

Labor's **Multicultural Engagement Taskforce: Report**



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Messages from the Taskforce.



Message from Peter Khalil MP (Chair):

I was honoured to have been selected by Labor Leader Anthony Albanese to chair this important Taskforce. As the son of Egyptian migrants who fled their home country in search of a safer and brighter future, I understand what it is like to grow up in a multicultural community, to speak multiple languages at home, to face prejudice, to grapple with identity and belonging and to reconcile my heritage with being Australian. I was honoured that this lived experience was acknowledged by Anthony when setting up the Taskforce.

I would like to thank everyone who assisted the Taskforce's work, especially those who have made submissions and who spoke with us so frankly. I also appreciate that everyone was willing to adapt to the "new normal" of COVID-19, providing evidence by Zoom and persevering despite occasional technological challenges!



Message from Anne Stanley MP (Secretary):

It has been a great privilege to hear from multicultural communities from around the country. It is clear from submissions and round tables that there are many structural and systemic issues that affect our multicultural communities. The information collected from our deliberations will better inform policies and programs to ensure that all Australians live in a fair and egalitarian society.

Executive summary.

Since introducing the Racial Discrimination Act in 1973, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) has championed multicultural policy as a cornerstone of Australian values and social cohesion.

The Multicultural Engagement Taskforce was launched in December 2019 to engage multicultural Australia to help inform, with as many voices as possible, Federal Labor's policies and the role of multiculturalism in social cohesion and Australian identity.

The Taskforce undertook consultation throughout 2020 and concluded its consultation in December 2020.

Through consultations we explored the following areas, as outlined in our Terms of Reference:

- Quality of access to Commonwealth government services.
- Current support provided in the areas of small business, entrepreneurship and innovation.
- Barriers and needs regarding access to Commonwealth government services, networking and partnership opportunities that help link community groups to Commonwealth government services.

We welcomed submissions in all forms including in writing, audio or video and in any language. We were grateful to receive more than 60 submissions from groups and individuals with input into how we could improve policies and services for Australia's multicultural communities.

We heard that:

- Too often people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities are not aware of government services and the support that is available to them.
- In many cases business support that is available is not accessible for CALD communities, particularly new and emerging migrant groups.
- There is considerable potential that is not being utilised for partnership between local, state and federal government, and between the Federal Government and various non-government and grassroots organisations to aid the access of CALD communities to services.

Given the timing of our work, our conversations often came back to the particular struggles for multicultural communities from COVID-19. In many ways, COVID-19 placed a magnifying glass on many of the issues multicultural communities faced outside the pandemic – access to services, adequacy of translation services and official information, and the persistent threat of racism.

Executive summary cont.



We heard that in some cases, like the use of community radio to communicate health messages by the Victorian, Queensland and Western Australian Governments, successful strategies were used to reach CALD communities. But too often, CALD communities were sidelined by the Federal Government, particularly when it came to the use of Google translation services, the reliance on digital and social media for vital information and restrictions on economic measures like JobKeeper.

We also saw that CALD communities were particularly vulnerable to the rise in racism and right-wing extremism in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic. The rise in racist and bigoted views are being felt by many CALD communities and pose a direct threat to the safety of CALD communities as well as broader social cohesion in Australia.

The Taskforce heard from Carol, a Chinese Australian community leader in Cockburn, WA. She told us the story of her son who was in China in January 2020 for Lunar

New Year. When he returned home, the local Chinese Australian community encouraged him and other returned travellers to isolate and stay at home. This was long before any mandatory isolation was introduced by the federal or state governments. Carol told us how the Chinese community did grocery shopping for returned travellers to encourage them to stay at home. She said the community felt targeted by the media which only **“tells the one side of the story”**.

The COVID-19 pandemic showed how important successful relationships with CALD communities are to the health and wellbeing of the broader Australian community. We saw that recently arrived migrants were generally more vulnerable to contracting COVID-19. This is due to a range of factors including higher concentration in contact-facing jobs, insecure work and working multiple jobs. Their health and wellbeing is vital to all our health and wellbeing. This must be front and centre to the vaccine distribution program as we move forward.

Participants in this Taskforce expressed optimism that Australia can seize an opportunity after COVID-19 to promote multiculturalism as a positive, inclusive strategy that supports social cohesion and economic growth. However, participants also raised concerns that the general support for multiculturalism in Australia is at risk and cannot be taken for granted.

Consultation: the voices shaping our policy.

The Taskforce's main method of consultation was through roundtable discussions with CALD community leaders, local councillors, service providers, community organisations, business networks, ethnic peak bodies and individuals from our cities, suburbs and regional centres. The Taskforce commenced a series of roundtable consultations in Sydney, Wollongong and Melbourne, before moving the discussions online due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through these consultations we explored the following areas as laid out in our Terms of Reference. We also invited participants to comment more broadly on the future of multiculturalism in Australia as well as, in later consultations, the impact of COVID-19 on CALD communities.

The voices we heard.

Awareness of services

When migrants move to Australia, they often import the knowledge from their home country and know little about how services operate in Australia. Sameer Pandey, Parramatta City Councillor, pointed out that some in the **"Multicultural community have no idea what the NDIS is."**

Access to services

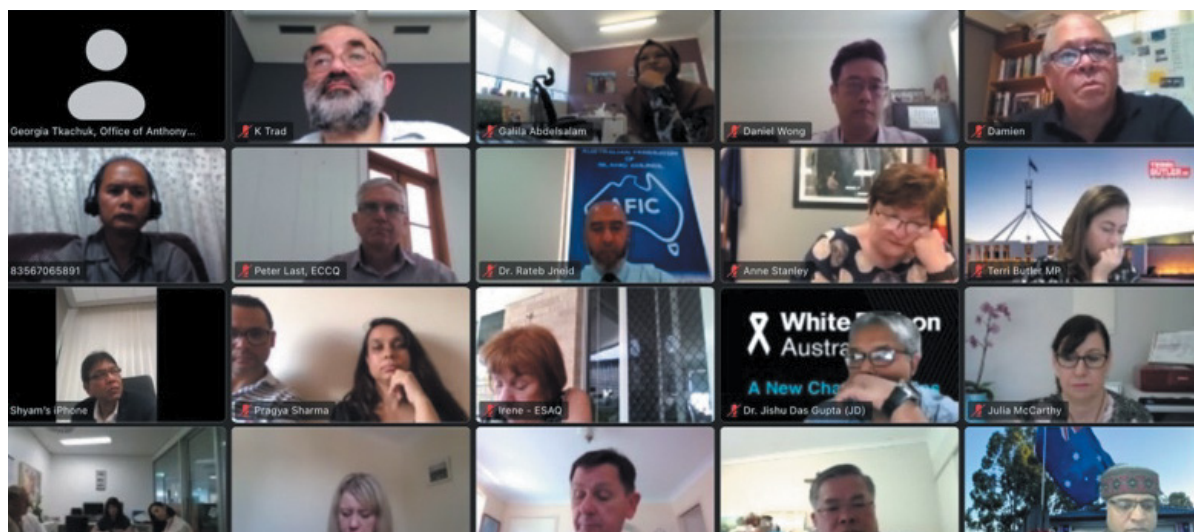
A representative from Connecting Community 4 Kids said **"Accessing any services people don't know where to start."**

As Vita Mezzatesta, a Victorian of Italian background, said **"Accessing services online isn't for everyone, it doesn't make it easier, it takes longer and things still get lost in the system... We want human to human help."**

Disability

The Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association (MDAA) of NSW said **"The NDIS is inaccessible for CALD community members to make an enquiry. There is a lack of anticipated need for translators..."**

The voices we heard cont.



Aged Care

The MDAA of NSW said **“People are dying waiting for their home care package to be approved.”**

“Many participants mentioned that Service providers and Aged Care Services are not using interpreters... causing a number of delays relating to their access for assistance.”

Representation

Yaz Mubarakai MLA WA Parliament said **“Equal representation builds trust in the institutions from the community and more community members want to participate.”**

Analyn Nobleza, a Queenslander of Filipino background said **“We should be treated neutral and fairly especially in terms of equality in work opportunities where we can serve and impart our knowledge to the community and to Australia as a whole.”**

Treatment of temporary visa holders

Dr Renu Narchal from the University of Western Sydney said **“International students need to be treated with a lot more dignity and respect. They are not just cash cows here.”**

Access to business

Sam Youssef from the Australian Arab Association said **“Immigrant dream [is] to start a business”.**

Charmaine Hunzwi from Incubate Foundation said **“No one knows where to start, no one knows where to go.”**

Corinne Kemp from Migrant Women in Business said **“the majority of [their] migrant and refugee clients still encounter significant barriers to engaging in the program successfully.”**

Issues of access to federal government services.

The Morrison Government has consistently failed to provide proper access to government services for CALD communities:

- Making government services accessible to CALD communities is no longer a priority for the Morrison Government. Reporting on equity access to government services is not mandated.¹
- There have been successive job cuts to government departments and agencies,²³ including 21,400 from the Australian Public Service since 2013, leading to fewer frontline staff.
- The Federal Government failed to get clear information to CALD communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. In some cases incorrect translations were used, which undermined our public health response.
- Critical services like NDIS applications are not tailored to the needs of CALD communities.
- There has been limited assistance to older CALD Australians applying for home care packages.

The Taskforce heard that accessing federal government services including Centrelink, the NDIS, Aged Care services and mental health support is often more difficult for people from a CALD background. Consistently, the following reasons emerged for these discrepancies:

1. A lack of awareness within some CALD communities about what services are available.
2. A lack of translation of information into relevant languages, or properly translating relevant information.
3. The increasing use of online and digital access and limited digital literacy in English in some CALD communities.

The difficulties in accessing federal government services are exacerbated by the lack of funding for multicultural and CALD specialised service providers.

As a consequence, CALD community members continually turn inwards to their own communities for support, rather than to Federal Government services.

1. Department of Home Affairs 2021, Multicultural Access and Equity in Government Services Report 2013-15, viewed 21 November 2020, <<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/multicultural-affairs/about-multicultural-affairs/access-and-equity>>.

2. Australian Government, Services Australia 2018-19 Annual Report, viewed 26 November 2020, <<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/annual-report-191019-v2.pdf>>.

3. Australian Government, Services Australia 2011-12 Annual Report, viewed 26 November 2020, <<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/dhs-annual-report-2011-12-full-report-web.pdf>>.

Issues of access to federal government services cont.

Awareness

A key message that emerged during the consultations was that CALD community members are too often not aware of what support is available.

Participants remarked that while translating and distributing government messaging about available support services is a start, it has limited reach and effectiveness.

Many CALD community members still feel that government services don't apply to them and their community. Even when community members are aware of the services that are available to them, many do not know how to go about accessing that support.

Language

In our consultations, participants stated that people don't want to reach out to access government services because they perceive their English to be poor.

Participants reflected on the importance of frontline staff with language skills and nuanced cultural understanding.

While many have functional spoken English, it may not extend to the written level required to access services. Those with weaker written English will struggle to answer forms correctly and give up attempting to access the service. For example, with My Aged Care all

correspondence and processing papers are in English and recipients must organise and collate information during the application process on their own. NDIS applications are difficult and often require multiple visits to support workers and clinicians.

Digital

The move of many services to online-only can make it harder for CALD communities to access those services. Many older members of CALD communities don't have access to the internet or a computer at home or don't feel confident accessing information and applying for assistance in this way. Community members want one-to-one assistance through the application process, not an online chat box or an automated call line.

Smaller service providers are missing out.

The Taskforce heard from multiple organisations that the government tender process is now geared towards large organisations who operate nationally rather than local or specialist service providers. These larger programs tend to have a one-size-fits-all approach to services and are unable to address the needs of specific CALD communities because it is not within their remit or in their capacity to do so. This shift has seen local and specialist service providers miss out on tenders and grants year after year.

Issues of access to federal government services cont.



Aged Care

Delays in approval for home care packages have left vulnerable older Australians without access to the care they need for long periods of time. CALD Australians face additional challenges, as often with ageing and dementia there is a reversion to one's first language. Yet there is limited in-language support for older CALD Australians and spots in multicultural aged care homes are limited. The Taskforce learnt that these complications can prevent older CALD Australians from living out the last years of their life with dignity and care.

Participants remarked on the limited funding for organisations that help older CALD Australians apply for home care packages.

The Taskforce recognises the need to meet the future demand for culturally-prepared care workers and care workers who can speak a second language, as well as provide for the cultural needs of the older person.

NDIS

A major issue that was brought to the attention of the Taskforce related to disability and the NDIS was stigma. In some CALD communities there is considerable stigma attached to disability and mental illness. There are community advocacy organisations working to overcome this stigma and to help people access the NDIS. These organisations are making a real difference in their communities but have limited scope due to funding restraints.

Participants informed the Taskforce that the Morrison Government's introduction of independent assessments for new NDIS applications will further complicate the application process. There is a further concern that independent assessments could be traumatic for many CALD community members who have fled conflict and violence.

Mental health

The challenges of COVID-19 in 2020 brought the importance of looking after mental health to the forefront. Despite federal, state and territory governments increased mental health support funding, CALD communities can struggle to access mental health support either in their language or from clinicians who understand their cultural background.

Issues of access to federal government services cont.

Awareness of mental illness within CALD communities is a concern. Currently there is no collection of national statistics on mental health in CALD communities. Participants suggested surveys on mental health should be broadened to collect data on this important statistic.

Impact of COVID-19

The Taskforce heard of the significant challenges CALD communities faced during the past year due to COVID-19. Community leaders struggled to keep up with the speed of changing government messages and disseminate that information within their community.

The communication challenge was heightened by combined factors: language barriers, lack of awareness of available services, a level of mistrust of government institutions, limited access to the internet and the lack of digital skills. This was exacerbated by COVID-19 restrictions which pushed socialising, service delivery, work and school to online delivery, magnifying the digital divide.

The use of Google Translate by the Federal Government to translate their messages was not only lazy, but dangerous. In some instances, these poorly translated messages resulted in incorrect and conflicting information about COVID-19 being distributed to CALD communities.

Participants remarked on the success of communicating health messages via community radio by the Victorian, Queensland and Western Australian Governments. It is especially important that critical government and health messaging can reach CALD communities, as recently arrived migrants are generally more vulnerable to contracting COVID-19. This is due to a range of factors including higher concentration in contact-facing jobs, insecure work and working multiple jobs.

Significant sections of CALD communities were unable to qualify for any federal government support. Temporary visa holders including international students, skilled visa holders, refugees and asylum seekers, were left out of the JobKeeper and JobSeeker payments.

This left people totally reliant on charities and the goodwill of their communities to simply put food on the table and survive.

The Taskforce heard how this exclusion from support, as well as comments from the Prime Minister that they should “go home” made temporary visa holders feel unwelcome, despite their contributions to the Australian economy and community community. This has tarnished Australia’s international reputation.

Issues of access to federal government support for CALD small business, entrepreneurship and innovation.

The Morrison Government has neglected CALD small business, entrepreneurship, innovation and employment and the value they provide to Australia's economy:

- Advertising for business support and grants fail to reach CALD communities.
- There are significant barriers in the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS) application process for CALD community applicants.

Small business, entrepreneurship and innovation

It has long been the dream of successive generations of migrants to start a small or family business.

Migrants have huge potential for entrepreneurship, innovation and contribution in the business sector.⁴ Studies have shown that migrants, including refugees, are more likely to be motivated into entrepreneurship.

The Centre for Policy Development's 2019 report on this issue found that "refugees are the most entrepreneurial migrants in Australia – nearly twice as likely to be entrepreneurs as Australian taxpayers as a whole."⁵

The Taskforce heard that this entrepreneurial drive can be from both necessity and opportunity.

However, starting a business in Australia as a migrant or person of CALD background can be complicated by a lack of awareness about available support, difficulties with access, poor suitability of support programs and limited coordination between federal agencies and business support and NGOs connected with migrant and refugee communities.

The Taskforce heard a variety of views on the availability of business support for recent migrants and people of CALD backgrounds. Some participants stated that there are a range of programs for mentorship and business support from local and state governments, while other participants were unable to find any appropriate support.

CALD small and family businesses struggled like many other businesses in 2020, but they also faced additional difficulties, including supporting employees on temporary visas who weren't eligible for JobKeeper. Some CALD employers that were eligible for

4. Regional Australia Institute (2019), Evidence of Migrant Business Ownership & Entrepreneurship in Regions, viewed 10 November 2020, <http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/home/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/2018_Final_Migrant-Business-Ownership-in-Regions.pdf>

5. Centre for Policy Development (2019), Seven Steps to SUCCESS: Enabling Refugee Entrepreneurs to Flourish, viewed 1 November 2020, <<https://cpd.org.au/2019/04/seven-steps-to-success-report/>>

Issues of access to federal government support for CALD small business, entrepreneurship and innovation.



JobKeeper or other government support grants, struggled to access these supports due to limitations in digital literacy.

Government messaging and advertising regarding business support is failing to reach many CALD communities. Some participants raised the point that a lot of business support and grants that were available during the COVID-19 crisis were advertised only on social media platforms, missing many demographic groups.

Accessing government business support is unnecessarily difficult for CALD communities. Forms can be lengthy, as can navigating information that applies to a specific business. The Taskforce heard of the difficulties of having to apply for multiple licences and contact various agencies and departments because there is no single point of contact that can answer all questions. Applying for grants, in your second language can be incredibly difficult.

Suitability of government business support programs can lock out migrants and CALD community members. One business support program that was brought up frequently was the NEIS. Many participants highlighted the value of this program in preparing its participants to successfully incubate and start their own business.

However, the nature of the program makes it inaccessible for many people with CALD backgrounds. The Taskforce heard how the NEIS program requires a high level of English language proficiency and a dedicated time commitment. This time commitment is not flexible, making the program and all its benefits inaccessible for many migrants, particularly women who are more likely to have caring and family responsibilities and thus require a more flexible schedule.

Overall, most of the available support is geared towards the establishment phase of a business and limited support for sustaining businesses which require mentorship or advice a few years down the track.

We need to harness the incredible potential of migrants, including refugees, in the field of business and entrepreneurship. We propose a tailored program, with similar goals to the NEIS program.

Recommendations.

Based on the submissions, Labor's Multicultural Engagement Taskforce recommends the following policy proposals:

Access to Services

COVID-19 Specific and Emergency Management

1. In context of the current vaccine rollout and the existing Government commitments, ensure equity in access to COVID-19 vaccinations for all Australians, including residents in Australia regardless of visa or Medicare status. The vaccine rollout must ensure:
 - a) clear and accurate translations on when and where to be vaccinated; and
 - b) outreach to CALD communities and service providers as part of Australia's vaccination program, and funding the use of community radio, social media, and NGOs to spread government messages in-language.
2. Design policy for CALD community service providers, of all sizes, to work in partnership with the government to serve communities during times of national emergency, including ways to harness strength within CALD communities during times of crisis. This policy should take stock



of all the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Federal Government Services

3. Address the major barriers preventing equal access to federal government services for CALD communities by pursuing a whole-of-government strategy for translations and improve the Digital Transformation Strategy for CALD communities, this includes:
 - a) Tasking the Digital Transformation

Recommendations cont.



Agency to include a comprehensive roadmap for digital government services tailored for CALD communities.⁶

- b) Implementing key audio translations for essential government websites and imbed translation referral systems.
- c) Offering one-to-one in person assistance for each essential service.
- d) A nuanced CALD workforce strategy

for recruiting and training frontline workers who can speak a second language at core service provider agencies like NDIS, Centrelink, ATO, My Aged Care and Immigration.

- 4. Education and outreach policies with CALD communities about mental health and disability.

Access to Business Support

- 5. Establish a Migrant New Enterprise Incentive Scheme: Arrive and Thrive program, tailored to the needs of its participants by including wrap around support, flexible time commitments and an orally focused delivery.
- 6. Investigate options for a business coordinator to be placed at Services Australia for targeted case coordination for individuals who wish to start their own business. Specific responsibility would be to help coordinate translation services and assist CALD applicants when applying for small business grants.

6. Australian Government, Digital Transformation Agency, viewed 20 February 2021, <<https://www.dta.gov.au/help-and-advice/build-and-improve-services/user-research/understanding-diversity>>

Conclusion.

Our identity as Australians is central to who we are as individuals, as a community and a country. Our connection to this country, whether our ancestors have lived here for tens of thousands of years or whether we came to Australia only recently, is vital for social cohesion.

This past year has been trying for many Australians. We should be proud of our strength in coming together to hold off COVID-19 and having one of the most successful responses to the pandemic across the world. But we should also recognise that for many Australians, COVID-19 was a time of further marginalisation, where they were cut off from government services and subject to increased racial attacks.

Our consultations made clear that there is still much work to do to fully embrace our cultural diversity. Too many Australians still experience racism, both in the community and institutionally. We need to ensure the practical realities of multiculturalism and a

diverse population is understood and that barriers to a person engaging fully in the political, economic and social life of our country are actively addressed and removed.

We must not fall into the trap of trivialising multiculturalism, of saying that we are proud of our diversity without actually listening to the concerns and issues of our communities or worse ignoring them.

Multiculturalism doesn't just appear from statements made about federal policy, but by working on a grassroots level with local community groups. Engaging with these communities will ensure the success of government programs. People from CALD backgrounds and migrants are involved in their local cultural or ethnic community organisations. These organisations can help to inform their communities about what services and support is out there and how community members can access it.