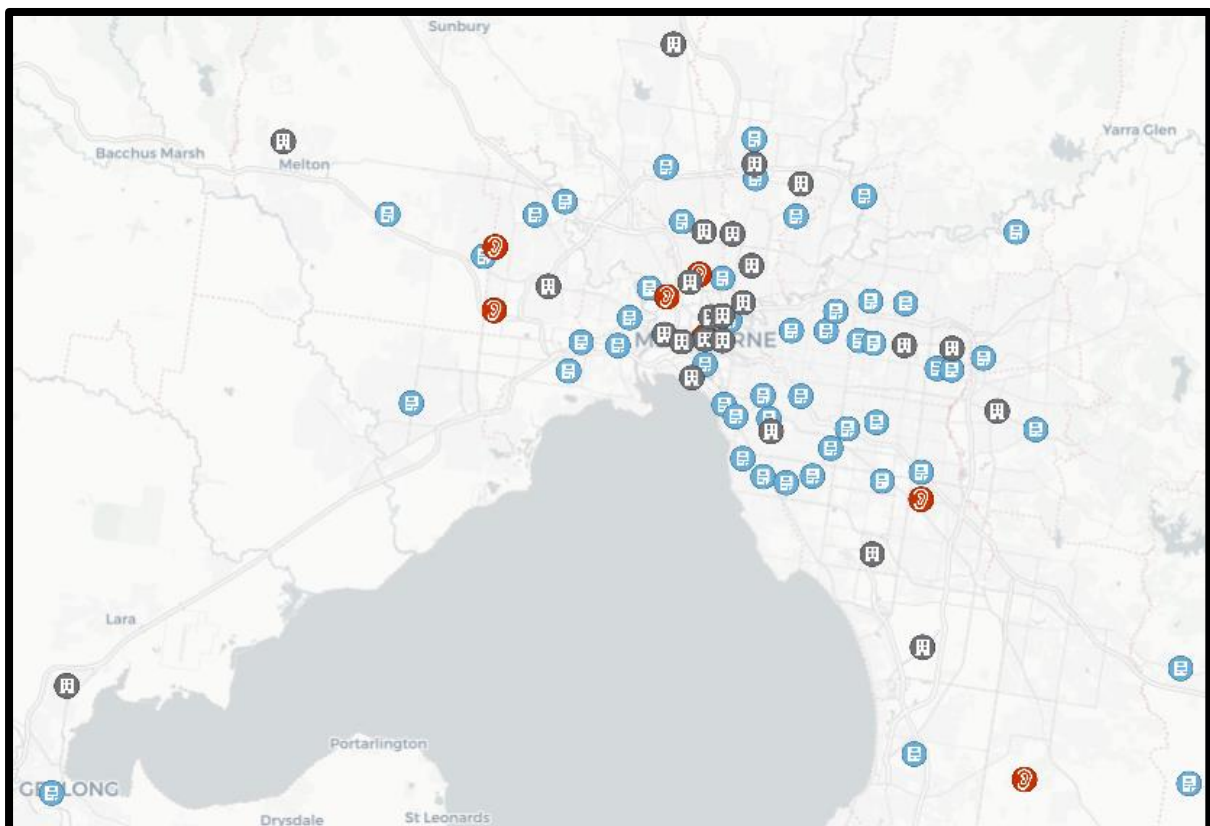


Figure 9b: A map of consultations and submissions received for the Victorian Multicultural Review in Greater Melbourne.





Public consultations

Targeted organisations

Written submissions

Targeted stakeholder consultations

Multicultural

Community / Faith

Specific

- Afri-Aus Care
- African Youth Alliance
- African Youth Initiative
- Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights (AMWCHR)
- Australian Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN)
- Board of Imams Victoria (BOIV)
- Chinese Association of Victoria
- English Language Schools (Noble Park, Western & Collingwood)
- Gurduara Council of Victoria
- Hindu Council of Australia (Victoria)
- Federation of Indian Associations of Victoria

- Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV)
- Jewish Community Council of Victoria (JCCV)

Broader Multicultural & Peaks

- Australian Multicultural Foundation
- Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY)
- Department of Education (Vic)
- Department of Home Affairs
- Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV)
- Faith Communities Council of Victoria (FCCV)
- Immigration Museum
- Independent Multicultural Media Association
- Multicultural Museums Victoria

- Regional Multicultural Alliance
- Victorian African Communities Committee
- VMC
- VITS LanguageLoop

Non-Multicultural Specific

- Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV)
- Scanlon Foundation
- Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI)
- Victorian Council of Social Services (VCSS)
- Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC)
- Victoria Police
- Victorian Social Services Regulator
- Victorian Trades Hall Council

Open public consultations

13 open public consultations were held, including 9 metropolitan, 2 regional and 2 online. Locations included Brunswick, Casey, Craigieburn, Geelong, Glen Eira, Morwell, North Melbourne, Shepparton, Springvale, St Albans, and Wyndham.

The following communities and organisations had representatives at the above public consultations:

Organisations

- AMES Australia
- Australian Multicultural Community Services
- Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council Inc.
- Beyond Blue
- Brimbank City Council
- Channel 31
- Chinese Australian Network Inc.
- City of Melbourne
- Community Hubs Australia
- Cultura
- Eastern African Women's Foundation
- Foundation House
- Geelong Latin American Movement
- Migrant Resource Centre
- Monash University
- Professionals Australia
- Progressive Judaism Victoria
- Seniors Latin Club Inc.
- University of Melbourne
- Victorian Legal Aid
- Welcoming Australia

Communities

- Brazilian
- Chin
- Chinese
- Cypriot
- Dutch
- German
- Greek
- Indian
- Indonesian
- Iranian
- Karen
- Liberian
- Macedonian
- Maltese
- Nepalese
- Nigerian
- Pakistani
- Punjabi
- Somali
- Syrian
- Ukrainian

Written submissions

159 written submissions were received for the Victorian Multicultural Review, which consists of 64 personal submissions 95 organisation submissions, including from the following organisations and communities who chose to identify themselves:

Organisations

- ABAWyn
- Academy of Indian Music, The
- Aleph Melbourne
- AMES Australia
- Australia Afghanistan Initiative Inc.
- Australia Baha'i Community
- Australian Christian Lobby
- Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT)
- Australian Iranian Senior Citizen Society of Victoria

- Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council
- B'nai B'rith Victoria
- Buddhist Council of Victoria
- Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare
- Centre for Multicultural Youth
- Centre for Muslim Wellbeing
- Chinese Media Group
- Cinespace
- City of Greater Geelong
- City of Port Phillip
- City of Stonnington
- Community Hubs Australia
- Community Response Australia Inc.
- Cultura
- Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria
- Filipino Community Council of Victoria Inc.
- German Lutheran Church
- Gippsland Multicultural Services
- Good Shepherd
- Great Stupa, The
- Greater Dandenong City Council
- Hindus for Human Rights ANZ
- Humanism Project, The
- Hume City Council
- Independent Multicultural Media Association (IMMA)
- Intercultural Cities Australia National Network (ICANN)
- Interfaith Centre of Melbourne
- iGen
- Indian Carnatic Music and Dance in Melbourne
- Islamophobia Register Australia
- Jewish Community Council of Victoria
- Jewish Council of Australia
- Kaladhara Arts and Culture Inc.
- Karen Culture & Support Foundation
- Khairul Amal TV Australia Inc.
- Lalor North Primary School
- La Trobe University Greek Studies Program
- Modern Greek Teachers' Association, The
- Monash Council
- Multicultural Arts Victoria
- Municipal Association of Victoria
- Netball Victoria
- Natyatharu School of Dance
- North Balwyn Uniting Church
- North Western Melbourne Public Health Network
- Oncall Language Services
- Professionals Australia
- PRONIA
- Regional Multicultural Alliance
- REJOICE
- Settlement Services International
- Socio-Cultural Syriac Inc. Association
- Tamil Pentecostal Church Group
- Tenants Victoria
- Victorian Refugee Health Network
- VicSport
- VITS LanguageLoop
- Westjustice

Cultural and faith communities

- | | | |
|--------------|------------|-------------|
| • Afghani | • Buddhist | • Chinese |
| • Australian | • Baha'i | • Christian |

- Congolese
- Filipino
- French
- Hindi
- Humanist
- Indian
- Iranian
- Italian
- Jewish
- Karen
- Greek
- Lutheran
- Macedonian
- Muslim
- Pakistani
- Pentecostal
- Syrian

Appendix B – Reporting requirements under the Act

Section (26) of Multicultural Victoria Act 2011

26 Reporting requirements of Government Departments

As soon as practicable after the end of each financial year, each Department Head must prepare and submit to the Minister a report on—

- a) the use of interpreting and translating services by the Department during the financial year; and
- b) communications in languages other than English and communications in the multicultural media made by the Department during the financial year; and
- c) any major improvements made, or initiatives developed, by the Department during the financial year that promote multiculturalism in Victoria and meet the identified needs of Victoria's diverse communities, including the identified needs of youth, older persons and women within these communities; and
- d) the extent to which people from diverse backgrounds were represented during the financial year on boards and committees established by the Department or for which the Department is administratively responsible; and
- e) the Department's progress under its cultural diversity plan (by whatever name called) to address provision for culturally sensitive service delivery to Victoria's communities; and
- f) any initiatives developed by the Department that meet the identified needs of diverse communities in regional and rural areas of Victoria; and
- g) any measures taken by the Department to promote human rights in accordance with the **Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006** for diverse communities.

Appendix C – Social cohesion pledge

Organisations consulted

- Board of Imams Victoria (BOIV)
- Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY)
- Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV)
- Faith Communities Council of Victoria (FCCV)
- Independent Multicultural Media Association
- Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV)
- Jewish Community Council of Victoria (JCCV)
- Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI)
- Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS)
- Victorian Equal Opportunity of Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC)
- Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC)
- Victorian Sikh Gurdwaras Council
- Victorian Social Services Regulator

Victorian Common Funding Agreement (VCFA)

Examples of existing relevant standard clauses in the VCFA which recipient organisations sign up to include:

- The Organisation and the Department share a vision to improve the outcomes for people in Victoria. Through this Agreement, the Organisation and the Department will engage with each other cooperatively and collaboratively to achieve this vision.
- The Values as an attachment to the VCFA (Appendix X) are an important part of the Department's funding program Guidelines and describe the Department's minimum expectations regarding the conduct of its funding recipients.
- The Organisation has acknowledged, and in accepting funding, intend to undertake funded activities in alignment with the Values.
- The expectations set out in the Values are not intended to reduce, alter or supersede any other obligations which may be imposed on the Organisation, whether under this Agreement or at law.
- If the Organisation fails to fulfill or is in breach of any of its obligations under this Agreement and does not rectify the omission or breach within ten (10) Business Days of receiving a notice in writing from the Department to do so, the Department will be entitled to terminate this Agreement and may recover from the Organisation any part of the Funding.

Termination on notice

Clauses 14.1 and 14.2 relate to termination for breach as follows:

14.1 If the Organisation or the Department is in breach of this Agreement, the party in breach will remedy the breach within thirty (30) Days of that party receiving written notice requiring it to fix the breach.

14.2 If notice has been given under clause 14.1 and the breach is not satisfactorily remedied within thirty (30) Days, the party who gave notice may immediately terminate this Agreement by giving written notice.

Immediate termination

Clause 14.3(e) of the VCFA provides that the Department may terminate the Agreement immediately by giving written notice to the Organisation ***if the Organisation behaves in a way that the Department believes that its continued association with the Organisation may be detrimental to the reputation of the Department.***

Suspension

Clause 12.1 provides that at any time during the Term, the Department may by written notice, require the Organisation to immediately suspend delivery of the Activity, or part of the Activity if.

12.1(3) the Organisation has breached this Agreement, and notice has been given to the Organisation by the Department under clause 14.1 [Termination of Agreement]; or

12.1(4) the Organisation or its officer, board member, employee, member, volunteer, subcontractor, representative or agent has breached, or is reasonably suspected to have breached, any Law material to the Activity or the operation of the Organisation.

Under clause 12.5, the Department may immediately suspend payment of all or part of the Funding if.

12.5(3) the Organisation has breached the Agreement, and notice has been given to the Organisation by the Department under clause 14.1 [Termination of Agreement].

12.5(5) the Department has requested the Organisation to suspend all or part of the Activity under clause 12.1.

Other relevant clauses

Clause 3.1(6)(iii) provides that the Organisation will deliver the Activity in accordance with the Agreement to the reasonable satisfaction of the Department and will at all times comply with all applicable Laws.

Under s41K of the *Summary Offences Act 2022*, Public display of Nazi symbols:

(1) A person must not intentionally display a Nazi symbol if—

(a) the person knows, or ought reasonably to know, that the symbol is associated with Nazi ideology; and

(b) the display—

(i) occurs in a public place, a non-Government school or a post-secondary education institution; or

(ii) occurs in sight of a person who is in a public place, a non-Government school or a post-secondary education institution.

Penalty: 120 penalty units or imprisonment for 12 months or both.

Nazi symbol means—

(a) a Hakenkreuz, being a symbol of a cross with the arms bent at right angles in a clockwise direction; or

(b) a symbol that so nearly resembles the symbol referred to in paragraph (a) that it is likely to be confused with or mistaken for that symbol.

If an organisation breaches section 41K, then it will be in breach of clause 3.1(6)(iii) of the VCFA and the department can consider suspending or terminating the VCFA.

Likewise, clause 3.1(6)(ii) provides that the Organisation will deliver the Activity in accordance with all Applicable Department Policies (defined any applicable Department policies and guidelines, as amended or replaced from time to time, including those set out in the Schedule.) Therefore, if the department had an applicable Department policy annexed to the VCFA regarding codes of conduct and values, and the organisation breached them, then the department could consider suspending or terminating.

Victoria's Multicultural Policy Statement (aka. Values Statement)

'Victorian. And proud of it.' is Victoria's Multicultural Policy Statement. It sets out the Victorian Government's ambition with a range of policies, programs and services that encourage every one of us to participate in a stronger, safer and more harmonious community.

The Multicultural Policy Statement is underpinned by the Victorian Values Statement, a set of shared values that form the foundation of our cohesive, multicultural society.

1. One law for all

2. Freedom to be yourself

Victorian Values Statement

**3. Discrimination is
never acceptable**

4. A fair go for all

**It is up to all of us to
contribute to a Victoria
5. we can be proud of**

1. One law for all

Everyone is equal under the law. All Victorians have the same legal rights, responsibilities and protections. As Victorians, we all have rights under the law and responsibilities towards each other. By respecting our mutual rights and responsibilities, we can ensure a safe and cohesive society.

2. Freedom to be yourself

Everyone is free to be themselves and to feel safe in being true to themselves. The Government wants every Victorian to be able to celebrate their culture with pride and practice their traditions in peace.

The freedom to be yourself includes freedom of speech, expressions of gender, sexuality and religion, and peaceful assembly; it does not allow people to break the law or to impinge on the safety or freedom of others.

3. Discrimination is never acceptable

Everyone has a responsibility to promote inclusion and participation and to reject exclusion, racism and all forms of violence. A society free of discrimination is better able to tackle problems like economic and social disengagement and improve health and wellbeing for all.

4. A fair go for all

Everyone deserves a fair go in life. That means giving every Victorian – no matter where they live, their circumstances, or their background – the support they need to enjoy the

Victorian way of life. This includes quality education and healthcare, accessible transport, equity in employment and a safe place to live.

5. It is up to all of us to contribute to a Victoria we can be proud of

We all want similar things – the opportunity to thrive, for our successes to be recognised, and for our families and loved ones.

Appendix D - Benefits and challenges of multicultural diversity

The table below provides an overview of the benefits and challenges of multicultural diversity.

	Benefits	Challenges
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expanded Talent Pool: Attracts skilled workers from across the globe. Addresses labour shortages and enhances productivity in various sectors (e.g., healthcare, tech, construction). ▪ Global Business Competitiveness: Companies with multicultural teams are better equipped to operate in international markets. Cultural awareness fosters relationships with diverse clients and partners. ▪ Entrepreneurship & Job Creation: Immigrant communities frequently establish small businesses, contributing to economic growth and employment. ▪ Boost in Consumer Demand: Diverse populations generate demand for a broader range of goods and services, stimulating market expansion. ▪ Increased Innovation & Creativity: Diverse perspectives promote more creative problem-solving and innovation. Multicultural teams can develop new ideas and products that resonate with global markets. ▪ Addressing Demographic Challenges: Australia's ageing population means that immigration brings in younger workers to support the economy and tax base. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Integration and Adjustment Costs: Investment needed in language education, job training, and community programs. There are short-term costs for social services and support infrastructure. ▪ Workplace Miscommunication: Cultural and language barriers may lead to misunderstandings or inefficiencies. Requires effective diversity training and inclusive policies. ▪ Unequal Economic Outcomes: Discrimination or a lack of opportunities can result in the underemployment of skilled immigrants. This may result in the wasted potential of human resources. ▪ Short-Term Economic Strain: Influxes of migrants may put pressure on housing, healthcare, and welfare systems, particularly in low-resource areas. ▪ Cultural Resistance and Social Friction: If not correctly managed, perceived job competition or cultural clashes can lead to economic and political backlash.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regional Development: Skilled migrants and refugee resettlement can help sustain smaller regional towns by boosting local economies and addressing labour shortages. ▪ Tourism and International Education: Multiculturalism enhances Australia's global reputation as an open, diverse country, making it more attractive for tourists and international students (a major export sector). Family and friendship connections also boost tourism. ▪ Trade and International Relations: A diverse population helps build stronger trade ties due to shared cultural and language backgrounds. 	
Social / Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social Enrichment: Cultural festivals, food, art, music, and traditions contribute to a more prosperous and vibrant society. They also encourage cultural curiosity, openness, and global awareness. ▪ Inclusive National Identity: Modern Australia is shaped by immigration. Celebrating multiculturalism strengthens national unity and reflects our social reality. ▪ Improved Global Citizenship: Exposure to different worldviews fosters empathy and encourages stronger social cohesion when diversity is embraced and respected. ▪ Language Skills & Cultural Competence: Multilingual and culturally aware citizens are vital assets in a globally connected world. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social Integration Issues: Without appropriate support, immigrants may feel isolated or have difficulties integrating, leading to marginalisation. ▪ Racism and Discrimination: Prejudice can create social divisions and undermine the advantages of diversity if not actively addressed. ▪ Cultural Clashes or Misunderstandings: Differences in norms and values can lead to tension. ▪ Pressure on Social Services: During periods of high migration, schools, healthcare, and housing may be strained if not adequately planned for. ▪ Identity Politics or Division: When politicised, it can result in polarisation or the perception of "us vs them," particularly if economic conditions are challenging.

Appendix E: Endnotes

¹ [About Multicultural Affairs](#), Victorian Government website

² www.health.vic.gov.au/multicultural-health-action-plan-2023-27/victorias-cultural-diversity, Victorian Department of Health, *Victoria's Cultural Diversity*,

³ [International Education – economic and social value](#), Victorian Government Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions website.

⁴ Jenson J, *Mapping Social Cohesion: The State of Canadian Research*, Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc. 1989

⁵ Mark Saba, *Australia's Multicultural Framework Review: is interculturalism the future for a bonded Australia*, Lexigo webpage.

⁶ Fethi Mansouri & Amanuel Elias, “*The Intercultural Dialogue Index (ICDI): An Index for Assessing Intercultural Relations*” Social Indicators Research, 2021.

⁷ Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, *Mapping Social Cohesion Report*, 2024.

⁸ Fethi Mansouri & Amanuel Elias, “*The Intercultural Dialogue Index (ICDI): An Index for Assessing Intercultural Relations*” Social Indicators Research, 2021.

⁹ Michelle O'Toole, Mark Duckworth, Katrina Scaramella, Bulent (Hass) Dellal, (2025) *Better ways of working together: Mapping co-design in CVE initiatives in Victoria*. Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies, Melbourne, Australia. <https://www.crisconsortium.org/mapping-codesign-in-cve>

¹⁰ M. Duckworth, Horn, C., & Grossman, M. 2024. *Do Governments Trust Communities? The Trust Flows Project Research Report*. Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies, Melbourne, Australia. <https://www.crisconsortium.org/trust-flows-research-project>

¹¹ [National Small Business Strategy](#)

¹² [CGU Migrant Small Business Report 2017](#), Analysis & Policy Observatory website