



Multicultural NSW

COMMUNITY RELATIONS REPORT 2024



STRONGER *together*



Acknowledgement of Country

**Multicultural NSW acknowledges the traditional custodians
of the lands and waterways of NSW and pays respect to
Aboriginal leaders past and present.**

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The artwork on this page is taken from the Multicultural NSW Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and was created by artist Rheanna Lotter. The artwork represents the commitment, inclusion, diversity and strength between Multicultural NSW and the wider community.

A note on terminology

In this report, the terms ‘multicultural’ and ‘culturally diverse’ (or its variants, ‘culturally and linguistically diverse’, or ‘culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse’) are reserved to describe the society of NSW, or Australia, as a whole—as in ‘Australia is a multicultural society’, or ‘the people of NSW are culturally diverse’.

This is consistent with the language of the *Multicultural NSW Act 2000*, which defines ‘cultural diversity’ as ‘the different linguistic, religious and ancestral backgrounds of the people of NSW’, and which ‘promotes the equal rights and responsibilities of all the people of NSW within a cohesive and multicultural society’.

To the best extent possible, terms used to describe particular communities or groups of people are in plain English (not acronyms) and are appropriate to the context at hand, which in a multicultural society may relate to culture, language, religion, migrant or refugee history, or any other term that suitably recognises the identity, experience and context of the people being described. In this sense, our terminology should be as diverse as the people we serve and responsive to the different contexts in which we live and work within a culturally diverse society.

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Submission Letter



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To whom it may concern,

It is a pleasure to submit the 2024 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 New South Wales (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.

The Multicultural Principles enshrined in the Act lay the foundations for a cohesive multicultural society. In essence, the Multicultural Principles call on public authorities and the people of New South Wales to :

- share democratic values, governed by the rule of law, and promote a unified commitment to Australia
- accept and value the fact that NSW is a culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse society
- respect our democratic freedoms to practise 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.

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.

In this report, analysis of data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and other sources provides important context on recent migration and population trends in NSW.

In the previous two editions of the Community Relations Report, we analysed 2021 ABS Census data relating to religious diversity (2022 report) and linguistic diversity (2023 report). For this year's report, we provide a new analysis of Country of Birth data from the 2021 ABS Census. An analysis of 2021 and 2016 ABS Census data by Country of Birth shows people born in India represent the fastest growing community in NSW by number of people born overseas. Our analysis also highlights the diversity that exists within this community, with people speaking many different languages and practising different religions.

As with previous editions, this year's report draws on the valuable data provided by the annual national Mapping Social Cohesion survey by the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute. Complementing this data with our own commissioned research, this year we also present findings from the second NSW Community Relations Survey conducted by the Australian National University (ANU) for Multicultural NSW. This state-representative survey uses novel measures of 'active community relations' to assess the extent to which people actively engage with people from different cultural or religious backgrounds. We also present findings from the second independent evaluation of the Multicultural NSW COMPACT Program, as a case study showing how Multicultural NSW is proactively supporting and facilitating 'active community relations' among young people.

This report also presents the keynote address by ANU's Professor Alan Gamlen to the inaugural annual Multicultural NSW Regional Engagement Program (REP) Summit held in Wollongong in June 2024. Prof. Gamlen provided a highly engaging lecture on 'The Future of Multiculturalism' and his insights are very relevant to this report.

As in previous years, this year's report draws on the contributions of NSW agencies through their participation in the Community Resilience and Response Plan (COMPLAN) and the Multicultural Policies and Services Program (MPSP), both of which are whole-of-government initiatives led by Multicultural NSW in line with the Act.

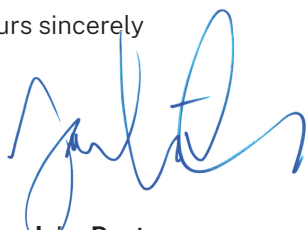
This report covers some events and refers to some data sources that occurred or were collected outside of the 2023-24 financial year but within the 2024 calendar year. This is because some reports such as the COMPLAN Committee and the Scanlon Foundation's Mapping Social Cohesion are issued on a calendar year basis. This also provides continuity with preceding editions of the Community Relations Report that reported on a calendar year basis.

As this report shows, the year 2024 presented several challenges for community harmony, with factors both local and global impacting our communities and our cohesion. The incidents of hate we witnessed during the year have been rightly condemned in the strongest terms. There is no place for antisemitism in any form in our society. Racism and hate directed towards any group in our society is simply not acceptable. There is no place for Islamophobia in any form in our society. There is no place for racial hatred or religious intolerance in our society. Yet despite the challenges, this report also showcases the remarkable resilience of our communities and the willingness of community leaders to come together to support each other in times of need. We stand united.

I thank all the community members, researchers, agencies and organisations who have contributed insights to this report. I thank and acknowledge the Multicultural NSW Advisory Board for providing its expertise and insights in this report, and for providing valued advice and support to the agency throughout the year.

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

Yours sincerely



Joseph La Posta

Chief Executive Officer
Multicultural NSW



Statement from the Advisory Board

About the Multicultural NSW Advisory Board

The Multicultural NSW Advisory Board is an independent statutory body established under the *Multicultural NSW Act 2000* (the Act) to provide expert advice and guidance to Multicultural NSW and the Minister for Multiculturalism. Our role is to ensure that the Multicultural Principles remain embedded in government policies and services while strengthening community harmony, inclusion, and social cohesion.

The Advisory Board plays a key role in shaping multicultural policy and community engagement strategies by leveraging expertise across government, academia, business, and community leadership. As one of our statutory functions under the Act, we provide advice to Multicultural NSW on the annual Community Relations Report, the agency's independent report to Parliament on the state of community relations as affected by cultural diversity.

The 2024 Community Relations Report reflects on key challenges, achievements, and policy directions impacting our culturally diverse society. With this statement, the Advisory Board reaffirms its commitment to addressing racism, strengthening social cohesion and ensuring that government policies remain inclusive and reflective of our state's cultural diversity

Multicultural NSW Advisory Board statement

This past year has seen significant challenges and shifts in community relations, driven by global conflicts, local tragedies, and economic pressures. The Advisory Board has closely monitored these developments and provided strategic input to ensure that NSW remains a leader in multicultural harmony, resilience, and inclusivity.

In 2024, geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, the overthrow of Assad in Syria, armed conflicts in Ukraine, Sudan, and Congo and the repatriation of Australian citizens from conflict zones have had direct consequences for local communities. These global events have contributed to heightened social division, community anxiety, and increased reports of hate incidents.

We have advised Multicultural NSW on proactive engagement strategies to support affected communities, counter misinformation, and prevent division, ensuring that public discourse remains constructive and inclusive.

The year saw a concerning increase in reports of antisemitism and Islamophobia, particularly in the wake of global conflicts. Reports of hate crimes, targeted discrimination, and heightened community tensions emphasise the need for a coordinated response from the government, law enforcement, and civil society.

The Advisory Board remains committed to addressing these challenges through policy recommendations, education initiatives, and strengthened community partnerships. Multicultural NSW's interfaith dialogue initiatives, community-led programs, and anti-racism strategies have been crucial in mitigating tensions and fostering a spirit of unity.

As this report demonstrates, the Bondi Junction and Wakeley attacks, along with neo-Nazi demonstrations in regional NSW, have underscored the ongoing risks to social cohesion. The Advisory Board supports the COMPLAN Committee's work by monitoring community safety threats and advising Multicultural NSW on preventative measures.

We continue to emphasise the importance of law enforcement collaboration with communities, ensuring that public safety efforts are culturally informed and community-centred.

This report draws on the Scanlon Foundation's 2024 Mapping Social Cohesion Report to show that social cohesion in Australia remains under pressure but has not cracked. Communities have shown remarkable resilience amid rising cost-of-living pressures, housing shortages, and employment barriers.

The Scanlon report highlights that strong community networks and government support have played a vital role in maintaining stability. The Advisory Board continues to advocate for targeted policies that promote economic participation, workforce inclusion, and housing security for all communities.

Strategic priorities and future directions

As part of its strategic focus, the Multicultural NSW Advisory Board conducted a workshop in November 2024 to assess emerging challenges and opportunities shaping community relations over the next five years. The discussion emphasised the need for a more structured and proactive approach to engaging with the NSW Government, ensuring the Board plays a stronger advisory role in policy decisions and community relations initiatives.

Key priorities identified included strengthening data-driven insights to inform policy, enhancing the effectiveness of Regional Community Networks (RCNs), and increasing youth engagement through the Multicultural Youth Network to ensure young voices are directly connected to decision-makers. The Board also emphasised the importance of developing a formal Community Relations Protocol to guide responses to significant community incidents and strengthening partnerships across human services sectors to build a more unified and cohesive multicultural society.

The Board recognised several emerging trends that will shape multicultural engagement in the coming years, including increased social fragmentation since the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of global conflicts on local community relations, and the growing influence of digital technologies on public trust and misinformation. There is also a pressing need to counteract negative narratives surrounding migration and multiculturalism through evidence-based storytelling and economic empowerment initiatives.



Nick Kaldas APM
Chair



Joseph La Posta
CEO



Cr Sally Betts



Simon Chan AM



Malaemie Fruean OAM



Sonia Sadiq Gandhi



David Giang



Omer Incekara



Elfa Moraitakis



Polina Bilinsky Mycak
Youth Member



Dr Saba Nabi OAM
Regional Member



Janice Rodrigues
Youth Member



Ramneek Singh



George Vardas

Members of the Multicultural NSW Advisory Board
(as of 1 December 2024)

Ensuring equitable access to multicultural services, particularly in regional areas, remains a key priority, alongside efforts to safeguard language services and promote long-term social cohesion. Through these strategic priorities, the Board aims to play a more active role in shaping policy and fostering stronger, more inclusive communities.

Some of the key priorities identified in the November 2024 workshop were:

- Expanding policy recommendations that address racism, discrimination, and community safety concerns.
- Strengthening engagement with law enforcement to ensure community trust and culturally competent policing.
- Advocating for greater economic opportunities for migrants, particularly in employment pathways and regional workforce participation.
- Enhancing youth leadership pathways, ensuring young voices are represented in policy, business, and civic leadership.
- Ensuring the sustainability of multicultural programs, including funding for language services, education, and social cohesion initiatives.

By continuing to connect government agencies with diverse communities, we will ensure that multiculturalism remains a cornerstone of our state's identity and future success.

Advisory Board Member updates

There were several changes to Advisory Board membership in 2024.

After nine years of dedicated service, Professor Sandra Hale concluded her final term in August 2024, leaving a lasting impact through her expertise in language services and translation policy.

Our Youth Advisory Board members, Hawa Mohammad and Esther Adeyinka, also completed their terms in 2024. Their contributions to youth engagement and advocacy were invaluable. Polina Bilinsky Mycak (appointed in 2023) and Janice Rodrigues (appointed in May 2024) now hold these positions, with Ms Rodrigues bringing expertise in refugee youth settlement and gender justice advocacy.

We also welcomed Elfa Moraitakis to the Advisory Board in May 2024, whose extensive experience in Western Sydney's community sector adds a valuable regional perspective.

Additionally, we acknowledge the re-appointment of Simon Chan AM, Sonia Sadiq Gandhi, Ömer Incekara, and Ramneek Singh for additional three-year terms, recognising their ongoing contributions to Multicultural NSW's mission.

Commitment to Multicultural NSW

The Advisory Board takes great pride in its role as custodians of multiculturalism in NSW and remains committed to ensuring that all communities feel valued, included, and empowered.

We express our deepest gratitude to the CEO and staff of Multicultural NSW, whose dedication have been instrumental in supporting communities during a challenging year. We also acknowledge and thank our outgoing Board members for their service and welcome our new and returning members, whose expertise will help shape the future of multicultural policy in NSW.

As the 2024 Community Relations Report highlights, NSW remains a global leader in diversity and social cohesion. We remain steadfast in our commitment to fostering unity, resilience, and opportunity for all.

On behalf of the Multicultural NSW Advisory Board, we would like to commend the 2024 Community Relations Report to the Parliament of New South Wales.



“ The Advisory Board reaffirms its commitment to addressing racism, strengthening social cohesion and ensuring that government policies remain inclusive and reflective of our state’s cultural diversity. ”

Multicultural NSW Advisory Board members and members of the NSW Faith Affairs Council with the Hon. Steve Kamper MP, Minister for Multiculturalism, at Parliament House

Acknowledgements

- Multicultural NSW acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands and waterways of NSW and pays respect to Aboriginal leaders past and present.
- Multicultural NSW acknowledges the advice and counsel of the Multicultural NSW Advisory Board under the leadership of its Chair, Nick Kaldas APM, throughout the year.
- This report draws on data from the 2021 Census by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and other ABS data sets.
- This report summarises some of the key findings of the 2024 Mapping Social Cohesion report by the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute. The Scanlon report has provided valuable insights for the Community Relations Report over several years.
- Multicultural NSW thanks its research partners at the Australian National University (ANU). Professor Kate Reynolds and Dr Benjamin Jones have led an interdisciplinary team at ANU and worked with an international expert reference group to design the NSW Community Relations Survey for Multicultural NSW. In this report, we present key findings from the second NSW Community Relations Survey conducted in late 2024.
- Multicultural NSW thanks Professor Alan Gamlen, Director of the Migration Hub at ANU, for permission to reproduce his keynote address 'The Future of Multiculturalism' delivered for the inaugural Multicultural NSW Regional Engagement Program (REP) Summit held in Wollongong on 25 June 2024.
- The NSW Community Resilience and Response Plan (COMPLAN) Committee met throughout 2024 to identify, assess, monitor and address issues impacting community harmony. A report on the COMPLAN Committee's activities for 2024 is included within this report and is endorsed by all member agencies. It provides an important source of information about the state of community relations as assessed by member agencies. Multicultural NSW acknowledges the contributions of all COMPLAN members and advisers from the NSW Police Force, Anti-Discrimination NSW, NSW Department of Communities and Justice, NSW Health, NSW Reconstruction Authority, Local Government NSW, and the NSW Premier's Department.
- The NSW Department of Education and NSW Health submitted reports to Multicultural NSW in 2024 under the Multicultural Policies and Services Program (MPSP). The NSW Department of Communities and Justice, NSW Police Force, NSW Ombudsman, NSW State Emergency Service, Sydney Opera House, Fire and Rescue NSW, Office of The Director of Public Prosecutions, Office of Sport, and TAFE NSW also provided reports on their Multicultural Plans in their 2023-24 Annual Reports. This report showcases examples of good practice in multicultural policy and service delivery from each of these agencies.
- Multicultural NSW thanks all the agencies, organisations, researchers and community members who contributed to this edition of the Community Relations Report.
- The Hon. Steve Kamper MP, Minister for Multiculturalism, provided leadership, stewardship and advocacy for the work of Multicultural NSW throughout 2024. While so much of the work of a Minister is public facing, behind the scenes, Minister Kamper has also spent many a late-night hour engaged in personal phone calls with community and religious leaders, both providing and receiving counsel and support during times of need. The Minister and Multicultural NSW have also been ably supported in our work by the staff of the Minister's Office. The contents of this report nevertheless reflect the agency's independent advice.

The state of community relations in New South Wales 2024

Local and global events presented challenges for communities and community relations in 2024. In the face of these challenges, the people of NSW continued to demonstrate resilience by standing united against divisive forces and coming together in times of need. At the local and interpersonal level, our everyday relations with each other across cultural, linguistic and religious differences remain strong. This is a strength we can draw on when facing challenges in the future.

Community resilience in action

This report examines a range of data and information sources to gauge the strength of community relations in NSW as affected by cultural diversity. Sometimes, though, the strength of our relationships becomes most evident, not in the form of carefully compiled statistics and survey reports, but in the spontaneous expression of community solidarity that we often witness in response to crisis. This is community resilience in action.

Importantly, community resilience does not emerge in the moment of crisis but is formed in the everyday ways in which we live together, help each other, and proactively work together to strengthen community relations over time. These everyday efforts often go unrecognised, as they form the background to the frontpage news items that typically focus on the crisis. But it is these existing relationships that we depend upon most of all in a time of crisis, and that will ultimately determine how well we respond to a crisis and recover in the long term.

This report's assessment of the state of community relations therefore begins with a narrative testament to the strength of our community resilience.

Test of resilience after two shocking acts of violence

The first example relates to two separate, shocking acts of extreme violence that occurred within a few days in April.

On 13 April, a 40-year-old man stabbed and killed six people and injured 12 others in the Westfield shopping centre in Bondi Junction. Five of those killed were women, including an international

student from China. The one man who was killed was an unarmed security guard, a refugee from Pakistan and a member of the Ahmadiyya community. The attacker was shot dead by a lone police officer. The perpetrator, who acted alone, was known to police and had a history of serious mental health issues. The NSW Police Commissioner observed that the attacker appeared to be targeting women, although investigators did not formally identify any motive for the attack. The lack of any apparent ideological motivation meant the incident was not deemed to be terrorism.

Only days later, on 15 April, a 16-year-old boy travelled for 90 minutes across the city to a church in Wakeley, where he stabbed an Assyrian Orthodox bishop during a livestreamed sermon. The bishop survived with permanent vision loss in one eye, and two others were injured in the attack while trying to help the bishop. The attacker, who had struggled with mental health issues, was arrested and later charged with a terrorist offence, with police alleging the attack was religiously motivated. This was soon followed by several other arrests of young people with online connections to the attacker.

While tragic and horrific in their own right, the impact of these two violent incidents was exacerbated by the spread of misinformation, disinformation and conspiracy theories. Before police could publicly identify the perpetrator of the Bondi Junction attack, racist misinformation about the attacker's identity was already being promoted by far-right conspiracy theorists online. One version of misinformation falsely claimed the attacker was Muslim and the attack was related to events in Gaza, while another version falsely named the attacker as an individual from the Jewish community. This is an example of how bad actors can exploit times of tragedy and crisis to sow discord and division along racial and religious lines. It highlights the need to remain vigilant to the threat of racist misinformation and disinformation during times of crisis.

In the case of the Wakeley attack, the bishop victim was himself known to have spread misinformation at times, including promoting anti-vaccination and anti-government messages during the COVID-19 pandemic. With the bishop having amassed a substantial following online, images from the livestreamed attack circulated rapidly among his

followers and more broadly among the community through online networks. By the time police and first responders arrived on the scene, they were confronted by a large mob that grew to around 2,000 people, with the scene quickly descending into rioting, assault and affray. More than 50 police officers were injured and 20 police vehicles damaged in the riot. Separately, misinformation began circulating online within the Muslim community about unfounded threats to local mosques in reprisal for the church attack. This fear was further compounded by a feeling among some in the Muslim community that the declaration of the Wakeley attack as ‘terrorism’ would further fuel Islamophobia, with many questioning the police decision to label this attack as terrorism, while the Bondi Junction incident was never categorised as such.

Times of crisis like these can bring out both the best and the worst in people. Unfortunately, these events show how rapidly a situation can escalate when fear, emotion and misinformation combine to undermine community harmony.

Alternatively, we see the best in people when communities come together across cultural and religious differences to help each other in times of need. In response to both these incidents, we also witnessed a public outpouring of sympathy for victims and powerful public displays of unity and solidarity. In responding to the attack on a priest in a place of worship, faith leaders from across religious divides mobilised within a matter of hours on the very night of the attack to de-escalate tensions and became a collective voice for calm and compassion (see page 65). We saw the same powerful expression of interfaith solidarity during prayer vigils held for the victims of the Bondi Junction attack.

Building community resilience in an uncertain world

To understand the state of community relations in our multicultural society, we need to take both a local and a global perspective. As a multicultural society, we are connected to every part of the world. As digital citizens, we are connected with each other and with world events more immediately than ever before. These connections can make us stronger and bring us closer together as a community. They can also expose us to a world that seems increasingly prone to conflict and polarisation.

Sadly, 2024 witnessed the most conflicts around the world since World War II, and the second highest conflict related death toll in the past 30 years (see pages 18-19).¹ Whenever war, conflict or strife break out somewhere in the world, there will be communities in NSW who are impacted, who are hurting and who are grieving. The escalation of violence in Israel and Gaza, the ongoing war in Ukraine, the violent crackdown on student protests and the subsequent ousting of the authoritarian government in Bangladesh, the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad in Syria (see pages 62-64) – for communities with family and cultural connections to these parts of the world, and many other places experiencing conflict, these are not ‘world news’ headlines but real world, personal stories of grief, pain, loss and anxiety, as well as stories of hope and resilience. In a multicultural society, the wellbeing of our local communities is intimately tied to such global events. In an increasingly uncertain world, building community resilience requires an understanding of how local communities are impacted by global events, and it means supporting each other as fellow Australians.

Our community resilience was tested in 2024 by one of the most polarising of global issues. Following the abhorrent 7 October 2023 terrorist attacks on Israel, the violence that ensued in Gaza continued to escalate throughout 2024 and expanded during the year into Lebanon and the broader region. The impacts of the Middle East crisis reverberated locally on many levels. Impacted communities were alternatively traumatised and grieving, angry and fearful, mobilised and paralysed. Community activists raised the alarm about rising levels of hate linked to the conflict, escalating as the year ended with a spate of arson and vandalism attacks targeting Jewish neighbourhoods and synagogues – events that regrettably carried over into the new year (see pages 59-64 for the NSW COMPLAN Committee’s report). At times, heightened community sentiment seemed to make the very idea of empathy and dialogue seem impossible. But that would misrepresent the important work that typically happens behind the scenes to bring communities together in times of need.

This report acknowledges the deeply felt impacts of the situation in Israel, Gaza and the broader Middle East among our communities. It also recognises the efforts of police and government agencies to support communities and community safety (see pages 62-64). Most importantly, it also recognises the efforts of communities to support each other during this difficult time. Underneath the frequently heightened community sentiment

¹ <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/highest-number-of-countries-engaged-in-conflict-since-world-war-ii/>

and political rhetoric, there are countless examples of community members quietly working for the common good of humanity. Examples include faith leaders standing united across religious differences (see pages 80-83), charities and community organisations stepping up to support repatriated Australian citizens and their families (see pages 20-21), young people inspiring hope and showing how peacebuilding starts at home (see pages 18-19). These are just a few examples presented in this report that show how, in the face of adversity, the people of NSW continue to build a strong and resilient multicultural society.

The biggest democratic exercise in history

Keeping a global focus, 2024 also presented the biggest test of democracy in world history. More people voted in elections internationally than ever before, with 76 countries holding general elections, including some of the world's most populous countries (India, USA, Indonesia, Pakistan, Brazil, Bangladesh, Russia and Mexico) and some of Australia's largest export markets (South Korea, India, Taiwan, Indonesia, the USA and UK).²

Overseas elections are obviously important to NSW for political and economic reasons (the US Presidential election clearly has worldwide implications). They can also impact relations within and between our communities. For example, the world's largest democracy, India, held the biggest single election in history, with 642 million voters going to the polls between April and June. People born in India represent the fastest growing number of people born overseas in NSW (see page 24). This cohort of our community is diverse, speaking different languages, practising different religions and following different politics back in their country of birth. As preceding editions of the Community Relations Report have documented, political and communal tensions in India have sometimes given rise to tensions within sections of Australia's Indian communities.³ In the lead-up to the Indian election, the inauguration of the Ram Janmabhoomi Mandir in Ayodhya, India, in January, had the potential to reignite tensions given the contentious and violent history associated with the Hindu temple's construction on the site of a former mosque. To the community's credit, the temple inauguration and the 2024 Indian general election passed without incident in NSW.

² <https://www.exportfinance.gov.au/resources/world-risk-developments/2023/november/world-record-elections-scheduled-in-2024-increase-policy-uncertainty/>

³ See Community Relations Reports for 2021, 2022 and 2023 at <https://multicultural.nsw.gov.au/resources/the-state-of-community-relations-in-nsw/>

In an increasingly uncertain world, building community resilience requires an understanding of how local communities are impacted by global events, and it means supporting each other as fellow Australians.



Immigration was a divisive topic of debate in many elections around the world, including in Europe. Concerningly for many observers, for the first time since Nazi rule, a far-right nationalist party won a state election in Germany on an anti-immigration, anti-Islam platform.⁴

International trends like this help to put our own experience into perspective. They should serve to remind us how fortunate we are.

Shifting attitudes towards immigration levels

In Australia, support for immigration and multiculturalism remains strong.⁵ That being recognised, widespread concerns about the cost of living and housing affordability have factored into national political discourse about immigration levels. Public opinion about immigration has shifted, with more people starting to think that immigration levels are too high, and with evidence suggesting that Australians who are struggling financially are more likely to believe this (see pages 38-41 on the findings of the 2024 Scanlon Foundation report). This is in a context in which Net Overseas Migration, while experiencing a momentary surge following the temporary pause on migration during the COVID-19 pandemic, actually declined in Australia, and even more so in NSW, in 2023-24. In fact, migration levels are still not at the levels we would have expected by now in a pre-pandemic world (see page 25).⁶

While economic insecurity understandably plays into people's attitudes and public debate about immigration, we must also remain alert to the way extremists can exploit such sentiment for their own ideological ends. The regional border town of Corowa was confronted with this problem in October, when a group of masked, black-clad neo-Nazis held a rally in the town, falsely claiming that migrant workers were taking jobs away from locals. Like many regional towns, Corowa has a proud reputation of welcoming newcomers who want the town to grow and thrive. The individuals involved in the rally were mostly from Victoria, while the local people of Corowa – including local businesses and the regional council – made it very clear that racist extremists are not welcome in their town (see page 62).

The Corowa incident shows that, while the vast majority of people understand the value of immigration and cultural diversity, there is a small

number of individuals who seek to incite fear, hate and division, often along racial or religious lines, and increasingly along lines of gender and sexuality as well (in July, another neo-Nazi rally targeted an LGBTIQ+ Pride event in Albury). One thing all extremists have in common is a hatred for diversity and a disdain for the fundamental human and democratic rights that protect our freedoms in a diverse society. As the people of Corowa demonstrated, it is crucial that we all stand united against these hateful and divisive forces.

Standing united against extremism

The reality of the extremism threat was reinforced in 2024 when ASIO raised the national terrorism threat level from 'Possible' to 'Probable'.⁷ The first time the terrorism threat level had been raised to this level was in 2014, at the height of the ISIS threat, and the year that saw the Sydney CBD transformed into a sea of flowers after the Martin Place siege (see page 55). A decade on, the extremist landscape has evolved into a complex ideological ecology, fuelled by conspiracy theories and anti-government thinking that spread online like a virus during the pandemic, and compounded by a volatile global environment and a social media ecosystem that rewards extreme behaviour, obfuscates truth and enables hate. There is no single or clear ideological driver behind the new forms of extremism, with racism, misogyny, religious intolerance and all manner of bigotry finding expression in the new pseudo-politics of hate.

Irrespective of the role that ideology may or may not play as a motive, extremists and terrorists all deploy the same tactic, which is to incite fear and division. And as the ASIO Director General has stressed: *words matter*.⁸ How we talk about these issues in the public domain can either help extremists get what they want (more fear, more division) or it can deny them what they want, by uniting us as a society.

How well we respond collectively to this threat to social cohesion is a measure of our resilience. This requires a whole-of-society approach to countering hate and division in both online and offline environments. There is encouraging evidence to suggest that NSW is leading the way in designing and delivering programs to counter this threat to community harmony (see pages 55-58).

⁴ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-09-02/far-right-party-wins-german-regional-election/104299430>

⁵ <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/publications/mapping-social-cohesion-report/2024-mapping-social-cohesion-report>

⁶ <https://policybrief.anu.edu.au/when-will-migration-return-to-normal/>

⁷ <https://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/national-threat-level/current-national-terrorism-threat-level>

⁸ <https://www.asio.gov.au/statement-middle-east>

Everyday community relations are the norm

Without diminishing the real challenges for community relations that we faced in 2024, including the persistent challenges of racism and discrimination (see pages 38-41), there is strong evidence that—at the everyday level of interpersonal engagement—the people of NSW do enjoy positive relations with each other across cultural, linguistic and religious differences, and most people consider this kind of engagement to be the norm in our multicultural society (see pages 42-54 for an analysis of the second NSW Community Relations Survey). There is also a solid evidence base to show how community programs are successfully cultivating new connections between people across cultural, linguistic and religious differences (see pages 55-58 on the evaluation of the COMPACT Program).

It is sometimes easy to forget how successful we are as a multicultural society. We have seen in recent times how terms like ‘social cohesion’ and ‘multiculturalism’ can become weaponised, with critics and pessimists distorting the meaning of such terms to suit their own ideological agendas. But beneath the surface of rhetoric and opinion lies the reality of lived experience, and it is here we find that NSW continues to set an example for the rest of the world as a peaceful, multicultural society. This is a unique strength and one we can draw upon when faced with challenges in the future.

International trends like this help to put our own experience into perspective. They should serve to remind us how fortunate we are.

CASE STUDY

Peacebuilding starts at home: young people inspiring hope for the future

Founded by Australian philanthropist Steve Killelea AM in 2007, the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) is a global think-tank, headquartered in Sydney but working internationally on issues relating to peace, security and development.

IEP produces the Global Terrorism Index, the Global Peace Index (GPI), and the Global Positive Peace Index.

The Global Peace Index 2024⁹ reveals that there are currently 56 conflicts, the most since World War II, and 92 countries are involved in conflicts outside their borders, the most since the GPI's inception.

The GPI recorded 162,000 conflict related deaths in the last year. This was the second highest toll in the past 30 years, with the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza accounting for nearly three-quarters of deaths worldwide.

110 million people are either refugees or internally displaced due to violent conflict, with 16 countries now hosting more than half a million refugees.

North America saw the largest deterioration of peacefulness by region, driven by increases in violent crime and fear of violence.

While the GPI measures 'negative peace', IEP has also adopted a concept of 'Positive Peace'. Positive Peace is defined as the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies. The same factors that create lasting peace also lead to many other positive outcomes that societies aspire to, including thriving economies, better performance on ecological measures, and high levels

of resilience and adaptability to change. Other factors that improve with Positive Peace are inclusiveness, wellbeing and happiness.¹⁰

While maintaining a global watch on deteriorating peacefulness, IEP has also adapted its positive peacebuilding principles to support young people in finding solutions to issues within their own local communities.

IEP joined the Multicultural NSW COMPACT Alliance (see pages 55-58) in 2022 and has been co-designing local peacebuilding initiatives with young people since then. In 2024, IEP was successful in securing new COMPACT program funding to deliver the 'NSW Global Links: Partnerships for Peace' project over the next four years.¹¹

"We are witnessing a record number of conflicts, a rise in militarisation, and heightened international strategic competition... It's been 80 years since the end of WWII, and the current crises underscore the urgency for world leaders to commit to investing in resolving these conflicts."¹²

Steve Killelea AM, Founder & Executive Chairman, IEP

⁹ <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/>

¹⁰ <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/positive-peace-index/#/>

¹¹ <https://multicultural.nsw.gov.au/community-resilience/compact/>

¹² <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/highest-number-of-countries-engaged-in-conflict-since-world-war-ii/>

110 million people are either refugees or internally displaced due to violent conflict, with 16 countries now hosting more than half a million refugees.

The project recognises that the ripple effects of global conflicts are increasingly being felt locally. The project seeks to understand and address these complex dynamics by engaging young people from conflict-affected backgrounds in youth-designed projects and providing platforms for them to be involved in policy discussions. The project has been carefully designed to provide insights and capabilities needed to effectively prepare for, prevent, respond to, and recover from local tensions that may arise as a consequence of international conflicts.

Patricia Garcia AO is the IEP project lead for NSW Global Links. A respected humanitarian and 2016 Australian of the Year State Finalist, Patricia has lived and worked in war zones for over 20 years.

Patricia recognises the importance of taking a trauma-informed approach to working with young people who have experienced living in war zones.

“Their global experiences, including the experiences of trauma they have been through, shape their lives and any peace work on a local level must address these lived experiences,” she said.

Patricia sees an urgent need to implement local peacebuilding activities, particularly with school students.

“Positive Peace is not some utopian idea, not just about the absence of war and conflict, it’s about focusing on what works and emphasising the factors that create thriving societies,” she said.

Reflecting on her work with high school students in Western Sydney, Patricia highlights the importance of translating theory into practice.

“Before [the students] thought that it was just one of those concepts that was elusive, abstract and too hard to understand,” Patricia explained.

“Now they have some understanding of how to take some action that contributes to peace.”



Patricia Garcia AO, Institute for Economics and Peace, project lead for NSW Global Links: Partnerships for Peace

You can read the Global Peace Index 2024 at: www.visionofhumanity.org

You can learn more about the Multicultural NSW COMPACT Program at: <https://multicultural.nsw.gov.au/community-resilience/compact/>

CASE STUDY

Lebanese Australians grateful for safe evacuation

In view of the situation in Lebanon in 2024, the Australian Government offered evacuation flights to Australia for Lebanese Australians and close family.

A total of 14 flights arrived in Australia with some 3,500 evacuees. Most of these arrived in Sydney. Flights arrived from 7 to 24 October 2024.

The majority of arrivals were Lebanese Australians with substantial connections in Australia. A small though significant number had not lived in Australia for many years. These people needed support to get Australian identity documents, register for Centrelink and Medicare, open bank accounts and find private rental accommodation.

Some evacuees also needed temporary accommodation, meals, clothing and personal support. Trauma and, in some cases, language and cultural issues made this a complex and lengthy task.

In total, 52 families involving 173 persons (including 94 children) were assisted, with ages ranging from babies to the elderly. They were accommodated at several hotels in Sydney during this process.

The process was coordinated by the Disaster Welfare unit, part of Homes NSW in the Department of Communities and Justice. Participating agencies included NSW Health, NSW Department of Education, Service NSW, Services Australia, the NSW Telecommunications Authority, Transport for NSW and Multicultural NSW.

These agencies typically work together following natural disasters but the Lebanon repatriation was unusual due to the war trauma, language and cultural issues, and the duration of the operation.

The Disaster Welfare unit built on its prior relationship with Multicultural NSW and the two agencies were able to access and sustain a significant team of Arabic speakers, including agency staff, community volunteers, and religious leaders. These were drawn from Disaster Welfare's chaplaincy network, Multicultural NSW's interpreter panel, and Multicultural NSW's community networks.

Recognising the depth of language skills within the NSW Public Service, Disaster Welfare also drew on the resources of departmental staff with community language skills. This has proven to be a very significant resource in response to various disasters, with staff skills across over a dozen languages, in particular Arabic, Hindi and Chinese languages.

SSI was engaged to support case coordination as well as briefings in language about living in Australia and the realities of the rental market.

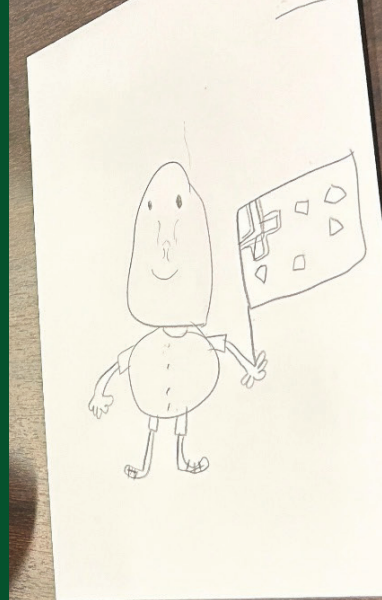
The chaplains, interpreters, community volunteers, SSI and departmental staff put in multiple shifts over many days – this helped to build trust and create a safe environment where evacuees could raise more sensitive needs and express some of their experiences.

In total, 52 families involving 173 persons (including 94 children) were assisted.

Community volunteers also provided an important link back into the various communities, facilitating the donation of Arabic food, children's books and appropriate religious attire. This was a valuable service and agency staff were greatly appreciative of the time and effort contributed by community volunteers.

Disaster Welfare provided the following example of a successful outcome for one family:

A husband, wife and daughter moved to a suitable and affordable property with NSW Government assistance. The father and daughter are now both attending TAFE: the 17-year-old daughter is studying English and the father is studying to be a teacher's assistant. The family is very grateful for the fresh start in Australia and for the all the assistance on arrival and since then, including assistance in finding specialised medical support for an ongoing issue.



A child expressed his gratitude in a drawing.



Community volunteers went out of their way to donate clothing and other essential items

The people of NSW in 2024

To understand the state of community relations as affected by cultural diversity, we need to appreciate that NSW is one of the most culturally diverse states in the world.

The 2021 ABS Census, still the best and most current data we have available, tells us that 29.3% of people in this state were born overseas, and 50.3% (the majority) of us have at least one parent who was born overseas.

While country of birth is only one indicator of cultural diversity,¹³ it is an important one to consider when examining the size and growth of our cultural communities as influenced by migrant settlement.

Our largest cohorts of first-generation Australians are made up of people born in China, England, India, New Zealand, and the Philippines.

Country of birth data can also help us understand how recent settlement trends influence the growth of cultural communities. When we compare 2021 to 2016 Census data, we can see the fastest growing cohort of first-generation Australians by number is made up of people born in India, followed by those born in Nepal, the Philippines, Iraq, and Vietnam.

As the table opposite shows, while people born in India represent the fastest growing *number* of first-generation Australians, people born in Nepal represent the fastest *proportionate* growth in terms of the rapidly growing size of the Nepali Australian community.

On a national level, the top five fastest growing number of first-generation Australians come from India, Nepal, the Philippines, China, and Vietnam. Proportionately, the Nepali Australian community is also the fastest growing community at the national level.



¹³ The Community Relations Reports for 2022 and 2023 examined 2021 Census data relating to religious diversity and linguistic diversity, respectively. See <https://multicultural.nsw.gov.au/resources/the-state-of-community-relations-in-nsw/>

Ranking (2021 Census)	Country of birth (outside Australia)	2021 Census – number of responses	% of NSW population (2021 Census)
1	China (excludes Special Administrative Regions (SARs) and Taiwan)	247,595	3.1%
2	England	231,385	2.9%
3	India	208,962	2.6%
4	New Zealand	118,527	1.5%
5	Philippines	106,930	1.3%

NSW - Top five countries of birth in NSW (exclusive of Australia)

Ranking (2016 Census) – Country of birth (exclusive of Australia)	Ranking (2021 Census) – Country of birth (exclusive of Australia)	Ranking (2016 and 2021 Census) – Growth in country of birth (by size) (exclusive of Australia)	Country of birth	Growth (between 2016 and 2021)	% Growth (between 2016 and 2021)
3	3	1	India	65,503	45.7%
14	7	2	Nepal	32,824	102.2%
5	5	3	Philippines	20,178	23.3%
12	9	4	Iraq	15,077	37.4%
6	6	5	Vietnam	13,866	16.5%

NSW – Fastest growing countries of birth by number (exclusive of Australia)

Ranking (2016 Census) – Country of birth (exclusive of Australia)	Ranking (2021 Census) – Country of birth (exclusive of Australia)	Ranking (2016 and 2021 Census) – Growth in country of birth (by size) (exclusive of Australia)	Country of birth	Growth (between 2016 and 2021)	% Growth (between 2016 and 2021)
4	2	1	India	217,967	47.9%
27	11	2	Nepal	67,749	123.7%
5	5	3	Philippines	61,501	26.5%
3	3	4	China (excludes SARs and Taiwan)	40,060	7.9%
6	6	5	Vietnam	38,646	17.6%

Australia – Fastest growing countries of birth by number (exclusive of Australia)

CASE STUDY

Cultural diversity within the Indian Australian community

People born in India represent the fastest growing number of first-generation Australians, according to 2021 ABS Census country of birth data. 65,503 people born in India settled in NSW between 2016 and 2021.

When we look at other indicators of cultural diversity, we can also see that this cohort is diverse, speaking different languages, practising different religions, and identifying with a variety of ethnic ancestries.

According to the 2021 Census, NSW residents who were born in India:

- now call Australia home, with most (51.9%) being Australian citizens.
- can communicate in over 60 languages and dialects, with the top five being Hindi, Punjabi, English, Gujarati and Telugu.
- have a strong English proficiency, with 82.5% being able to communicate in another language and speak English either “very well” or “well”.
- identify with over 110 ancestries, with the top five being Indian, Punjabi, Sikh, English and Tamil.
- have over 60 religious affiliations, with the top five being, Hinduism, Sikhism, Western Catholic, Islam and the Anglican Church of Australia.

- reside across the state in both metropolitan areas (such as Blacktown and Parramatta) and non-metropolitan areas (like Central Coast and Wollongong).
- work across a variety of industries including Professional, Scientific and Technical Services, and Manufacturing.
- are well educated, with nearly three-quarters (71.5%) having received a Diploma or higher level of education.

NSW residents born in India are highly active across all aspects of public life, including business and government. The community has shown a strong sense of civic duty, including during recent natural disasters and COVID-19, with community and religious leaders helping disseminate information and community groups supporting those in need.¹⁴

51.9%
are Australian
citizens

**have a strong
English
proficiency**

**work across
a variety of
industries**

**are well
educated**

¹⁴ https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australias_indian_diaspora_220317_full_report.pdf, p ii.

Migration and population trends

The people of NSW are culturally diverse because our state is built on migration. Our long-term economic prosperity and the capacity of our communities to thrive depends on migrants choosing to live and work in our state and contributing to our society.¹⁵ Overwhelmingly, we are a state that welcomes new arrivals and understands the social and economic benefits of immigration and cultural diversity (see pages 38-41).

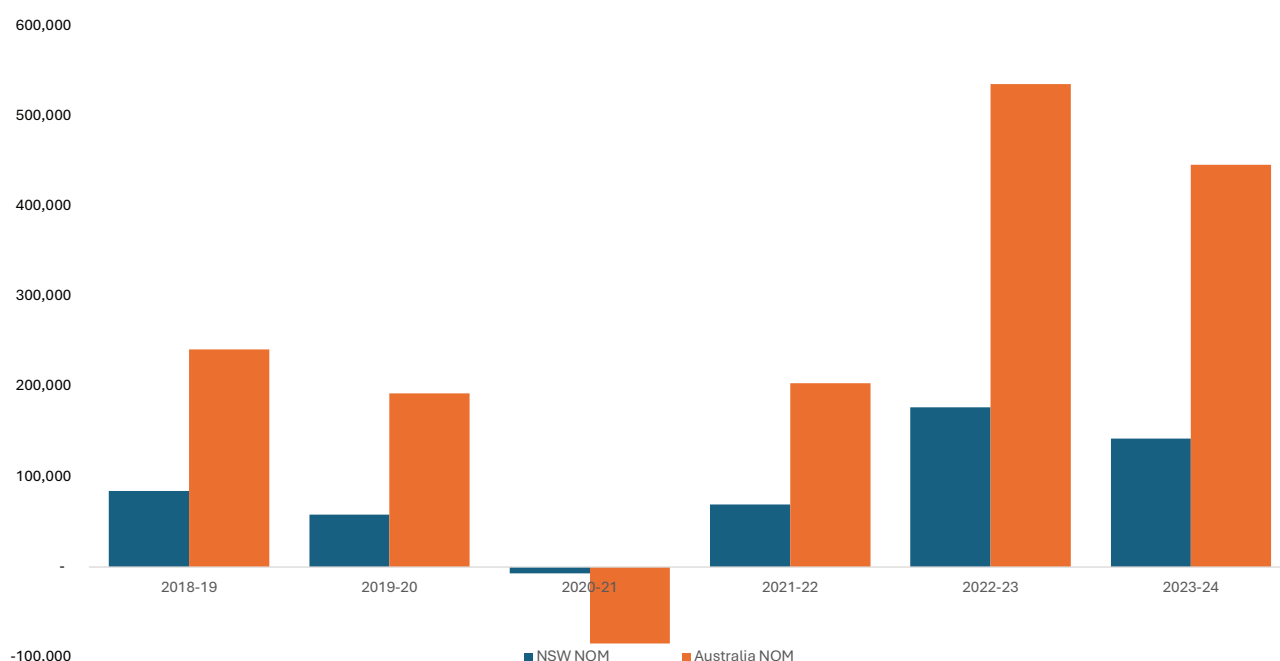
Our population growth is a result of natural increase (births minus deaths) and net migration (overseas and interstate arrivals minus departures). Natural increase is slowed by declining fertility rates (people are having fewer babies) and an ageing population.¹⁶ Today, an ageing population and a declining birth rate means that net overseas migration (NOM) remains the primary driver of our population growth. In 2023-24, the population of NSW grew by 143,158 people.

142,473 of these were people who migrated from overseas.

Migration levels have been rebounding after the temporary halt on immigration imposed during the COVID-19 crisis. However, between 2022-23 and 2023-24, NSW experienced a decline in NOM of 19.6% (-34,627).¹⁷ As a proportion of the population, this decline is greater than the 16.8% (-89,880) decline in NOM felt nationally, and the decline experienced in NSW makes up nearly two-fifths of the national decline in NOM.¹⁸

These trends seem to contradict the views expressed by some public commentators about rising immigration levels. In fact, according to ANU migration expert Professor Alan Gamlen, “contrary to claims of record-high migration, Australia is still far from catching up to the levels of migration that, in the pre-pandemic world, we expected to have had by now.”¹⁹

Migration levels may continue to fluctuate for some time, with continued policy changes likely to cause further volatility.²⁰



Source: ABS, National, state and territory population, June 2024

NSW and Australia NOM, 2018-19 to 2023-24

¹⁵ <https://www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-06/2021-22%20NSW%20Intergenerational%20Report%2C%20Chapter%201%20-%20Population.pdf>, p 32-3.

¹⁶ <https://www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-06/2021-22%20NSW%20Intergenerational%20Report%2C%20Chapter%201%20-%20Population.pdf>

¹⁷ https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/jun-2024/31010do001_202406.xlsx

¹⁸ https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/jun-2024/31010do001_202406.xlsx

¹⁹ <https://policybrief.anu.edu.au/when-will-migration-return-to-normal/>

²⁰ <https://policybrief.anu.edu.au/when-will-migration-return-to-normal/>

Migration levels are set by the Commonwealth and include different migration streams, including permanent migration under skilled, family and humanitarian streams, and temporary migration including student, visitor and temporary skilled visa streams.²¹ Net overseas migration (NOM) includes both permanent and temporary migration, factoring in both arrivals and departures.

In 2023-24, the number of places delivered under the permanent Migration Program (primarily skilled and family visa streams) in NSW declined by 0.1%. More specifically, the number of skilled visas issued in NSW went backwards by 1.2% in 2023-24 compared to the year before.²² The Australian Government's decision to reduce the national planning levels for the Migration Program by 5,000 places, with the skilled visa stream being the most impacted, may have implications for NSW in a current skills shortage.²³

The 2023-24 Humanitarian Program was delivered in full, with 20,000 permanent visas granted.²⁴

In terms of temporary migration, international students (typically the largest cohort of temporary migrants) are slowly returning to NSW. There were 375,398 international student enrolments and 208,831 commencements recorded in 2023, an increase of 2.9% and 7.6% respectively when compared to 2019 pre-COVID-19 levels.²⁵ Significantly in the context of a skills shortage, the VET sector experienced the highest growth within international education during this period. VET course enrolments increased by 13.2% and commencements by 11.4%. While still recovering from the pandemic era, international education generated \$17.9 billion for the state in 2023, exceeding the previous year by 84.7%.²⁶

NOM calculations obviously factor in both the arrival and departure of international students: that is (usually), on commencing and completing their studies. These numbers are still being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, because we had no international students arriving during the period, and those arriving after the pandemic still need to complete their studies before they will factor into the NOM departure figures (or transition to another visa).²⁷ The Australian Government's proposed cap on the

international student intake, combined with a likely marked increase in international student departures in the near future, may have implications for the international education industry and the economic benefits it brings to NSW.

Population planning key to the future

Modelling by the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) predicts that from 2021-22 to 2040-41, our population will grow by more than 1.9 million people, an annual growth of 1.1%.²⁸ This is a projection based on historical trends,²⁹ and as is the case traditionally, NOM is expected to be the primary driver of this growth, contributing 1.7 million people from overseas over the 20-year period. NOM is projected to grow on average by 4.3% annually over this period. For context, the average annual NOM change over the previous 20-year period was -1.5%, due to the dramatic impact that COVID-19 had on migration.³⁰

Top five NSW local government areas ('LGA') by NOM, 2022-23	Projected average annual NOM change, 2021-22 to 2040-41
Sydney	4.2%
Parramatta	4.2%
Canterbury-Bankstown	4.4%
Cumberland	3.7%
Blacktown	5.9%

Western Sydney has traditionally been the hub of population growth, often experiencing higher than average numbers of new overseas arrivals.³¹ Interestingly, DPHI projections to 2040-41 suggest that key Western Sydney hubs will experience an average annual NOM growth that is comparable to the state average of 4.3%.

The unprecedented pause on migration during the COVID-19 pandemic has had lasting effects, not the least of which is a skewed picture of population growth and its influence on public perceptions about immigration levels.

²¹ <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/what-we-do/migration-program-planning-levels>.

²² <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/report-migration-program-2023-24.pdf>, p 17.

²³ <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/programs-subsite/files/administration-immigration-programs-13th-edition.pdf>, p 25.

²⁴ <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/programs-subsite/files/administration-immigration-programs-13th-edition.pdf>, p 36.

²⁵ <https://www.education.gov.au/download/12716/international-student-data-year-date-ytd-september-2024/39951/all-data/xlsx>

²⁶ <https://www.education.gov.au/international-education-data-and-research/education-export-income-calendar-year>.

²⁷ <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/overseas-migration-drives-australias-population-growth>.

²⁸ <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/data-and-insights/population-projections/explore-the-data>.

²⁹ <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-11/2024-nsw-population-projections-methods-and-assumptions.pdf>, p 6.

³⁰ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/jun-2024/310102.xlsx>.

³¹ https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/regional-population/2022-23/32180DS0002_2022-23.xlsx.

The fact is, we have known since at least the mid-2000s that NOM would be the primary driver of population growth. Longer-term population projections have not substantially changed from the pre-pandemic to post-pandemic eras. In theory, projected steady migration growth should make population planning easier, and that includes housing policy that accommodates predicted population growth. Moreover, as recognised by the NSW Government, migration can act as a vital source of labour supply and productivity in housing construction and thereby help boost housing supply.³²

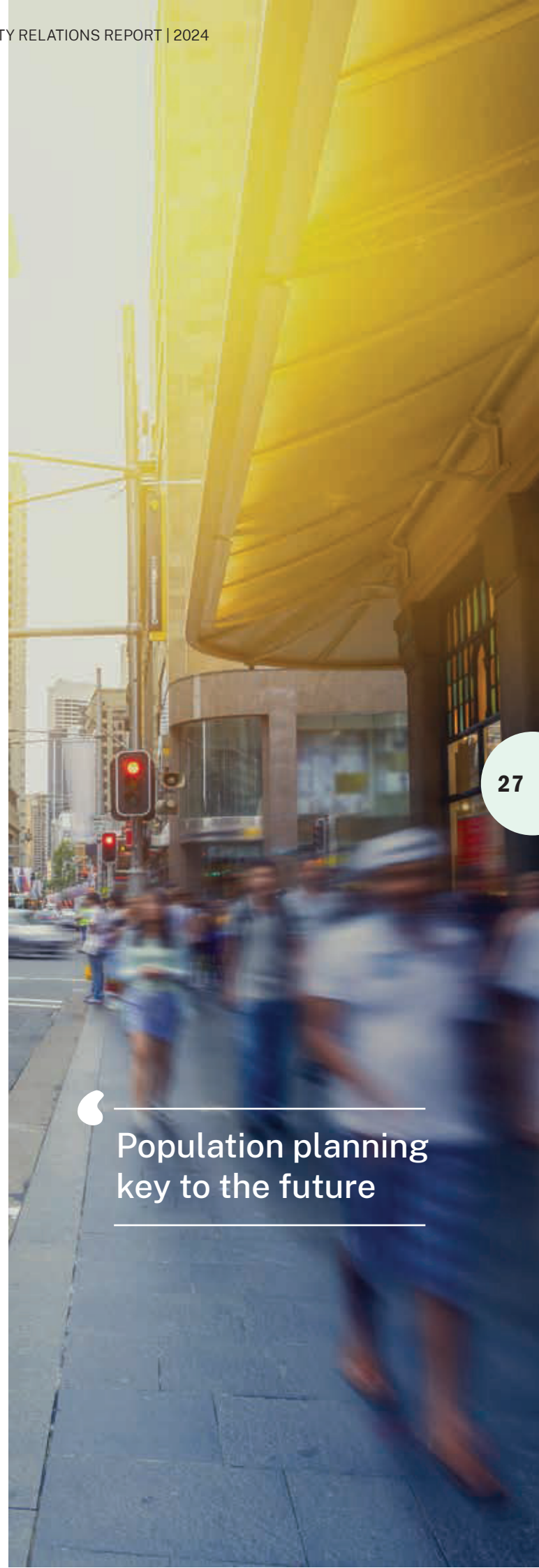
Migration is still the only viable workforce solution to the problem of an ageing population. NSW is predicted to become an increasingly older population: by 2040-41, there will 52% more people aged 65 or older.³³ This outpaces the projected 21% growth in the working age population. This problem is compounded for regional areas, where some regions are experiencing falling population sizes that can even threaten the future viability of their regional communities. Walgett, for example, is predicted to decline in population by 329 people between 2021-22 and 2040-41, a number that is already offset by a predicted net arrival of 55 migrants over the same period.

Of course, migrants are not merely workers. We are families with children who go to local schools and play for our local sport teams. We are volunteers and community leaders who help to build a sense of place and belonging.³⁴ We are artists and scientists, teachers and nurses. We are friends, neighbours and colleagues. We are a migrant community, a society built on migration and working for a better future together. We are, as the song goes, Australian.

³² https://www.productivity.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-11/20241114_NSW-PEC-report-Review-of-housing-supply-challenges-and-policy-options-for-New-South-Wales.pdf, p 71-3.

³³ <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/data-and-insights/population-projections/key-findings>.

³⁴ <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settlement-services-subsite/files/economic-social-civic-contributions-booklet.pdf>, p 46-53.

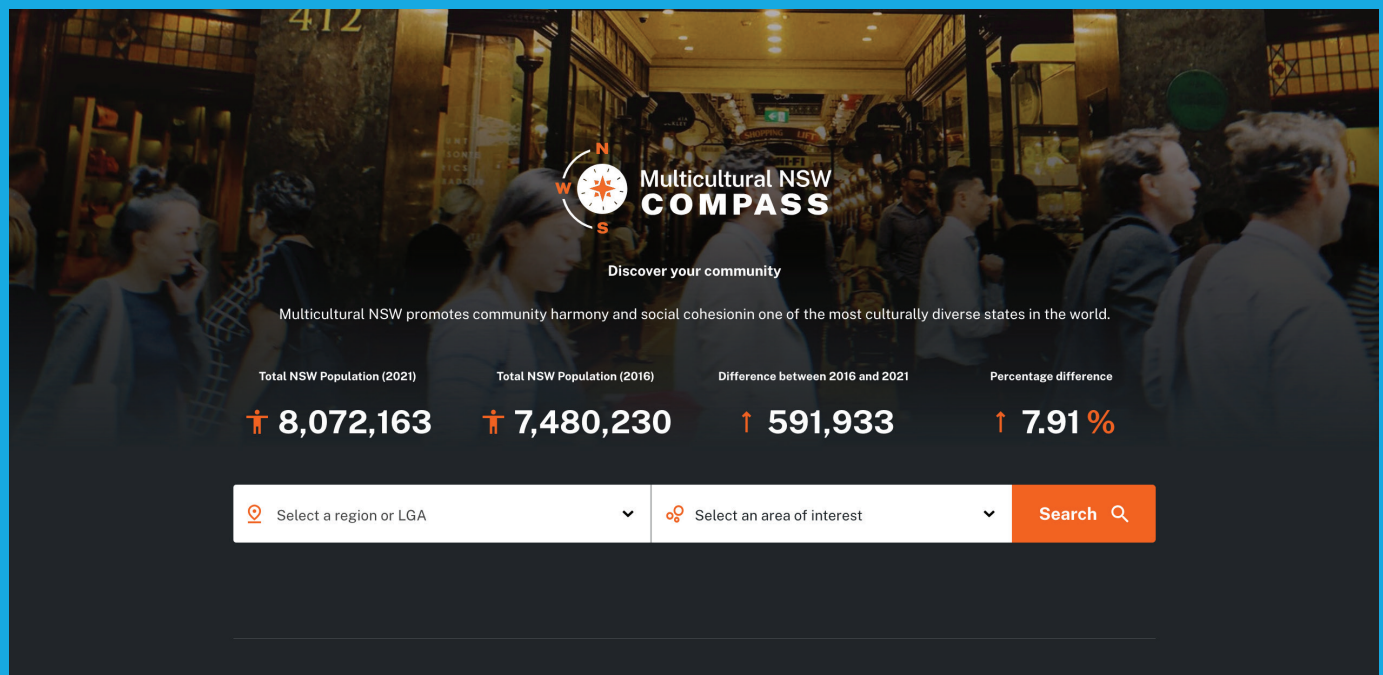


CASE STUDY

Discover your community: the Multicultural NSW Compass

The Multicultural NSW Compass webpage aims to provide users with the ability to view ABS Census data in an attainable format. The webpage displays data for 30 variables, covering several topics for 128 different Local Government Areas (LGAs) within NSW, the whole of NSW, and metropolitan and regional areas as defined by the two regions of Greater Sydney and Rest of NSW. The information can also be viewed as a downloadable 10-page summary PDF file that provides a snapshot of the selected geographic area.

The Multicultural NSW Compass is a valuable resource for students, researchers, project managers, service planners, grant applicants and anyone who needs to better understand the culturally diverse community they serve.



The future of multiculturalism: regional summit tackles big topics

Almost 200 delegates joined the inaugural Multicultural NSW Regional Engagement Program (REP) Annual Summit in Wollongong in June 2024.

The Summit was the culmination of the first 12 months of regional engagement activities under the REP, which began in June 2023 with a listening tour across 10 regions and included a series of topical roundtables and joint regional forums. The REP aims to expand, nourish and sustain effective, wide-reaching, robust relationships with and between communities across our regions. The program provides a variety of regional engagement offerings that facilitate dynamic, purposeful and technologically enabled engagement with regional communities throughout the year, culminating in the annual regional summit.

In 2024, Regional Community Networks (RCNs) were established in 10 regions. The RCNs help Multicultural NSW expand its community networks in regions and serve as steering committees providing advice and guidance to Multicultural NSW on the strategic direction of the broader REP.

The inaugural REP Summit brought together REP participants from across the state and featured a distinguished line-up of speakers and panellists addressing some of the most pressing issues facing our multicultural society today.

One panel examined current trends in migration and strategies to support new arrivals to thrive. The panel featured experts and policymakers from the fields of humanitarian settlement, international education, and skilled migration tackling current debates about the social and economic costs and benefits of immigration. Dr Aruna Sathanapally, CEO of the Grattan Institute, directly challenged the idea that immigration should be used as a policy lever to address housing affordability, arguing instead that forward-thinking housing policy and planning should already be in place to facilitate forecasted immigration levels.

Another panel examined how, in the face of global and local challenges, communities are standing up against racism and hate. The distinguished panellists were Nick Kaldas APM, Chair of the Multicultural NSW Advisory Board, Multicultural NSW Advisory Board member Simon Chan AM, President of the Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW, Helen McKenzie, and Dr Rachel Sharples from the Challenging Racism Project at Western Sydney University.

Mal Lanyon APM, CEO of the NSW Reconstruction Authority, Murat Dizdar, Secretary of the Department of Education, and Dr Jan Fizzell from the Office of the Chief Health Officer led another panel discussion on modelling good multicultural practice and building capability across sectors.

In another panel, Breda Diamond, Director of Multicultural NSW Language Services, Davide Schiappapietra, Head of Language Content at SBS, and Thang Ngo, author of the Multicultural Communications Playbook, explored how we can all benefit from living and working better with language diversity.





L-R: Simon Chan AM, Multicultural NSW Advisory Board member, Dr Rachel Sharples from the Challenging Racism Project at Western Sydney University, Helen McKenzie, President of the Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW, and Nick Kaldas APM, Chair of the Multicultural NSW Advisory Board, at the inaugural Multicultural NSW Regional Engagement Program (REP) Summit, 25 June 2024.

A highlight of the summit program was the keynote address by Professor Alan Gamlen, Director of the Migration Hub at the Australian National University. A self-confessed “migration nerd”, Professor Gamlen has been deeply invested in researching and teaching human migration since the early 2000s. His keynote speech, ‘The Future of Multiculturalism’, brilliantly addressed five key questions:

QUESTION 1: *How multicultural is Australia today?*

QUESTION 2: *What status do Indigenous Australians hold in multiculturalism?*

QUESTION 3: *Does multiculturalism reflect Australia’s super-diversity?*

QUESTION 4: *Does Australia govern multiculturalism effectively?*

QUESTION 5: *What mechanisms exist to address these key questions?*

Professor Gamlen has kindly granted permission to reproduce his keynote speech in full opposite.



The Future of Multiculturalism: five key questions

Keynote Address to the Multicultural NSW Regional Engagement Program Annual Summit, 25 June 2024

By Professor Alan Gamlen, Director of the Migration Hub at
The Australian National University

Good morning colleagues. In New Zealand I would say *Tihei Mauri Ora*. Here I should say I'm honoured to be a visitor on Dharawal land, and excited to be at this event, building relationships within the vibrant multicultural sector of New South Wales — arguably Australia's most proudly multicultural state. I look forward to learning from all of you throughout the day.

For the next half hour, you're stuck with me. I've been asked to talk about The Future of Multiculturalism. Rather than making pronouncements, I'm going to raise some key questions I think we need to think hard about regarding Australian multiculturalism.

PRELIMINARY QUESTION:

Why am I giving this talk?

Before I get to the key questions, there's a preliminary question I suspect you're all asking, which is, why am I giving this talk.

I'm here as a migration nerd, deeply invested in researching and teaching human migration since the early 2000s. My journey began with a Japanese Government scholarship, allowing me to study the music of migrants and ethnic minorities in South Osaka from 2003 to 2005, focusing on how music promoted human rights among marginalised groups.

I then won a scholarship to do a doctorate at Oxford University, based first at the Centre on Migration Policy and Society and later after graduation at the International Migration Institute. These days I'm a professor at the Australian National University, directing the ANU Migration Hub, a group of about 110 migration experts across five colleges and numerous schools and institutes.

Why did I take this path? Because I felt this was an important area where I could make a difference. Migration has always been a significant force in human history and is one of today's great challenges. It has driven human progress and

conflict alike. Today, more people live outside their birthplace than ever before, some by choice, but many due to circumstances beyond their control.

The movement of people is a defining feature of our time. Regulating migration and displacement involves complex tasks and necessitates cross-sector and interdisciplinary cooperation to understand how population movement changes lives, transforms societies, and shapes economies. I've dedicated my career to addressing these challenges.

But my personal interest in these issues began much earlier. I was born in Canada to New Zealander parents of British and Māori descent, and I'm a member of the *Tainui* confederation of tribes in New Zealand. Alongside mainstream schooling in New Zealand, I received traditional Māori leadership training, focusing on language, speechmaking, weaponry, and performing arts. I've always been called a "white Māori," sparking my lifelong interest in race, racism, and ethnic identity.

My closest companion on this journey was another boy called Allan. White Alan and Black Allan, they called us. We trained together from boyhood, and became lifelong friends, more like brothers. White Alan became a professor. Black Allan was working in a fish factory when he was murdered. The different stories of the two Alans taught me quite a lot about racism. I have experienced exclusion, degrading treatment and violence because of my skin colour. But I'm here, and he's not.

My background has led me here, but I acknowledge that others might do a better job of a speech like this. Several are on a committee that is currently reviewing Australia's multicultural framework. As I understand it, this committee has gathered deep insights and produced a report to shape Australian multiculturalism. No doubt the committee members will be able to discuss their work when the Government is ready to launch the report. But that is taking longer than everyone expected.

Why? Most of us think the government's reluctance to discuss the multicultural framework review – and migration more generally – stems from fears of distracting from public concerns about the cost of living. They also don't want to play into the hands of the Opposition, who have spotlighted migration issues ahead of the federal election. Maybe that's fair enough. But this reluctance highlights the current contentious state of multiculturalism in Australia, despite its institutionalisation since the 1970s. In 2024, multiculturalism remains a topic many are hesitant to address openly.

QUESTION 1:

How multicultural is Australia today?

This leads to my first key question: How multicultural is Australia today? The term “multicultural” remains a powerful description of Australia's diverse population. Australia boasts the world's oldest continuous culture, alongside non-Indigenous Australians who identify with over 300 different ancestries. Almost a third of Australia's population was born overseas, and almost half of Australians have a parent born overseas. One in five Australians speak a language other than English at home. The majority of Australians have a recent migrant background.

However, we must distinguish between “multicultural” as a description of demographic facts, and multiculturalism as a distinctive ideology, doctrine, philosophy, or system of thought. Descriptively, a “multicultural society” is simply one characterised by cultural diversity. As a policy framework, multiculturalism involves a deliberate, systematic approach by the government to manage and celebrate this diversity. This includes specific policies, laws, and initiatives that promote inclusivity, equality, and the active appreciation of different cultures.

As a system of thought, multiculturalism is multifaceted, incorporating debates about the most important kinds of diversity – be it ethnic, racial, religious, linguistic or others – and how recognition and incorporation should occur. At its core, multiculturalism seeks to foster inclusivity, tolerance, and equality, creating a society where diversity is acknowledged and embraced as a source of strength and enrichment.

How multicultural is Australia in this ideological sense? The Australian Human Rights Commission notes the importance of celebrating cultural diversity while understanding the role of race in shaping society and challenging systemic racism. Sixty percent of Australians believe racism is a significant problem in Australia.

This issue recently came to a head when ABC broadcaster Laura Tingle's claim that Australia is a “racist country” caused a political uproar. After pressure from the ABC, Tingle issued an apology, expressing regret for the controversy her remarks generated. ABC Director Justin Stevens stated that her remarks lacked context, balance, and supporting information, and did not meet ABC editorial standards.

So, 60% of people acknowledge racism as a problem, which suggests awareness of an issue needing address. However, 40% do not see it as a problem. Why not? It could be because they came from countries where racism was far worse. Or perhaps they are just unaware of the racism experienced by many Australians.

But this unawareness leads to troubling questions: Why are different segments of Australian society unaware of each other's realities? What should be done to foster mutual understanding and dismantle barriers among different groups?

In line with multicultural principles, I think addressing these issues should involve the promotion of communication, mutual understanding and tolerance, rather than castigating people for discrimination in a way that hardens differences.

No human community has a monopoly on racism. It is seen in India's Hindu nationalism under Narendra Modi, in China's nationalism under Xi Jinping, and South Africa's xenophobic violence against migrants. All nations struggle to define a boundary between insiders and outsiders.

And in any discussion of nationhood today, one of the most important questions is about the status of first nations.

QUESTION 2:

What status do Indigenous Australians hold in multiculturalism?

That leads to my second question on the future of multiculturalism: What is the place of Indigenous peoples within multiculturalism?

Indigenous Australians have a rich multicultural history of their own. Before colonisation, they traded with Macassans from Indonesia. Today, Maningrida, on Australia's north-central coast, is one of the world's most linguistically diverse communities, with 15 indigenous languages spoken daily.

Contrary to the old colonial belief that Indigenous people were fading away, they are historically resurgent; the population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia increased by 25% between 2016 and 2021.

But once again, we must distinguish between “multicultural” as a demographic fact and “multiculturalism” as an ideology or policy framework. It’s straightforward to say that Indigenous cultures are part of Australia’s multicultural fabric in a descriptive sense. But how well does Australia include, manage and celebrate Indigenous cultures?

A study in November last year by the Australian National University found that almost 90% of voters believe First Nations Australians should have a say over matters affecting them. Additionally, about 80% think the Federal Government should improve reconciliation and undertake truth-telling processes. Yet, despite this overwhelming support, the referendum on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament failed, with more than 60% of voters rejecting it.

The easy answer is to blame this outcome on racism. But with 60% of Australians acknowledging racism as an issue, this is simplistic. I defer to the co-author of the ANU study, my colleague professor Nicholas Biddle, who wrote, “this raises serious questions about why the proposal failed”. He added that the “findings suggest it is not such much the premise of recognition but the model that was being presented to voters, among other key factors”.

So, the question becomes, what is the right model for recognising the special status of first nations within modern nation states? Is it liberal multiculturalism? Or is it something else? And what else is there?

To understand the current place of Indigenous peoples in Australian multiculturalism, we must revisit this country’s settler colonial history. The 1800s gold rush brought over 600,000 migrants, mostly from the UK. After Federation in 1901, the White Australia Policy restricted non-European migration, decreasing overseas-born residents, and excluding non-white Aboriginal people in their own country.

The liberal movements of the 1960s and 1970s replaced the White Australia Policy with what I call “economic multiculturalism.” Whereas the imperial migration regime welcomed people from any socio-economic background provided they were white, this new economic multiculturalism welcomed people of any ethnic background provided they were rich.

This approach has done little for those who are neither rich nor white, including many Indigenous Australians. In some ways, Australia’s multiculturalism relegates them to the status of just one of many ethnic minority groups vying for government attention. As the Australian Human Rights Commission states, “Racism is often hidden by narratives that emphasise multiculturalism and social harmony.”

QUESTION 1:

How multicultural is Australia today?

QUESTION 2:

What status do Indigenous Australians hold in multiculturalism?

The question of Indigenous peoples' place in the multicultural framework isn't unique to Australia. In New Zealand, where I grew up, this debate centres around the concept of biculturalism – based on partnerships between Māori and the British Crown, formalised in the Treaty of Waitangi.

As biculturalism grew during the Māori Renaissance of the 1980s, politicians began acknowledging Māori through tokenistic greetings. Tina kootoo, tina kootoo, tina kootoo katooa they would say. We laughed at their pronunciation but appreciated the gesture.

But then, as New Zealand followed Australia and Canada in abandoning its racist colonial immigration policies, the population became more multicultural. The token greetings of politicians expanded to include Pacific and Asian languages:

“Talofa lava, Malo e lelei, Fakaalofa lahi atu, Ni sa bula vinaka, Namaste, Kia orana, la Orana, Gud de tru olgeta, Taloha ni, Talofa, Kia ora tatou and Warm Pacific Greetings to you all this afternoon”, the ministers would say.

Many Māori, who had struggled for generations to gain recognition – at times in alliance with these similarly oppressed new ethnic groups – felt their special status was diluted, becoming just another ethnic minority. After working so hard towards biculturalism, at the last minute they were offered a watered-down multiculturalism which still left the Anglo majority firmly in the position to divide and rule.

This debate is not unique to New Zealand either: it exists in Canada, balancing the French and English-speaking populations, and in countries like Singapore and Malaysia with their distinctive tri-cultural models.

The question remains: What model suits Australia's future? Should it be a multiculturalism that doesn't afford Indigenous people any special status? Or a biculturalism that embeds ethnic boundaries and hierarchies within the constitution? Or something else? And if so, what else is there?

This is no easy question, and it leads to a broader discussion about the problem of culturalism within multiculturalism.

QUESTION 3:

Does multiculturalism reflect Australia's super-diversity?

Put simply, culturalism is a problem akin to racism, where we exaggerate the boundaries between groups and ignore the things that connect them.

In multiculturalism, this means ignoring aspects of identity like class, gender, sexuality, legal status, and disability that divide populations and don't fit neatly within single cultural groups.

This oversight compounds the difficulties faced by people who are disadvantaged in multiple different ways. The Australian Human Rights Commission highlights this in their 2020-21 Women of Colour Australia Workplace Survey Report, where only 7% said they were led by a woman of colour, despite 26% saying they were led by a person of colour.

This leads to my next question: Does the idea of multiculturalism reflect the complex nature of Australia's diversity today?

In some respects, today's multiculturalism is underpinned by what I and my colleague Steven Vertovec have called “ghetto thinking,” which emerged from the Chicago School of urban sociology in the 20th century. Ghetto thinking starts with the notion that ethnic groups are coherent communities with shared traits, living in homogeneous “immigrant colonies,” and that assimilation is inevitable.

This has led to policies that assume the existence of unified ethnic “communities” led by “representatives” who often reinforce the same power structures that migrants fled in the first place.

Objections to culturalism are longstanding. Critics argue that socio-cultural identities are multiple and fluid, and communities are divided by various sub-identity groups. But multiculturalism, they say, sometimes expects immigrants to conform to an Australian version of the very culture they sought to escape.

It also, critics say, gives undue control over the integration process to individuals who appear to be representatives of a particular ethnic group, regardless of their actual legitimacy. These representatives are often middle-class males who claim to represent a “community” that is much more diverse.

To address these flaws, theories of intersectionality” and “superdiversity” have emerged over the past two decades. These theories emphasise the complexity within cultural groups and the need to address power imbalances among sub-groups. They highlight that people once considered part of homogenous cultural communities now have vastly different experiences based on factors like language, religion, race, class, gender, sexuality, legal status, and timing of arrival. These differences challenge the assumption of common experiences, on which many multicultural institutions are based.

However, these critics themselves face rebuttal. Theories of “superdiversity” and “intersectionality” are sometimes criticised for altogether erasing culture as a key variable. Instead of portraying migrants as members of a cultural group, these theories risk presenting them as hyper-individuals with no community. This forces migrants to choose between conforming to their cultural community’s stereotypes or adopting a highly individualistic, urban Australian culture.

The challenge is to create a settlement system that balances maintaining cultural traditions with providing options to belong to multiple communities. The idea, as suggested by liberal multiculturalism proponents like Will Kymlicka – and reinforced by colleagues like Sandra Elhew-Wright – is that people should have the choice to belong to as many or as few communities as they wish, depending on their personal preferences.

The challenge lies in understanding how the government can support individuals with diverse experiences, which requires further exploration and consideration in Australia’s multicultural framework.

This leads to my fourth key question, about the governance of multiculturalism.

QUESTION 4:

Does Australia govern multiculturalism effectively?

How does Australia govern multiculturalism? At the state and local levels, the multicultural sector is vibrant, but there is an absence of strong representation of the sector at the federal government level. We’ve been hearing good things about the New South Wales settlement framework led by Peter Shergold, which aims to integrate government efforts across the state government.

It’s quite a different story at the Commonwealth level. In Canberra, poor coordination among the various agencies that deal with migration and multiculturalism is a major problem. These issues are central to Australia’s national identity, economy, labour market, social cohesion, and politics. Yet there’s no dedicated federal level Immigration Department guiding and coordinating these many programs across federal, state, and municipal levels of government.

The Department of Home Affairs now handles permanent and humanitarian migration, most temporary visas, citizenship, and multicultural affairs. However, treating these programs as a subset of security and policing restricts Australia’s ability to compete for highly skilled migrants with

QUESTION 3:

Does multiculturalism reflect Australia’s super-diversity?

QUESTION 4:

Does Australia govern multiculturalism effectively?

countries like Canada. Home Affairs also lacks a system-level view as different agencies control other migration aspects. Treasury, for example, oversees net migration forecasts, while DFAT and DEWR manage Pacific Labour Mobility. Meanwhile, state and territory governments have their own migration governance structures with dedicated visa channels and extensive settlement services.

Making things even more complex, the Immigration Minister is not a Cabinet member, which limits coordination with other Cabinet ministers. Despite holding what is currently the most politically important portfolio in all of government, the Immigration Minister doesn't even get a seat at the decision-making table. To draw an analogy: The net migration rate impacts Australian society far more than the Official Cash Rate—and yet far less effort goes into regulating it.

There is currently a clear window of opportunity to address these issues. Multiple government areas are undergoing separate reviews, including the Review of the Multicultural Framework, the Parkinson Review of the Migration System, the Nixon Review into visa-system exploitation, the O'Kane Review of Higher Education, the Administrative Reviews reforms, the Productivity Inquiry, the Employment White Paper, and housing crisis initiatives.

We should take this opportunity re-establish a standalone Immigration Department, with a Cabinet-level Minister to maintain the relevant regulatory frameworks, allocate resources, and ensure parliamentary oversight. The migration and multicultural affairs portfolio needs a single, authoritative focal point within the government.

QUESTION 5:

What mechanisms exist to address these key questions?

My final question is, how should we address these questions? What mechanisms or institutions exist, or should exist, to deal with these tricky issues?

It is clear that multiculturalism in the 21st century is more complicated and nuanced than in the 1970s. While it remains important for migrants to retain their cultural identities to enable more successful settlement, it is no longer sufficient to manage diversity solely by funding simplistic “cultural communities.”

For Australia's multicultural framework to remain relevant and successful, this new complexity must be widely understood. There is a need for more inclusive and engaging approaches to

educating policymakers, service providers, and the public about the meaning and importance of multiculturalism today and into the future.

Within schools and workplaces, education about multiculturalism and diversity often focuses too much on compliance with new institutional norms, making education dull and formulaic. Instead, we need to improve the quality and nuance of multicultural education to make it intellectually and creatively engaging and stimulating.

Outside formal education, the media plays a crucial role in informing the public about multiculturalism and diversity. Quality public broadcasting has been central to Australian multiculturalism since the establishment of the state-funded Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) in the late 1970s. The SBS helps prevent alienation among new settlers and counteracts negative stereotypes and discrimination.

However, the rise of social media and the decline of traditional mass media have undermined this approach. Many people now get their information and entertainment through large, privately-owned social media platforms based in other countries. These platforms have become breeding grounds for misinformation designed to create social divisions over migration, multiculturalism, and diversity, fuelling political polarisation and the rise of proto-fascist parties.

Another key challenge is the public's poor understanding of migration itself. Media coverage, dominated by sensationalists, often attributes every problem to migrants. One week, inflation is blamed on too few migrants driving up wages; the next, it's too many migrants driving up rents.

It's mystifying how migrants can simultaneously occupy these opposite states of being in the public mind. Forget Schrödinger's Cat. Quantum physics should be studying Schrödinger's Immigrant. Jests aside, these media stereotypes don't make sense and aren't based on facts. But such misinformation is widespread and often weaponised on social media by extremists.

The tone of migration debate has deteriorated partly due to declining migration research and training capacity. We aren't educating enough people on how migration really works.

While Australia aspires to compete in migration with countries like Canada, we haven't matched their significant investments in high-quality migration research and education institutes. Australia has no equivalent to Canada's recent investment of A\$111 million in the “Bridging Divides” program, aimed at

understanding the challenges of migrant integration in the mid-21st century.

To lead the world in understanding and managing migration, Australia should match Canada's efforts and establish a National Migration Institute to conduct research, educate experts, and inform the public. Remarkably, such an institute does not currently exist, despite the centrality of migration to Australia's national identity. Most Australians are either born overseas or have a parent born overseas.

The government's Migration Strategy, released last December, makes positive steps toward fixing a broken migration system. But a repair of this scale needs a stronger whole-of-government plan and more investment in understanding migration. The solution lies in reinstating a standalone immigration department led by a senior Cabinet minister and establishing a national migration institute.

Maintaining the migration system requires more than brief consultations every three decades. It needs independent institutions to generate reliable knowledge, and strong statutory authorities to coordinate government action – neither of which currently exist. Again, we need a standalone immigration department led by a senior Cabinet minister to restore whole-of-government coordination at the federal level, and a National Migration Institute to improve public understanding.

Meanwhile, we should applaud the government's decision to review the Multicultural Framework alongside other aspects of Australia's migration system. Since the end of the White Australia Policy, multiculturalism has become the framework for managing ethno-cultural diversity. However, both the nature of diversity and service provision in Australia have changed significantly since these pillars were established. The government's review is therefore timely and necessary, and I am eagerly looking forward to the release of this review.

I'll finish there. Thank you very much for having me here today. I'm happy to take questions and comments, and I'm looking forward to meeting and learning from you all as the day progresses.

QUESTION 5:

What mechanisms exist to address these key questions?

Measuring the state of community relations as affected by cultural diversity

Social cohesion under pressure, but not broken: key points from the 2024 Mapping Social Cohesion Report

This section contributes to an assessment of the state of community relations as affected by cultural diversity, as required under the *Multicultural NSW Act 2000*.

For several years we have drawn on publicly available data from the annual Mapping Social Cohesion Report by the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute. This is a major national annual survey of public opinion on social cohesion, immigration and population. The survey's annual findings have provided a useful frame of reference for this report and for the work of Multicultural NSW by identifying national trends that may impact community relations.

The Australian National University (ANU) conducted the 18th Mapping Social Cohesion survey for the Scanlon Foundation in 2024.³⁵ The 2024 poll was the biggest yet, with over 8,000 respondents providing an extensive insight into Australians' attitudes, perceptions and behaviours across 100 indicators of social cohesion, immigration, multiculturalism, wellbeing and other topical issues. The report includes the findings of the survey, plus an analysis of 45 qualitative interviews and an additional 229 surveys in three cultural communities conducted in four languages (including English).

The Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI) of Social Cohesion aggregates survey responses across five domains of social cohesion: belonging, worth, social inclusion and justice, participation and acceptance and rejection.

Last year's Scanlon survey revealed that social cohesion in Australia is under pressure and declining. The 2023 survey returned the lowest score ever on the SMI, primarily due to economic uncertainty.³⁶ The 2024 survey remained stable, returning the same score as 2023: 78 on the SMI. While still the equal lowest score since the Scanlon surveys began, the report puts this finding in the context of a world struggling with conflict and division in 2024. "In the context of the national and global challenges of the last 12 months, this stability reflects the resilience of Australian society and the bonds that connect people," the report notes.³⁷

Economic pressures and financial stress continue to negatively impact social cohesion, especially in the domains of social justice and a sense of belonging. The report shows that people experiencing financial hardship have lower levels of trust in government and other people. Australians who are struggling financially are also less likely to believe that immigration is good for the economy and more likely to think that immigration levels are too high.

That noted, key measures relating to cultural diversity – such as support for multiculturalism and a non-discriminatory immigration program – remain very strong, even among those who believe current immigration levels are too high. This is an important observation, because while the percentage of people who say the number of immigrants is too high has jumped significantly – from 33% in 2023 to 49% in 2024 ("Australians are now evenly split

*"In a world struggling with conflict, division and polarisation, social cohesion in Australia remains under pressure, but has not cracked. Under the weight of the last year, Australians' sense of belonging, happiness and participation in community and civic life have held steady, while the strength of our communities may be protecting our wellbeing and harmony. In several areas though, challenges to social cohesion remain, while new pressures are emerging."*³⁸

2024 Mapping Social Cohesion Report

³⁵ <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2024>

³⁶ <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2023>. Also see the 2023 Community Relations Report

³⁷ <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2024>, p.7.

³⁸ <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2024>

between those who think immigration is too high and those who think immigration is about right or too low”) –85% per cent of people still believe that ‘multiculturalism has been good for Australia’, only four percentage points down from 2023.³⁹

The report also shows that experiences of racism and discrimination are still far too common, with over one-third (34%) of people who were born in a non-English speaking country reporting having experienced discrimination due to their skin colour, ethnic origin, or religion over the last 12 months. There is also a growing awareness that racism is a problem in Australia, with 63% of respondents acknowledging there is a problem in 2024.

Amid heightened community concerns about increasing antisemitism and Islamophobia linked to the violence in the Middle East, the report records an increase in the percentage of people holding negative attitudes towards Jewish people (from 9% in 2023 to 13% in 2024) and Muslims (from 27% in 2023 to 34% in 2024). However, these increases coincide with growing religious intolerance more

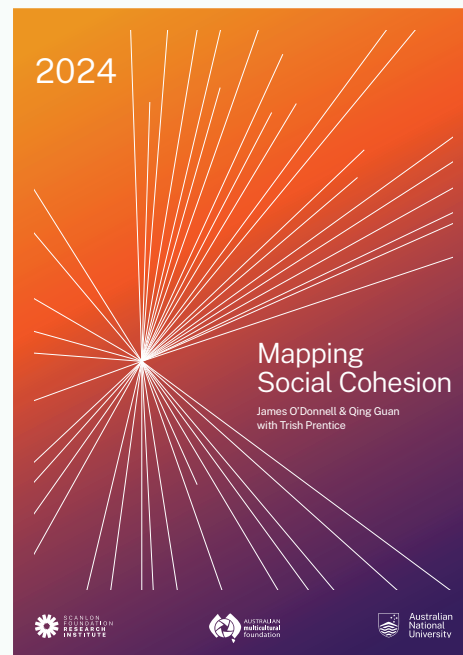
generally, with people holding negative attitudes to any faith other than their own increasing from 38% to 48% from 2023 to 2024. Negative attitudes towards Muslims, which had been slowly declining in the years before 2024, remain by far the highest towards any single faith group. This well-established fact must remain a key focus when addressing the problem of religious intolerance in our society.

The Scanlon report also provides an important insight on the impact of heightened protest activity on social cohesion in 2024, observing that “highly visible protests, boycotts and other political activities seen online and through the media amplify apparent divisions, making Australians seem more divided and dissatisfied than they are.”⁴⁰

The report identifies a key source of strength for social cohesion at the local neighbourhood level, where high rates of interpersonal trust and intercultural cohesion provide a solid base from which Australians continue to draw strength in the face of an increasingly uncertain world.



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³⁹ <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2024>, p.8.

⁴⁰ <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2024>, p.11.

Below are some key take-away findings from the 2024 Mapping Social Cohesion Report. Readers are encouraged to visit the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute website and read the report themselves to discover its other many valuable findings.⁴¹

Some key findings from the 2024 Mapping Social Cohesion report by the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute

Social cohesion is under pressure but remains stable

- The Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI) measures attitudes within the five domains of belonging, worth, social justice, political participation, and acceptance/rejection.
- The SMI for 2024 was 78, the same as 2023, a notable level of stability given the state of the world in 2024, but still the equal lowest recorded SMI since the Scanlon surveys began in 2007.
- Australians' sense of belonging and social justice are significantly below their long-term average, driven by concerns about economic inequality and experiences of financial hardship.
- 47% of survey respondents in 2023 reported a 'sense of belonging to a great extent', down from 48% in 2023, 52% in 2022, 63% in July 2020, and 74% in 2007.
- 86% of adults agree (46%) or strongly agree (40%) that 'in the modern world, maintaining the Australian way of life and culture is important'.

Financial insecurity is impacting social cohesion

- Nearly one-half (49%) of people cited the economy and economic issues as the most important problem facing Australia today. A further 14% of people cited housing shortages.
- 40% of respondents believe their life in Australia will be much (7%) or a little (33%) improved in the next three or four years, 33% believe it will be the same as now, and 27% believe it will be a little (21%) or much (6 %) worse.
- 41% of adults say they are at best 'just getting along' financially, 11% describe themselves as 'poor' or struggling to pay bills.
- People struggling financially tend to be less trusting, have a weaker sense of belonging, and are less likely to be happy.

Attitudes to immigration levels are shifting

- Nearly half of survey respondents (49%) said immigration was 'too high', up from 33% in 2023 and 24% in 2022.
- Overall, though, 82% of respondents still agree or strongly agree that 'immigrants are generally good for the economy', five points below 2022 levels but still six points higher than in 2019.
- 83% people do not agree that Australia should reject migrants on the basis of their ethnicity or race.
- Of those who think immigration is currently too high:
 - 64% cited economic issues or housing affordability as the most important problem facing Australia.
 - 43% described their financial circumstances as poor, struggling to pay bills or just getting along.
 - 73% still believe multiculturalism has been good for Australia and 60% still believe that 'immigrants are generally good for the economy'.

⁴¹ <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2024>

Support for multiculturalism remains strong

- 85% per cent of people believe that 'multiculturalism has been good for Australia', down from 89% in 2023, but still higher than 2018 levels (78%).
- 71% of people agree or strongly agree that 'accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger', down from 78% in 2023, but up from 63% in 2018.
- 92% agree or strongly agree that 'someone who was born outside of Australia is just as likely to be a good citizen as someone born in Australia'.
- 86% like meeting and getting to know people from different ethnic and cultural groups.

Racism and religious intolerance are persistent problems

- 17% of people surveyed claimed that they had been subject to discrimination due to their skin colour, ethnic origin, or religion over the last 12 months. This is similar to levels recorded since 2018, suggesting a lack of progress in addressing the problem.
- This figure rises to 34% of people who were born in a non-English speaking country, and up to 45% of people born in India, 43% of those born in Sub-Saharan Africa, 39% born in mainland China and 35% of those born in South-East Asia.
- There is widespread awareness that racism is a problem, with 63% of people believing that racism is a fairly big or very big problem in Australia. This figure is marginally higher (65%) for people who were born in Australia, possibly reflecting a growing sense of shared responsibility for addressing racial equity.
- The proportion of people holding negative sentiment towards Muslims remains significant in contemporary Australia at 34%, which is higher than 2023 (27%) and a reversal of a recent trend that had seen negative attitudes slowly declining from 2019 (39%), 2021 (32%) and 2022 (29%).

Community relations at the local and interpersonal level are strong

- 82% of survey respondents agreed that people in their local area are willing to help their neighbours.
- 81% agreed that their local area is where people from different national or ethnic backgrounds get together well.
- 79% said they have two or more people in their 'close circle of friends' from different ethnic, national, or religious backgrounds.

- The faith group with the next highest level of negative sentiment is Christians, which increased from 16% in 2023 to 19% in 2024.
- 13% of respondents held negative views towards Jews, up from 9% in 2023.

Measuring active community relations: summary findings from the second NSW Community Relations Survey

Since 2022, Multicultural NSW has been working in partnership with experts from the Australian National University's Australian Social Cohesion – Exploring New Directions (ASCEND) interdisciplinary research team to find a way to better understand the state of community relations as affected by cultural diversity.

The ANU team developed a framework for measuring and tracking community relations. Under the framework, 'community relations' is conceived of as a multidimensional concept, reflecting the extent to which people interact positively with others in their communities and particularly with those from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, the extent to which they trust government and important societal institutions, their support for cultural diversity and their sense of belonging and identity.

The framework is organised into five domains: intergroup contact, community solidarity, community and institutional trust, attitudes towards immigration and multiculturalism, and national identification. Under each domain is a set of sub-domains. These are listed in Table 1 below.

In last year's Community Relations Report (2023), ANU presented the preliminary findings of a novel community relations survey commissioned by and developed for Multicultural NSW: the NSW Community Relations Survey (CRS).

While various larger-scale Australian national surveys (e.g. Scanlon Foundation, General Social Survey) also measure some of the constructs used for CRS and can be used to benchmark results from the new survey, the CRS is innovative and distinctive as it uses different and additional

Table 1. Domains and sub-domains for a Community Relations Measurement Framework

Domain	Sub-domain
Intergroup contact	Inter-ethnic/cultural mixing
	Experience of discrimination
	Inter-ethnic/cultural friendships
Community solidarity	Neighbourhood cohesion
	Community involvement
	Community voice
Community & institutional trust	Generalised trust
	Trust in other institutions
Attitudes towards immigration and multiculturalism	Support for multiculturalism and diversity
	Prejudicial attitudes
National identification	National belonging
	English proficiency

measures informed by international surveys and from contemporary research in social psychology. The key insight obtained during the development of the CRS is that no existing national surveys capture the extent to which community members *actively seek to engage with* fellow community members from ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds different to their own. To this end, several novel active community relations measures were created and included in the 2023 CRS (see Table 2, in bold).

Presented here for the first time, the findings from the second survey (the 2024 CRS) provide insight

into both the current state of play and whether there have been any changes in the last 12 months in community relations across both metropolitan and regional NSW.

For the 2024 CRS, the research team also developed and included some additional written responses from survey respondents about active community relations which provide insight into the types of things happen day-to-day in communities to strengthen community relations (see Table 2, in bold and italicised).

Table 2. Selected measures of ‘active community relations’

Domain	Example Item
Active community relations (general)	‘I invite people from different ethnic, cultural, or religious groups to my house.’
Active community relations (culture)	‘I try to understand the customs and practices of people from different ethnic, cultural, or religious backgrounds.’
Active community relations (bystander action)	‘If I see discrimination against people from different ethnic, cultural, or religious backgrounds I actively work to confront it.’
Active community relations norms (general)	‘Other people in my community invite people from different ethnic, cultural, or religious groups to their house.’
Active community relations (culture)	‘Other people in my community try to understand the customs and practices of people from different ethnic, cultural, or religious backgrounds.’
Active community relations (type of activity)	Emergent themes from written responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socialising • Cross-cultural sharing • Helping • Attending organised events (e.g. multicultural festivals, volunteering)
Community solidarity	‘People in my community can depend on one another.’
Community participation	‘I attend ...community meetings ...community events ...organised activities.’
Discrimination	‘I experience discrimination ...in the workplace ...in my local area ... at restaurants ...when dealing with government or public services.’
Social isolation	‘I have no-one to lean on in times of trouble.’
National and ethnic identification	‘I have a lot in common with other Australians.’ ‘I believe that different ethnic, cultural, or religious groups should be helped to preserve their identities.’

2024 CRS: sampling procedure and analytical strategy

The CRS is a representative survey in that the demographic characteristics of respondents aligns with the proportion of NSW residents in terms of age, gender, and country of birth from both metropolitan and regional areas. A total of 2,058 NSW residents over the age of 18 participated in the survey.

The CRS is conducted in such a way that makes it possible to make comparisons between respondents as a function of country of birth and geographic location in Australia as follows:

Country of Birth (COB)	
COB 1	Those born in Australia, other English-speaking countries (e.g. New Zealand, the UK, North America) and North-Western Europe
COB 2	Those born in non-English speaking countries (e.g. Asia, the Middle East, Africa, South America), and southern (e.g. Italy, Greece, Spain) and eastern (e.g. Croatia, Serbia, Poland) Europe

Region	
Metropolitan NSW	Greater Sydney
Regional NSW	Rural centres and associated townships (e.g. the Hunter, the North and Central Coast, Southern Tablelands, Central West)

Categorising data according to these dimensions enables the broader questions which form the basis of the CRS to be assessed, such that mean scores on the measures outlined in Table 2 can be compared across the four groupings A, B, C, D, as per below:

Table 3. 2024 CRS groupings by COB and metro-regional

	Metropolitan Areas	Regional Areas
COB 1	A	B
COB 2	C	D

For the purposes of this report, mean respondent scores for each of these four groupings were obtained and were subject to statistical analysis in order to determine whether there were any meaningful (statistically significant) differences between them.

Qualitative analysis

In addition to the 2023 measures, the 2024 CRS included some qualitative measures which aimed to achieve detailed insights into both whether and how participants engaged actively with people from different ethnic, cultural, or religious backgrounds.

Respondents were asked “Do you actively ‘go out of your way’ to engage with people from different ethnic, cultural, or religious backgrounds?” to which they simply indicated ‘Yes’ or ‘No’.

If the answer was ‘Yes’ there was a prompt to “Please list up to three types of things you do in these interactions with people from different ethnic, cultural, or religious backgrounds.”

The number of the sample who responded ‘yes’ or ‘no’ in each of the four groupings A, B, C, D, outlined in Table 3 above are shown opposite.

Results show that 58% of COB1 respondents living in metropolitan areas (Group A) and 40% living in regional areas (Group B) indicated that they do actively seek to engage with people in their community from ethnic, cultural, or religious backgrounds which were different to their own. For COB2 respondents, 37% living in metropolitan (Group C) and 42% living in regional areas (Group D) indicated ‘Yes’. Note that although only those respondents who answered ‘Yes’ (n=984) completed the written responses, all respondents (n=2,058) completed the survey as a whole.

	COB 1		COB 2		Total
	Metropolitan (Group A)	Regional (Group B)	Metropolitan (Group C)	Regional (Group D)	
Yes	572	168	213	31	984
No	409	253	370	42	1,074
Total	981	421	583	73	2,058

A thematic analysis was conducted for the written responses. A number of themes were identified (Phase 1) along with the proportion of respondents who engaged in each type of activity (Phase 2).

Phase 1

The four dominant themes which emerged from are labelled and some examples provided below.

1) Socialising

- “Share similar interests, talk about tasks we do everyday and spend time together”
- “We get together, have a coffee and socialise”
- “Visit people in their homes”

2) Cross-cultural dialogue

- “Share my culture and perspectives to provide mutual understanding and respect”
- “Chat about differences and common ground we share and share experiences”
- “Learn about their culture [and] their beliefs and experiences”

3) Helping

- “Say hi, ask them how their day is and if they need any help”
- “Give helpful recommendations drawn from past encounters or insights”
- “I ask questions, offer suggestions, and provide information to help”

4) Organised events

- “I participate in multicultural workshops, gaining insight into different customs and beliefs”
- “I engage by listening, learning, and participating in diverse cultural events or festivals”
- “Volunteering in community groups to help migrants ... involved in community kitchen”



Australian
National
University



Multicultural
NSW

Phase 2

An initial analysis of these responses was conducted drawing on a random sample of 30% of respondents from groupings A, B and C and all responses from grouping D (COB2/Regional) due to

the low sample size for Group D. The type of activity and the number of instances (with proportion in brackets) are displayed in the table below.

	COB 1		COB 2	
	Metropolitan (Group A)	Regional (Group B)	Metropolitan (Group C)	Regional (Group D)
Socialising	108 (68%)	25 (50%)	46 (72%)	24 (77%)
Cross-cultural dialogue	43 (25%)	19 (38%)	19 (30%)	12 (39%)
Helping	25 (15%)	6 (12%)	7 (11%)	3 (10%)
Organised events	28 (16%)	8 (16%)	16 (25%)	7 (22%)
Sample total	172	50	64	31

Summary

- Across all groupings A, B, C and D (COB 1 and COB 2 in regional and metropolitan areas), social engagement (such as chatting with neighbours, meeting up for coffee, having a barbecue) was the most common way in which respondents actively engaged with community members from different backgrounds. The proportions were relatively less for COB1 respondents in regional areas.
- Engaging with others both through sharing one's own cultural norms and values with others and discussing/celebrating the cultures of other groups was the next most common form of engagement, with this being higher overall among respondents in regional areas.
- Attending organised community events (such as community meetings, multicultural events/festivals) was a more common way of actively engaging with community members from different backgrounds among COB2 respondents than COB1 respondents.
- Helping behaviour was the fourth main way respondents actively engaged with community members from different backgrounds.

Quantitative analysis

Active community relations

Active community relations assesses the extent to which respondents actively engage with people from different ethnic, cultural or religious backgrounds and has three dimensions: general, cultural, and bystander action. All items within each construct were combined to form scales and were measured on a 1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree) Likert scale. Descriptions and results for each are outlined below.

1. Active community relations (general)

This measured the extent to which respondents engaged in general behaviours that indicate active relations with people from different cultural backgrounds (“I invite people from these different groups to my house”). The overall average was above the mid-point of the scale (M=5.04). Findings for specific respondent categories are displayed in Figure 1.

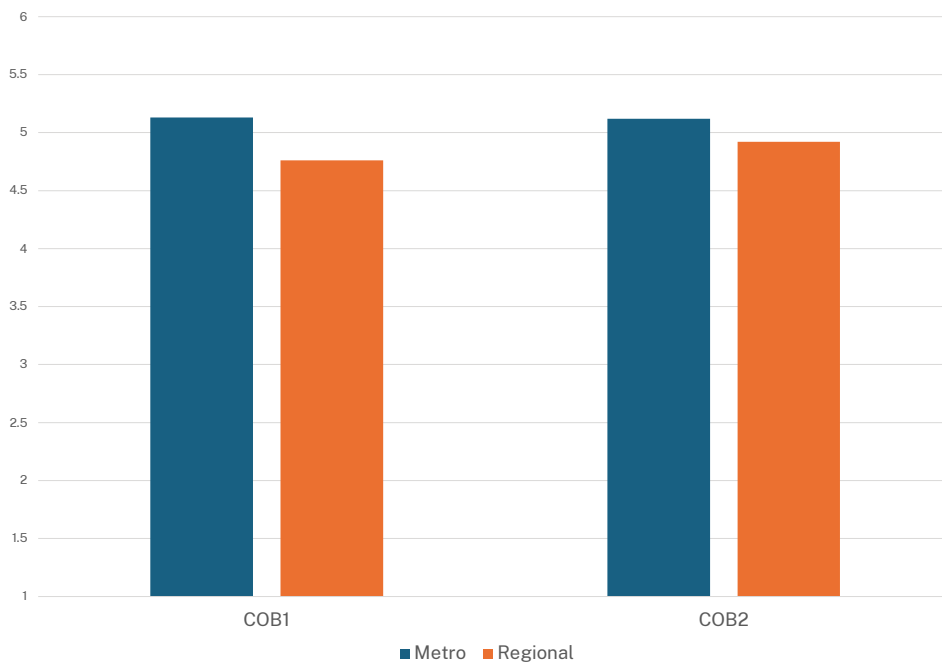


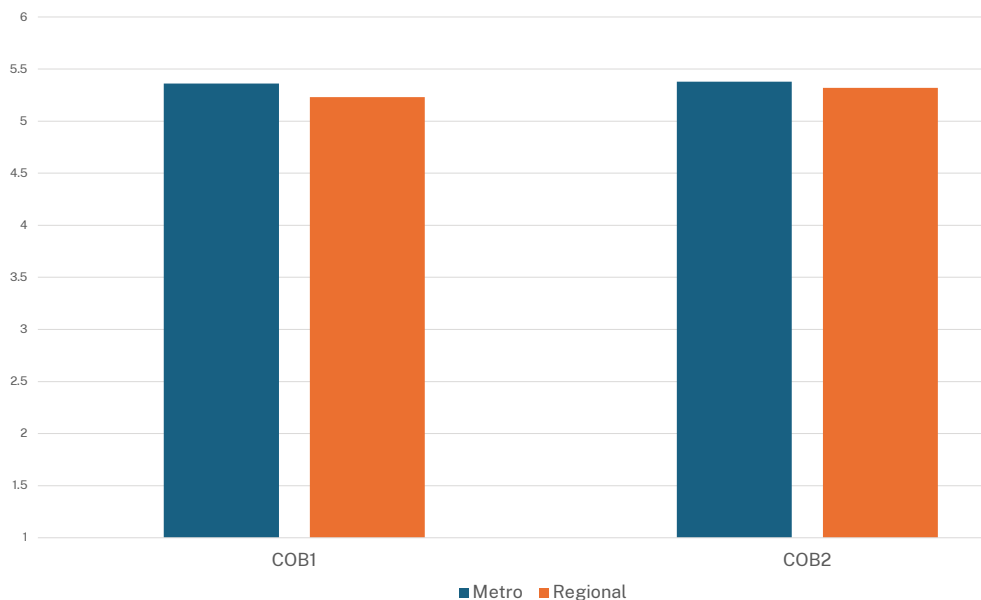
Figure 1.
Active
Community
Relations

Results show that respondents living in metropolitan areas overall were more likely to engage in active relations with people from different cultural groups (M=5.13) than those living in regional areas (M=4.78). In terms of COB, there was no significant difference between the scores for COB1 (M=5.02) and COB2 (M=5.1) respondents.

2. Active community relations (culture)

Items in this scale measure the extent to which respondents actively engage in sharing and learning the cultural traditions of people from different cultural backgrounds (“I try to understand the customs and practices of these other groups”). The overall average was significantly above the mid-point of the scale (M=5.34). Findings for specific respondent categories are displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2.
Active Community
Relations (Culture)

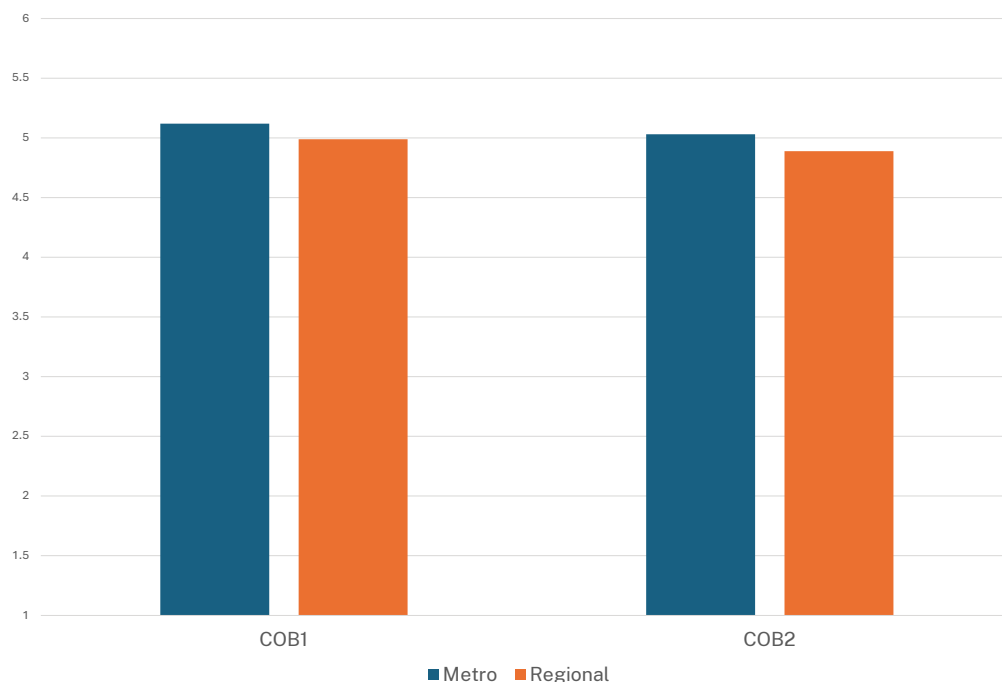


For this measure, there were no significant differences overall between respondent scores for COB1 (M=5.32) and COB2 (M=5.38) nor were there any significant differences overall between those in metropolitan (M=5.37) and regional (M=5.24) areas.

3. Active community relations (bystander action)

Items in this scale assessed the extent to which respondents actively behaved in such a way to challenge any stereotyping or discrimination they see against those from different cultural backgrounds (“If I see discrimination against people from these different groups I actively work to confront it”). The average overall score was above the mid-point of the scale (M=5.06). Findings for specific respondent categories are displayed in Figure 3.

Figure 3.
Active Community
Relations (Activism)



For this measure, again there were no significant differences overall between respondent scores for COB1 (M=5.09) and COB2 (M=5.01) nor were there any significant differences overall between those in metropolitan (M=5.37) and regional (M=5.25) areas. Note that the latter difference suggested metropolitan respondents being more actively engaged in bystander action related to anti-discrimination behaviours than regional respondents.

Active community relations norms

Items also assessed the extent to which respondents thought other people in their community engaged in these particular ways (i.e., they were perceived active community relations norms or ‘what we do’).

1. Active community relations norms (general)

Items in this scale measured the extent to which respondents believed that others in their community engaged in generic types of active relations with people from different cultural backgrounds “Other people in my community invite people from these different groups to their house”). The overall average was above the mid-point (M=5.07). Findings for specific respondent categories are displayed in Figure 4.

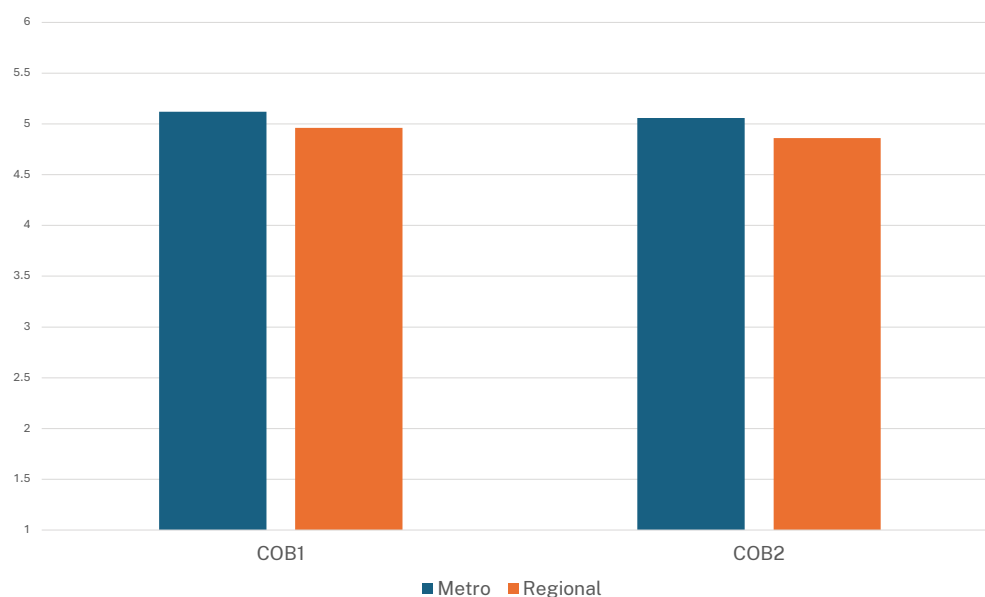


Figure 4.
Active Community
Relations Norms

Results show that respondents living in metropolitan areas overall were more likely to engage in active relations with people from different cultural groups (M=5.11) than those living in regional areas (M=4.94). In terms of COB, there was no significant difference between the scores for COB1 (M=5.08) and COB2 (M=5.04) respondents.



2. Active community relations norms (culture)

Items in this scale measured the extent to which respondents believed that others in their community actively shared and learned the cultural traditions of people from different cultural backgrounds (“Other people in my community try to understand the customs and practices of these other groups”). The overall score was above the mid-point of the scale (M=5.03). Findings for specific respondent categories are displayed in Figure 5.

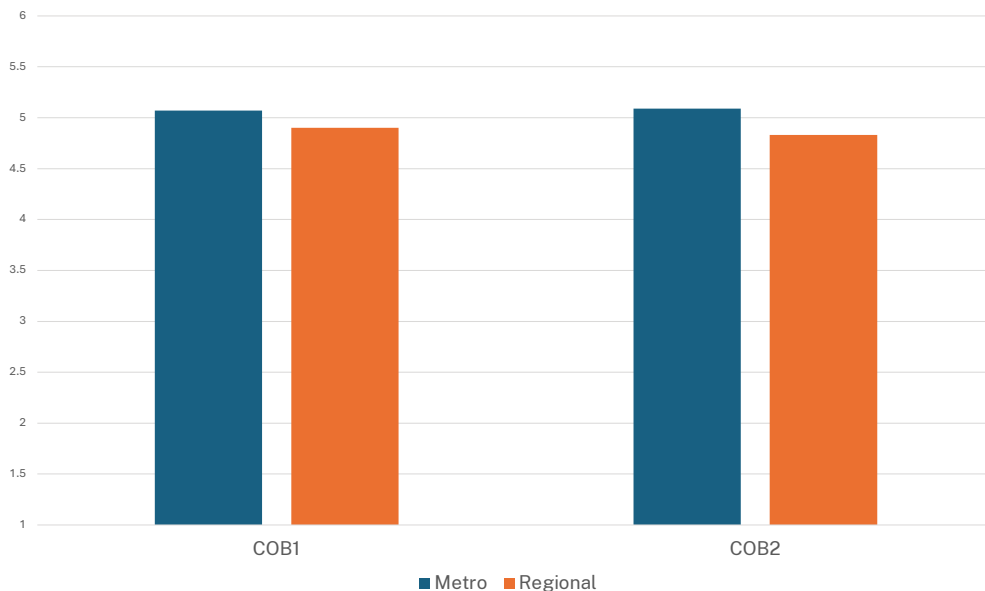


Figure 5.
Active Community
Relations Norms
(Culture)

Results again show that respondents living in metropolitan areas overall were more likely to engage in active relations with people from different cultural groups (M=5.08) than those living in regional areas (M=4.89). In terms of COB, there was no significant difference between the scores for COB1 (M=5.02) and COB2 (M=5.06) respondents.

Community solidarity

A six-item scale measured perceptions of solidarity and togetherness within respondents’ communities (“People can depend on one another”). All items were measured on a 1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree) Likert scale and were combined to form a single scale. The overall average was above the mid-point of the scale (M=5.01). Findings for specific respondent categories are displayed in Figure 6.

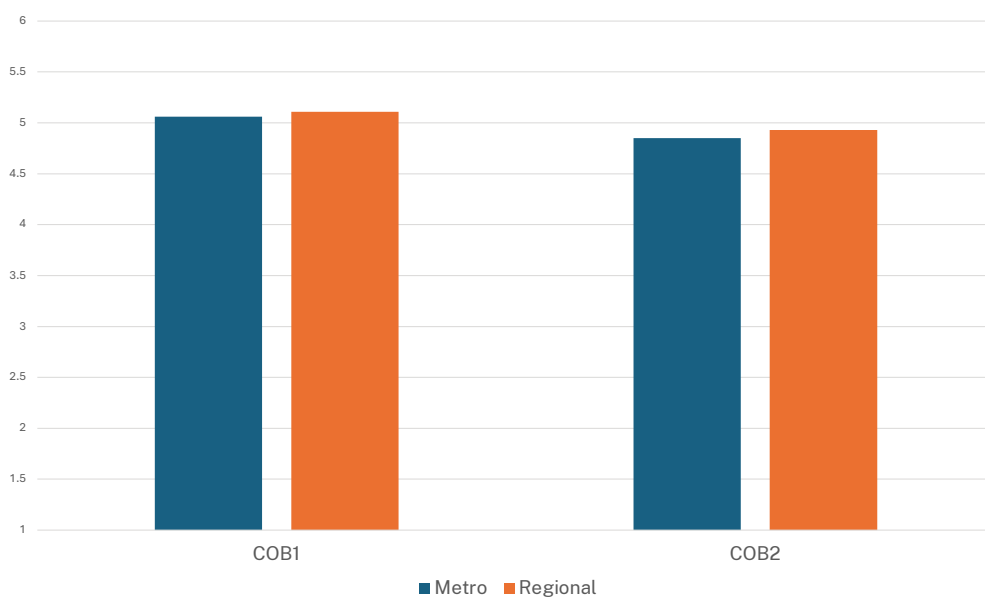


Figure 6.
Community
Solidarity

Results show that COB1 respondents were overall more likely to believe there is high solidarity in their local community (M=5.08) than COB2 respondents (M=4.86). However, there was no significant difference overall between respondents living in metropolitan areas (M=4.98) and those living in regional areas (M=5.09).

Community participation

A series of four items measured the extent to which respondents participated in various types of community activities (“I attend... community meetings, community events, organised activities, volunteering”). For this construct, responses were measured on a different scale that was a 5-point Likert scale (1 not at all – 5 all the time). Overall scores were above the mid-point of the scale ($M=2.79$). Findings for specific respondent categories are displayed in Figure 7.

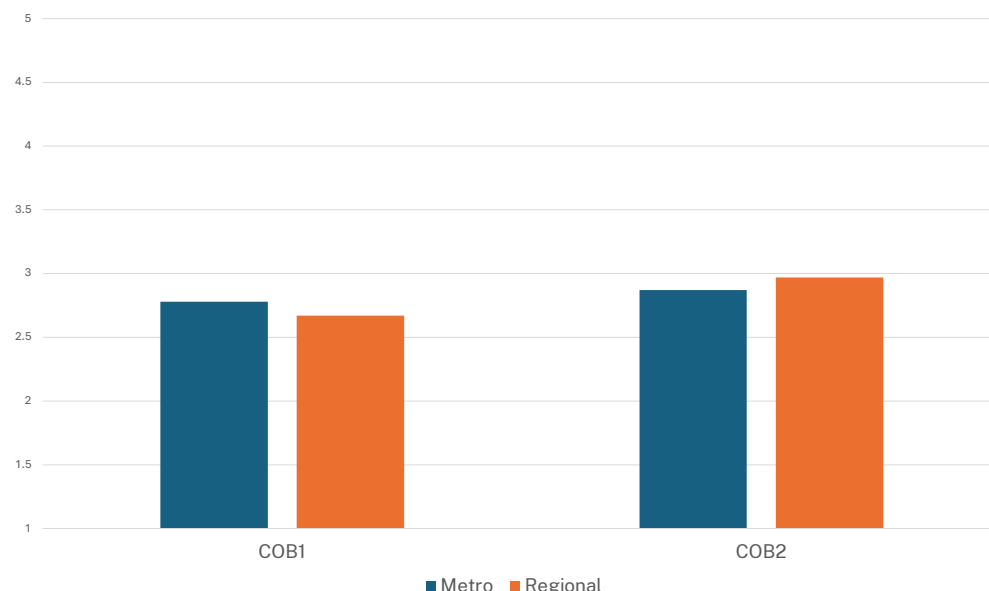


Figure 7.
Community Participation

Results show that COB2 respondents overall were more likely to participate in community activities and events ($M=2.88$) than COB1 respondents ($M=2.75$). However, there was no significant difference overall between respondents living in metropolitan areas ($M=2.81$) and those living in regional areas ($M=2.72$).

Discrimination

A series of five items measured the extent to which respondents experience discrimination in various situations (“I experience discrimination... in the workplace, when renting or buying a house, when dealing with government departments or public services, in a restaurant, in my local area”). For this construct, responses were measured a 5-point Likert scale (i.e. 1 not at all – 5 all the time). Overall scores were below the mid-point of the scale ($M=1.73$). Findings for specific respondent categories are displayed in Figure 8.

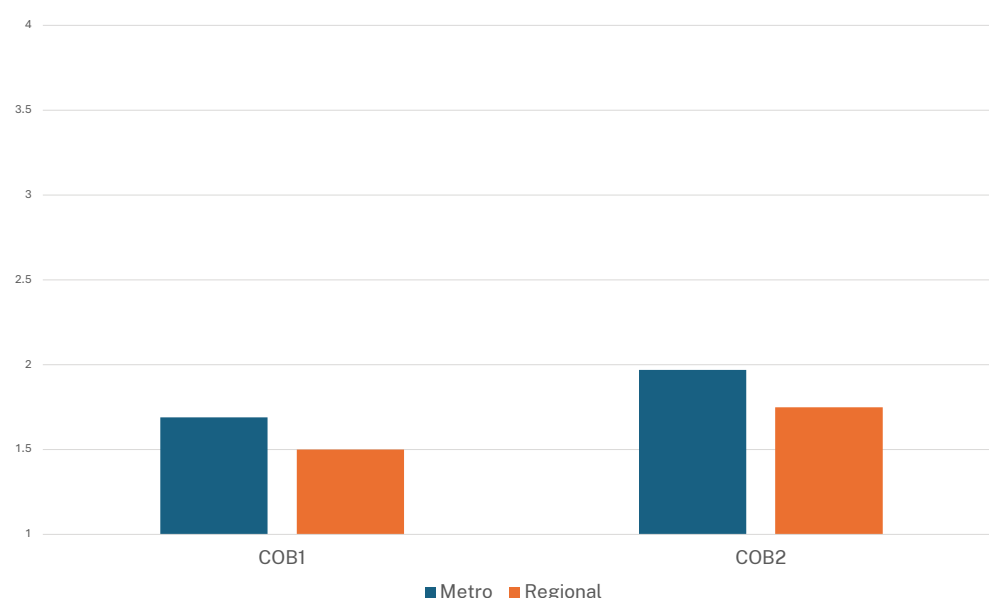


Figure 8.
Discrimination

Results show that COB2 respondents overall were more likely to experience discrimination in their local community ($M=1.95$) than COB1 respondents ($M=1.63$). Moreover, respondents living in metropolitan areas ($M=1.79$) were more likely to experience discrimination than those living in regional areas ($M=1.54$).

National and ethnic identification

A series of five items measured the extent to which respondents identified with Australia as a nation (“I have a lot in common with other Australians”). These items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 strongly disagree–7 strongly agree). Overall scores were significantly above the mid-point of the scale ($M=5.64$). Findings for specific respondent categories are displayed in Figure 9.

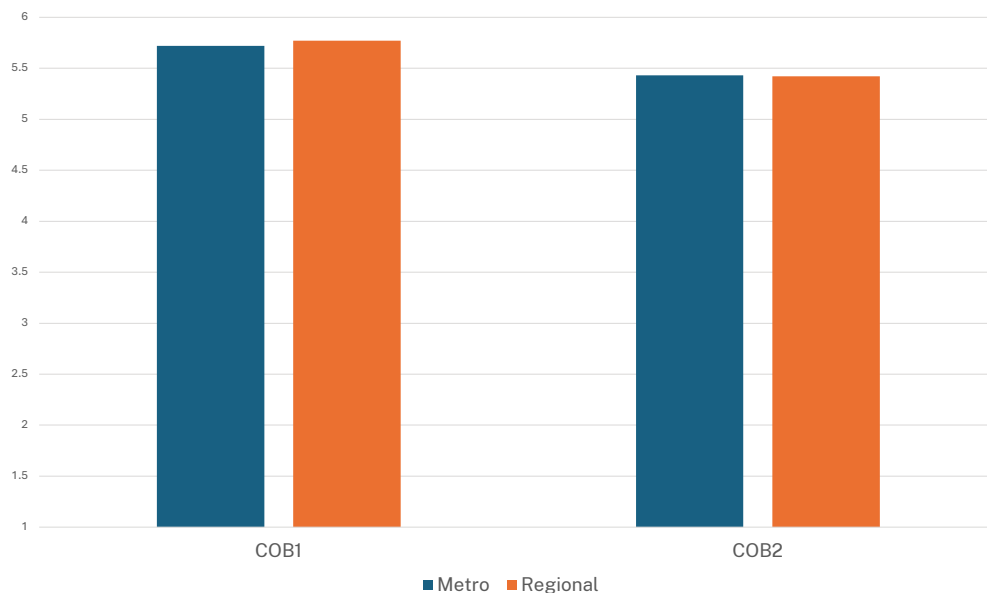


Figure 9.
National
Identification

Results show that COB1 respondents overall identified more strongly with Australia as a nation ($M=5.73$) than COB2 respondents ($M=5.43$). However, there was no significant differences in national identification between respondents living in metropolitan areas ($M=5.61$) than those living in regional areas ($M=5.72$).

A single item was included which measured respondents’ opinions regarding the preservation of ethnic identities (“I believe that other ethnic, cultural, or religious groups should be helped to preserve their identities”). This item had a 1 strongly disagree–7 strongly agree Likert scale. Overall scores were significantly above the mid-point of the scale ($M=5.30$). Findings for specific respondent categories are displayed in Figure 10.

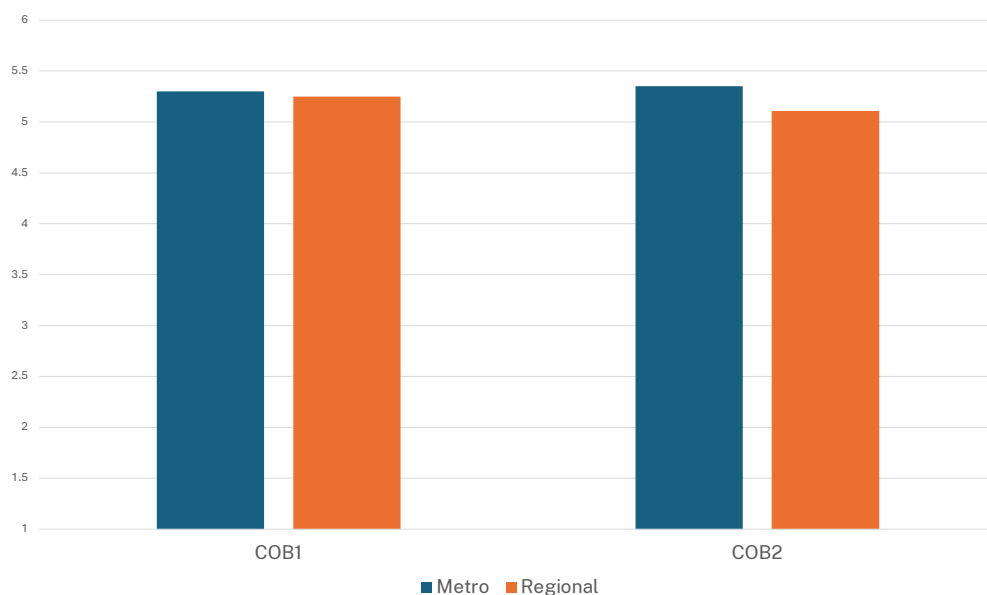


Figure 10.
Ethnic
Preservation

Results show no significant difference between the extent to which COB1 respondents endorsed the idea that more should be done to preserve ethnic groups’ identities ($M=5.29$) than COB2 respondents ($M=5.32$), nor was there any significant difference on this measure between respondents living in metropolitan areas ($M=5.32$) than those living in regional areas ($M=5.23$).

Social isolation

An additional indicator of a lack of positive relations could be loneliness. Four items measured the extent to which respondents felt a sense of being isolated in their community (“I often feel very lonely”). These items were measured on a 1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree) Likert scale. Overall scores were slightly below the mid-point of the scale (M=3.24). Findings for specific respondent categories are outlined in Figure 11.

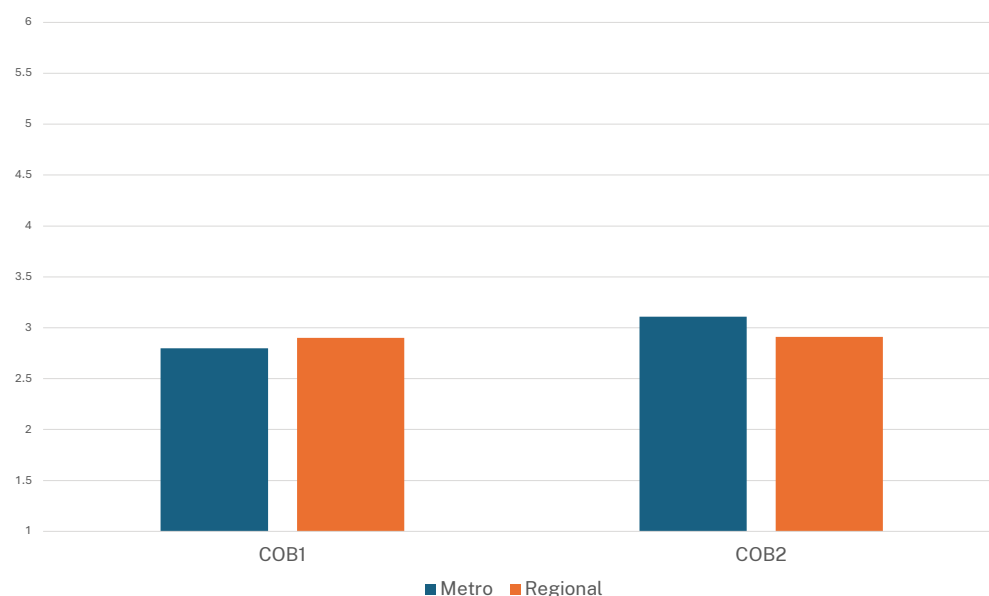


Figure 11.
Social
Isolation

Results show that COB2 respondents were more likely to feel socially isolated within their community (M=3.09) than COB1 respondents (M=2.84), but there was no significant difference between the extent to which metropolitan respondents experienced higher levels of social isolation (M=2.92) than those living in regional areas (M=2.91).

Summary and comparison to 2023 and 2024 findings

Across the first two years of the CRS there are indicators of positive community relations for both COB and regional categories. There were some different results between the two surveys:

- Mean responses on a number of constructs are slightly higher in 2024 than 2023 findings.
- In 2023, COB2 respondents were more likely to actively engage in active community relations (culture, bystander action and culture sharing norm). In 2024, there were fewer significant differences when comparing COB1 and COB2 respondents.
- Levels of discrimination are higher in 2024 than 2023, particularly among COB2 respondents and among those COB2 respondents in metropolitan areas.
- In 2024, COB2 respondents overall reported feeling more socially isolated than COB1 respondents, particularly in metropolitan areas.
- In 2024, on both of the active community relations norms measures scores were significantly higher among metropolitan respondents than regional respondents.
- In 2024, perceptions of community solidarity were higher among COB1 respondents than COB2 respondents, which is the reverse of 2023 findings when COB2 respondents scored higher.
- In line with 2023 findings, community participation levels were significantly higher among COB2 respondents.

NSW Community Relations Survey (CRS): Why is it important?

The NSW Community Relations Survey (CRS) develops and improves our understanding of community relations, firstly by including additional items assessing active community relations (“I invite people from different groups to my house”) and community norms (“What others do”). These enable a move beyond a more passive assessment of community relations such as attitudes toward a more definitive understanding of how much respondents seek out and engage in actual behaviours characteristic of positive community relations.

Given that for all measures there was specific emphasis on community members from different ethnic, cultural, or religious backgrounds, the CRS can inform in new ways the state of proactive and cross-cultural community relations. Positive community relations prevail when community members themselves are active in creating inclusive communities where people feel they belong and are respected and have opportunities for personal development.

These insights can inform choices that individuals, businesses, community groups and governments make about what should be done and what people are willing to do and support to strengthen the multicultural community they would like to see thrive.

This CRS helps us to gain better insights into the state of community relations. It enables more understanding of exposure, community norms and willingness to be more proactive in building a connected community. There is much to indicate that community members feel welcome, supported and valued. The more this continues, the greater our community wellbeing and prosperity in future.



CASE STUDY

COMPACT Program proves young people are the solution for community harmony

“We are from different parts of the world... when we come together, we are stronger.” – Young participant in the COMPACT Program

A resilient program

Now entering its 10th year, the Multicultural NSW COMPACT (Community Partnership Action) Program was first inspired by the way the people of NSW came together after the Martin Place siege in Sydney in December 2014. The message from our community was clear: *We stand united. We – all of us together – will not let extremists divide us.*

Still going strong a decade after the siege transformed the Sydney CBD, COMPACT has grown to become a state-wide network of community partners and allies who are standing united against hate. COMPACT has inspired and empowered more than 80,000 young people as champions for community harmony.

In 2024, the publication of a second independent program evaluation has once again proven that COMPACT is successfully empowering young people to build social cohesion and community resilience.

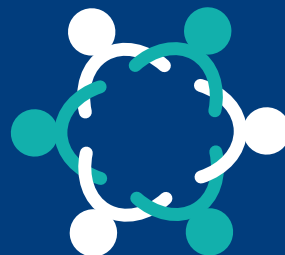
The *Evaluation of the COMPACT Program 2021-2024* by Urbis Pty Ltd covered a challenging four-year period for the program. This was a period that saw bushfires, floods and a one-in-100-year pandemic test our resilience as a community. This time was made even more challenging by the rise of racism, online conspiracy theories and anti-government sentiment, and with global events and overseas conflicts leaving their mark on local communities.

“COMPACT has demonstrated resilience to changes in the community harmony landscape and has withstood challenges to social cohesion brought on by adverse events,” the independent evaluators found.

During the 2021-2024 funding cycle, Multicultural NSW supported 24 multi-year COMPACT Partnership Projects, 19 smaller six-month projects supporting community recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and COMPACT strategic partnerships supporting whole-of-program outcomes.

Program delivery was heavily impacted by the pandemic, yet it is estimated that COMPACT reached 23,000 young people in this funding period, bringing the program’s total reach to over 80,000 young people since 2016.

The evaluation found that COMPACT’s core principles as a whole-of-society resilience building program were well supported by community stakeholders, and that “COMPACT is a highly credible and sought-after grants program empowering young people as champions for community harmony across metropolitan and regional NSW.”



COMPACT
CommunityPartnershipAction

Forming new cross-cultural relations

One of the strongest outcomes observed was the forming of new social connections for young people, in particular new connections across different cultural, ethnic or religious backgrounds. Participants reported increased understanding of the diversity within their communities as well as increased empathy and respect for others:

- 80% of participants agreed they learned about different perspectives and ways of life;
- 76% of participants agreed their COMPACT involvement led to a greater appreciation for different perspectives and ways of life.

The evaluation also found that COMPACT projects are instilling agency and confidence in young people, providing pathways for youth leadership:

- 79% of participants agreed that after participating in COMPACT they could contribute to their local community;
- 76% of participants agreed they had learnt new leadership and advocacy skills.

“One of the strongest outcomes observed was the forming of new social connections for young people, in particular new connections across different cultural, ethnic or religious backgrounds.” – Evaluation of the COMPACT Program 2021-2024

Participants have learned about and celebrated diversity within their communities

80%

of participants agreed they have learnt about different ways of life as a result of their participation in COMPACT.

80%

of participants agreed they have learnt about different perspectives as a result of their participation in COMPACT.

COMPACT Projects have strengthened young people's connections to their communities

79%

of participants agreed they could contribute to their local community after taking part in their COMPACT Project.

76%

of participants agreed they felt greater pride in their local community after taking part in their COMPACT Project.

COMPACT augments participant leadership capacity and perceptions of agency

79%

of participants agreed they could contribute to their local community.

76%

of participants agreed they had learnt new leadership and advocacy skills.

74%

of participants agreed they had greater confidence to engage in leadership and/or advocacy opportunities.

74%

of participants agreed they felt more confident speaking up among friends and family about issues that mattered to them.

Participant outcomes: Evaluation of the COMPACT Program 2021-2024

In line with good practice, the evaluation obtained formal research ethics approval to conduct qualitative interviews with young people who had participated in funded COMPACT projects. Fifty young people were interviewed for the evaluation. Their insights provided valuable depth and perspective to the quantitative data obtained from surveys and sentiment analysis.

“I’m more aware of the people around me and what they might be feeling when it comes to certain topics,” said one program participant.

“Everybody in the project is from completely different backgrounds, and I think from speaking to them I’m getting to know why they are the way they are: their traditions, their religions, the values from their cultures, seeing how that has made them the person they are... And all of our different backgrounds offer slightly different perspectives on the situation,” said another participant.

A collective force for community harmony

Above and beyond delivering inspiring projects for young people, funded COMPACT Program partners also come together regularly under the banner of the COMPACT Alliance as a community of practice and a state-wide community resilience network.

The program evaluation found the COMPACT Alliance is a robust and valued community of practice supporting the delivery of the COMPACT Program. The Alliance is widely praised by members as a forum in which to build professional networks and learning:

- 87% of COMPACT Alliance members strongly agreed other members had demonstrated willingness to share knowledge and learnings;
- 82% of Alliance members reported their organisation had formed new partnerships or networks through the Alliance.

“The concept of the [COMPACT Alliance] and the engagement that this particular grant round has continued I think is second to none... there is no other sort of funding stream that has this kind of support, alliance and allegiance. It’s just I think it’s incredibly innovative... an absolute credit to Multicultural NSW,” one COMPACT Alliance partner shared with the evaluators.

You can find the full report of the Evaluation of the COMPACT Program 2021-2024 here:

<https://multicultural.nsw.gov.au/community-resilience/compact/>

Expanding the proven COMPACT Program

Building on the proven success of the program, in October 2024, the NSW Government awarded over \$12 million in grants for 20 new COMPACT Partnership Projects involving over 65 partner organisations who will be delivering youth-led solutions for the next two to four years (2024 to 2028).

As part of their formal induction into the COMPACT Program, in December 2024, over 100 COMPACT Alliance partners came together for a two-day COMPACT X DIGI Engage Summit in the Blue Mountains. The Summit was delivered in partnership with the Digital Industry Group (DIGI), the not-for-profit industry association representing global digital platforms in Australia. The Summit aimed to build the capacity of the COMPACT Alliance to effectively engage young people online and to create safer, more harmonious online communities.



COMPACT X DIGI Engage Summit

Key moments in the COMPACT story

- 2014** The people of New South Wales stand together in solidarity following the Martin Place siege.
- 2015** The COMPACT Program begins with extensive community consultation and a review of international best practice. The first COMPACT grants open one month after the shooting of Curtis Cheng outside the NSW Police Force headquarters.
- 2016:** The first COMPACT Partnership Projects commence. The COMPACT Alliance comes together for the first time.
- 2018:** COMPACT has engaged 20,000 young people and is independently evaluated as a 'first-of-its-kind' program that has made significant progress towards its objectives of building social cohesion and community resilience.
- 2019:** The COMPACT Alliance mobilises to support local communities and young people impacted by the devastating terror attack in Christchurch, New Zealand.
- 2020/21** Bushfires, floods and a one-in-100-year pandemic test our resilience as a community. Racism, online conspiracy theories and anti-government sentiment are on the rise. COMPACT has engaged 50,000 young people to deliver solutions. The COMPACT Alliance expands as a state-wide network supporting communities and young people through challenging times.
- 2022/23** Global events and overseas conflicts leave their mark. Communities rally to combat racism and religious intolerance. Foreign interference has surpassed terrorism as the primary national security threat and threatens social cohesion. The COMPACT Alliance expands to include more than 80 partner organisations committed to safeguarding social cohesion against hate and division.
- 2024** Continuing violence overseas is felt deeply by local communities. Religious leaders call for interfaith unity after a stabbing in a church leads to rioting. The COMPACT Alliance convenes to tackle the increasing spread of online hate and disinformation. COMPACT has engaged more than 80,000 young people. An independent evaluation finds 'COMPACT has demonstrated resilience to changes in the community harmony landscape and has withstood challenges to social cohesion brought on by adverse events.'
- 2024+** COMPACT has more work to do. New threats to community harmony are emerging. The lines are becoming blurred between local and global, foreign and domestic, online and offline. Young people are concerned about hate and polarisation and want to do something about it. In an increasingly uncertain world, COMPACT will continue to be a voice and a force for community harmony in New South Wales.

Monitoring and addressing issues impacting on community harmony: 2024 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 13(1)(f) 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 agencies through incident reporting, community engagement networks and advisory structures, community sentiment analysis, social media listening, environmental scanning, social cohesion mapping and other agency capabilities.

The COMPLAN Committee, chaired by Multicultural NSW, is a senior officers group comprised of representatives from the NSW Police Force, Anti-Discrimination NSW, NSW Department of Education, NSW Department of Communities and Justice, NSW Health, NSW Reconstruction Authority, Local Government NSW, NSW Premier's Department and Multicultural NSW. Other agencies are invited to join COMPLAN Committee meetings as needed to advise on matters relevant to their portfolios. The Cabinet Office was represented at several COMPLAN Committee meetings in 2024.

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

Meetings in 2024

The COMPLAN Committee held nine meetings in 2024:

- four were regular quarterly meetings scheduled under COMPLAN Preparedness arrangements (9 March, 4 May, 3 August, and 7 November).
- four additional out-of-session meetings were called under COMPLAN Prevention and Response arrangements:
 - 16 April –in response to the Wakeley church stabbing and subsequent riot on the evening of 15 April.
 - 20 September and 2 October –to monitor community sentiment and community harmony risks in the lead up to the one-year commemoration of the 7 October 2023 Hamas attacks on Israel.
 - 13 December –in response to an arson attack on a synagogue in Melbourne, anti-Israel vandalism in a Jewish neighbourhood in Sydney, and in the context of the regional escalation of Israel's war into Lebanon and the overthrow of the Assad regime in Syria.
- in addition, on 28 October 2024, Multicultural NSW facilitated a meeting between COMPLAN Committee members and Mr Peter Khalil MP, Australia's Special Envoy for Social Cohesion, to discuss the roles of the Special Envoy and COMPLAN and issues of mutual concern.

The statement below summarises the COMPLAN Committee's activities and its assessment of issues impacting community harmony in 2024.

Understanding local and global trends

Under COMPLAN Preparedness arrangements, the COMPLAN Committee provides a forum for collecting and sharing information, advice, research and best practice relating to community harmony and community resilience. In 2024, this included:

- a presentation and discussion on the findings of the 2023 Mapping Social Cohesion report by the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute (9 March meeting). The report showed that social cohesion in Australia is under pressure and declining, primarily due to economic pressures, while support for cultural diversity remains high.
- a presentation by Professor Katherine Reynolds, from the Australian National University's Australian Social Cohesion - Exploring New Directions (ASCEND) interdisciplinary research team, on the findings of the first NSW Community Relations Survey (4 May meeting). This large and state-representative survey, commissioned by Multicultural NSW for the Community Relations Report, introduces novel measures of 'active community relations' that move beyond more passive assessments of attitudes and opinions toward a more definitive understanding of how people seek out and engage in actual behaviours of cross-cultural relations. Respondents to the first NSW Community Relations Survey endorse a positive assessment of community relations across cultural, ethnic and religious groups.
- a presentation by Steve Killelea AM, Founder and Executive Chairman of the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), on the findings of IEP's 2024 Global Peace Index report (1 August meeting). The report provides an important insight into deteriorating peacefulness in countries round the world. The COMPLAN Committee discussed the impact of this decline on local communities with family and cultural connections to those parts of the world. Mr Killelea also spoke about the project that IEP is implementing locally under the Multicultural NSW COMPACT Program to train young people in peacebuilding principles and practice (see pages 18-19).
- a special out-of-session meeting (28 October) between COMPLAN Committee members and Mr Peter Khalil MP, Australia's Special Envoy for Social Cohesion.

Responding to local incidents and situations that threaten community harmony

The COMPLAN Response phase occurs in response to a situation that threatens community harmony. The Response phase includes specific measures to counter divisive influences, limit harmful consequences, and provide support and relief for affected persons and communities.

Responding to the Wakeley incident

Multicultural NSW activated the COMPLAN Response phase in response to the stabbing of a bishop at the Christ The Good Shepherd Church in Wakeley and the riot that immediately followed the attack on the evening of 15 April (see page 65). The knife attack was declared a terrorist incident by the NSW Police Force.

The COMPLAN Committee convened out-of-session on 16 April to facilitate communication and coordination across member agencies. The regular meeting of 4 May also included this issue as a key agenda item. The following agency measures were shared with the committee:

- NSW Police Force provided a briefing on the situation and advised that investigations into the offence against the bishop and the subsequent riot were underway:
 - more than 40 people involved in the rioting were later arrested under Strike Force Drips.
 - Police conducted high visibility operations in the Southwest Sydney area and all around the Sydney metropolitan area to protect community safety.
 - Police reiterated a zero-tolerance approach to anyone seeking to undertake acts of reprisal or retribution and requested the assistance of COMPLAN agencies in relaying that strong message to communities.
 - Misinformation circulating social media was generating unnecessary fear in the community and communities should contact their local Police Area Command (PAC) for accurate information and with any community safety concerns.
 - As the incident has been declared a terrorist incident, the Public Information

Response and Recovery Arrangements (PIRRA) for a terrorist incident were in effect.

- In line with COMPLAN arrangements, Multicultural NSW immediately activated its established community networks to manage the risk and empower community and faith leaders to de-escalate tensions and promote community harmony:
 - Multicultural NSW brought NSW Faith Affairs Council members and other key faith leaders together with the Premier, Minister for Multiculturalism and Commissioner of Police. The NSW Faith Affairs Council came together on the night of the attack, and again the following day, to issue a call for calm and interfaith unity.
 - Recognising the leadership role that women often play in response to community tensions, Multicultural NSW facilitated a women's forum co-hosted by the Minister for Women and the Minister for Multiculturalism and co-chaired by two female members of the NSW Faith Affairs Council.
 - Multicultural NSW disseminated NSW agency resources to support communities and community harmony, as identified through COMPLAN member agencies, through its community networks, including the COMPACT Alliance—an established state-wide network of over 80 partner organisations who are committed to safeguarding social cohesion against hate and division.
 - The COMPACT Digital Youth Alliance convened online in the week of the attack to discuss youth-led solutions to online hate and misinformation.
 - Multicultural NSW convened the multi-agency Safe Places for Faith Communities Program grants assessment panel in the week of the Wakeley incident to expedite approval for \$5 million in grants supporting safety and security at places of worship.
- The Premier's Department prepared social media insights reports and strategic communications resources with NSW, Commonwealth and local government agencies and community stakeholders, including a communications tool kit for communities to support social cohesion. The State Security Group and the Premier's Prevention Panel on Hate and Extremism were also convened in response to the incident.
- The Department of Education provided support to staff from the school that the 16-year-old perpetrator of the stabbing had attended. Regrettably, the school had been named by one media outlet. While the incident occurred during school holidays, staff were offered counselling and other support during this time.
- NSW Health continued to focus on messaging for the community about support services, including mental health services, as it had been doing since the tragic stabbing attack in Bondi Junction that killed six people only a few days earlier (see page 13), Multilingual resources were also promoted through the Transcultural Mental Health Centre.
- The NSW Reconstruction Authority, while focused on flood relief and support to flood impacted communities, provided advice to the NSW Government on the provision of material and financial aid following the Bondi Junction incident.
- Victim Services at the Department of Communities and Justice compiled a factsheet, specifically for congregants of the Christ the Good Shepherd Church, promoting the Victims Access Line for mental health services and financial support. The Department had existing relations with religious leaders at the church and provided key contacts to Multicultural NSW and other agencies on the night of the incident.
- Anti-Discrimination NSW actively promoted its Enquiries Line and community education resources.
- Local Government NSW provided advice and support to Fairfield City Council, as the incident occurred within this local government area and impacted communities from the area. The council updated its internal risk management plans for Youth Week events planned for April.

Community roundly condemns neo-Nazi rally in Corowa

In October, the regional town of Corowa on the border near Victoria was confronted by a group of masked, black-clad neo-Nazis aligned with the National Socialist Network (NSN), led by known extremist Thomas Sewell. The group held a rally in the centre of the town and displayed offensive banners and distributed flyers in letterboxes proclaiming “White Man Fight Back” and “Australia for the White Man”.

The group, mostly from Victoria, falsely claimed that migrant workers were taking jobs away from locals. The ostensible trigger was the sale of the local piggery to the Brazilian corporation Rivelea and the recruitment of migrant workers at the site.

The local community, including local businesses, roundly condemned the rally. Like many regional towns, Corowa has a proud reputation of welcoming newcomers who want the town to grow and thrive. The town of Corowa and the regional Federation Council were supporters of the Multicultural NSW Growing Regions of Welcome (NSW GROW) pilot program, which aimed to connect interested people from migrant and refugee backgrounds living in Western Sydney with opportunities in the Murray and Riverina regions. Corowa is also home to the ‘Who Is My Neighbour’ initiative which hosted a group of visiting refugees in local homes.

While vocal in their condemnation of the rally and appreciative of the bi-partisan support for their position in the NSW Parliament,⁴³ local community and business leaders and the Federation Council expressed a need for more support in knowing how to respond to extremist hate groups. Multicultural NSW and the NSW Police Force met with local community leaders and the NSW Police Force Engagement and Hate Crimes Unit subsequently arranged a visit to Corowa to present to local leaders on reporting and responding to hate crimes and hate incidents.

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. A standing agenda item for the COMPLAN Committee in 2024, the ongoing crisis in Gaza and the regional escalation of Israel’s war into Lebanon, Syria and Iran presented manifest risks to local community harmony throughout the year. The Committee also

monitored the local community impacts of Russia’s ongoing war in Ukraine, the violent crackdown on student protests and the subsequent ousting of the authoritarian government in Bangladesh, the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, and the lead-up to the general election in India.

Supporting communities impacted by the crisis in Gaza and Lebanon

Following the 7 October 2023 Hamas attacks on Israel, the crisis in Gaza continued to escalate throughout 2024. As Israel’s war expanded during the year beyond Gaza into Lebanon, Syria and Iran, more communities became directly impacted. With community activists reporting rising levels of antisemitism and Islamophobia, the crisis presented manifest risks to local community harmony and would be a standing agenda item for the COMPLAN Committee throughout 2024. In addition to regular meetings, three out-of-session COMPLAN Committee meetings were called in response to this specific issue (see above).

Throughout the year, Multicultural NSW, the NSW Police Force and the Premier’s Department continued to engage community leaders to extend sympathies to impacted communities, listen to community perspectives, keep lines of communication open between communities and government, and promote harmony and safety.

Community sentiment remained highly elevated, especially among Jewish and Muslim communities, as well as other impacted communities. The regional escalation of the war into the south of Lebanon particularly impacted the Lebanese Shi’a Muslim community, with several thousand Australian citizens and their families needing to be evacuated from the region and repatriated to NSW (see pages 20-21).

Large-scale weekly pro-Palestinian rallies were peaceful, with NSW Police reporting very few incidents. Relations between police and protest organisers were respectful and contributed more broadly to strengthened relations between police and Arab and Muslim communities. This level of trust was critical in the lead up to the one-year commemoration of 7 October, with community leaders and protest organisers helping to spread messages to communities about the importance of abiding by laws relating to the display of symbols. NSW Police also advised that the weekly rallies were very resource intensive from a staffing perspective.

While community relations at the agency level remained strong, this sentiment was not always extended to political leaders, with Muslim community leaders continuing to express a strong

sense of injustice and one-sidedness in the way government and the media communicated about the issue.

Within the Jewish community, concerns about community safety and rising antisemitism were expressed with a sense of fear, hurt and distress. The NSW Police Force maintains close relations with the Jewish Community Security Group and, throughout the year, Operation Shelter continued to protect public order and community safety. For most of the year, NSW Police advised that very few reports of hate incidents had met a criminal threshold. However, towards the end of the year, a series of arson and vandalism attacks targeting Jewish neighbourhoods and synagogues clearly elevated the issue to the level of serious crime, with NSW Police launching a major investigation under Strike Force Pearl.

Responding to concerns about increasing hate and vilification, in February, the NSW Government asked the NSW Law Reform Commission to expeditiously review and report on the effectiveness of section 93Z of the *Crimes Act 1900* (NSW) in addressing serious racial and religious vilification. The Commission handed down its report in September. While acknowledging the legitimate community concerns about the impact of vilification, including racial and religious hatred, the report did not recommend changes to section 93Z.

Anti-Discrimination NSW did not experience a significant increase in discrimination or vilification complaints through its formal mechanisms and so engaged with community-based reporting mechanisms to better understand the prevalence of antisemitism and Islamophobia. Anti-Discrimination NSW presented at and attended various community forums targeting impacted communities.

The NSW Department of Education was tasked with implementing a NSW Government election commitment to address religious bullying in schools and worked closely with faith communities to establish a Religious Intolerance Hotline. The Department also supports schools from both government and non-government sectors in relation to anti-social and extremist behaviours in schools. The Department also supported school staff to ensure that public schools can focus on their primary role of education and offer students a refuge from constant exposure to distressing news and debate about overseas conflicts. The Premier's Prevention Panel on Hate and Extremism, chaired by the Premier's Department, explored options for additional social cohesion measures in schools.

The NSW Department of Education provided a range of resources to support affected NSW public school

communities including advice to support student and staff wellbeing and harmony within schools and advice for parents and carers in community languages. The Department's Anti-Racism Strategy was released in 2024 to enhance efforts for countering racism and religious intolerance in NSW public schools. This 12-year system-wide commitment is contributing to the creation of a safer, stronger, more inclusive and cohesive NSW public education system and state.

Local Government NSW advised that Council staff in certain local government areas needed support in navigating the highly complex issues that impact their local communities. In October, the Premier's Department delivered the Safeguarding Social Cohesion workshop for staff from 25 local councils. The workshop provides practical resources to support communities and community-facing professionals through collective trauma events and to support effective public communications in times of stress and shock.

In September, the Australian Government activated its contingency plan to evacuate Australian nationals and their immediate family members from Lebanon under the Australian Government Plan for the Reception of Australian Citizens and Approved Foreign Nationals Evacuated from Overseas (AUSRECEPLAN). This in turn activated the NSW Government Plan for the Reception of Australian Citizens and Approved Foreign Nationals Evacuated from Overseas (NSWRECEPLAN). By the end of October, approximately 3,500 individuals and their family members had safely arrived in Australia, including around 2,400 people remaining in NSW, with others transiting interstate after first arriving in Sydney. NSWRECEPLAN is a multi-agency plan to support repatriations to NSW, which in this case included some individuals with medical and mental health needs, limited English proficiency and single mothers with children. A total of 178 people (79 adults, 94 children) required emergency accommodation. NSW agencies worked closely with local charities and community volunteers to support repatriated citizens and their families and link them with services and local community support networks (see pages 20-21).

As part of its ongoing work to bring communities together in times of need, Multicultural NSW convened an out-of-session meeting of the NSW Faith Affairs Council on 1 October. The Council issued a joint statement reaffirming its commitment to working together for peace, harmony and understanding in response to overseas conflict.

⁴² <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#/docid/HANSARD-1820781676-97496/HANSARD-1820781676-97553>

The ongoing situation in the Middle East clearly remains a deeply distressing and polarising issue for many people. The COMPLAN Committee will continue to monitor community harmony risks, support impacted communities and promote community harmony.

Community sentiment mixed after overthrow of Assad regime in Syria

In December, the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria by opposition forces, including Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and the Syrian National Army, generated mixed sentiment among local communities.

While some in the community felt buoyed by the development, others with links to minority groups in Syria such as the Alawite and Shi'a communities expressed caution about the future. Community perspectives on the situation are also influenced by different sources of news and information from overseas which sometimes reflect partisan interests in the region.

As Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham is still a listed terrorist organisation in Australia, the Committee noted the potential risks for communities expressing support for the group.

Bangladeshi community left in the dark during student protest crackdown

In September, a severe government crackdown on student protests in Bangladesh led to more than 200 people being killed, 2,500 arrests, a national curfew, and a temporary shutdown of communications, including the internet, across the country.

Local community members were unable to contact family in Bangladesh during this time and experienced a high level of anxiety over the situation. The community was relieved when communications were eventually restored.

The subsequent ousting of the authoritarian government in Bangladesh was welcomed by many in the community.

Countering divisive overseas influences within the Indian community

The COMPLAN Committee has examined concerns that political and communal tensions in India may

be impacting local community relations since a public order incident in Harris Park in 2020 and a series of other violent incidents and tensions in 2021, 2022 and 2023.⁴³

Multicultural NSW and the NSW Police Force have worked with community leaders to ensure that divisive fringe elements do not tarnish the good reputation of the Indian community, which has made such a significant contribution to our peaceful and prosperous state.

In the lead-up to the general election in India in 2024, the inauguration of the Ram Janmabhoomi Mandir in Ayodhya, India, in January, had the potential to reignite tensions given the contentious and violent history associated with the Hindu temple's construction on the site of a former mosque. The temple inauguration was celebrated by Hindus locally with events including live streams, processions, religious offerings and devotional songs. To the community's credit, the temple inauguration and the 2024 Indian general election passed without incident in NSW.

Supporting community harmony as Russia's war on Ukraine continues

The Ukrainian community continues to raise concerns about content circulating online supporting the Russian Government's invasion of Ukraine.

In March, Ukrainian community activists planned a protest outside the Russian consulate in Sydney in relation to elections in Russia.

NSW Police and Multicultural NSW did not observe any significant risk to community harmony arising from these issues in 2024.

The COMPLAN Committee will continue to monitor local community harmony risks arising from international developments.

Submission of 2024 COMPLAN Committee report

This report is compiled in accordance with COMPLAN arrangement 15(G) and is submitted to the Chief Executive Officer of Multicultural NSW with the aim of informing the 2024 annual report by Multicultural NSW on the state of community relations in NSW (Community Relations Report). The report has been reviewed and endorsed by all COMPLAN member agencies.

⁴³ See Community Relations Reports for 2021, 2022 and 2023 at <https://multicultural.nsw.gov.au/resources/the-state-of-community-relations-in-nsw/>

CASE STUDY

Faith leaders call for peace after church stabbing and riot in Wakeley

In the evening of 15 April, a 16-year-old boy stabbed a bishop in his church during a livestreamed sermon. The bishop was injured but survived. Police declared the attack as 'religiously motivated terrorism'.

Police and first responders were confronted at the scene by a large mob that soon grew to around 2,000 people. Over 50 police officers were injured and 20 police vehicles damaged in the riot. Over 40 people were later arrested and charged with a range of offences including riot, assault and affray.

Recognising the urgent need to de-escalate tensions, religious leaders were remarkably

responsive, coming together online within hours on the night of the attack to collaborate on an urgently needed joint response. Multicultural NSW brought members of the NSW Faith Affairs Council and other key faith leaders together with the Premier, Minister for Multiculturalism and Commissioner of Police. The joint statement below calling for calm and interfaith unity was issued the next day. The statement was shared with more than 50,000 social media followers, 4,500 community and government organisations, 240 religious leaders and was published by almost 30 media outlets.

Tuesday, 16 April 2024

Today we convened a meeting of faith leaders representing religious communities across Western Sydney. All of the following communities endorsed and supported the statement below that calls for calm, to follow police instructions, and for peace.

Places of worship are places of peace and prayer. The people who gather there should never feel threatened or unsafe, no matter what religion they follow.

As faith leaders representing the diverse religious communities of New South Wales, we stand united against all forms of hate and violence. Our prayers are with the victims and we

call on our communities to extend our message of care and compassion to all.

We have trust in our police and first responders and full confidence in their work. Police should never be attacked for keeping our communities safe. The scenes we witnessed after the attack are unacceptable to anyone, and especially to people of faith.

For people of faith, religion is never a justification for violence. It has been a very difficult week but we are a strong community in New South Wales. We call on everyone to act with kindness and respect for each other.

Now is the time to show that we are a caring and united community.

Statement agreed to by all members of the NSW Faith Affairs Council:

Right Reverend Dr Michael Stead, Anglican Church, Diocese of Sydney
Mr Gawaine Powell Davies, Chair, Buddhist Council of NSW
Imam Shadi Alsuleiman, President, Australian National Imams Council
Dr Ali Al Samail, Resident Scholar (Sheikh), Australian Ahl Al Bait Islamic Centre
Mr Surinder Kumar Jain, Vice President, Hindu Council of Australia
Ms Monica Doumit, Director of Public Affairs and Engagement, Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney
Mr David Ossip, President, NSW Jewish Board of Deputies
Rev. Dr Steve Bartlett, Director of Ministries, Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT
Rev. Dr Manas Ghosh, Minister in the Uniting Church Uniting Church in Australia Synod of NSW & ACT
Rev. Dr Kamal Weerakoon, Minister, Presbyterian Church of Australia
Mr Darshan Singh Gill, Patron, Australian Sikh Association (ASA) (Gurdwara Sahib Glenwood)
Very Rev. Fr Christophoros Krikelis, Chancellor, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia
Rev. Ralph Estherby, National Director/CEO for Chaplaincy Australia, Australian Christian Churches

Mr Darren Bark, Co-Chair, Better Balanced Futures (Faith NSW)
Mr Murray Norman, CEO, Better Balanced Futures (Faith NSW)
Reverend Heather Joyce Topp, Senior Chaplain and Interfaith Minister, Buddhist Council of NSW
Reverend William Crews AM, Superintendent Minister, Ashfield Parish Mission
Ms Katherine Xavier, Interfaith Commission Member, Catholic Diocese of Parramatta
Ms Monica Chahoud, Melkite Charitable Foundation President, Melkite Catholic Eparchy of Australia, New Zealand and all Oceania

The statement was also supported by:

Archbishop Mar Meelis Zaia, Assyrian Church of the East
Archbishop Amel Shamon Nona, Catholic Chaldeans in Australia
Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay, Maronite Bishop of Australia, New Zealand and Oceania
Dr Rateb Jneid, President of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils
Mr Hafez Alameddine, President of the Lebanese Muslim Association

A full report on the activities of the NSW Faith Affairs Council in 2024 is available at Appendix A (pages 80-83).

CASE STUDY

Conference fosters robust conversations on social cohesion and democratic resilience

Social cohesion and democratic resilience are more than aspirations. They are foundational to our nation's collective wellbeing and prosperity. This foundation, however, is under strain, with economic pressures, divisive rhetoric, and global uncertainties creating unprecedented challenges that must be navigated and resolved.

It is within this context that Western Sydney University, in partnership with the Department of Home Affairs and the NSW Premier's Department, convened the inaugural Strengthening Social Cohesion Conference over two days in October 2024.

Over 400 leaders, policymakers, community members, and industry representatives from across Australia came together over two days to tackle these challenges. Through thought-provoking keynote addresses, engaging panel discussions, and focused concurrent sessions, participants broadened their understanding and capability to deploy actionable strategies that reinforce social cohesion and democratic resilience.

In addition, nearly 100 leaders and practitioners participated in post-conference Immersion Sessions. These three-hour sessions were delivered in a hybrid format, enabling participants to embark upon a deeper dive and refine their skills and capacity to deliver positive impact in their community.

Three satellite community events were also delivered to connect local communities directly to the conference discussions. This amplified the conference's impact and provided opportunities to bridge the gap between national conversations and local experiences.

The post-conference evaluation found that 89% of participants had improved their understanding of social cohesion and democratic resilience.

Some of the key insights documented from the conference were:

Kindness is key

In the context of heightened tensions, compassion and empathy is more important than ever. Dialogue where these elements are absent will exacerbate challenges and fail to generate the trust required to address them.

Diversity as a cornerstone

Diversity of cultures, beliefs, identities, and viewpoints is central to Australia's story. Social cohesion can thrive through recognising and valuing these differences, as opposed to emphasising conformity to a national identity.

Words matter

Language shapes public perceptions, either fostering unity or amplifying divisions. Responsible discourse from all stakeholders is critical for bridging divides, especially in times of unprecedented challenges.

We can't go it alone

Lasting social cohesion requires collaboration between governments, businesses, and communities. By aligning on common goals, these groups can create robust, resilient responses to societal challenges.

Voices of the future

A focus on the future is essential if we want to see beyond the problems of the present. Young people are our future and our present – their voices need to be heard today so we shape the future we want together.

STRENGTHENING SOCIAL COHESION CONFERENCE

You can see the full Strengthening Social Cohesion Conference program and speaker bios at: <https://strengtheningsocialcohesion.com.au/>

Good Practice in Multicultural Policy and Service Delivery

The Multicultural Principles are the policy of the State

The *Multicultural NSW Act 2000* (the Act) establishes the Multicultural Principles as the policy of the state, requiring public authorities to observe the Multicultural Principles in the conduct of their affairs. NSW was the first jurisdiction in Australia to introduce a deliberate, state-wide policy that recognises the value of cultural, linguistic and religious diversity.

The Multicultural Policies and Services Program (MPSP) was developed to bring to life the Multicultural Principles entrenched in the Act.

The MPSP promotes good practice in multicultural policy and service delivery

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

The MPSP is the whole-of-government mechanism designed to assist agencies in planning and improving performance in the delivery of government services in a culturally diverse society. In other words, the MPSP aims to empower NSW Government to build cultural competence.

Under the MPSP, NSW Government agencies are required to 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.

1. SERVICE DELIVERY

OUTCOMES

Mainstream services deliver for everyone.

Targeted programs fill the gaps.

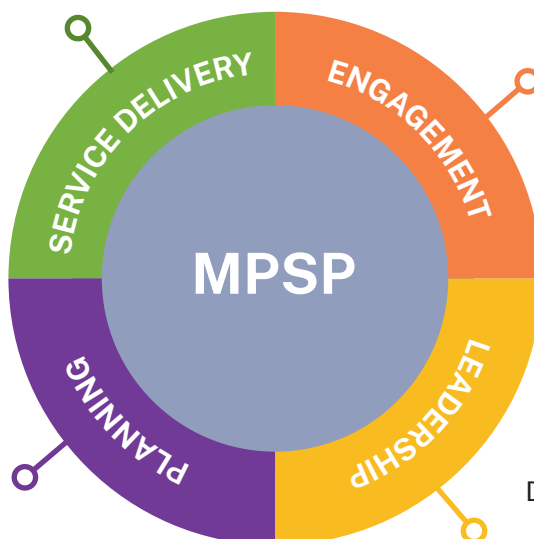
People know about services and programs through culturally and linguistically effective communications.

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.

The four MPSP focus areas

MPSP agency report highlights

Under current MPSP reporting requirements, all NSW Government agencies are required to report on the progress of their Multicultural Plans in their annual reports.

Designated MPSP agencies (DMAs) are agencies that are recognised for their role in delivering essential policies and services for our culturally diverse society. In addition to reporting in their annual reports, DMAs are also required to submit a detailed report on the progress of their Multicultural Plans in two-or three-year cycles.

For the 2022-24 MPSP reporting period, the DMAs reporting to Multicultural NSW were:

NSW Health

NSW Department of Education

The two reports submitted to Multicultural NSW were assessed as meeting at least the minimum standards across the four Focus Areas. They also provided examples of good practice that demonstrate each agency's commitment to observing Multicultural Principles.

The next section highlights some examples of good practice identified in the two DMA reports, as well as highlights from several other agencies identified through the broader MPSP reporting requirement.

Developing targeted solutions to improve outcomes

The MPSP framework supports agencies to plan for and deliver services that are appropriate and accessible to all communities in our culturally diverse society. Under the focus area of Service Delivery, this includes ensuring agencies deliver world class services that meet the specific cultural and linguistic needs of their customers.



Cabramatta High School and Intensive English Centre ease the transition to school

Cabramatta High School provides support to students who enter the Intensive English Centre (IEC) through the Settling In wellbeing program. The program is delivered by the school psychologist, supported by bilingual Student Learning Support Officers, with students and families linked to external agencies where appropriate. While in the IEC, students participate in skills workshops such as art therapy, cooking skills, High Potential and Gifted Education mathematics, wellbeing sessions with community services, gardening skills, sports skills and STEM education.

For students in transition from the IEC to mainstream high school, there is the Leaver's Program which is delivered by a teacher from the IEC and an English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) teacher from the high school. This strengths-based program prepares students for high school education, including developing skills to navigate the expectations, opportunities and challenges of the next phase of their education. In their first term of high school, the students receive ongoing support with the Helping Hand Program which is delivered by the same teachers, providing students with the confidence to share their experiences of high school and successfully transition to their new learning environment.

NSW Health launches the Dandelion Project

The Dandelion Project has begun planning to deliver a wellbeing pathway for pregnant women affected by Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) in South Western Sydney Local Health District (SWSLHD) by filling the gaps in current service delivery. Six FGM/C affected women have been consulted to inform best practice. A high-quality model of care will be co-designed by the end of 2024, with the potential to be rolled out across other LHDs in 2025.

The Dandelion Project aims to understand, consolidate, and improve quality-of-care provision, by integrating the needs of women with the FGM/C midwifery and education approaches. Modifications to the mainstream health system include strengthening current referral pathways and partnerships, reviewing FGM/C midwife appointment times, developing a new assessment tool and practice guideline, and training midwives in specific skills relevant to assessment and referral.



NSW Department of Education plans for new humanitarian arrivals

Following the escalation of violence in the Middle East from October 2023, Palestinian students from Gaza began to enrol in NSW public schools. To facilitate the enrolment of these newly arrived students, the Department of Education (DoE) adjusted its policies for students on tourist/visitor visas to allow automatic exemption from temporary resident education fees and access to the New Arrivals Program. This ensures that students can access school education and receive intensive, on-arrival English language support as required.

Students continued to arrive in 2024, most recently arriving from Lebanon as Australian citizens. Given they have been living overseas for a long time or were born overseas, their on-arrival needs are still significant. DoE attended sessions organised by settlement services to help these newly arrived families during the process of enrolment. Information on how to best support students arriving due to this conflict was added to the DoE's website.

NSW Police Force increases in-language support

To support operational policing, the NSW Police Force partnered with Multicultural NSW to continue developing a multilingual phrases app, which is due for release on MobiPOL in December 2024. The app contains commonly used instructions and phrases drawn directly from the NSW policing context which have been translated by certified translators and then embedded into the app. The pre-translated phrases can be displayed in both visual and audio mode.



NSW Police Force raise awareness for potential targeted scams

To support operational policing, the NSW NSW Police Multicultural Liaison Officers, in collaboration with the Field Support and Community Engagement Team, Crime Prevention Command developed state-wide 'Chinese Blessing Scam' awareness material for police and community members. Factsheets, flyers, and social media tiles were disseminated which were translated to Traditional Chinese and Simplified Chinese.

TAFE NSW delivers trade program for Pasifika women

The Pasifika Women in Trades Pilot Program is an initiative with the Pacific Women Professional & Business Network at TAFE NSW Miller and supported by The First Step Program. This program provided 16 learners of Tongan and Samoan descent the opportunity to engage in a blended experience of carpentry, stonemasonry and bricklaying. The workshops were orchestrated to empower young Pasifika women by providing hands-on experience and practical trade skills.



Engaging with communities to deliver programs



Under the focus area of engagement, the MPSP framework encourages agencies to engage, consult, collaborate, co-design and partner with communities to ensure meaningful input to the design and implementation of policies and services.

Local Health District collaborates with local Afghan communities to improve health outcomes

Western Sydney Local Health District co-designed the program *Accepting Change: Maternal Health and Planning your Family in Australia* with Afghan communities and in partnership with Auburn Maternity, Family Planning Australia, Safe Start and MotherSafe. The program addresses advanced maternal age in pregnancy, mental health of all the family and concerns about contraception. It includes a health education program, videos for men and women and a tour of local Family Planning clinics. community understanding and ensuring an inclusive and respectful transition to Woolgoolga High School for all primary school students.

NSW Department of Communities and Justice convenes multicultural consultative forums for child protection related issues

The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) Community Services Multicultural Consultation Group (MCG) convened quarterly meetings with 14 members representing NSW peak multicultural agencies. The MCG provides a state-level consultative forum for DCJ to receive input on child protection related issues, promote best practice and support continuous improvement in culturally and linguistically competent service delivery to children, young people and their families. Consultations were held on DCJ's Targeted Earlier Intervention Program, Forced Marriage Legal Protections, Anti-Racism Unit, Youth Justice programs, Refugee Settlement in Illawarra and Emergency Foster Care Recruitment Project.

Local school showcases cultural communities

Woolgoolga is home to a large Sikh population and over a third of students come from Punjabi speaking homes. These students are supported by two community language teachers. Woolgoolga Public School receives a significant number of non-local enrolment applications from Indian families resulting from strong support structures for students from Punjabi backgrounds.

Two local community language teachers coordinated a combined schools professional learning day at both of Woolgoolga's *gurdwaras* (Sikh temples) in Term 3, 2024. Staff from Woolgoolga, Sandy Beach and Corindi Public Schools joined Woolgoolga High School staff to develop an understanding of and appreciation for the Sikh religion.

The Sikh temples have since extended the invitation to local schools to bring students to the temples to learn about Sikhism and Indian culture. This is with a view to broadening community understanding and ensuring an inclusive and respectful transition to Woolgoolga High School for all primary school students.

Office of Sport introduces cultural sports to the wider community

Originating from the Malay-Thai peninsula, Sepak Takraw is a sport that combines the skills of football, volleyball, and martial arts into one. Sometimes described as Kick Volleyball, the game is played with a rattan ball and involves teams of three players each who use their feet, head, knees and chest to hit the ball over a net.

The Office of Sport (OoS) brought together Illawarra based multicultural service providers to plan for a weekly Sepak Takraw program, introducing the unique game to the Illawarra. Sepak Takraw has now become a consistent activity at existing events and initiatives provided by the multicultural sector. The project delivery enables a unique cross-cultural focus by including Traditional Indigenous Games in each of these activities.

Moving forward, using the knowledge gained from the 2024 Culturally Inclusive Games programs, the OoS will guide and assist the Illawarra sport sector to grow and include culturally diverse choices for participation in sport, strengthening community connection and inclusion.

NSW State Emergency Service works with community to improve disaster preparedness

During the year, the NSW State Emergency Service (NSW SES) has been actively involved in community engagement. The NSW SES Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities Project developed targeted in-language communication materials in 15 languages and established a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities stakeholder network. This project was initiated in recognition of the need to create more inclusive, innovative and meaningful risk awareness and preparedness communications, so that all communities are equally aware and informed of the natural hazards of flood, storm and tsunami.



Embedding inclusive practices in the public sector



Under the MPSP focus area of leadership, the MPSP framework encourages agencies to demonstrate leadership in culturally inclusive practice. The following examples demonstrate how agencies are improving employee skills in culturally inclusive practices and building a culture that promotes diversity.

NSW Health Education and Training Institute increase staff cultural competency

Health Education and Training Institute (HETI) leaders have mandated comprehensive cultural competence training for all staff, tailored to address the needs of communities. HETI's leadership has also actively promoted and supported the development of multilingual health resources, some of which have been recognised in the NSW Multicultural Health Communication Awards. These resources include multilingual health information portals and educational materials that cater to the diverse linguistic needs of communities.

NSW Department of Education improves plans to deal with religious intolerance in schools

In 2024, DoE reviewed existing professional learning courses for opportunities to build staff capacity to recognise religious intolerance and bullying and understand its impacts. To support this, DoE increased collaboration with faith organisations to strengthen understanding of specific religions through professional learning for staff. Additionally, K-12 curriculum resources across Key Learning Areas were reviewed for opportunities to increase content that explores and promotes religious diversity to support greater understanding of religious communities and their experiences. and Culturally Responsive Self-Assessment Tool.

Office of the Director of Public Prosecution increases staff ability to work with interpreters

The Office of the Director of Public Prosecution's (ODPP) Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Coordinator worked with the Witness Assistance Services (WAS) team to develop and publish a quick reference guide on engaging interpreting services. The guide was designed to help Legal and WAS staff understand when an interpreter may be needed, how to book the services, and things to keep in mind when using interpreter services. In conjunction, Professor Ludmila Stern (UNSW, Masters programs in Interpreting and Translation) was invited to deliver a session on the topic of Legal professionals working with interpreters: can policy improve practice? which delved into interpreting as a profession, considerations to ensuring interpreter suitability, and the process of briefing interpreters.

Justice Health NSW improves staff ability to respond to the needs of refugees

Through the Harmony and Healing Project, Justice Health NSW developed a NSW Framework for a Trauma-Informed and Culturally Responsive Workforce (the Framework) to enable staff to confidently work in a trauma-informed and culturally responsive way within secure settings. The project was funded by the Ministry of Health's first Refugee Health Flexible Fund.

Alongside the Framework are a range of supporting resources to support leaders, managers and staff to develop their individual, team and organisational capability in trauma-informed and culturally responsive practice. They include the Trauma-Informed and Culturally Responsive Organisational Capability Checklist and Trauma-Informed and Culturally Responsive Self-Assessment Tool.

NSW Department of Education builds anti-racism capabilities in schools

The Anti-Racism in Action program was delivered to 119 teachers from 61 schools in 2023 and 2024. The program includes a full-day professional learning for Stage 3 teaching staff who are then supported to deliver a sequence of eight lessons in their classrooms. Students are supported to identify, prevent and understand the impacts of racism, as well as to respond effectively and confidently as anti-racism upstanders.



Recognising the value of cultural diversity



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Under the MPSP framework area of leadership, agencies are supported to lead by example in fostering respect for cultural diversity and maintaining community support for cultural diversity.

NSW Police Force showcases the art of refugees

Refugee Week was celebrated in June 2024 with an art exhibition by refugee artists at NSW Police Headquarters in collaboration with Settlement Services International. The exhibit involved artists who have had refugee and trauma experiences talking about their art, engaging attendees, and exploring the value of storytelling through art. The theme for this year's art exhibition was Finding Freedom through Family. A collaborative piece was also created by the artists and was the centrepiece of the exhibition.



NSW students explore culture and identity through public speaking

The DoE Multicultural Perspectives Public Speaking Competition for students in Stage 2 and Stage 3 provides an opportunity for positive cultural expression and for students to develop an understanding of Australian multicultural society. The range of topics provided for speakers prompts thoughtful enquiry into the nature of issues such as prejudice and racism, helping students to consider the broad concept of what it means to belong in a multicultural society, and to challenge pre-conceived notions of identity. The messages conveyed through the competition broaden the understanding of both speakers and the diverse audiences who participate in the program.

Feedback from experienced adjudicators helps guide students to a broader understanding of multiculturalism and its many facets. The competition also encourages students to explore their own personal experiences and gives them an opportunity to research their own family and cultural backgrounds. This contributes to the building of positive inter-generational relationships and allows students to develop greater understanding of their own cultural heritage and identity.

In 2023, 2,009 students participated in the competition. In 2024, 1,929 students participated.

Sydney Opera House celebrates local communities

The Sydney Opera House's Concert Hall Northern Foyer was turned into a community-focused African bazaar to coincide with a performance by Benin-born singer and songwriter Angelique Kidjo. This community activation created a space where audiences who were new to the Opera House would feel welcome. More than 300 ticket-holders attended the bazaar, which included a live percussion workshop with Lucky Lartey and stalls from Ki-Simba and The Social Outfit.



Using data to improve services



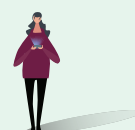
Under the MPSP focus area of planning, agencies are encouraged to collect and analyse data about the cultural and linguistic diversity of their communities, customers and clientele to ensure an evidence-based approach to planning services and designing systems and policies.

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NSW Department of Education ensures schools are well equipped to support diverse students

DoE's needs-based funding model allocates resources to schools each year based on identified school and student needs. To ensure schools are well equipped to support their diverse student populations and communities, four equity loadings – Aboriginal background, socio-economic background, low level adjustment for disability, and English language proficiency – are provided to address the needs of student cohorts with additional learning needs. In addition, schools receive targeted funding for individual students who require high or moderate level adjustments for disability, newly arrived students and students from refugee backgrounds.

Data collected through the EAL/D Annual Survey is used to determine the equity loading for English language proficiency allocated to schools to support the English language development of EAL/D learners. Through the survey, schools also report on the English language needs of their refugee, international and Aboriginal EAL/D learners. Schools receive the equity loading for English Language Proficiency as an EAL/D teacher allocation and/or flexible funding.



NSW Ombudsman improves service delivery to communities

NSW Ombudsman has improved analysis of its complaints data to ensure better understanding of demographic variables. This has enabled the agency to focus its efforts to improve awareness of, and service delivery to, our culturally diverse community.

Cancer Institute NSW develops data dashboard

The Cancer Institute NSW has developed a unique tool that provides access to granular cultural diversity information on communities for health service planning. The Multicultural Data Explorer dashboard includes distinctive visualisations on birthplace, ancestry, language spoken at home, and indigenous status by district, local government area and suburb. The data was extracted from the 2021 Census and supports viewing, analysing and reporting of demographic data to support local cancer service planning. Narrative information was also embedded to enable an equity-first lens for decision making, financial investment, and monitoring. The Dashboard metrics from a three-month period in 2024 indicate 694 users and 1,146 sessions.

Fire and Rescue NSW improves firefighters' ability to respond to community needs

Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW) successfully delivered the NSW Reconstruction Authority Disaster Risk Reduction Fund research program to develop evidence-based approaches to mitigate fire and emergency risks in cultural communities. The project addressed key questions about communication accuracy, the validity of reports linking preventable fires to cultural practices and the potential for building emergency service capability through culturally competency communication.

Internally, the program used the research to equip firefighters with tools and knowledge for effective cross-cultural engagement, including a multicultural engagement toolkit. Externally, the program co-designed a prototype smartphone app that gamified prevention and preparedness. The program also established a multiagency reference panel and adopted a community-led approach, engaging with diverse populations across four LGAs. The approach demonstrated the potential for stronger more sustainable outcomes through collaborative partnerships.



A refreshed MPSP framework

Multicultural NSW implemented a review of the MPSP (the Review) from November 2023 to February 2024. The Review was a commitment made under the Multicultural NSW Strategic Plan 2021-2025, *Stronger Together*. The Review aimed to refine and streamline reporting processes and better support agencies in observing the

Multicultural Principles in the conduct of their affairs. The refreshed MPSP framework will feature measurable, outcome-based indicators and targets to measure impact and progress over time. The refreshed framework will drive action in the design, operation and implementation of policy, programs and service delivery for the people of NSW.

Appendix A: NSW Faith Affairs Council - 2024 statement of activities

Report and review of the NSW Faith Affairs Council

This statement of activities is prepared in accordance with the Terms of Reference for the NSW Faith Affairs Council (the Council), which require that a short annual statement of activities by the Council will be included in the Community Relations Report, an independent annual report by Multicultural NSW to the NSW Parliament on the state of community relations in NSW.

The Council's Terms of Reference further require that a review of the Council, including its Terms of Reference, be undertaken one year after its establishment. This statement is also prepared to inform that review, by outlining activities undertaken in accordance with the Council's functions under its Terms of Reference. The Council submits this statement of activities as evidence that the Council has been fulfilling its functions, that the Council's functions remain valid, and that the Council's Terms of Reference remain appropriate.

Background to the establishment of the Council and first meeting (2023)

As a 2023 election commitment, the Minister for Multiculturalism established the Council in late 2023 under Section 11 of the *Multicultural NSW Act 2000* as standing committee of the Minister's agency, Multicultural NSW.

12 members of the 19-member Council were determined by a nomination and appointment process based on the most recent Census data relating to religious diversity in NSW and assessment criteria as included in the Council's Terms of Reference. The founding 12 members met on 27 September 2023 for a Council inception meeting, where the Council's draft Terms of Reference were discussed.

The Minister for Multiculturalism appointed seven additional members following an open application and selection process based on the assessment criteria. All 19 Council members have

an initial 12-month term, with the opportunity for reappointment for a maximum of up to four years. Members are listed below.

The Chief Executive Officer of Multicultural NSW is a non-voting, ex-officio member of the Council, in addition to the other 19 members. Multicultural NSW provides secretariat support to the Council.

The first full meeting of the 19-member Council was convened on 29 November 2023. At that meeting, the Council's Terms of Reference were endorsed subject to minor amendments and members nominated and appointed the Council Chair (The Right Reverend Dr Michael Stead). The Council established a Code of Conduct and Register of Interests to ensure transparency and accountability during Council deliberations. The Council also issued its first joint statement – an 'Interfaith Resolution' calling for respect and compassion during a difficult time for many communities.

Meetings held in 2024

Following the first full meeting in November 2023, the Council held scheduled quarterly meetings in 2024: on 31 January, 30 April, 3 July and 6 November.

In addition, Council members came together out-of-session on several occasions in response to emerging issues and to foster enhanced collaboration.

Activities undertaken in fulfilment of the Council's functions

1. Improve the NSW Government's understanding and competency in relation to policies, programs and services that affect religious communities and people of faith in New South Wales

In its first 12 months, the Council provided a valuable formal mechanism for the NSW Government and NSW Government agencies to consult with members on policies, programs, services, prospective legislation and the implementation of legislation that may affect religious communities and people of faith in NSW.

Functions of the Council

The Council is established as a formal consultative mechanism to:

Improve the NSW Government's understanding and competency in relation to policies, programs and services that affect religious communities and people of faith in New South Wales.

Identify opportunities for enhanced collaboration between the NSW Government and religious communities on initiatives that benefit people in New South Wales irrespective of their religious affiliation.

Facilitate the co-ordination of faith-based organisations to support communities during times of need.

Provide advice on the priorities and emerging trends within religious communities.

Propose solutions to support and enhance community wellbeing, community safety, and community harmony across religious differences, including in response to emerging issues or events relating to religious intolerance.

Facilitate ongoing dialogue between the NSW Government, religious communities, and between members.

Consider relevant issues raised by religious communities that are referred to the Council for consideration.

The Council's scope is limited to consultations on current or prospective matters.

The Council:

- was consulted by Anti-Discrimination NSW on the prospective implementation of the *Conversion Practices Ban Act 2024*
- participated in consultation forums with the NSW Chief Health Officer on the implementation of the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2022*
- discussed the NSW Law Reform Commission's review the effectiveness of section 93Z of the *Crimes Act 1900* (NSW) in addressing serious racial and religious vilification in NSW
- established an Education Working Group to work with the NSW Department of Education on a range of issues that affect people of faith in NSW public schools, including informing the development of a Religious Intolerance Helpline and a review of the Department's Controversial Issues Policy, and advocating for improved data collection on religious diversity in schools
- participating in the Office of the Children's Guardian's Religious Sector Community of Practice in relation to the NSW Child Safe Scheme and the implementation of Child Safe Standards.

Some members also provided input to the NSW Government to inform its position on the *Equality Legislation Amendment (LGBTIQ+) Bill 2023*.

2. Identify opportunities for enhanced collaboration between the NSW Government and religious communities on initiatives that benefit people in New South Wales irrespective of their religious affiliation

In 2024, Council members participated in a range of NSW Government forums and initiatives benefitting people in NSW, irrespective of their religious affiliation or lack of religious affiliation. Council members participated in:

- the Premier's Harmony Dinner in March
- the NSW Government's Social Media Summit in October
- the NSW Government's Strengthening Social Cohesion Conference in October
- the Premier's Community BBQ reception for His Majesty King Charles III in October
- the NSW Government Diwali Celebration Dinner and Sydney Opera House illumination celebrating Diwali in November.

3. Facilitate the co-ordination of faith-based organisations to support communities during times of need

The Council provides an opportunity to better coordinate multi-faith responses to support people and communities in times of need. Activities in 2024 include:

- the Council received a submission on 'Coming Together to Help Those in Need' and appointed a working group to bring a proposal to a future meeting of the Council
- the Council established a Chaplaincy Working Group that is working with the Civil Chaplaincy Advisory Committee to better coordinate representation to NSW Government agencies on the provision of chaplaincy services to those in need in hospitals and prisons and during times of disaster
- as detailed under function 5 below, the Council played a key role in coordinating multi-faith responses to emerging issues that impacted community wellbeing, community safety and community harmony.

4. Provide advice on the priorities and emerging trends within religious communities

This is a core function of the Council that has informed all activities undertaken under the other Council functions.

5. Propose solutions to support and enhance community wellbeing, community safety, and community harmony across religious differences, including in response to emerging issues or events relating to religious intolerance

2024 was a challenging year for many communities and the Council played a key role in coordinating multi-faith responses to emerging issues that impacted community wellbeing, community safety and community harmony. Activities include:

- on 16 April, following the stabbing of a priest in his church in Wakeley and subsequent rioting and affray targeting police and first responders, Council members joined other faith leaders to issue a joint statement calling for calm, care and compassion. The statement also reinforced the importance of instilling trust and confidence in the work of police and first responders. A second joint statement was issued on 19 April
- On 21 April, Council members joined a candlelight vigil honouring victims of the 13 April stabbing spree in Bondi Junction that killed six people and injured 12 others

- The Council came together for an out-of-session meeting on 1 October and issued a joint statement reaffirming its commitment to working together for peace, harmony and understanding in response to overseas conflict
- The Council issues joint statements on 11 December and 16 December condemning incidents of antisemitism and Islamophobia and calling for unity.

6. Facilitate ongoing dialogue between the NSW Government, religious communities, and between members

The Council has provided a forum for dialogue between the NSW Government, religious communities, and between members. Activities include:

- the Commissioner of Police, Karen Webb APM and Assistant Commissioner Brett McFadden APM, NSW Police Force, were invited to address the Council at its July meeting
- the NSW Police Force Engagement and Hate Crimes Unit presented to the Council at its November meeting on reporting hate crimes and hate incidents
- members have formed new inter-faith relationships and have invited each other to participate in a range of community and faith-based events outside of formal Council business.

7. Consider relevant issues raised by religious communities that are referred to the Council for consideration

In addition to considering issues raised by members on behalf of their religious communities, the Council has received correspondence from faith-based organisations acknowledging the important work of the Council. It has also received correspondence from a range of non-religious organisations, including some local government councils, on issues relating to the Council's functions.

8. The Council's scope is limited to consultations on current or prospective matters

The Council has only focused on current or prospective matters.

Members of the NSW Faith Affairs Council

Right Rev. Dr Michael Stead – Bishop of South Sydney, Anglican Church of Australia (Chair)

Surinder Jain – National Vice President, Hindu Council of Australia

Imam Shadi Alsuleiman – President, Australian National Imams Council (ANIC)

David Ossip – President, NSW Jewish Board of Deputies

Rev. Dr Steve Bartlett – Director of Ministries, Baptist Churches of NSW/ACT

Rev. Ralph Estherby – National Director/CEO for ACC Chaplaincy Australia, Australian Christian Churches

Monica Doumit – Director Public Affairs & Engagement, Catholic Church in Australia, Archdiocese of Sydney

Darren Bark – Co-Chair, Better Balanced Futures

Murray Norman – Inter-Church Commission on Religious Education in Schools (ICCOREIS)

Rev. Heather Topp – Interfaith Minister, Buddhist Council of NSW

Dr Ali Al Samail – Resident Scholar (Sheikh), Australian Ahl Al Bait Islamic Centre

Rev. Dr Manas Ghosh – Religious Minister, Uniting Church in Australia Synod of NSW/ACT

Rev. Bill Crews AM – Superintendent Minister, Ashfield Parish Mission

Rev. Dr Kamal Weerakoon – Religious Minister, Presbyterian Church of Australia in NSW

Gawaine Powell Davies – Chairperson, Buddhist Council of NSW

Fr Christophoros Krikelis – Chancellor, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia

Darshan Singh Gill – Patron, Australian Sikh Association

Katherine Xavier – Interfaith Commission Chair, Catholic Diocese of Parramatta

Monica Chahoud – Melkite Charitable Foundation President, Melkite Catholic Eparchy of Australia, New Zealand and all Oceania

Joseph La Posta – Chief Executive Officer, Multicultural NSW (ex officio)



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