



# Community Relations Report 2020-2021



NEW SOUTH WALES GOVERNMENT

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# Submission Letter



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To whom it may concern,

It is a pleasure to submit the 2020–21 Community Relations Report on behalf of Multicultural NSW for the Parliament of New South Wales.

I submit this report under section 14 of the *Multicultural NSW Act 2000* (the Act), which requires, for each financial year, Multicultural NSW to prepare for Parliament:

- a report on the state of community relations in NSW as affected by cultural diversity
- an assessment of the effectiveness of public authorities in observing the Multicultural Principles in the conduct of their affairs.

This report reaffirms the commitment of Multicultural NSW to advocate for the Multicultural Principles, enshrined in section 3 of the Act as the policy of the State, across the NSW public sector and in the community we serve.

Multicultural NSW recognises that the factors contributing to and affecting our cohesive multicultural society are many and complex. The agency has therefore drawn on data, information and insights from a range of reliable sources in producing this report.

As in previous years, this Community Relations Report draws on the latest independent findings of the annual Mapping Social Cohesion surveys by the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute and the insights and experiences of NSW agencies through their participation in the whole-of-NSW Government Community Resilience and Response Plan (COMPLAN) and Multicultural Policies and Services Program (MPSP).

This report covers some events and refers to some data sources that occurred or were collected outside of the 2020–21 financial year but within the 2021 calendar year. This is because some reports like the COMPLAN Committee report and the Scanlon Foundation survey report on a calendar year basis. Given the focus of last year's Community Relations Report on the impact of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was also considered important to include in this year's report relevant information from the second half of the 2021 calendar year following the outbreak of the Delta wave of the pandemic from June 2021.

This year's report also draws on insights derived from an intensive program of online community and stakeholder engagement that Multicultural NSW led across the State, in partnership with NSW Health and other agencies, in response to the ongoing challenges presented by COVID-19 pandemic.

The outbreak of the Delta variant of COVID-19 in June 2021 presented significant challenges for the State and demanded an enormous effort by government and communities throughout the second half of 2021. This report recognises the remarkable efforts and resilience of the people of New South Wales in response to this challenge by drawing on insights from community engagement and community sentiment analysis conducted by Multicultural NSW throughout the Delta wave of the pandemic.

Throughout 2021, this involved more than 100 online forums with regional networks, multi-faith religious leaders, peak multicultural bodies, community groups, and the humanitarian and settlement sector. These helped to identify the impacts of the pandemic on communities and community harmony and to empower communities with the most up-to-date public health advice and messaging. Combined, these forums involved more than 6830 individual engagements.

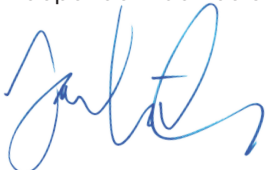
In addition, Multicultural NSW conducted over 700 in-depth qualitative interviews with more than 250 community leaders throughout the Delta wave. These interviews, conducted recurrently, provided context and direct insight into community sentiment and experiences of the pandemic. They also helped to identify community solutions to community needs and ensure the NSW Government's COVID relief efforts were informed by grassroots multicultural insights.

I thank all the community and religious leaders, agencies and organisations who contributed to these consultations and to the COVID response. Your commitment to the Multicultural Principles has helped to make NSW into the strong, resilient and cohesive society that it has proven to be through a tough and tumultuous period.

In 2020–21, I was proud to launch the Multicultural NSW Strategic Plan 2021-2025 *Stronger Together*. Our strategic vision to 2025 is 'an inclusive, connected and socially cohesive multicultural NSW'. *Stronger Together* draws inspiration from the resilience and cohesion of the people of NSW, as demonstrated through two years of a global pandemic in which our communities have come together across the multicultural spectrum of our society to support each other in times of need.

A key outcome of *Stronger Together* will be the collection of data to develop a new measure that helps us understand and monitor the state of community relations in NSW as affected by cultural diversity. This will inform a rigorous, evidence-based annual Community Relations Report and a refreshed whole-of-government framework for assessing of the effectiveness of public authorities in observing the Multicultural Principles. I look forward to delivering on this commitment in future editions of the Community Relations Report.

In accordance with section 6 of the Act, I confirm that the contents of this report reflect the independent advice of Multicultural NSW.



**Joseph La Posta**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Multicultural NSW

# Statement from the Multicultural NSW Advisory Board

The Multicultural NSW Advisory Board is an independent body established under the *Multicultural NSW Act 2000*.

Drawing on the diverse skills and insights of our members, the Advisory Board assists Multicultural NSW to achieve its legislated objectives by promoting community harmony and the Multicultural Principles. We advise Multicultural NSW and the Minister for Multiculturalism on a range of issues relating to these objectives and the agency's strategic direction.

We bring experience and expertise on issues relating to cultural diversity from a range of professional, academic and community-based fields of practice. These include medicine, law, policing and counter terrorism, education, linguistics, interpreting and translation, business and marketing, diversity and inclusion, arts and culture, sports, migration and settlement, and more. Our lived experiences as community leaders and multicultural advocates help to guide and inform the work of Multicultural NSW across its various responsibilities.

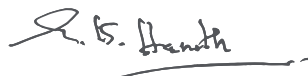
Three Advisory Board members concluded their terms in 2020–21: Steve Widders, Devpaal Singh and Albert Vella OAM. All three made outstanding contributions during their terms. Two new members were welcomed to the board: Nick Kaldas APM, who brings a wealth of experience to the board as a former NSW Police Force Deputy Commissioner who made pioneering efforts to improve community policing in a culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse society; and Youth Member Hawa Mohammad, a law and communications student and UNICEF Australia Young Ambassador who contributed to a landmark report about young peoples' experiences before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. An important feature of the Board is the inclusion of young people in our membership: two positions are reserved for young people who were under the age of 25 at the time of their appointment. We welcome Hawa's appointment as our new Youth Member and the fresh perspectives she brings.

The Advisory Board held seven meetings in 2020–21, including three extraordinary meetings convened in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the year, Advisory Board members also represented Multicultural NSW, engaged communities and stakeholders and advocated for cultural diversity at state-wide forums. Several board members chaired Regional Advisory Council (RAC) meetings during 2020–21 to ensure Multicultural NSW and the NSW Government were kept abreast of issues impacting communities across the state.

The Advisory Board is proud of the leadership, dedication, and hard work of Multicultural NSW through the COVID-19 pandemic. Under its CEO, Joseph La Posta, the agency has made an enormous contribution to the State's pandemic response. Multicultural NSW has delivered significant outcomes for communities impacted by the pandemic. It has listened to community leaders and ensured that COVID relief efforts were directly informed by community perspectives and needs. It has made cultural and linguistic diversity a central rather than peripheral consideration for the NSW Government at this critical time.

Once again, through its immense output of translation work and multicultural engagement to support public health priorities, Multicultural NSW has clearly demonstrated its value to the NSW Government and the critical importance of cultural capability to state resilience. This capability needs to be embedded across the government to support its preparedness for future crises.

The 2020–21 Community Relations Report affirms that the people of New South Wales have remained resilient and cohesive, despite some of the most significant challenges our State has ever experienced. It also illuminates issues demanding ongoing vigilance to ensure we remain resilient and cohesive into the future. We hope this report will help guide this work in the year ahead.



**Dr G.K. (Hari) Harinath OAM**  
Chairperson  
Multicultural NSW Advisory Board

# Our Advisory Board



**Dr G.K (Hari) Harinath OAM**  
**Chair**

MB BS, DT M&H (Syd)  
Appointed 1 July 2013  
Appointment expires 30 June 2022



**Joseph La Posta**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

B App Sci (Town Planning) RMIT



**Dai Le**

B.Arts Political Science (Macquarie)  
Appointed 1 Aug 2012  
Appointment expired 5 August 2021



**Sonia Sadiq Gandhi**

M.Com  
Appointed 31 January 2018  
Appointment expires 2 February 2024



**Cav. Felice Montrone OAM**

Appointed 1 Dec 2012  
Appointment expired 5 August 2021



**Cristina Talacko**

B.Laws (Lond)  
Appointed 31 January 2018  
Appointment expires 2 February 2024



**Kyung (Kenneth) Hong**

B.Laws (Bond)  
Appointed 15 Sept 2014  
Appointment expires  
24 October 2023



**Albert Vella OAM**

Appointed 31 January 2018  
Appointment expired 31 January 2021



**Margaret Piper AM**

B.Ed (Hons) M.Ed (Syd)  
Appointed 15 Sept 2014  
Appointment expires 24 October 2023



**Grace Ho**

B.Com, MBA  
Appointed 10 June 2020  
Appointment expires 25 May 2023



**Prof Sandra Hale**

BA, Dip.Ed., M.App.Ling., PhD, NAATI  
Appointed 1 August 2015  
Appointment expires 31 July 2024



**Omer Incekara**

Appointed 10 June 2020  
Appointment expires 25 May 2023



**Devpaal Singh**

Civil Engineering & Law student (Syd)  
Appointed 15 Sept 2014  
Appointment expired 25 October 2020



**Nick Kaldas - NEW MEMBER**

Appointed 25 October 2020  
Appointment expires 24 October 2023



**Steve Widders - RETIRED MEMBER**

Appointed 15 Sept 2014  
Appointment expired 25 October 2020



**Esther Adeyinka - YOUTH MEMBER**

BA.Laws (ND)  
Appointed 10 June 2020  
Appointment expires 25 May 2023



**Simon Chan**

B.Arch (Hons.) B.Sc.(Arch)  
Appointed 31 January 2018  
Appointment expires 2 February 2024



**Hawa Mohammad -  
NEW YOUTH MEMBER**

Law & Comms student (UTS)  
Appointed 1 February 2021  
Appointment expires 31 January 2024

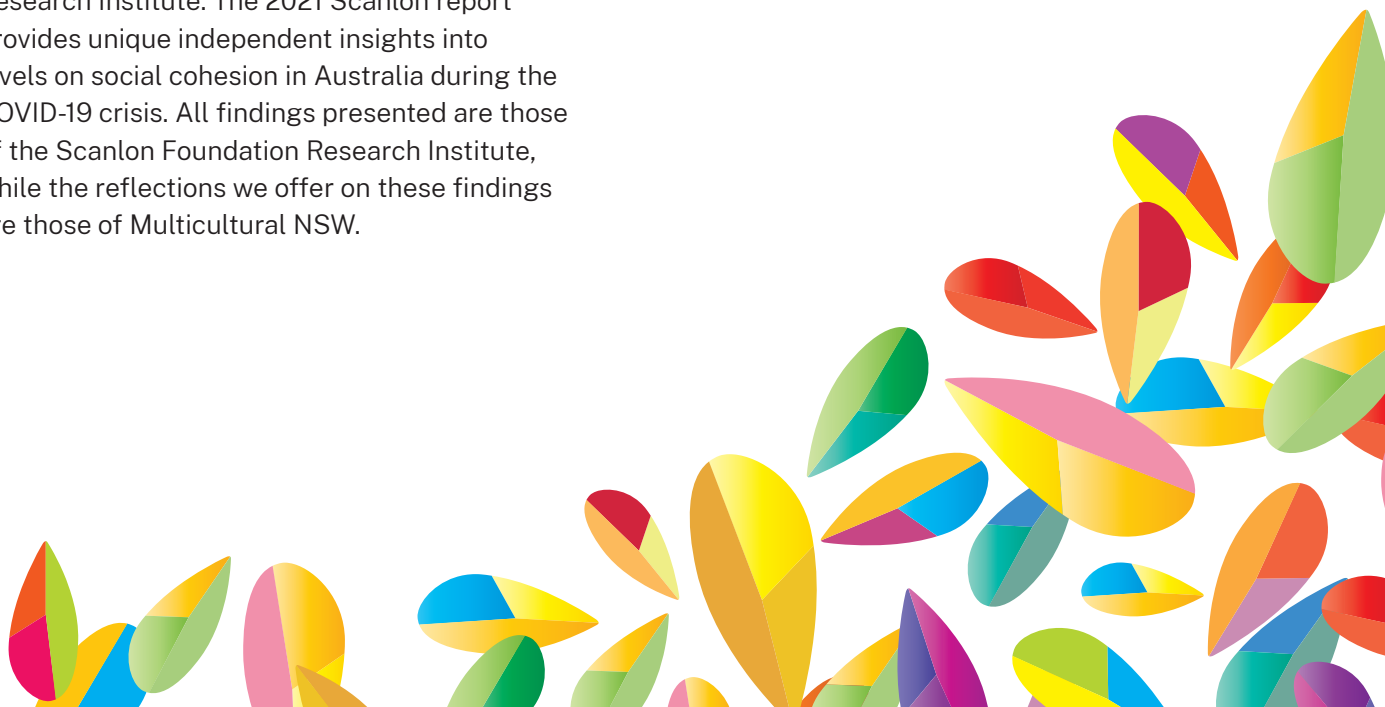
# Acknowledgements

- Multicultural NSW acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands of NSW and pays respect to Indigenous leaders past, present and emerging.
- Multicultural NSW acknowledges the strong commitment of community and religious leaders to supporting NSW communities throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- From the onset of the Delta wave of the pandemic in June 2021, more than 250 community leaders shared their time and insights with Multicultural NSW by taking part in our Community Sentiment Analysis project. Multicultural NSW conducted more than 700 in-depth qualitative interviews with these community leaders. Interviews could last between 30 minutes and an hour, and many participants agree to repeat the interviews on a weekly basis to help Multicultural NSW track changes in community sentiment over the course of the Delta wave and ensure COVID relief efforts remained responsive to emerging community needs. Multicultural NSW thanks all the community leaders who participated in this project. We also thank the team of NSW agency staff who agreed to assist Multicultural NSW by conducting the interviews and being there to listen to communities doing it tough on the ground.
- Since the pandemic's onset in early 2020, Multicultural NSW has activated its Religious Communities Forum online. Religious leaders have played a key role during the pandemic in disseminating public health information to their communities and congregations. They led by example during the vaccination roll-out, publicly encouraging communities to come forward for vaccinations and offering places of worship as vaccination hubs. They provided key insights into the ways faith communities were coping with public health orders and provided essential spiritual, psycho-social and welfare support to communities during this difficult time.
- Members of the Multicultural NSW Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) network remained active participants in online engagement forums, providing valued insight into the impact of the pandemic on communities across the State.
- Multicultural NSW and the NSW Coordinator General for Settlement, Professor Peter Shergold AC, engaged with leaders from the humanitarian and settlement sector to identify priority issues for refugees, asylum seekers and temporary visa holders. This included regular meetings of the Joint Partnership Working Group. Once again this year, the sector truly stepped up to support some of the most vulnerable people in our community.
- Peak multicultural bodies such as the Ethnic Communities Council of NSW, Multicultural Communities Council of the Illawarra, Hunter Multicultural Council, Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga and the Federation of Community Language Schools provided Multicultural NSW with key insights and advice on issues impacting migrant communities during the pandemic and strategies to support them.
- Multicultural NSW has especially valued its partnership with NSW Health, NSW Police Force and the Department of Customer Service throughout the pandemic. Special mention must be made of Dr Jan Fizzell (Senior Medical Adviser, NSW Health), Assistant Commissioner Tony Cooke (Corporate Sponsor for Cultural Diversity, NSW Police Force), and William Murphy (Deputy Secretary, Department of Customer Service), who attended online community engagement forums hosted by Multicultural NSW through the year and whose collaboration and responsiveness contributed directly to the effectiveness of these engagements.



- The NSW Community Resilience and Response Plan (COMPLAN) Committee met six times in 2021 to identify, assess, monitor, and share information and resources about the community harmony impacts of COVID-19. The Committee examined a range of community concerns, including experiences of racism, perceptions of unequal treatment under public health orders, anti-vaccination protests and other issues impacting community harmony during the pandemic. In late 2021, Multicultural NSW worked with the COMPLAN Committee, in consultation with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the NSW Public Service Commission, to coordinate a NSW Government submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission on its proposed National Anti-Racism Framework. A copy of the submission and a 2021 activity statement from the COMPLAN Committee are included in this report.
- The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) submitted its report in 2020–21 under the Multicultural Policies and Services Program (MPSP). This was the only report received in 2020–21 due to varied reporting cycles and machinery of government changes. Highlights from the DPIE report are included in this report.
- As in previous years, the 2020–21 Community Relations Report draws on the latest publicly available findings of the annual Mapping Social Cohesion surveys by the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute. The 2021 Scanlon report provides unique independent insights into levels on social cohesion in Australia during the COVID-19 crisis. All findings presented are those of the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, while the reflections we offer on these findings are those of Multicultural NSW.
- The committed members of the Multicultural NSW Advisory Board continue to provide the CEO and staff of Multicultural NSW with invaluable advice and expertise on all things related to cultural diversity.
- In 2020–21 and through to the end of 2021, three Ministers led the Multicultural portfolio: the Hon. Dr Geoff Lee MP, the Hon. Natalie Ward MLC and, from December 2021, the Hon. Mark Coure MP. All three Ministers led Multicultural NSW's intensive schedule of online community and stakeholder engagement forums during COVID-19. These engagements provide many of the insights presented in this year's report. The contents of this report nevertheless reflect the independent advice of Multicultural NSW.

Multicultural NSW thanks all the agencies, organisations, researchers and community members who made a contribution to the 2020–21 Community Relations Report.



# The State of Community Relations in NSW 2020–21

## *We are Stronger Together: the people of NSW tough out another hard year*

2020–21 was another tough year for the people of NSW.<sup>1</sup> A one-in-100-year pandemic entered its second year, profoundly affecting the way we live our lives and come together as a community. In early 2021, extreme rain and floods inundated the Mid-North Coast and parts of the Hunter and Sydney, impacting many regional areas still recovering from the devastating 2019–20 Black Summer bushfires. Overseas conflicts and humanitarian crises directly impacted families and communities in NSW, while ongoing restrictions to international travel due the pandemic meant that many people experienced long separation from families and friends in their countries of origin.

Successive waves of the COVID-19 virus corresponded with fluctuating sentiment in the community. As last year's Community Relations Report affirmed, the people of NSW proved to be remarkably resilient and cohesive in response to the first wave of the pandemic in 2020. In the face of adversity, the strength of our community spirit was displayed time and time again as people came together across cultural, linguistic and religious differences to help each other in times of need.

By early 2021, a sense of optimism pervaded as we successfully brought case numbers down towards zero. It felt like NSW had come through the pandemic and life could return to normal – or at least 'COVID-normal'. By June 2021, that sense of optimism was confronted by a new set of challenges with the outbreak of the Delta wave of COVID-19. A surge in cases under a more virulent strain of the virus, the re-introduction of tough lockdown measures in local government areas of concern, and an urgent drive for vaccinations all contributed to a sense of frustration, anxiety and exhaustion.

Times of crisis can challenge our sense of togetherness as a community. Crises can bring to the surface underlying social tensions, grievances and vulnerabilities, and there will always be fringe elements in a society who seek to exploit this to undermine trust and sow discord and division. This report acknowledges these challenges, but it also highlights the great strength and resilience of our community in coming together in the face of adversity.

Community Resilience is one of the five strategic pillars of Multicultural NSW's Strategic Plan 2021–2025, *Stronger Together*. Drawing inspiration from the resilience and cohesion of the people of NSW as demonstrated throughout the pandemic and in the face of many other challenges, we define our goal under the Community Resilience pillar as:

*'Expanding robust relationships that inspire people to foster social cohesion, stand united against divisive forces and come together in times of need.'*

This report attests to the robustness of those relationships on many levels. On one level, Multicultural NSW has strengthened its relationships within the NSW Government to ensure that cultural diversity and social cohesion were central rather than peripheral considerations in the pandemic response. On another level, the capacity to mobilise relationships *with, within, and between* the diverse cultural, linguistic and religious communities of NSW proved to be critical in empowering and supporting people on the frontline of the virus outbreak.

It will be vitally important for NSW to learn from this experience in our planning and preparedness for any future disaster or crisis, whether it be natural or human-made, local or global. For whatever form of adversity we may come to face, our community resilience will be measured by the strength of our relationships with each other as fellow members of a multi-faith, multi-lingual, multicultural State.

*We are stronger together.*

<sup>1</sup> This report covers some events and refers to some data sources that occurred or were collected outside of the 2020–21 financial year but within the 2021 calendar year. This is because some reports like the COMPLAN Committee report and the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute's survey report on a calendar year basis. Given the focus of this year's Community Relations Report on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was also considered important to include relevant information from the second half of the 2021 calendar year following the outbreak of the Delta wave of the pandemic from June 2021.

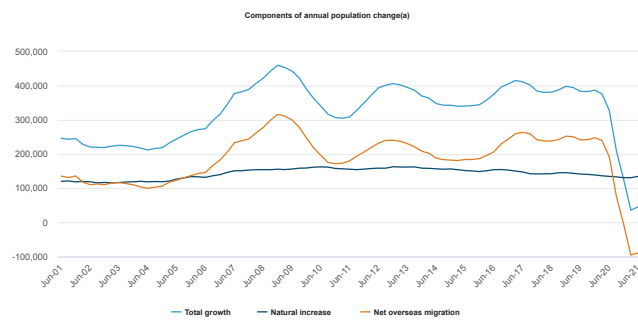
## Pandemic puts a pause on migration and population growth

Migration is consistently a key driver of population and economic growth in NSW and the main force shaping the cultural diversity of our state.

Net Overseas Migration (NOM) is a measure of the net gain or loss of population through permanent and temporary migration into and from Australia. According to the Australian Government, in the 15 years from 2005 to 2019, NOM accounted for more than half the increase in Australia’s population and accounted for the share of Australia’s overseas-born population standing at 29.8 per cent by the end of 2019-20.<sup>2</sup>

International travel restrictions introduced by Australia and other countries in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have had significant impact on NOM and consequently on population growth in NSW and Australia. NOM’s share of the total population for 2020 was just 0.01 per cent due to the impact of the pandemic.<sup>3</sup> Annual growth of the Australian population for the financial year to June 2021 was 0.2 per cent, primarily due to NOM departures.<sup>4 5</sup>

The NSW 2021-22 Budget Half Yearly Review noted a 0.1% increase in the NSW population in 2020-21 Outcomes.



a. Annual components calculated at the end of each quarter.  
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, National, state and territory population June 2021

Source: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/populationnational-state-and-territory-population/latest-release>

While limiting the arrival of new permanent and temporary migrants, restrictions on international travel have also imposed social and emotional costs on migrants and refugees already living here.

For many people, a second year of international travel restrictions meant prolonged separation from families and friends and the important support networks they provide, especially during difficult times. Many people have missed out on opportunities to share important occasions like births, marriages and funerals with family and loved ones overseas.

Migrants and refugees hoping to sponsor family members to settle in Australia have had to wait even longer than usual. Family reunion plays an important role in the settlement process by establishing kin support networks and providing cultural, emotional and economic security. Prolonged delays to family reunion resulting from COVID travel restrictions therefore have the potential to impact settlement outcomes in the longer term.

## Community solutions key to crisis response

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, Multicultural NSW has led an intensive program of online community and stakeholder engagement – supported by senior officials from NSW Health, NSW Police Force, Department of Customer Service and other agencies – to identify the impacts of the pandemic on communities across NSW, to empower communities with the most up-to-date public health advice and messaging, and to ensure pandemic relief efforts remained responsive to the needs of all communities.

Multicultural NSW maintained its online COVID engagement program throughout 2020 and 2021, even after the first wave of the pandemic had passed. When the Delta wave of COVID-19 hit Sydney in June 2021, Multicultural NSW was ready to ramp up the scale and frequency of its online community engagement in response to the rapidly emerging crisis.

In 2021, this involved more than 110 online engagement forums with regional networks, multi-faith religious leaders, peak multicultural bodies, community groups, the humanitarian and settlement sector, and local councils impacted by the Delta wave. These forums were highly valued by community leaders, with forums often attracting anywhere from 150 to 350 people, with some as

2 <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/migration-trends-highlights-2020-21.PDF>  
3 <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/migration-trends-highlights-2020-21.PDF>  
4 Australian Bureau of Statistics National, state and territory population, year ending June 2021  
5 Australian Bureau of Statistics Overseas Migration, year ending June 2021

high as 600 participants at the height of the Delta wave. Combined, these forums involved more than 6,830 individual engagements.

To complement this online outreach, more than 250 community leaders – mostly from the 12 local government areas most heavily impacted by the Delta outbreak and the tough public health restrictions in South-West and Western Sydney – agreed to share their time and insights with Multicultural NSW by taking part in a new Community Sentiment Analysis project.

Over three months, Multicultural NSW conducted 716 in-depth qualitative interviews with these community leaders to help track changes in community sentiment over the course of the Delta wave and identify community solutions to community needs.

Insights from the interviews were coded, analysed and presented to senior NSW agency officials twice a week to ensure the NSW Government’s pandemic response was informed by grassroots multicultural insights and experiences.

Sentiment analysis revealed a diverse range of community needs and concerns, including experiences of financial hardship resulting from lockdown measures, food insecurity, COVID safety for frontline workers, care for people in isolation, access to culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health support, access to technology during stay at home measures, families struggling to support school students with the transition to online learning and the longer term effects of disrupted learning, lag-time between English language and translated public health information becoming available, access to vaccines and many other concerns. Strong themes were also identified around the impact of the pandemic on social cohesion and community harmony – these are addressed in the 2021 report by the COMPLAN Committee on page 24 of this report.

While interviewees were asked to reflect on the needs of their communities or the communities they work with, it was painfully clear to our interviewers that many community leaders were themselves feeling fatigued, anxious and overwhelmed. They needed more help to continue supporting their communities.

The insights revealed through Multicultural NSW community engagement and community sentiment analysis directly informed the allocation of funding to empower and support local communities at the coalface of the pandemic response. They have informed the allocation of more than \$38 million in grants to address the needs of communities impacted by the Delta outbreak since June 2021. This includes:

- \$15 million in partnership grants to support the work of 152 NGOs
- \$6.25 million to specialist services working with vulnerable temporary visa holders and asylum seekers
- \$6 million to support the work of local councils in affected LGAs
- \$5.25 million to support 278 grassroots multicultural organisations
- \$2.95 million to support innovative COVID relief efforts by NGOs working in the 12 local government areas of concern.

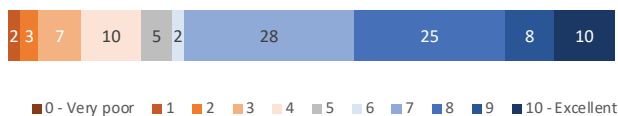
In general, how would you describe how concerned your community has been about COVID-19 over the past week? (%)



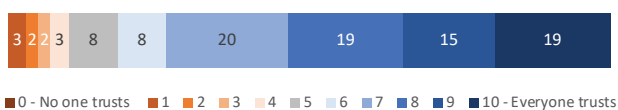
Do you feel the level of concern in your community has changed in the past week? (%)



How would you rate the quality of communications from the NSW Government about COVID-19 for your community and the language groups relevant for you? (%)



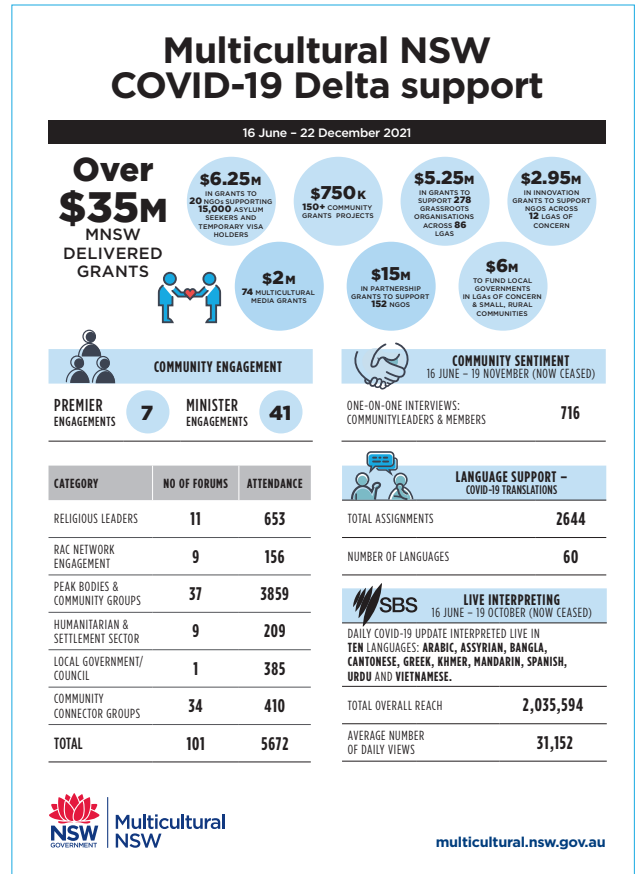
To what extent do you feel members of your community trust the official public health advice about COVID-19? (%)



Source: Multicultural NSW Community Sentiment Analysis: 27 August 2021

- \$2 million to support multicultural media to communicate public health messages in community languages. This was in addition to a new strategic partnership with SBS to provide simultaneous live interpreting of the Premier's daily COVID-19 updates from June to November 2021.

In addition, Multicultural NSW established local networks of grant recipients across the 12 local government areas of concern. Grant recipients came together under the Multicultural NSW Community Connectors program to form local communities of practice that shared strategies across cultural, linguistic and religious communities and created new linkages between grassroots multicultural organisations and larger mainstream providers of food and welfare relief. The Community Connectors program gave community groups a voice in the design and delivery of COVID-19 relief efforts. It created new opportunities for collaboration across different communities who were all experiencing similar needs and issues and thereby enhanced the efficacy and impact of grant funding to individual community organisations.



*“A collaborative approach between government and organisations has been essential to building robust and resilient communities in a time of emergency and crisis.”*

Community Connector participant feedback



Philippine Australian Sports & Culture Inc received a grant of \$30,000 to provide essential food and hygiene vouchers to vulnerable members of the Filipino community.

The packs also included information on Government services and resources on COVID-19.

*“Thanks for everything you’re doing for us, we appreciate it so much,” said one of the organisation’s clients.*

*‘You’ve made our Christmas that much better.’*



## ‘LGAs of concern’ lead the state and nation in vaccination drive

At the height of the Delta wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, 12 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in South-West and Western Sydney were designated ‘LGAs of concern’ due to high transmission rates. LGAs of concern were subject to tough public health orders restricting mobility, impacting workers, businesses, students, families and communities. These areas were doing it tough in terms of the health, economic and social impacts of the pandemic.

Unlike during much of the first wave of the pandemic in 2020, newly introduced COVID vaccines presented an opportunity to stem the spread of the Delta variant and communities in the LGAs of concern led the charge in taking up the opportunity to get vaccinated.

Community and religious leaders responded with great enthusiasm and responsiveness to a call from NSW Health and Multicultural NSW to feature in social media video messages encouraging their communities in their own languages to get vaccinated and allaying community concerns about vaccine safety.

As early as May 2021, senior community leaders and heads of religious institutions from a broad spectrum of faiths stood alongside the Premier, Minister for Health and Minister for Multiculturalism at the Homebush Vaccination Centre to receive their first dose and encourage their communities and congregations to do the same.

Getting the vaccination message out was critical but there was also a need to make vaccines more accessible to local communities in places that were culturally safe and familiar. Religious and community leaders were incredibly generous in offering up their places of worship and community centres to NSW Health to establish vaccination pop-up hubs. This unique collaboration between NSW Health and local cultural and religious communities was very well received by communities and vaccine pop-up hubs subsequently became a key strategy in the vaccination roll-out in NSW.

The impact of this collective effort by communities and government is reflected in the high ‘double dose’ vaccination rates in areas that what were once considered ‘LGAs of concern’. For example, by year’s end in 2021, 95% of adults living in Blacktown and 91.4% of adults living in the Canterbury-Bankstown area had received their second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. These are some of the highest rates of vaccination in the state and, indeed, the nation.

The people of NSW have a lot to thank the communities of South-West and Western Sydney for coming through the Delta wave of COVID-19.



Leading by example: religious and community leaders getting their first dose of COVID-19 vaccine at the Homebush vaccination centre, 26 May 2021.



Vaccination pop-up clinics provided familiar and accessible ways for communities to get the jab. This pop-up clinic at Green Valley Mosque vaccinated 839 people in one day.

Mr Mohammed Yasin, President of the Muslim League of NSW, the operator of Green Valley Mosque and Islamic College, spoke about the unique collaboration that made the clinic a success:

*'Multicultural NSW was actively involved as a partner in setting up the pop-up walk-in clinic at our mosque and was there for us every at every step of the way. They advocated on our behalf and worked closely with NSW Health and our local health district to make this outreach program a success.'*

*'Our mosque is a place of spiritual and social connection and a place where our community feels safe and secure in a trusted setting.'*

*'As soon as we started the clinic, many members of our community and the broader community came forward to get vaccinated. We got a lot of praise for the setup, ease and convenience from the individuals and families who took advantage of the clinic.'*

*'We are delighted that our pop-up clinic vaccinated 839 people. I want to pass my special thank-you to NSW Health South-West LHD, Multicultural NSW and Green Valley Islamic College for this partnership in keeping our community safe from COVID-19.'*

## Building community harmony across the State

### Regional communities rally to help the most vulnerable

While the Delta outbreak started in Sydney, with South-West and Western Sydney suffering the highest case numbers and the toughest restrictions, the virus quickly spread to other parts of the state. Protecting vulnerable Aboriginal communities in remote and regional areas became the most urgent concern and a top priority for the vaccine roll-out.

The re-introduction of State border closures in response to Delta separated families across boundaries and created challenges for people living in border communities. Along the Murray at the NSW-Victoria border, regional stakeholders rallied to support for vulnerable refugee communities and temporary visa holders, including seasonal agricultural workers who may have been caught unprepared by the border closures and virus outbreak. A cluster of COVID-19 cases among a small refugee community in Albury prompted an urgent response from NSW Health. A local network of refugee advocates, settlement services and Multicultural NSW Murray-Darling Regional Advisory Council (RAC) members activated to support NSW Health in getting health messaging and support through to the community.

In response to increasing case numbers in Newcastle and the Hunter, a local network of multicultural and refugee support services, with dedicated support from NSW Health and NSW Police Force, ran a weekly crisis meeting to support refugee and migrant communities in the region.

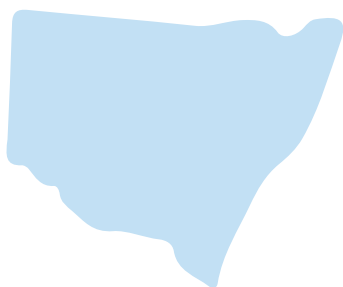
## Regional communities lay out the welcome mat for migrants and refugees

Regional centres in NSW are putting their hands up to receive and welcome migrants and refugees as a way of building the local workforce and strengthening local communities.

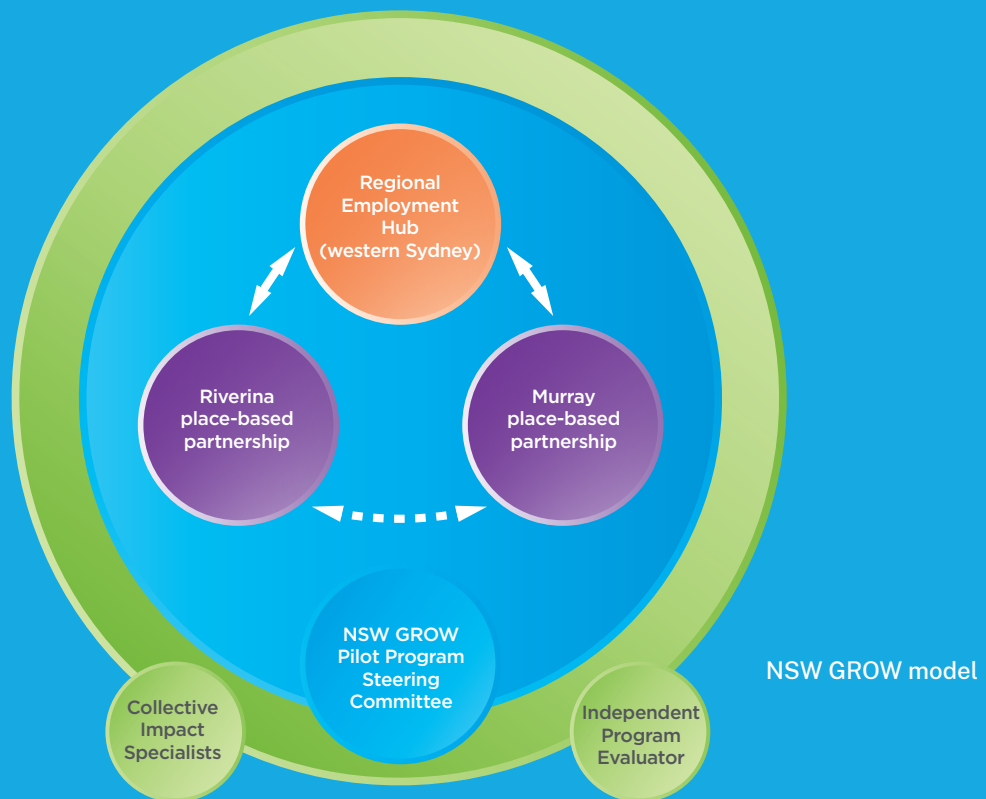
Because of their established service infrastructure, the regional NSW centres of Armidale, Coffs Harbour, Albury and Wagga Wagga are designated by the Australian Government as 'primary settlement' locations to receive newly arrived refugees and humanitarian entrants. In addition, efforts are being made to support 'secondary settlement', or regional resettlement, where migrants and refugees currently living in Western and South-West Sydney – traditionally a primary settlement location for the bulk of new arrivals to NSW – are encouraged to explore the benefits of moving to a regional centre.

While Sydney can offer important family and cultural support networks in the early stages of settlement, secondary migration from the city to the regions can be a 'win-win' for newcomers and regional communities. Many parts of regional NSW have experienced declining populations and critical skills and labour shortages and are keen to grow and revitalise their communities by attracting and retaining new arrivals. Meanwhile, many migrants and refugees may be attracted to the regional lifestyle but are not aware of the opportunities that exist in regional centres.

NSW Growing Regions of Welcome (NSW GROW) is an innovative regional resettlement pilot program led by Multicultural NSW. The pilot brings together governments, communities, services and industries together to prepare for, attract and welcome newcomers to regional NSW. Newcomers, for the purposes of the pilot, is an inclusive term that refers to individuals with refugee and migrant-like backgrounds. The overall aim of the pilot is to provide interested newcomers living in Western and South-West Sydney with the information and support they need to relocate to the regions, and support regional communities to help them thrive in the long-term.







After extensive stakeholder engagement in 2020, two NSW GROW regional pilot sites were selected: Riverina and Murray. The NSW GROW Riverina and Murray Regional Taskforces have commenced planning to ensure their regions are properly prepared to welcome newcomers. Community preparedness demands strong employment opportunities and service infrastructure, and it also needs a local community that is welcoming and open to the opportunities that increased cultural diversity brings to their community.

The Australian Red Cross and Regional Development Australia Riverina provide ‘backbone’ coordination for the two Taskforces, whose cross-sector membership includes government and community service providers and Multicultural NSW Regional Advisory Council (RAC) members from the two regions. The Australian Red Cross has also been funded to establish a Western Sydney Regional Employment Hub to provide a tailored ‘matchmaking’ service to ensure the skills and aspirations of interested newcomers fit with the employment and lifestyle opportunities in the regions. NSW GROW was formally launched in June 2021.

With primary settlement dramatically affected by COVID-19 due to international travel restrictions

and the temporary hold on Australia’s humanitarian intake, secondary settlement presents another way for regional areas to attract and retain newcomers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has, however, also impacted the NSW GROW pilot in several ways. Public health restrictions on movement introduced in Western and South-West Sydney inhibited the possibility of newcomers from these areas travelling to the regions to explore resettlement opportunities. The pandemic has also seen dramatic increases to housing prices in regional NSW, as working-from-home arrangements allowed many Sydneysiders to make the ‘tree change’ and move to the regions. The impact of housing availability in regional areas on refugee communities has been a recurring concern for Multicultural NSW RAC members and other regional stakeholders during the pandemic and may have longer term implications for regional resettlement.

Recognising these challenges during the first COVID wave, the NSW GROW Regional Taskforces focused on supporting migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and temporary visa holders who were already living in the Murray and Riverina regions to secure employment, which in turn supported local industries to fill workforce shortages.

# Strengthening relations between Ezidi and Indigenous communities in Coffs Harbour

*'We are all one under the sun. We are fighting for our rights to belong. We are all one under the sun. We are going to make a change. Together we are strong.'*

*All One Under the Sun,  
Song Writing Collective, 2021*

Coffs Harbour on the Mid-North Coast of NSW is becoming a very culturally diverse regional town.

In early 2018, Coffs Harbour opened its arms to new refugees from war-torn Syria and Iraq. Hundreds of Ezidi refugees who fled the genocidal onslaught of ISIS have now found a peaceful new home in the sunny coastal town. But this was not Coffs Harbour's first experience of refugee settlement. From the mid-2000s, the town's local chapter of the Sanctuary Foundation had sponsored humanitarian entrants from South Sudan and other parts of the Horn of

Africa. The experience contributed to the Australian Government designating Coffs Harbour as a primary settlement location and supporting the Ezidi settlement there. Led by the local council, a new Coffs Harbour Settlement Action Plan has brought local services together to foster collaboration and ensure the best settlement outcomes for new arrivals.

A welcoming and harmonious community is essential to successful refugee settlement. Addressing issues like racism and fostering strong relationships across diverse communities, including relationships between refugees and local Aboriginal communities, all need to be part of the settlement strategy.

This is the focus of a new project funded by Multicultural NSW under its COMPACT Program. *All One Under the Sun* is a youth-led, arts-based project delivered by the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) and Blue-Sky Community Services, and supported by Headspace Coffs Harbour, Coffs Harbour Aboriginal Lands Council and Coffs Harbour Council.

The program supports young people to stand united against racism and hate through a series of cross-cultural arts-based projects and community events. The project intends to support both young people who experience racism and young people who are or could become allies. It is driven by young people



through a Youth Action Collective that includes Goori young people, young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, and non-Indigenous and non-migrant young people. The Youth Action Collective is developing an anti-racism campaign using collaborative song writing, music performances, and short films.

Naomi Steinborner, the project coordinator from Blue Sky Community Services, identified the need to create spaces for young people to come together across cultures.

‘Young people have told me that they attend school with many culturally diverse students, and yet they are quite separated from each other and exist in their own little siloes. They don’t necessarily talk across cultural groups.

‘By the end of the first song writing workshop, they were hugging and adding each other on social media. It was very easy for them to break down those barriers and to form strong bonds. They were able to share their experiences with racism and their hopes for the future.’

Naomi said a highlight of the program in early 2021 was a Song Writing Collective that brought together a culturally diverse network of young people to collaborate on writing, performing and producing a song that draws on lived experiences of racism and gives a voice to young people’s vision for a cohesive and inclusive community.

One of the young participants provided the following feedback in an anonymous survey:

‘I loved meeting other people who were as passionate as me about music. I also loved the feeling of knowing that our song could make an impact on other people’s thinking and understanding of racism.’

The *All One Under the Sun* project has responded to emerging issues between newly settled Ezidi communities and local Aboriginal communities. The project will engage young Goori and Ezidi men in hip-hop dance workshops with the aim of strengthening cross-cultural understandings and ties between two communities who have both experienced recent and historical trauma. Naomi said *All One Under the Sun* “is very much taking the approach of strengthening understanding, relationships and respect for everyone involved in the project for First Nations culture and history. And at the same time sharing cultures and experiences of community from refugee backgrounds. We are finding that creating opportunities for people to come together and build relationships across cultures is creating a shared understanding and building resilience.”

*All One Under the Sun* received an award during Child Protection Week 2021 for leadership in promoting the healing and well-being of migrant and refugee families in the Mid-North Coast of NSW.



# Assessing the health of social cohesion in a pandemic: Reflections on the findings of the 2021 Scanlon Foundation Mapping Social Cohesion survey

## Evidence of resilience: 2021 Mapping Social Cohesion survey

Mapping Social Cohesion is a major national survey of public opinion on social cohesion, immigration and population issues conducted each year by Emeritus Professor Andrew Markus of Monash University for the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute in partnership with the Australian Multicultural Foundation.

A prime objective of the survey is to further understand the social impact of Australia's increasingly diverse immigration program.

The annual findings of the Mapping Social Cohesion survey provide a useful frame of reference for the Community Relations Report and for the work of Multicultural NSW by identifying national trends that may impact community relations in NSW. All findings presented here are publicly available on the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute website and this reference is acknowledged for all the data presented in this section<sup>6</sup>. The reflections offered on these findings are those of Multicultural NSW.

2021 marks the 15th Mapping Social Cohesion survey and the third during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, two surveys delivered the result (perhaps unexpected for many commentators at the time) that social cohesion moved in a positive direction during the first year of the pandemic.

The Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI) measures attitudes within the five domains of belonging, worth, social justice, political participation, and acceptance/rejection. The benchmark 2007 survey set the overall Index at 100.0 points. In 2020 it sat at 89.4 in July and 92.3 in November, a statistically significant increase from 83.7 in 2019.



*'As we live through one of the greatest challenges of our lifetime, how has cohesion been impacted? We know the pandemic has been all-consuming – no other answer has garnered such consensus in response to the question 'what is the greatest problem facing Australia today?'. But what has it meant for the country's mood, and our openness to the world?'*

**Peter Scanlon AO,**  
2021 Mapping Social Cohesion Report.



<sup>6</sup> <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/publication/2021-mapping-social-cohesion-report>

One of the key positive findings from 2020 related to the high level of trust in government in response to the first wave of the pandemic. This included the widely held view that effective leadership was being provided in the time of crisis, including financial support to those who had lost their jobs and those whose businesses had been impacted.

To answer the question as to whether Australian society had experienced more or less cohesion in the second year of the pandemic, the 2021 Mapping Social Cohesion report includes a new Australian Cohesion Index and findings from Life in the Pandemic qualitative research. As well, a national survey was conducted 12-26 July, at a time of rising concern over the spread of the new Delta wave of pandemic that led to lockdown restrictions in NSW on 26 June, later extended into other States.

In July 2021, the SMI was marginally lower than 2020 at 88, but still more than four index points higher than in July 2019. In four of the five domains, the SMI was higher in 2021 than in 2019.

As may be expected, the major shift in opinion recorded in the 2021 survey relates to governments' ability to contain the spread of the COVID-19

virus. While support for government declined in 2021 compared to 2020, it remains high. Key to the positive findings appears to be the high level of trust in fellow citizens, the level of economic satisfaction and optimism for the future.

Both the 2020 and 2021 Scanlon reports provide clear evidence that Australia has proven to be a strong, cohesive and resilient society throughout the pandemic. This being said, there remain some concerning trends that warrant ongoing attention. As summarised below, there remain concerns about experiences of racism and negative attitudes towards some groups in our community.

## Support for multiculturalism remains strong

A clear and consistent finding of the Scanlon surveys is that support for multiculturalism in Australia remains in very good health and is certainly strong enough to withstand the pressures and uncertainties of a global pandemic.

For many years, the Scanlon surveys have consistently found a strong level of support for

The Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI) of Social Cohesion, 2018-21 (LinA)

DOMAIN	2018	2019	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021	CHANGE 2020-2021
1. Sense of belonging	85.0	86.0	88.3	87.5	84.2	-4.1
2. Sense of worth	77.4	80.0	84.0	83.0	82.0	-2.0
3. Social inclusion and justice	87.8	92.6	112.0	110.5	97.4	-14.6
4. Political participation	94.6	93.0	95.4	93.8	95.0	-0.4
5. Acceptance (rejection)	62.9	66.7	67.4	86.6	81.4	+14.0
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>81.5</b>	<b>83.7</b>	<b>89.4</b>	<b>92.3</b>	<b>88.0</b>	<b>-1.4</b>

Source: 2021 Scanlon Foundation Mapping Social Cohesion Report, Table 1

'Multiculturalism has been good for Australia' 2018-21 (percentage, LinA)

RESPONSE	2018	2019	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021
Strongly agree	26	25	26	27	29
Agree	52	55	58	57	57
<b>Sub-total agree</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>86</b>
Disagree	14	12	11	11	11
Strongly disagree	8	7	5	4	3
<b>Sub-total disagree</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>
Neither agree or disagree	1	1	0	0	0
<b>N (unweighted)</b>	<b>2,269</b>	<b>2,033</b>	<b>3,090</b>	<b>2,793</b>	<b>3,572</b>

Source: 2021 Scanlon Foundation Mapping Social Cohesion Report, Table 31

multiculturalism, an understanding of the social and economic benefits of immigration, and a rejection of discrimination based on race or religion in immigrant selection.

This support remained high in 2021, with 86% of Australians agreeing or strongly agreeing that multiculturalism has been good for Australia, an increase from 84% in 2020.

## Racism remains a concern in Australia

While support for multiculturalism remained positive in 2021, this exists alongside a level of negative sentiment towards some minorities, including people born in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

The 2021 Scanlon survey also confirms some of the concerns raised by community groups about the potential for heightened anti-Asian and anti-Chinese sentiment during the pandemic. 69% of Australians born in Asian countries reported holding the view that racism is ‘a very big problem’ or ‘a fairly big problem’ in Australia, compared with 57% born in Australia. This is significant jump from 2020, when 59% of Australians born in Asian countries reported holding the view that racism is ‘a very big/fairly big problem’, compared with 36% born in Australia.

These increases may indicate both the level of racism being experienced in communities, and a heightened awareness of the problem of racism in Australia. The rise of the global Black Lives Matter movement and the anti-racism advocacy of community groups during the COVID-19 pandemic have brought the problem of racism to the forefront of recent public debate. Communities are increasingly using their voices to call out racism as a problem and demand racial equality.

## Attitudes towards Muslims still a concern

One of the consistently concerning findings of the Scanlon surveys for several years has been high levels of negative sentiment directed towards Muslim Australians.

The 2021 survey asked respondents for their attitude to six faith groups. As in past years, the highest negative response by a substantial margin was towards Muslims, at 32%. While there is indication of statistically significant lessening of negative sentiment towards Muslims, no other faith group attracts the same level of negativity, with negative attitude towards the Christian faith group at 13%, 12% towards Sikh, 10% towards Hindu, 9% towards Jewish, and 4% towards the Buddhist faith.

‘Is your personal attitude positive, negative or neutral towards... [faith group]?', Response: ‘very negative’ and ‘somewhat negative’, 2017-21 (percentage, LinA)

FAITH GROUP	2017	2018	2019	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2020
Buddhist	6	7	6	5	4	4
Jewish	-	-	-	9	9	9
Christian	12	12	14	11	12	13
Hindu	-	-	10	12	12	10
Sikh	-	-	-	13	14	12
Muslim	41	39	40	37	35	32

Source: 2021 Scanlon Foundation Mapping Social Cohesion Report, Table 39

The findings confirm what many community members and leaders have reported in relation to anti-Muslim sentiment in Australia. Clearly, more needs to be done to reduce misunderstanding and foster positive engagement between Muslims and other Australians, including migrants who may be importing negative attitudes from their countries of origin.

## Connections strengthened during the pandemic

The 2021 Mapping Social Cohesion report includes a welcome new section presenting findings from qualitative research on Life During the Pandemic.

Despite the challenges of living through the COVID-19 pandemic, research participants revealed a high level of optimism about the future.

More than a third of participants (38%) felt their communities would emerge from the pandemic stronger, not weaker. Many felt that their social connections were strengthened through social media and online engagement.

The report cites one respondent as saying:

‘I think the biggest lesson I’ve learned is how resilient people are and how strong they are. After each lockdown, I’m so impressed with the sheer willingness of people to just connect.’<sup>7</sup>

*‘I think the biggest lesson I’ve learned is how resilient people are and how strong they are. After each lockdown, I’m so impressed with the sheer willingness of people to just connect.’*

<sup>7</sup> <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/publication/2021-mapping-social-cohesion-report>



# Monitoring and addressing issues impacting on community harmony in NSW: 2021 Report from the NSW Community Resilience and Response Plan (COMPLAN) Committee

## About COMPLAN

The NSW Community Resilience and Response Plan (COMPLAN) aims to maintain and promote community harmony, build community resilience and better equip the State to prevent, limit, withstand, respond to, and recover from situations that threaten community harmony.

COMPLAN is established under Section 13f of the *Multicultural NSW Act 2000*, which authorises Multicultural NSW to provide a single coordination point for integrated responses to issues associated with cultural diversity. COMPLAN draws together NSW agencies' capabilities and details a coordinated, whole-of-government approach to preventing and managing risks to community harmony.

COMPLAN facilitates coordination of information and insights identified by NSW agencies through incident reporting, community engagement networks and advisory structures, community sentiment analysis, social media monitoring, environmental scanning, social cohesion mapping and other agency capabilities.

The COMPLAN Committee, chaired by Multicultural NSW, is a senior officers' group with representatives from the NSW Police Force, Anti-Discrimination NSW, Department of Education, Department of Communities and Justice (Office of Community Safety and Cohesion), NSW Health, Resilience NSW, Local Government NSW and Multicultural NSW. Other agencies are invited to join COMPLAN Committee meetings as needed to advise on matters relevant to their portfolios. For example, Study NSW has made an important contribution to the Committee throughout the COVID-19 pandemic by providing insights and advice on international student experiences during this challenging time.

The COMPLAN Committee is responsible for the oversight and implementation of COMPLAN across the four plan phases of Preparedness, Prevention, Response and Recovery.

## Meetings held in 2021

The Committee met six times in 2021: 4 February, 3 March, 6 May, 12 July, 5 August and 4 November.

Four of these meetings were regular quarterly meetings scheduled under the COMPLAN Preparedness phase.

Two out-of-session meetings were convened: in March, the Committee came together to address ongoing concerns about the impact of domestic political issues in India on local community relations within the Indian community in NSW; in July, the Committee met to monitor the impacts of the Delta outbreak of COVID-19 on community harmony.

Below is a summary of the COMPLAN's Committee's assessment of issues impacting community harmony in 2021.

## Monitoring the community harmony impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

The arrangements established under COMPLAN are available to support NSW state emergency management arrangements if an emergency, disaster or crisis (natural or human-generated) presents risks to, or consequences for, community harmony.

As it has done since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, the COMPLAN Committee continued to convene throughout 2021 to identify, assess, monitor, and share information on the impacts of the pandemic on community harmony. While NSW agencies continued to support the public health response, the COMPLAN Committee provided a forum for agencies to examine some of the specific challenges the pandemic presents for social cohesion and discuss strategies for promoting community harmony.

In early 2021, declining case numbers and a sense that NSW had come through the pandemic seemed to correlate with a general sense of optimism in



the community. However, the ongoing closure of Australia's international borders also meant that many people in NSW experienced long separation from families and friends in their countries of origin. The lack of opportunity for genuine family reunion – especially at important life-cycle stages like births, marriages and deaths – impacted community well-being for all migrant and refugee communities.

As was the case in 2020, experiences and perceptions of racism and racist scapegoating surrounding the pandemic, including anti-Asian and anti-Semitic sentiment, remained a concern for the Committee in 2021. However, agencies reported fewer complaints in the first half of 2021 compared with the later part of 2020, perhaps corresponding to the decline in case numbers.

The onset of the Delta wave of COVID-19 in June 2021 presented new challenges. A spike in cases, the subsequent introduction and enforcement of tough public health restrictions, a concerted push for vaccination uptake and a thwarted sense of optimism that we had overcome the virus all contributed to heightened community sentiment and anxiety.

Multicultural NSW shared with COMPLAN insights into community sentiment based on more than 700 in-depth qualitative interviews conducted with community leaders during the Delta wave. These insights confirmed an increasing sense of fatigue, anxiety, fear and frustration. Community concerns related variously to the health impacts of the outbreak, perceptions of changing and conflicting advice around vaccines, the challenges of remote learning for school students, perceived inconsistencies in the application and enforcement of public health restrictions and the social and economic impacts of public health restrictions, especially in local government areas of concern in South-West and Western Sydney (areas that are also the most culturally and linguistically diverse). These concerns were echoed in a social media 'listening' research project commissioned by the Office of Community Safety and Cohesion that revealed more anger and division and less of a sense of togetherness in 2021 compared to the first wave of the pandemic in 2020.

The spread of misinformation, disinformation and conspiracy theories around COVID-19 and the government response has been a consistent concern for the Committee since the start of the

pandemic. These concerns intensified during the Delta outbreak and the vaccination roll-out.

Protest rallies against public health restrictions and vaccinations visibly demonstrated the depth of sentiment among certain sections of our community. Reporting on a protest in the Sydney CBD in July that attracted more than 3,500 people, the NSW Police Force noted the diverse range of motivations, interests and cultural backgrounds of people involved. The protest was hijacked by individuals who became violent towards police, with about 60 people arrested on the day. The NSW Police Force maintained that community sentiment was largely against the protestors, with thousands of calls to the Crime Stoppers hotline from concerned members of the public leading to many more arrests.

Community leaders in South-West Sydney raised concerns with NSW Police Force and Multicultural NSW that their communities were feeling unfairly targeted by police in the enforcement of public health orders. This feeling was exacerbated on social media by the circulation of de-contextualised footage of arrests that contributed to misperceptions about the police response. This was often juxtaposed against de-contextualised footage of Eastern Sydney beaches featuring outdoor recreational activity. The deployment of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to assist in disaster relief efforts also raised concerns that refugee community members may be re-traumatised because of past experiences with authoritarian regimes in their countries of origin. NSW Police Force and Multicultural NSW jointly engaged communities to communicate the facts about the police operation and the humanitarian role of the ADF in disaster relief. NSW Police Force worked directly with community leaders to provide context and empower them with correct information about specific arrests to counter rumours circulating on social media. In response, the then NSW Police Commissioner held a press conference with a senior ADF representative to publicly clarify the role of the ADF in the pandemic response.

Sentiment analysis revealed community concerns that South-West and Western Sydney were being disproportionately targeted by government public health restrictions compared to other parts of Greater Sydney. Yet the epidemiology confirmed that the COVID-19 virus was itself exploiting pre-existing social and economic conditions in these

regions. Workers in these regions were less likely to be able to work from home and were therefore more likely to be exposed to the virus. Larger households in these regions meant that workers were more likely to spread the virus to larger numbers of people. NSW Health confirmed that unpreventable transmission of this kind was the main factor contributing to high case numbers in these regions, while pre-existing social and economic conditions also contributed to increased hardship for communities subject to public health restrictions. These regions of Sydney were suffering on many levels and this was showing in the community sentiment analysis.

As well as monitoring the community harmony impacts of the pandemic, the COMPLAN Committee shared information about strategies to support communities through the Delta outbreak and promote community harmony.

NSW agency insights into community sentiment directly informed the design and delivery of more than \$38 million in grants to empower and support local communities to provide grassroots pandemic relief during the Delta outbreak. Local networks of grant recipients came together under the Multicultural NSW Community Connectors program to form communities of practice to share strategies across cultural, linguistic and religious communities and to enhance the efficacy and efficiency of grant money.

Recognising the important role of community and religious leaders as credible messengers and in countering misinformation, NSW Health and Multicultural NSW continued to empower community leaders with accurate health information and advice to convey to their communities in their own languages and in different media.

Responding to complaints about mask-wearing and other public health requirements, Anti-Discrimination NSW published information about peoples' rights and responsibilities during the pandemic in range of community languages and promoted these resources through its community engagement mechanisms.

The Office of Community Safety and Cohesion delivered a series of training modules called *Safeguarding Social Cohesion during COVID-19* to build community capacity to address the collective trauma of the pandemic, manage information overload, and promote community cohesion. (Read

more about the Safeguarding Social Cohesion initiative on page 29 of this report).

In November 2021, Multicultural NSW launched a special round of Community Partnership Action (COMPACT) grants – the COMPACT Social Cohesion and Community Resilience grants – to support community-led projects that strengthen community connectedness and togetherness and as a core component of community recovery from the pandemic. Projects were due to begin in February 2022.

## Supporting communities impacted by overseas events and issues

COMPLAN recognises that community harmony may be affected by local, state, national or international incidents, situations, or events. In 2021, the Committee examined the risks to local community harmony arising from ongoing communal and political tensions in India, the outbreak of violence in the Israel-Palestine conflict in May and the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August.

### Monitoring the impact of Indian politics on community harmony in NSW

The COMPLAN Committee has examined concerns that political and communal tensions in India may be impacting local community relations in NSW since a public order incident in Harris Park in August 2020 and a series of other violent incidents and tensions in early 2021. The incidents attracted significant attention on community social media and in the media in India. Given similar issues occurring within Indian diaspora communities in other Western countries, the issue remained on the COMPLAN agenda throughout 2021 and an out-of-session meeting was called on the issue in March.

Multicultural NSW, NSW Police Force and Indian community leaders came together for a series of forums to discuss community-led strategies to promote unity and harmony across the diverse Indian community. On 25 March 2021, the Minister for Multiculturalism hosted a Unity Dinner, alongside the Leader of the Opposition, with leaders from the Hindu and Sikh communities in Harris Park. Community leaders endorsed a Joint Statement of Unity that was distributed by a range

of community organisations after the event. (Read the Joint Statement: Indian communities in NSW stand united for harmony on page 26 of this report).

NSW Police charged an Indian national in relation to several of the violent incidents. This individual's conviction, prison sentence and eventual return to India after serving his prison sentence in October 2021 continued to attract media and social media attention in India and the Indian diaspora. NSW Police also laid charges against another individual under section 93z of the NSW Crimes Act, making this the first test case of new laws against publicly threatening and inciting violence.

Multicultural NSW continues to receive representations from Indian community members and organisations concerned about the impact of divisive political rhetoric from India on community harmony in NSW. In December 2021, Multicultural NSW committed funding under its COMPACT Program to develop a new partnership project in 2022 working across the diverse Indian community to foster collaboration and unity in the face of divisive overseas influences.

### **Israel-Palestine conflict presents ongoing challenge for community harmony**

The protracted Israel-Palestine conflict often stirs deep sentiment within NSW communities, as it does throughout the world. This was certainly the case during the escalating violence in Gaza and the West Bank in May 2021.

Multicultural NSW and the NSW Police Force met with community leaders in Muslim and Jewish communities in May to hear their concerns and keep lines of communication open. Muslim leaders expressed their hurt and anguish as they witness the pain and suffering of innocent Palestinians. They called for justice for the Palestinian people and an end to violence in defence of human rights and peace, and for a demonstrated shared commitment to these principles from NSW and Australian governments and NSW community leaders. They appealed to political leaders and the media to exercise balance in their commentary on the situation and to demonstrate they had listened to Muslim community voices. Some community leaders also expressed frustration at efforts to foster inter-faith harmony between Muslims and Jews that failed to acknowledge historical and political grievances.

Jewish community leaders expressed concerns for community safety, recognising that while Australians have a democratic right to protest against the actions of the government of Israel, such protest can sometimes attract anti-Semitic elements who direct their anger toward Jews as a people and make the Jewish community in NSW feel unsafe. These concerns were heightened after statements made by a spokesperson for Hizb ut-Tahrir Australia during a protest in Sydney against Israeli military action in Gaza in May 2021 were published online in October 2021. One translation of these statements suggested they may have been inciting violence against Jews as a people and the issue attracted media attention. The NSW Police Force advised it is investigating the statements under the Section 93z of the Crimes Act.

### **Supporting communities impacted by the situation in Afghanistan**

The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021 was a matter of deep concern for Afghan communities in NSW who have fought against, or suffered persecution at the hands of, the Taliban regime.

The Australian Government's commitment to support Afghan evacuees was welcomed and NSW opened its arms to evacuees. Yet many NSW families feared for the safety of loved ones in Afghanistan who would not be included in the current evacuation quota. Concerns about trauma and mental well-being therefore extended beyond the evacuees themselves to include established Afghan Australian families and communities as well. To supplement already enhanced Commonwealth and NSW settlement support services, Multicultural NSW entered into an agreement with the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) to extend its counselling and casework services to established members of the Afghan community in NSW who may be impacted by the situation in Afghanistan.

Afghan community leaders raised concerns about the risk to community harmony posed by individuals in NSW who may be Taliban sympathisers or apologists. In October 2021, a planned online forum that advertised senior Taliban representatives as guest speakers attracted significant criticism from the broader Muslim community. The organisers

agreed to cancel the forum after speaking with the Minister for Multiculturalism.

Multicultural NSW established an Afghan Community Forum, co-chaired by Multicultural NSW and the NSW Coordinator General for Settlement, Professor Peter Shergold AC, to provide members representing the diverse range of Afghan communities in NSW with a direct link to the NSW Government, including the Minister for Multiculturalism, on issues relating to settlement and social cohesion.

## Tackling racism

The COMPLAN Committee also provides a forum for NSW agencies to share information about reports of racist incidents and initiatives to tackle racism in NSW. Member agencies also participate in a range of engagement forums to raise community awareness of reporting and redress mechanisms and support services.

At the November 2021 COMPLAN Committee meeting, the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) presented on its proposed National Anti-Racism Framework. The framework intends to be a long-term, central reference point to guide actions on anti-racism by government, NGOs, business, educators, health professionals, police, other justice authorities, civil society and the community.

The AHRC was consulting communities and stakeholders and invited public submissions on the proposed framework. In late 2021, Multicultural NSW coordinated a NSW Government submission to the AHRC through the COMPLAN Committee, in consultation with other key NSW Government agency stakeholders including the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Public Service Commission. Drawing on NSW agency input, the submission provides an overview of the NSW Government's commitment to addressing racism and racial inequality, as demonstrated through a wide range of legal protections, policies, frameworks, workforce development and training programs, community awareness campaigns, community partnerships and Indigenous reconciliation and reparation strategies. This submission highlights examples of these NSW commitments to help inform the work of the AHRC on its proposed framework. (Read the NSW Government submission to the AHRC on page 31 of this report).

As a NSW Government submission, the submission could not include input from COMPLAN member Local Government NSW. The Local Government Multicultural Network, which consists of local government workers from across NSW, made its own submission to the AHRC highlighting the important role of local government in tackling racism. In 2021, Local Government NSW also provided updates to the COMPLAN Committee on the development and implementation of the 'Racism Not Welcome' campaign endorsed by many councils in NSW in response to rising concerns about racist incidents during the pandemic.

The Anti-Discrimination Board also made an independent submission to the AHRC with further details about NSW anti-discrimination and anti-vilification laws and measures.

## Reviewing COMPLAN

Multicultural NSW has committed to reviewing COMPLAN as part of its 2021-2025 strategic plan, *Stronger Together*. The review will draw on lessons from implementing COMPLAN through the COVID-19 pandemic, refresh COMPLAN Committee membership, and update the roles and responsibilities of member agencies to support all four plan phases of Preparedness, Prevention, Response and Recovery.

# Safeguarding social cohesion during COVID-19

In its *Best Practice Guidelines: Supporting Communities Before, During and After Collective Trauma Events*, the Australian Red Cross defines a collective trauma event (CTE) as:

*‘an event, irrespective of the hazard, which results in a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds between people and impairs the prevailing sense of community... CTEs have an impact on the broader community and challenge people’s typical understanding of the way the world works.’*

While typically associated with sudden, violent, traumatic events, this definition also resonates with the experiences of many people in our community during the protracted collective trauma event of the COVID-19 pandemic. It also invites us to think about how we can best support communities to address the impacts of the pandemic on social cohesion and community wellbeing.

Recognising the strain and exhaustion that many community workers were experiencing while supporting their communities through the Delta outbreak in 2021, the Office of Community Safety and Cohesion collaborated with Multicultural NSW and Resilience NSW to deliver a series of workshops focused on addressing the community-wide psychosocial impacts of the pandemic and managing the information overload presented by the COVID-19 ‘infodemic’.

Featuring presenters including Kate Brady, the primary author of the Red Cross CTE guidelines, and strategic communications experts, the *Safeguarding Social Cohesion during COVID-19* workshops aimed to:

- strengthen capability and build resilience to support community workers assisting their communities during COVID-19
- strengthen understanding of the impacts of collective trauma on communities and the role of strategic communications during a crisis and in recovery

**Safeguarding Social Cohesion During COVID-19** | a series of free online workshops for people supporting their communities through the pandemic.

**INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP: SAFEGUARDING SOCIAL COHESION DURING COVID-19**

This session introduces evidence-based approaches and learnings that can help support clients, communities and staff.

- Understanding COVID-19: learning from community-wide impacts of other disasters.
- Understanding emergency management arrangements in NSW.
- How to target your audience with simple messages.
- Amplifying communication via stakeholders.
- Tackling misinformation.

It will introduce new knowledge and build confidence as a precursor to two deep dive modules.

**MODULE 1: Understanding and responding to community wide impacts of COVID-19**

- Normalising individual and community responses to crisis.
- Best practice psychosocial support: what you can do for your clients, organisations and communities.
- Collaborating strategically in disasters with stakeholders and communities.
- Self-care strategies: look after yourself so you can look after others.

**MODULE 2: Strategic communication during COVID-19**

- How to understand your audience, their motivations, needs and the barriers to reaching them.
- Mapping your stakeholders, who they are and who to target to amplify your message.
- Shaping compelling messages that cut through the pandemic noise.
- Developing ways and materials to tackle misinformation.

For more information, or to register for a session contact [Phone: Kate on 0204848611 or 02122662000](mailto:Phone: Kate on 0204848611 or 02122662000)

- provide practical tools and techniques to support community facing workers assisting their communities
- raise awareness of the emergency management arrangements during a crisis.

## Outcomes Snapshot:

- 35 online workshops were delivered from September to December 2021 to almost 500 participants from more than 95 organisations including local government, faith and cultural groups, peak bodies, and NSW Government agencies.
- Over 90% of participants reported that workshops increased their understanding of the community and psycho-social impacts of collective trauma events and of strategic communications
- 84% reported an increase in their knowledge of emergency management arrangements in NSW
- 85% agreed they gained practical strategies to support their communities.

Feedback from participants indicated an ongoing demand for similar programming to support young people in disproportionately impacted communities, including South-West and Western Sydney and some regional parts of NSW.

***On 25 March 2021, leaders from Hindu and Sikh communities endorsed the following Joint Statement of Unity in response to a series of incidents that raised concerns about the impact of political and communal tensions in India on local community relations.***

## JOINT STATEMENT

### Indian communities in NSW stand united for harmony

As Australians of Indian origin and leaders from the diverse Indian communities of New South Wales, we stand together against all forms of violence and hatred.

Recent incidents are not a proper reflection of our community. We condemn or reject any act of violence and stand in solidarity with victims of crime. We condemn or reject the spread of hate and misinformation that undermines trust between communities and call for unity and compassion.

While we are connected to India, we affirm our shared commitment to Australia and the laws that govern this state and nation.

We cherish the freedoms enjoyed in this country, and we respect people's democratic rights to express their views peacefully and lawfully without the fear of any violence or intimidation.

We also believe in exercising those freedoms responsibly with a shared respect for our fellow Australians irrespective of origin, race, culture or religion.

The diverse Indian communities of New South Wales have a long history of harmony and peace.

We are always ready to help those in need, whether it is supporting communities during natural disasters or caring for vulnerable members of our society.

As community leaders, we will work together to maintain trust and harmony across our community.

We will work with police and relevant government agencies to identify and resolve issues, ensuring that we continue our positive contributions to the peaceful and harmonious state of New South Wales.

We will use our voices as community leaders – whether in the media, on social media or other platforms – to promote harmony and mutual trust.

We continue to call for unity and compassion at all times.

### **Statement endorsed by the following organisations who participated in joint forums on 24 February and 16 March 2021:**

Australian Council of Hindu Clergy	Sikh Youth Australia
Australian Indian Sports Educational and Cultural Society	Support Organisation for Migrants and Asylum Seekers (SOMA)
Australian Sikh Association	Turbans 4 Australia
Federation of Indian Associations of NSW Inc	United Indian Association
Hindu Council of Australia	Young Sikh Professionals Network
Indo-Australia Bal Bharathi Vidyalaya-Hindi School Inc	

(organisations listed in alphabetical order)

#### **Statement also endorsed by:**

Sikh Association of Australia, Penrith	The North Shore Sikh Association of Sydney,
Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Revesby	Turrumurra

# NSW Government submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission on a proposed National Anti-Racism Framework

The NSW Government submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) on its proposed National Anti-Racism Framework provides an overview of the NSW Government's commitment to addressing racism and racial inequality, as demonstrated through a wide range of legal protections, policies, frameworks, workforce development and training programs, community awareness campaigns, community partnerships and Indigenous reconciliation and reparation strategies. The submission highlights examples of these NSW commitments to help inform the work of the AHRC on its proposed framework. It is not intended to be an exhaustive account of the many genuine efforts being made to address racism and racial inequality at an individual NSW agency level. The submission was coordinated by Multicultural NSW in December 2021 and lodged by the Minister for Multiculturalism, the Hon. Mark Coure MP, on 3 February 2022.

## Multicultural Principles are the policy of the State in NSW

The *Multicultural NSW Act 2000* (the Act) enshrines the Multicultural Principles as the policy of the State in NSW. The Multicultural Principles, found in Section 3 of the Act, lay the foundations for an inclusive, cohesive multicultural society. NSW was among the first jurisdictions in the world to enshrine multicultural principles in legislation, and the legislation underpinning the Multicultural Principles has enjoyed bi-partisan support in the NSW Parliament for more than 40 years.

In essence, the Multicultural Principles call on all individuals and institutions in NSW to:

- share democratic values, governed by the rule of law, and promote a unified commitment to Australia, its interests and future
- accept and value the fact that NSW is a culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse society
- respect our democratic freedoms to practice our cultural and religious traditions and speak our languages, within an Australian legal and institutional framework where English is the common language

- ensure NSW government programs and services, as well as opportunities to participate in public life, are accessible by everyone irrespective of their cultural, linguistic or religious heritage
- promote and maximise the value of cultural diversity for the social and economic benefit of NSW.

At an institutional level, all public authorities in NSW are required to observe the Multicultural Principles in the conduct of their affairs. They are required to develop Multicultural Plans and report on progress in observing the Multicultural Principles under the Multicultural Policies and Services Program (MPSP). The MPSP is the whole-of-government mechanism designed to assist agencies in improving the planning and delivery of government services in a culturally diverse society and enhancing cultural diversity leadership and engagement. In other words, the MPSP aims to build the cultural competence of the NSW Government to ensure quality customer service for everyone – irrespective of the language people speak or the culture or religion they practise.

At an individual level, the NSW Parliament recognises that the Multicultural Principles are based on *citizenship*. In this context, the expression 'citizenship' is not limited to formal Australian citizenship but refers to the rights and responsibilities of all individuals in a culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse society. This includes a commitment to Australia and the common values and things that bind Australians together, including recognition of the heritage of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It also includes the right of individuals to live safely, freely, and without the fear of racial discrimination, vilification or hatred.

## NSW has strengthened race hate laws and boosted police capability to investigate hate crime

The NSW Parliament recognises the rights of all individuals to protection from racial discrimination and racial vilification. Race is a protected attribute under the *Anti Discrimination Act 1977* (NSW) (ADA), where 'race' is defined as including colour, nationality, descent and ethnic, ethno-religious or national origin. The ADA makes it unlawful to discriminate in specified areas of public life against a person on grounds which include their race, sex, age, disability, homosexuality, marital or domestic status, transgender status and carer's responsibilities. Vilification on the grounds of race, homosexuality, transgender status or HIV/AIDS status is also unlawful.

In 2018, the NSW Government introduced tough penalties of up to three years' imprisonment for anyone that publicly threatens or incites violence against someone on the grounds of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, intersex or HIV/AIDS status (section 93Z of the *Crimes Act 1900* (NSW)). The Stop Public Threats campaign, designed in consultation with religious leaders, community organisations and other government agencies and launched in May 2020, aims to help victim-survivors and community understand their legal rights, and ensure that threats of violence are reported to police for investigation.

The NSW Government is also strengthening the NSW Police Force's capability to address hate crime, including racially motivated hate crime,

by providing additional training for frontline officers and additional system capacity to record, analyse and investigate crimes motivated by hate and prejudice. A new training program for all NSW Police Force employees will provide an understanding of hate crime and hate incidents (including hate speech), how to identify and record hate crime and incidents, and how to support victims of hate crime. In 2022, a new community education campaign will raise awareness about hate crime and how to report it.

## NSW has an integrated approach to monitoring and addressing threats to community harmony

Established under the *Multicultural NSW Act 2000*, the NSW Community Resilience and Response Plan (COMPLAN) draws together NSW agency capabilities and details a coordinated, whole-of-government approach to identifying, assessing, and addressing risks to community harmony, including risks arising from racist incidents and inter-communal tensions. COMPLAN facilitates coordination of information and insights identified by NSW agencies through incident reporting, community engagement networks and advisory structures, community sentiment analysis, social media monitoring, environmental scanning, social cohesion mapping and other NSW agency capabilities. Member agencies also participate in a range of engagement forums to raise community awareness of reporting and redress mechanisms and support services.

COMPLAN arrangements are available to support state emergency management arrangements if there is a risk that an emergency may impact community harmony. For example, the COMPLAN Committee has convened throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to share information and resources relating to experiences and perceptions of racism, racist scapegoating, racist conspiracies and disinformation.

COMPLAN was activated in response to the 2019 Christchurch terror attack in New Zealand to coordinate information and resources to support impacted communities in NSW.



## NSW is empowering communities to stand united against racist extremists

The NSW Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Program is delivering globally recognised initiatives to counter extremism motivated by racist or religious ideologies. For example, the proven Community Partnership Action (COMPACT) Program supports an alliance of more than 60 grassroots community organisations, peak charities and non-government organisations, private sector partners, schools, universities, NSW agencies and police. With members including anti-racism charity All Together Now, Western Sydney University's Challenging Racism Project, Islamophobia Register Australia and many other likeminded allies, the COMPACT Alliance is a force for community harmony that is committed to standing up and standing united against extremists who seek to incite fear and divide our community along racial or religious lines.

Since 2016, the Community Action to Prevent Extremism (CAPE NSW) project delivered by COMPACT partner All Together Now has trained thousands of frontline youth workers and NSW Government agency staff on the threat of racially motivated far-right extremism and how to respond to it.

In 2019, in the wake of the Christchurch terror attack, the NSW CVE Program sponsored the Collaborative Approaches to Counter the Extremist Right-wing and Islamophobia Threats conference. The conference brought together 120 government, academic, non-government and civil society representatives to examine the impacts right-wing extremism and Islamophobia on social cohesion. The NSW CVE Program has since commissioned research with a range of academic partners into the nature and prevalence of online far-right extremism, the exploitation of the COVID-19 pandemic by racist conspiracy theorists, and the 'creeping threat' to liberal democracy posed by racially motivated extremism. NSW has also invested in research to better understand how levels of social cohesion are tracking in NSW and areas where ongoing efforts should be focused. Findings from this research are being communicated to local governments and communities to assist them in the design of programs and services to improve social cohesion and community wellbeing in local areas.

Also supported under the NSW CVE Program, the Remove Hate From The Debate online initiative aims to empower young people with the tools and resources to speak out against online hate in a safe, effective and respectful way. Since 2017, the initiative has reached nearly one million people through its social media campaign. In 2022, a review of the Remove Hate From The Debate initiative will consider recent developments in anti-racism bystander empowerment and new approaches to countering online hate developed internationally in response to The Christchurch Call.

## NSW is rolling out mandatory anti-racism training for all public schools

In NSW schools, a revised Anti-Racism Policy mandates anti-racism training for all school staff from 2022. School staff will be trained to understand the impact of racism and their responsibilities in eradicating racism.

Under the Anti-Racism Contact Officer (ARCO) program, every public school in NSW is to have at least one ARCO. The ARCO role provides training and ongoing support, proactive anti-racism education, support for the complaints process, and collection of data on incidents of racism. Professional learning opportunities deepen understanding of anti-racism education and contributes to teacher accreditation.

The NSW Department of Education also manages and promotes *Racism. No Way!*, an anti-racism education resource for all Australian schools.



## We are *Stronger Together*: working for an inclusive, connected and socially cohesive multicultural NSW

Under its 2021-2025 strategic plan *Stronger Together*, Multicultural NSW, is working across the NSW Government and with community and industry partners to deliver on its vision of *an inclusive, connected and socially cohesive multicultural NSW* across five strategic priorities:

- **NSW language services:** this includes a commitment to enhancing the standards, capability and sustainability of the NSW interpreting and translation services industry as a fundamental service and right for members of our community with limited English language skills. It also includes a commitment to provide training for NSW agencies in working effectively with interpreters and an investment in recruiting and training interpreters in in-demand languages.
- **Sector capability:** this includes a commitment to reviewing and refreshing the whole-of-government MPSP to ensure a cultural diversity lens is applied to all aspects of leadership, planning, engagement, communications and service delivery across the NSW public sector.
- **Community resilience:** this includes a commitment to collecting data and developing a robust evidence-base for monitoring and measuring the state of community relations in NSW as affected by cultural diversity. It also includes a commitment to expanding the proven COMPACT Program to deliver effective programs to combat racism and hate.
- **Settlement:** this includes a commitment to supporting regional communities to welcome, settle and retain new arrivals and creating opportunities for newcomers to thrive wherever they choose to live in NSW.
- **A shared sense of value:** this aims to generate a widespread commitment to cultural diversity across NSW, including a shared commitment to protect the freedom of individuals and communities to practice and maintain their cultural, linguistic and religious traditions, and a shared commitment to build intercultural and interfaith understanding.

## A NSW public sector that understands and reflects the community it serves

The NSW public sector is the largest employer in Australia and employs more people now than at any time since 1999. One of the Multicultural Principles enshrined in the *Multicultural NSW Act 2000* is that 'all institutions should recognise the linguistic and cultural assets in the population of NSW as a valuable resource and promote this resource to maximise the development of the State.' The *Government Sector Employment Act 2013* reinforces this Multicultural Principle by holding the head of government sector agencies responsible for ensuring that workforce diversity is integrated into their organisation's workforce planning. Recognising and realising the potential of a culturally and linguistically diverse public sector workforce will deliver better services and better outcomes for our culturally diverse population.

The NSW Government's Workforce Profile Report provides an important insight into the cultural diversity of the public sector. It is estimated that 18.5% of the NSW public sector's non-casual workforce in 2021 identified as people who first spoke a language other than English as a child, compared with 18.1% in 2020. The proportion of employees in the public sector who identified as being from a racial, ethnic or ethno-religious minority group in 2021 was 13.1%, up from 12.6% in 2020. 3.7% of the workforce identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

It is reasonable to expect that, over time, the public sector should come to resemble the community it serves more closely. Steps are being made in this direction. For example, the highly regarded NSW Graduate Program continues to attract high-calibre talent. Graduates from households who speak a language other than English make up about 27% of the 150 applicants selected for the program in 2021, which is a strong correlation with currently available population data.

The NSW People Matter Employee Survey provides an important insight into the culture of inclusion and diversity in the NSW public sector. 79% of NSW Government employees who responded to the 2021 survey reported their organisation respects individual differences (such as cultures, working styles, backgrounds, ideas), and 80% believe that

personal background is not a barrier to participation in their organisation (e.g. cultural background, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender). 4% reported having experienced racism in the previous 12 months.

Across education, health, social policy, justice and other sectors, NSW agencies are developing and delivering anti-racism and cultural competence training for staff to support inclusive workplaces and effective service delivery in our culturally diverse society.

## The NSW Government is committed to reparation, reconciliation and healing with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Communities.

The NSW Government has committed to work with Aboriginal communities to advance the dialogue in NSW about intergenerational trauma and to have a better understanding of Aboriginal cultural perspectives on healing. This commitment involves acknowledging and addressing the wrongs of the past and recognising that many Aboriginal families and communities continue to experience the significant trauma, loss and intergenerational impacts of historic and racial assimilation policies.

The NSW Government Stolen Generations Advisory Committee, comprised of Stolen Generation Organisations (SGO) and NSW Government agencies, oversee the implementation of the recommendations in the *Report into Reparations for Stolen Generations (Unfinished Business)*. The NSW Government has committed to fund SGO coordinator positions in each of the four NSW SGOs with the aim of advocating and supporting Stolen Generation survivors and their descendants.

NSW signed the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap in July 2020, along with the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations (NSW CAPO), the Australian government, state and territory governments, the Australian Local Government Association. The NSW Government and NSW CAPO, in consultation with Aboriginal communities, have developed the first NSW Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap. The plan identifies focus areas and existing work

underway while acknowledging there is a lot more to do. In addition to the four priority reforms in the National Agreement, NSW has a fifth priority reform on Employment, Business Growth, and Economic Prosperity. This emerged as a key priority in consultations with the Aboriginal community and is strongly supported by the NSW Partnership.

*NSW Working together for a better future*, the NSW Public Sector Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES), sets out the key initiatives to be implemented across the NSW public sector and within departments and agencies over the period 2019 to 2025. The strategy sets the direction and targets for improving the employment of Aboriginal peoples in the NSW public sector.

Across the NSW Government, many agencies are taking meaningful action to support reconciliation by implementing their accredited Reconciliation Action Plans.

It is one of the NSW Premier's Priorities to increase the number of Aboriginal young people reaching their learning potential. Working towards Aboriginal students attaining their final school qualifications at the same rate as non-Aboriginal students is an important part of fostering equality of opportunity for Aboriginal people. Our target is to increase the proportion of Aboriginal students attaining Year 12 by 50% by 2023, while maintaining their cultural identity.



## NSW continues to work closely with other Australian governments to promote social cohesion and inclusion

The NSW Government continues to work closely with the Australian Government and other Australian governments on national efforts to promote social cohesion and inclusion.

For example, NSW is an active member of the Senior Officials Settlement Outcomes Group (SOSOG), an inter-governmental forum that works to improve coordination of service delivery for refugees and humanitarian entrants within and across jurisdictions. SOSOG played a key role in the development and continual implementation of the National Settlement Framework.

Along with the Commonwealth and other state and territory governments, NSW is a joint owner of National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI). NAATI's mission is to set and maintain high national standards for the translating and interpreting sector to enable the existence of an adequate supply of appropriately certified translating and interpreting professionals, responsive to the changing needs and demography of Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse society.

NSW is co-chair of the Countering Violent Extremism Sub-Committee (CVESC) of the Australia New Zealand Counter Terrorism Committee. CVESC is responsible for the development of nationally coordinated policy development and maintenance of specific countering violent extremism capabilities that aim to prevent individuals from becoming or remaining violent extremists and address the divisive impacts of violent extremism on social cohesion.

As detailed above, NSW is co-signatory to the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap and is implementing five priority reforms under the agreement.

Each of these national forums contributes in their own way to addressing issues of racism and racial inequality. However, currently, there is no dedicated national forum or framework specifically focused on anti-racism. This has not prevented NSW from pursuing its own commitments to anti-racism, as demonstrated in this submission. The NSW Government trusts this submission will help inform the work of the AHRC on its proposed National Anti-Racism Framework. The NSW Government looks forward to considering your revised Framework Concept Paper when it is finalised in June 2022.



# Good Practice in Multicultural Policy and Service Delivery

The NSW Government is committed to quality customer service. In a culturally diverse society, that means ensuring that government programs and services are available and appropriate to everyone – irrespective of their cultural, linguistic or religious heritage.

The Multicultural Policies and Services Program (MPSP) is a whole-of-government mechanism designed to assist agencies in planning and improve performance in the delivery of government services in a culturally diverse society. In other words, the MPSP aims to build the cultural competence of the NSW Government.

Under the MPSP, all government agencies must develop a Multicultural Plan with agreed outcomes. The MPSP framework consists of four Focus Areas, with nine outcomes tailored to the business needs and context of the reporting agency:

## MPSP Tools and Resources

The MPSP is more than a reporting and assessment framework. Under the MPSP, Multicultural NSW supports good practice in multicultural policy and service delivery by convening the Multicultural Coordinators’ Forum, a Community of Practice that brings together multicultural practitioners from across government to share expertise and experience, learn from challenges and jointly develop solutions.

In 2021, Multicultural NSW worked with the Multicultural Coordinators’ Forum to develop and launch the online MPSP Tools and Resources. MPSP Tools and Resources helps NSW Government agencies and other organisations to incorporate cultural diversity and inclusion planning across all areas of their business, including planning, service delivery, engagement, and leadership

## The four MPSP focus areas:

### 1. SERVICE DELIVERY

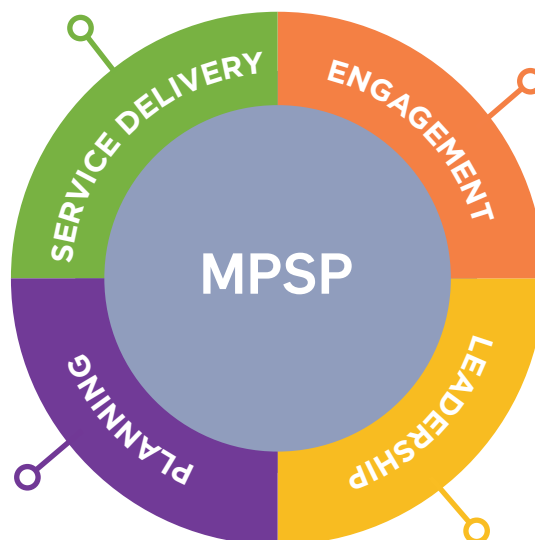
#### OUTCOMES

Mainstream services deliver for everyone. Targeted programs fill the gaps. People know about services and programs through culturally and linguistically effective communications.

### 2. PLANNING

#### OUTCOMES

Strong plans to deliver services.  
Evidence driven planning.



### 4. ENGAGEMENT

#### OUTCOMES

Effective collaboration with diverse communities. Understanding the needs of our culturally diverse community.

### 3. LEADERSHIP

#### OUTCOMES

Demonstrated leadership in culturally inclusive practices.  
Increased recognition of the value of cultural diversity.

## Designated MPSP Agencies: 2020–21 report highlights

Designated MPSP agencies (DMAs) are NSW Government agencies that are recognised for their role in delivering essential policies and services for our culturally diverse society. DMAs must update their Multicultural Plans every two or three years and report accordingly.

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) was the only DMA to submit an MPSP report in 2020–21. This was mainly due to varied reporting cycles and machinery of government changes. The DPIE report related to the 2019-20 reporting year.

Multicultural NSW assessed DPIE as meeting at least the minimum standards across the four MPSP focus areas, including planning, service delivery, leadership and engagement.

Our State is culturally diverse, so it is important that our State’s planning agency incorporates multicultural planning into every aspect of its core business. The DPIE report provided some examples of initiatives that demonstrate a commitment to good multicultural planning and practice. These are highlighted below.

### DPIE Multicultural Plan 2021-2025

*MPSP Focus Area 2 – Planning – Strong plans to deliver services*

DPIE launched its new cluster-wide Multicultural Plan 2021-2025 on Harmony Day in March 2020. The new plan demonstrates that DPIE continues to support and champion multicultural principles across the cluster. A key feature of the DPIE Multicultural Plan is its focus on building workforce capability. DPIE is now delivering Leading an Inclusive Culture training module across the cluster to build inclusive leadership practices.

### Rhodes Place Strategy and Redfern/ Waterloo redevelopment projects

*MPSP Focus Area 2 – Planning – Evidence-driven planning*

*MPSP Focus Area 4 – Engagement – Understanding the needs of our culturally diverse community*

DPIE has demonstrated effective use of cultural diversity data to plan and improve service delivery across a range of initiatives. The Rhodes Place Strategy is a plan for the development of the Rhodes Precinct over the next 20 years. The Strategy used demographic data to gain a better understanding of cultural diversity in the Local Government Area, improve communications and target messaging to specific communities. The draft Rhodes Place Strategy was exhibited for feedback between 31 August and 9 October 2020. DPIE published information on how it responded to community feedback in its What We Heard report in English and Simplified Chinese on the DPIE website.



Station Gateway West, Rhodes Strategy

DPIE engaged bilingual workers to provide in-language support to residents during the planning phase of Waterloo and Redfern redevelopment projects. DPIE used a range of community engagement techniques, including the delivery of workshops, community events, drop-ins and surveys. Engagement outcomes were captured and incorporated into the community engagement report which supported a successful planning proposal lodged with the City of Sydney.

## MPSP review to build sector capability

Building the cultural capability of the NSW public sector is a strategic priority for Multicultural NSW under its 2021-2025 strategic plan, *Stronger Together*.

Our aim is to model good practice and build capability across sectors to meet the needs of diverse communities through policy, programs and service delivery.

We will work closely with colleagues across sectors to identify where we can contribute to policy development and program design that improve outcomes for all the people of NSW. A key priority will be to build the capability of government and non-government workplaces through tailored training and advice that bring a cultural diversity lens to leadership, planning, engagement, communications and service delivery.

A key outcome of *Stronger Together* will be the collection of data to develop a new measure that helps us understand and monitor the state of community relations in NSW as affected by cultural diversity. This measure will inform a rigorous, evidence-based annual Community Relations Report and a refreshed whole-of-government framework for assessing of the effectiveness of public authorities in observing the Multicultural Principles – a framework currently provided by the MPSP.

Beginning in 2022, Multicultural NSW is working across the NSW Government to review and refresh the MPSP to ensure its relevance and impact. The MPSP review will aim to improve the standard of agency reporting with a stronger focus on evidence and outcomes. This will also improve the quality and objectivity of reporting on the performance of public authorities in observing the Multicultural Principles in the annual Community Relations Report.

Multicultural NSW looks forward to delivering on this commitment in future editions of the Community Relations Report.





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