Australian Government

Attorney-General's Department

Multicultural Access and Equity Plan | 2017–2019
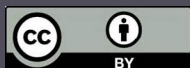
Multicultural Access and Equity Plan

The department's *Multicultural Access and Equity Plan 2017-2019* (MAEP) provides a framework to support our commitment to multicultural access and inclusion in the way we work and in the outcomes we deliver in line with our mission of 'achieving a just and secure society'.

This MAEP is guided by and fulfils our obligations under the *Australian Government Multicultural Access and Equity Policy*. The MAEP is also an important way for us to fulfil some key objectives outlined in our Diversity Strategy to ensure that all staff have access to inclusive and flexible work practices and are assisted by structures, conditions and systems that support their professional and personal circumstances. We have an opportunity to leverage our unique position in Government to show leadership in the community and the broader Australian Public Service.

Fundamental to achieving our mission is our ability to reflect the needs of communities in the development and delivery of laws, policy, programmes and services.

The MAEP aims to support a culture that embraces multicultural access and inclusion and is informed by the following six commitments: leadership, engagement, responsiveness, performance, capability and openness.

The MAEP also showcases examples of our work.

.

Our commitments to multicultural access and equity

Leadership

We all play a leadership role in ensuring that multicultural access and equity considerations are embedded into our organisation's culture.

- Promoting awareness of access and equity principles to staff.
- Demonstrating a commitment to addressing multicultural access and equity issues.
- Looking for opportunities to recognise and promote examples of strong performance and innovation in multicultural access and equity.

Engagement

Effective engagement and communication with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people is essential to ensure that legislation, policy, programmes and services are informed by and responsive to the needs of the community.

- Considering a range of communication techniques for engaging with stakeholders from different backgrounds, including using plain English, translators and interpreters where appropriate.
- Ensuring staff are familiar with guidelines for communicating with CALD audiences and the use of translating and interpreting services.
- Including CALD stakeholders in consultation about policy design, planning, delivery and evaluation, where appropriate.

Performance

Through feedback and data collection, we are continually seeking to improve our multicultural access and equity performance.

- Providing feedback mechanisms which are accessible to all stakeholders.
- Investigating ways to capture useful and useable data with respect to CALD stakeholders.
- Using client data where applicable to evaluate the delivery of services, programmes and outcomes.

Responsiveness

For the department to achieve its objectives, policies, programmes and services must be accessible and responsive to the needs of CALD communities.

- Considering the needs of a diverse client base in all aspects of departmental work including strategic planning, policy development, programme design, service delivery and assessment (including outsourced services).
- Including multicultural access and equity considerations in any whole-of-government standards or guidelines developed by the department.
- Building the cost of language services into procurement and programmes as appropriate, including for web content aimed at public audiences.

Capability

Investing in cultural competency enables us to engage effectively with culturally diverse stakeholders.

- Ensuring staff are supported and appropriately equipped with cultural awareness and competency skills.
- Encouraging employees to share language proficiencies, to facilitate language exchange and cross-cultural understanding.
- Participating in events that raise awareness and celebrate cultural diversity.

Openness

A transparent and open approach supports cross-agency outcomes for multicultural access and equity.

- Reporting on multicultural access and equity outcomes.
- Providing information on our multicultural access and equity performance to the Department of Social Services for an annual whole-of-government snapshot.

Accountability and reporting

We are all responsible for considering multicultural access, equity and inclusion when developing and delivering policy, programmes and services – both internally and externally – and we all need to be aware of how to best engage with CALD communities. Resources such as the *Multicultural Language Services Best Practice Guide* which covers the use of interpreters and translators can support us with meeting this responsibility.

We will report annually to our internal Diversity Council and externally to the Department of Social Services (DSS) on what we've done across the department to support our ongoing commitment to multicultural access, equity and inclusion. Once a year, each business unit within the department will be asked to reflect on what they have done to support the six commitments in this plan: leadership, engagement, responsiveness, performance, capability and openness, and to highlight achievements and challenges.

DSS will use this reporting to prepare an annual snapshot of the policy's implementation for the Australian Multicultural Council (AMC). Every three years DSS, in conjunction with the AMC, prepares a consolidated whole-of-government review report on the policy's performance to the Government for tabling in Parliament. These reports can be found at: https://www.dss.gov.au/

On 21 October 2016, the Digital Youth Forum to counter hate speech and promote diversity online was held in Melbourne. The event was co-hosted by the Digital Industry Group Incorporated and the department, bringing together 150 people from around Australia to promote tolerance, diversity, and positive engagement online.

The Digital Youth Forum was one of a range of outcomes from the Council of Australian Governments' December 2015 announcement of new countering violent extremism initiatives. It sought to empower youth as future leaders to use digital platforms to tell their stories and engage in conversations about issues that directly affect them and their families. These young voices provided a powerful alternative to the hate and division that can be found online.

Key stakeholders on the day included:

- Rosie and Lucy Thomas from anti-bullying platform *Project Rockit* facilitated the event and encouraged the audience to create real social change.

- Advocacy groups *All Together Now, Foundation for Young Australians* (FYA), and *ReachOut* ran workshops to teach participants how to identify and respond to hate speech online, how to leverage their skills as leaders, and how to promote inclusion and cross-cultural collaboration online.

- Representatives from Google, Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft and Yahoo shared their expertise and knowledge on what it means to be a 'good digital citizen'.

A key outcome of the forum was stories being shared that promote identity, belonging and diversity to counter and undermine material that promotes hate, dissention or violence. Participants were encouraged to develop live content throughout the day by filming themselves in the mobile YouTube studio and posting it with the Twitter hashtag #digiengage. Within hours the hashtag was trending and was one of the top three tags in Melbourne that day.

The forum was applauded for generating frank and open discussion of issues such as racism and online hate and extremism, social inclusion, mental health and online safety. Participants spoke positively about their experience of meeting other people who all want to make a difference. As our future leaders, they walked away confident they can inspire others to tackle violence and hate speech online by sharing positive messages and stories that show just how accepting and tolerant a society we are.

Family Law Branch

Legally-Assisted and Culturally Appropriate Dispute Resolution pilots: Family Relationship Centres

The government has committed to addressing the particular needs of Indigenous and CALD families experiencing family violence.

To support this, the department, through the Family Law Branch, has provided funding to implement Legally-Assisted and Culturally Appropriate Dispute Resolution pilots in eight Family Relationship Centres across Australia since June 2017. These targeted early interventions aim to assist families to resolve post-separation disputes in a safe and culturally appropriate way, recognising the special needs of their families, with access to interpreters and avoiding the need to go to court.

The pilots will be evaluated by the Australian National University's National Centre for Indigenous Studies in mid-2019, to highlight the successes and challenges of this pilot, and provide recommendations for its continuance. The success of the pilots will be based on whether Indigenous and CALD families receive adequate support to resolve their post-separation disputes through the Family Relationship Centre mediation process, and did not need to go to court.

Family Advocacy and Support Services Profile – Integrated Legal Assistance in Family Law

The government has committed $18.5 million to deliver integrated duty lawyer and family violence support services under Action 3.10 of the Third Action Plan of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*. These Family Advocacy and Support Services (FASS) are administered by the department.

The FASS are designed to assist families moving between the state and federal court systems, complementing specialist services available in state and territory courts. Many families involved in family law matters have complex needs and may be involved in matters across the family law, child protection and family violence systems. The FASS will prioritise clients who face additional barriers to accessing assistance, such as Indigenous and CALD clients, clients with a disability and clients from the LGBTIQ community.

Legal aid commissions in each state and territory are delivering the services in family law court registries, and local courts in the Northern Territory. The FASS will also provide support in seven circuit court locations across Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania. The commissions are working together with family violence support services, including multicultural assistance services, to ensure that multiple client needs can be identified and supported.

The FASS duty lawyers are providing clients with discrete legal advice and assistance, including drafting court documents, understanding orders, and assisting victims to access protective measures such as alternative ways to give evidence. Family violence social support workers are delivering trauma informed services to families, improving the safety of victims and children when engaging with the courts. They are also making referrals to additional support services, including specialist Indigenous and multicultural services.

The funding for these services includes the development of a community legal education resource, currently being prepared by National Legal Aid. This resource will provide information and practical guidelines about how family violence is managed within and between the family law, child protection and criminal law systems. The resource will include information for victims and perpetrators, and will be available in multiple languages to increase accessibility.

The department has contracted Inside Policy, an Indigenous-owned consultancy, to evaluate the FASS. The evaluation will consider the benefits of the service to clients and the courts and assess whether it has achieved its intended short-term outcomes. Early feedback from legal aid commissions is that the service is meeting a crucial need and that their lawyers' enhanced ability to intervene early and liaise with social workers is helping them to better identify clients' non-legal needs and support them to access other supports.

People Smuggling and Trafficking Section Profile

Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime

The 45 member country Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime provides a regional platform for the Government to work with multicultural stakeholders to strengthen responses to transnational crime in the Asia-Pacific. The department co-chairs the Bali Process Working Group on Trafficking in Persons (TIPWG), alongside the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The TIPWG is comprised of the 15 regional countries most affected by irregular migration, as well as the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The TIPWG has developed a series of best-practice regional policy guides on criminalising people smuggling and trafficking in persons and identifying and protecting victims of trafficking. In 2015, a Drafting Committee was established to develop the guides on identifying and protecting victims of trafficking, co-chaired by the department and the Indonesian Attorney-General's Office, and comprising subject matter experts from volunteer Bali Process states. To develop the guides, the Drafting Committee met several times and held a consultation workshop for the full Bali Process membership. The workshop enabled all interested regional states to contribute to the guides and share their experiences relating to identification and protection of victims.

The suite of guides enables sharing of best practice approaches to combat transnational crime across the region. They are readily accessible online and have been translated into several regional languages including Lao, Thai and Vietnamese. An ongoing priority of the TIPWG is to promote and provide training on the guides to regional countries to facilitate their effective implementation and use.

The department's work with a wide variety of multicultural stakeholders through the Bali Process is a strong example of a collaborative regional approach to strengthen the capacity of policy makers and practitioners to combat transnational crime in the region.

Cultural diversity remains under-represented at the senior leadership levels of Australian organisations. Dr Tim Soutphommasane, the Australian Race Discrimination Commissioner, addressed the department on the theme, *Reflections on cultural and linguistic diversity – Challenges, opportunities and leadership*. He identified that 14 per cent of the Australian population has a non European or Indigenous cultural background, while only five per cent of CEOs within ASX200 companies have such a background.

The Dr Soutphommasane discussed the barriers to cultural diversity, what we need to do to overcome bias, and why open discussion about race and culture should be encouraged. He emphasised that cultural diversity was important because it was the *right* thing to do.

As at 30 June 2017, the department's CALD staff represent 4.5 per cent of the workforce and Indigenous staff represent 1.6 per cent of the workforce, based on voluntary reporting.

Over the last 12 months the department has implemented a number of initiatives to build on our culture of diversity, flexibility and inclusion, including developing and implementing the *Diversity Strategy* and *Flexibility and Inclusion Action Plan*.

In June 2017, staff from CALD backgrounds discussed their experiences of working in the APS, including how the department recruits, promotes, and supports employees from CALD backgrounds.

The sessions were hosted by the Secretary, Mr Chris Moraitis PSM, and the department's CALD Champion and Deputy Secretary, Mr Iain Anderson. Staff were also invited to contribute anonymously via email or through the CALD Network about how the department can work to dismantle barriers to employment for people from CALD backgrounds and increase representation of staff from CALD backgrounds in leadership. Feedback from these sessions was provided as input to the APS Secretaries Equality and Diversity Council.

These insights will also inform the department's involvement with the Cultural Diversity and Leadership pilot program, initiated by Dr Soutphommasane, and the Secretary's role as a Male Champion of Change.

In September 2017, the department facilitated a CALD panel event which brought together, Ayesha Perry (AGD), HK Yu PSM (PM&C), and Professor Deep Saini (University of Canberra) to promote examples of CALD leadership. The panel members shared their personal insights into how their CALD background shaped their experience in their professional lives. The panel recognised that the APS leadership should reflect the wider, multicultural Australian society, and what could be done to achieve this. The underlying message was that we should *embrace* diversity, instead of simply, *tolerating* it.