

Communique for the Ministerial Forum on Multicultural Affairs

Friday, 13 March 2020

Multicultural Affairs Ministers from across the country met in Brisbane today for the inaugural meeting of the Ministerial Forum on Multicultural Affairs. The meeting was hosted and chaired by the Queensland Minister for Multicultural Affairs Stirling Hinchliffe.

This is the first meeting of Multicultural Affairs Ministers in over a decade, since the former Ministerial Council on Immigration and Multicultural Affairs was disbanded in 2010 and the subsequent short-term convening of the Select Council on Immigration and Settlement.

The meeting agenda was co-designed with input from States and Territories and focused discussion on six key issues: COVID-19, secondary settlement, social inclusion, employment, language services and service gaps for vulnerable cohorts.

COVID-19

Multicultural Affairs Ministers discussed the emergence of COVID-19 in Australia and its initial impact on specific communities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This has recently evolved to a community-wide issue following the World Health Organisation declaration regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Ministers identified common issues across jurisdictions including some instances of racial vilification and all Ministers agreed there must be zero tolerance to any form of this behaviour.

Ministers agreed to work together, including with the Australian Government, to share information, and to ensure distribution of consistent and accessible health advice in most community languages and appropriate formats for all of Australia's communities.

Ministers acknowledged and support the vital role that the SBS, as a national broadcaster, and community and ethnic media outlets have for delivering factual information and community guidance regarding COVID-19 for culturally and linguistically diverse communities. It is recommended this be included as part of the Australian Government's broader communication strategy regarding COVID-19.

Data collection

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Council of Australia (FECCA) presented on a range of issues impacting on culturally diverse communities nationally. FECCA raised the need for nationally consistent data collection about diversity to inform policies, programs and service delivery.

Multicultural Affairs Ministers expressed their support for nationally consistent collection of appropriate data to ensure people from culturally diverse backgrounds are more included.

Secondary Regional Settlement

Multicultural Affairs Ministers discussed opportunities to support successful secondary settlement in regional areas which are not already primary settlement sites and how to harness the positive contribution that migrants and refugees can make in those communities.

Ministers identified common issues, discussed examples of best practice and opportunities to collaborate to facilitate positive secondary settlement outcomes for migrants and refugees.

Ministers identified the need for collaboration between the Australian Government and other jurisdictions in relation to planning and appropriate resourcing for secondary settlement.

Ministers agreed to ongoing discussions across jurisdictions to share research, best practice and identify potential opportunities to work together supporting and encouraging regional settlement in areas of declining populations and skill shortages.

Barriers to social inclusion for culturally diverse communities

Multicultural Affairs Ministers discussed barriers to full participation in civic and economic life for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; in some cases, these may be due to systemic racism, unconscious bias or discrimination.

Joint discussions between the Ministers supported the identification of best practice initiatives and opportunities to collaborate.

Ministers also agreed to advocate for national leadership to build a culture of welcome that recognises the benefits of a strong and diverse economy, including the need for a national anti-racism strategy that is supported by robust evidence on effective strategies to address the underlying issues.

Employment

Multicultural Affairs Ministers discussed the importance of employment in successful settlement for migrants and refugees. Ministers acknowledged that improving economic pathways and labour market integration for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds is a complex issue and requires all levels of government, business, social enterprise, industry bodies and communities to work together.

Ministers discussed the need for specialist employment services to assist vulnerable job seekers into long term employment and to address under-employment.

Ministers agreed to collaborate to tackle these complex issues, building on several efforts at the State and Territory level and by sharing approaches, expertise and partnerships with industry bodies to achieve efficiencies and to improve pathways to employment.

Language Services

Multicultural Affairs Ministers discussed sustainability issues for the interpreting profession, particularly for interpreters working in the community sector due to no consistent National award and inconsistent pay rates for suppliers working across jurisdictions, and inconsistencies in employment and health standards for interpreters in the field.

Ministers agreed that inter-jurisdictional discussions will continue, focusing on building the national capacity of language services in emerging languages and the sustainability of future linguistically diverse communities' needs. Future discussions to identify a research strategy to strengthen the integrity of the industry and work conditions for future translators and interpreters.

Service gaps for vulnerable cohorts

Multicultural Affairs Ministers discussed the significant service gaps for some people based upon their visa category and their status as asylum seekers and the services and support

that States and Territories are providing. Ministers recognised these gaps are a result of changing Australian Government policies relating to people seeking asylum.

Ministers agreed that further advocacy of these issues to the Australian Government is necessary to address the ongoing and growing needs and increasing vulnerability of this cohort, especially in the space of essential services and access to employment.

Next Steps

Multicultural Affairs Ministers discussed the importance and significance of today's inaugural meeting and the need for continued discussions on these issues of vital importance to culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Ministers agreed that a second meeting of the Ministerial Forum on Multicultural Affairs should occur in 2020 hosted by the Australian Capital Territory Government at a date to be determined.

Ministers also agreed that further advocacy to the Australian Government and other jurisdictions should continue to urge them to participate in these discussions and future meetings.

The Ministerial Forum for Multicultural Affairs meeting today was attended by:

Queensland	The Hon Stirling Hinchliffe MP, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Racing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs (Chair)
Australian Capital Territory	Mr Chris Steel MLA, Minister for City Services, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Recycling and Waste Reduction, Minister for Roads and Active Travel and Minister for Transport
Victoria	Mr Josh Bull MLA, Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs
Western Australia	The Hon Paul Papalia CSC MLA, Minister for Tourism, Minister for Racing and Faming, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Defence Issues and Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests
Tasmania	Ms Kate Kent, Deputy Secretary, Communities, Sport and Recreation, Department of Communities Tasmania as proxy for the Hon Jeremy Rockliff MP, Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Disability Services and Community Development and Minister for Trade Minister for Advanced Manufacturing and Defence Industries