

Embracing Our Cultural Diversity

Victoria's Multicultural Policy Statement

Draft Consultation Paper

DRAFT - CONFIDENTIAL

Foreword from the Minister

Victoria is a proudly diverse state. We lead the world as a harmonious, diverse and fair society. All Victorians contribute to our diversity and the richness of our diversity is one of our greatest assets.

Almost half of all Victorians were born overseas or have a parent who was born overseas. And the cultural diversity of our state extends beyond this through broader family connections, social and cultural influences, and global business practices and connections. It is time for cultural diversity to be recognised as part of the mainstream and relevant to all Victorians.

The Victorian Government recognises the central role of cultural diversity in the life of the state. We are committed to delivering programs to support and leverage our diversity across all parts of our community and all government portfolios.

The purpose of this consultation paper is to outline the Government's vision for multiculturalism in Victoria. This is a starting point for a new conversation about cultural diversity with the community and a new approach to policy development across the government.

We highlight the enormous potential and benefits that diversity brings to our community and provide a focus on social cohesion, human rights, the rights of LGBTI individuals, gender equality, and the need to support those most at risk in our community. In doing so, we hope to introduce a new approach to multiculturalism that reflects a contemporary Victoria. An approach that places priority on social inclusion and economic engagement for all to provide a better future for all.

Multicultural Victoria

Successive waves of migrants and refugees from around the world have made Victoria their home, joining our Aboriginal communities to build a rich and diverse cultural heritage.

Our successful approach to multiculturalism

Our approach to multiculturalism in Victoria recognises our cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. In doing so we draw on the core values and building blocks of our democracy and from the responsibilities and obligations inherent in Australian citizenship.

We accept and respect the right of each and every Victorian to express and share their cultural, linguistic and religious heritage within an overarching commitment to the state and nation, our democratic framework, our institutions and the rule of law. This commitment creates our shared freedoms, our fundamental rights and responsibilities, and the core equality essential to a vibrant and flourishing society.

Victoria's approach to multiculturalism is underpinned by policies and programs designed to:

- Maximise the benefits of our cultural diversity
- Build the capacity of cultural diverse communities
- Promote social cohesion and community resilience
- Ensure that our services and infrastructure respond to the changing culturally diversity of our state.

Bipartisan leadership

Multiculturalism is the foundation of Victoria's social cohesion and an important source of economic, cultural and social benefits to our society. Victoria's successful multicultural approach has been due, in part, to longstanding bipartisan support. This bipartisanship is reflected in the continuing commitment by successive governments for multicultural programs, policies and legislation.

Common values and aspirations

Victorians share common values and aspirations, many of which are universal in nature. We all want to live peaceful, healthy and productive lives in a safe environment. We all want to live alongside others in goodwill and work together for the wellbeing of our community, family and friends. We all want to create prosperity now and for future generations. Democracy, freedom, peace, hard work and optimism are values that have brought generations of migrants to Victoria in the past, and are the same values shared by new arrivals coming to Victoria today.

With our diversity comes difference. Collectively, we speak many different languages, follow many different faiths and have different histories, experiences and cultural heritages. This difference should not be regarded with fear, but rather as an opportunity, a source of strength and an asset that will contribute to a vibrant, progressive society able to engage seamlessly with the rest of the world.

The opportunities and challenges ahead

Victoria's diversity presents extraordinary social, cultural and economic opportunities. We can use our cultural and linguistic diversity to attract new businesses and jobs, and enter new markets. We can leverage the international networks of Victoria's migrant communities as sources of new skills, ideas and resources to stimulate our economy and creativity. We can grow important industries such as tourism and international education, promoting Melbourne and Victoria as welcoming places to live and do business. However, we face some challenges that, if not addressed, may undermine our future. To maintain our inclusive and cohesive society all Victorians need to feel a sense of belonging, acceptance, and opportunity.

We must make sure that new migrants receive support to establish themselves in a new country and that Victorians from all backgrounds can access the services they need. We must also provide avenues for diverse communities to participate in decision-making and have a say in policies and plans that affect them.

While Victoria's success as a diverse and inclusive place is widely recognised, we cannot take our achievements for granted, especially in the face of national and international influences that are opposed to diversity or intent on promoting intolerance.

Embracing Our Cultural Diversity reaffirms the Victorian Government's commitment to multiculturalism, to continuing to welcome migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, and to working with Victorians from all cultural and linguistic backgrounds to ensure all are included in and contribute to a harmonious, fair and diverse Victoria.

Victoria's evolving identity

Victoria today is a successful multicultural state built on migration. Our diversity defines who Victorians are. We embrace and celebrate our diversity and strive to give all people of all cultural and religious backgrounds a sense of belonging.

Our diversity is increasing as more migrants settle here. Victorians now come from more than 200 countries, speak 260 languages and dialects and follow 135 religious faiths. Today, we speak more languages than ever before, have a richer culture and are part of networks and relationships that extend to more and more places around the world.

More than a quarter (26%) of Victorians were born overseas. Almost half of our population (46%) were either born overseas or have at least one parent who was born overseas. The top ten countries of birth for Victorians are England, India, China, New Zealand, Italy, Vietnam, Greece, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Philippines.

In addition to Aboriginal languages, more than 23% of Victorians speak a language other than English at home (compared to 18% Australia-wide). Around 1.23 million people speak another language, an increase of 23% from 2006 to 2011. The top ten languages, other than English, spoken at home are Italian, Greek, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Arabic, Turkish, Hindi, Punjabi and Macedonian.

Victorians value and support this diversity, with surveys consistently showing greater support amongst Victorians for multicultural diversity and lower rates of people experiencing discrimination. The Scanlon Foundation's 2015 *Mapping Social Cohesion* survey found widespread support for multiculturalism, with 86% of people agreeing it has been good for Australia: Melbourne recorded the highest proportion of *strong support* for multiculturalism (48%) compared to the national average (37%).[#]

Every year Victoria provides a safe home for around 32% of all refugees arriving in Australia. With continued global challenges and conflicts, Victoria will continue to welcome additional humanitarian entrants. Looking ahead, Victoria's population is projected to nearly double from 5.7 million in 2013 to 10 million in 2051, with over half of this growth expected to come from immigration.

With the continued growth of our cultural diversity it is important to recognise that members of our culturally diverse communities may also identify with or experience other points of difference including gender, sexuality, or ability. This diversity should also be celebrated and supported across our multicultural society.

1. Maximising the benefits of our diversity for all Victorians and building community capacity

Victoria's open, cosmopolitan and vibrant reputation attracts tourism, migration, international students and investment to our State. We can further leverage our multicultural and multilingual diversity to attract more jobs and investment, generate new opportunities and generate social and economic benefits for all Victorians.

Harnessing the many benefits of diversity

Victoria's diversity helps to promote Melbourne and Victoria as a great place to live, work, study and do business.

For the last five years, Melbourne has been recognised as the world's *most liveable city* and in 2015 Melbourne was also ranked as the world's *second best student city*. These global rankings reflect and reinforce the attractiveness of our State to a wide range of migrant groups. They help us to attract the best talent from around the world, participate in international networks and open up new sources of local creativity and productive capacity. We can harness this diversity and talent, using it as a bridge between Victoria and the many exciting economic opportunities on offer in the global economy. We can use the multilingual skills of our workforce to attract investors and we can harness the entrepreneurial strengths of our migrant communities to develop our local economy.

Working with the business and non-government sectors

Victoria's successful approach to multiculturalism is reinforced by the strong support that business and non-government organisations have shown for a productive, harmonious and multicultural Victoria. Community leaders, as well as the leaders of business, education, sports and religious organisations, have consistently recognised the strengths of multicultural Victoria.

This support needs to continue and strengthen even further if all Victorians are to reap the social, cultural and economic benefits of a growing, vibrant, diverse, outward-looking and inter-connected society.

Building community capacity and participation

Successful multiculturalism depends on strong communities. The Government will work in partnership with community groups, other governments and non-government agencies to build our ability to understand community strengths and better respond to community needs, including tackling economic and social disengagement that can lead to individual or community isolation.

We will promote the full participation of new, emerging and established multicultural communities in the economic, social and cultural life of Victoria. We will develop targeted strategies and initiatives to address the needs of older migrants and to strengthen the inclusion of young people. We will work across all levels of government, the sector and the community to strengthen our responses to Victorians from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds, including new arrivals fleeing the Syrian conflict.

We will promote the recognition that all Victorians contribute to our diversity. Stronger networks and targeted projects will support our youth from diverse cultural backgrounds, new arrivals (including refugees), and emerging communities to access mainstream service systems and fully participate in the social and economic life of Victoria.

Strengthening regional capacity

The diversity and cultural heritage of regional Victoria is a source of strength and pride. We will continue to promote this diversity through community celebrations and festivals. We will also support regional cultural infrastructure to preserve our multicultural heritage, promote inclusion and attract tourism.

We will strengthen the capacity and inclusion of regional multicultural, refugee and asylum seeker communities by investing in regional area partnerships which bring local government, regional ethnic communities' councils and settlement providers together in a coordinated and strategic approach.

2. Promoting social cohesion and community resilience within our society

Victoria remains a stable, cohesive and diverse society and a place where people want to settle, visit and invest. All Victorians share a responsibility for maintaining this stability and cohesion, and supporting attitudes that promote inclusion and participation and reject exclusion, racism and violent extremism.

Supporting cohesive, resilient communities

The 2015 results of the Scanlon Foundation's *Mapping Social Cohesion* longitudinal study shows that Victoria has a high level of social cohesion.

Maintaining a cohesive, resilient Victoria requires governments, communities, businesses, service providers, academics and others to work together to encourage and support individuals and communities in building and strengthening these links.

Bridging cultures and difference

Community celebrations and festivals give all Victorians the opportunity to experience our cultural diversity. These events are also bridges between cultures, which enable people to connect with and share their ethnic, cultural and religious heritage. They also help to incorporate our diversity into a blended and multi-layered Australian identity.

Bringing people together through the arts and sport

Creative and sporting activities and events are highly effective in bringing together people from diverse backgrounds and those who may otherwise be socially isolated or disengaged from the broader community. Through the VMC and OMAC, the Government will collaborate with key arts and sports bodies to facilitate inclusion, participation and cultural awareness and understanding.

Promoting human rights and equality

The Government's strong view is that there is no place for sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia or transphobia in Victoria. Accordingly, we will work to counter activities and ideas that prevent participation and a sense of belonging, including discrimination, racism and vilification – whether based on gender, race, religion, ethnicity, sexuality or ability.

Diversity of gender and sexuality

Sexual diversity is found in all human societies and amongst people of all faiths. Just as the Government is committed to a community that embraces and celebrates cultural and religious diversity, we place equal value on respect for diversity of gender and sexuality. The Government is committed to policies and actions that treat Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Gender Diverse and Intersex (LGBTI) Victorians with equity, fairness and decency.

We recognise that discrimination against LGBTI people has a negative impact on the lives of LGBTI Victorians, creating poorer health and wellbeing outcomes. We know that for some LGBTI Victorians from diverse cultural backgrounds, lack of acceptance of their gender or sexuality can result in rejection from their communities.

Strong communities are able to value and celebrate a range of differences. There should be no barrier to diverse genders and sexualities being counted as amongst the celebrated variations of a diverse multicultural society. To continue to develop a truly respectful and inclusive Victorian community, our multicultural communities must listen to the voices of LGBTI people, and LGBTI communities must embrace and include members from cultural diverse backgrounds.

Gender Equality

Gender equality has benefits for everyone. Advancing gender equality increases women's safety, security, health and wellbeing. Gender equality also has tangible benefits for Victoria's productivity and economic prosperity, as more women are supported to reach their potential.

The Victorian Government is committed to supporting women from all cultural, linguistic and faith backgrounds to ensure every woman in the state has the opportunity to fulfil her potential. The Government is developing a Victorian Gender Equality Strategy. To ensure the Strategy genuinely represents Victorian women we will be working to ensure that the voices of women in culturally diverse communities are included in its development.

We will work to develop partnerships with the whole community to achieve equal social, civic and economic participation for women in society. It will be important for Government to work with culturally diverse communities on the challenges and opportunities that gender equality presents.

Engaging our young people

Victoria is home to around one million young people with more than 25 per cent from culturally diverse backgrounds. The Government will continue to work across departments to increase representation of culturally diverse youth on advisory bodies, build their capacity through education, arts and sports and address barriers to employment including discrimination.

We will support program and service delivery across the whole of government for culturally diverse youth including projects such as the Regional Presence Project targeting the specific needs of culturally diverse youth in regional Victoria, including engagement with newly arrived asylum seeker and refugee young people.

3. Providing services and infrastructure that are responsive to the rights and needs of our culturally diverse population

Accessible and culturally responsive services are critical for Victorians of all cultural, linguistic and faith backgrounds to participate fully in society. The Multicultural Affairs portfolio will provide whole-of-government leadership to ensure that services incorporate a focus on CALD individuals and work with the community to tackle disadvantage and remove barriers to social and economic participation.

Building cultural competence and responsiveness

The Victorian Government will take a strong systematic approach to build the cultural competence and responsiveness of government services. We will do this through cultural diversity planning and workforce training; by requiring prevention and early intervention approaches in service delivery areas to target our most vulnerable and disadvantaged community members; and by providing well-planned and well-coordinated settlement and support services for refugee and asylum seeker arrivals.

Supporting people with disabilities

The Victorian Government has signed an agreement with the Commonwealth Government to implement rollout the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) from July 2016. The Government recognises that many people accessing disability services are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and may have particular communication and service delivery needs. We are committed to providing a high standard of services for all Victorians with disabilities, including people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Responding to family violence

The Government has established Australia's first Royal Commission into Family Violence, which is examining the entire family violence system from the ground up. The Terms of Reference specifically require the Commission to have particular regard to the needs and experiences of people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities who are affected by family violence.

The Commission will deliver its findings in early 2016, and the Government has committed to implementing all of its recommendations. In line with this, specific investments will be made to improve the responsiveness of services supporting women and children from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds who are experiencing, or at risk of, family violence.

The Government also recognises that the status of women in society is intrinsically linked to the broader issue of community attitudes towards women, which in turn influences the acceptance and prevalence of family violence. We are committed to women's equal representation in leadership and participation in the economic, social and civic life of the Victorian community as outlined in our forthcoming Gender Equality Strategy.

Supporting older people within our culturally diverse communities

The Victorian Government's ageing and aged care agenda supports policy, programs and services to meet the needs of an increasing number of older Victorians and this includes people from diverse cultural backgrounds. It is important that supports and services are responsive to the changing demographic profile of our older population. We will work across government to support people from all backgrounds to age well by optimising health and wellbeing at all life stages, addressing disadvantage and improving social participation in the older culturally diverse population.

Community infrastructure and cultural precincts

Having accessible community infrastructure is vital to encourage participation in activities that strengthen communities and promote our diversity. Cultural venues, facilities and precincts not only give culturally diverse communities a place to gather and celebrate cultural events; they also provide opportunities for all Victorians to gain a better understanding of different cultures.

Community consultation

The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring that, wherever possible, policies and programs are co-designed with active and meaningful input from communities and service providers. Co-creation is one of the principles underpinning the new Community Resilience Unit as it works in partnership with communities, academics and government agencies to create initiatives designed to support a socially cohesive Victoria.

The VMC will continue to actively seek the views of culturally diverse Victorians and remain a primary conduit between multicultural communities and the Government. The VMC will continue to undertake annual community consultations and seek the views of faith communities, young people and regional culturally diverse communities through structures such as the Multifaith Advisory Group, the Multicultural Youth Network and eight Regional Advisory Councils.

OMAC will work with all Victorian Government departments to strengthen their multicultural consultative mechanisms and ensure better representation of diverse communities on governance structures and in decision-making. This will ensure that multicultural voices inform evidence-based policies and have an input into improving services to better meet the needs of culturally diverse Victorians and communities.