



Australian Government

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

INQUIRY INTO MULTICULTURALISM IN AUSTRALIA

The role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government's social inclusion agenda

The Social Inclusion Agenda

This submission responds to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's inquiry into multiculturalism in Australia. It focuses on the important interactions between multiculturalism and the Government's social inclusion agenda. The Australian Government is working to build a stronger, fairer nation through its social inclusion agenda. Social inclusion is about all Australians having the opportunity to participate fully in the economic and community life of the nation, recognising that some people need extra support to do this. By contrast, discrimination because of race, ethnicity, culture or religion can reduce people's participation in a wide range of economic, social and community activities. Research suggests that race-based discrimination can lead to poor health, reduced productivity, and in some circumstances a reduced life expectancy¹.

Social inclusion is by definition an inclusive policy, and applies to all Australians regardless of ethnicity, cultural or linguistic background, gender, age or other factors. Achieving social inclusion requires tackling the most entrenched forms of disadvantage, expanding the opportunities available to everyone and strengthening individual and community resilience and responsibility.

The Government's long term vision and strategy for social inclusion is outlined in *A Stronger, Fairer Australia* (available at www.socialinclusion.gov.au). The Government has also established a set of principles of approach for social inclusion, the first of which is 'building on individual and community strengths – making the most of people's strengths, including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people from other cultures'. The other principles are:

- Building partnerships with key stakeholders
- Developing tailored services, to meet each person's different needs
- Giving high priority to early intervention and prevention
- Building joined-up services and whole of government solutions
- Using evidence and integrated data to inform policy
- Using locational approaches and
- Planning for sustainability.

¹ For example see Australian Human Rights Commission (2010) *In Our Own Words – African Australians: A Review of Human Rights and Social Inclusion Issues*, and Galabuzi, G.E. (2002) *Social Inclusion as a Determinant of Health*.

The social inclusion approach covers all sectors of the community. It is a strengths-based approach with a focus on making the most of the strengths of individuals and communities, getting services to work together to meet different needs and supporting flexible, local solutions.

Social Inclusion and Multiculturalism

The concepts of social inclusion and multiculturalism are related to one another in a number of significant ways. Multiculturalism involves building a harmonious, cohesive society, where all members have the opportunity to attain their full potential. The Government has recently released a new multicultural policy *The People of Australia, Australia's Multicultural Policy*. This policy recognises the breadth and diversity of Australian society. It complements the social inclusion agenda by emphasising fairness and inclusion for all Australians, regardless of cultural, religious or linguistic diversity.

Principle 2 of the policy particularly aligns with the social inclusion agenda:

‘The Australian Government is committed to a just, inclusive and socially cohesive society where everyone can participate in the opportunities that Australia offers and where government services are responsive to the needs of Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.’

As a result of the policy, a number of key initiatives will be implemented to enhance multiculturalism and benefit all Australians.

Social Inclusion, Multiculturalism and Data and Indicators

Analysis undertaken by the Social Inclusion Unit found that approximately five per cent of the Australian population aged 15 years or older experience multiple disadvantages which impact on their ability to learn, work, engage in the community and have a voice in decisions which affect them. These disadvantages include: low income, low skills, difficulty in gaining and keeping employment, housing stress, poor health and lack of access to services.

As a result, a number of social inclusion priority groups have been identified by the Government, which are at particular risk of disadvantage. These are:

- Homeless people
- Children at risk of long-term disadvantage
- Indigenous Australians
- People with disability or mental illness and their carers
- Communities experiencing concentrations of disadvantage and exclusion and
- Jobless families.

The Government recognises that coming from another culture, especially from a non-English speaking background, can increase the risk of a person experiencing disadvantage. Contributing factors include: disrupted education or employment opportunities as a result of displacement, having low economic resources, poor English skills and literacy, being disconnected from friends and family, having ongoing health conditions caused by deprivation or torture and trauma and feeling unsafe in the community as a result of lack of tolerance of diversity.

Through the *Australian Public Service Social Inclusion policy design and delivery toolkit* all Australian Public Service agencies are encouraged to consider these at-risk groups when undertaking policy and program design.

In 2009, the Australian Social Inclusion Board endorsed the Measurement and Reporting Framework to measure the distributional, multidimensional and longitudinal nature of social inclusion. The Framework can be found in *Social Inclusion in Australia: How Australia is Faring* (www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Resources).

The Framework aims to provide an evidence base for identifying communities and locations of disadvantage, to allow social policy to assist the most disadvantaged. It consists of high level headline indicators and supplementary indicators. The headline indicators are longer term indicators of the outcomes of social inclusion, and are grouped around three key domains: participation, resources and multiple and entrenched disadvantage. Participation refers to employment, education, social groups and civil activities. Resources refer to social resources such as friends and family, as well as community services and physical resources like housing. Multiple and entrenched disadvantage refer to those people who experience three or more disadvantages, and those who have sustained such disadvantage for two years or more.

The supplementary indicators complement the headline indicators by providing a fuller picture of each domain. One of the supplementary indicators, tolerance of diversity, seeks to monitor levels of acceptance of diverse cultures in the community. At present, there is little data available at a national level measuring community tolerance of diversity. However a 2007 project by Community Indicators Victoria found that most Victorians (89%) agreed or strongly agreed that it is a good thing for a society to be made up of people from different cultures. Younger people were more likely to agree than people in older age groups – 93% of people aged 18-34 agreed, compared to 89% of those aged 35-54 and 86% aged 55 and over².

Research undertaken by the Scanlon Foundation in 2009 found that intolerance of community diversity undermines social cohesion. While there is relatively high support in Australia for immigration and the economic, social and cultural benefits that immigrants bring, approximately 9% of Australians were found to be intolerant and agreed with the statement that 'ethnic diversity erodes a country's security'³.

The Board reported on Australia's progress against the social inclusion indicators in its report *Social Inclusion in Australia: How Australia is Faring* in 2010. The next report is due to be released in 2012, and will provide a longitudinal perspective on the effect of the social inclusion agenda on the lives of disadvantaged people and highlight areas for further improvement.

² Australian Social Inclusion Board (2010) *Social Inclusion in Australia – How Australia is Faring*.

³ Markus, A. (2009) *Mapping Social Cohesion 2009 – the Scanlon Foundation Surveys*.

Social Inclusion, Multiculturalism and Government Services

The Government has already made significant changes to improve social inclusion in Australia. Working Australians now have the security of new fairer workplace laws, while people without work can get help through major new employment services programs. The Government is tackling homelessness, and has committed to halving the overall rate of homelessness and offering supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who seek it by 2020. New homes and support services for people in need are being established across the country. The Government is investing \$63.5 billion in schools as part of the Education Revolution. It is seeking to reduce the disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians by investing \$4.6 billion to improve health services and support in remote areas.

The Government is also improving the way it delivers health, welfare and social services, particularly to those who need the most help. A key finding from research undertaken by the Australian Social Inclusion Board into breaking cycles of disadvantage was that not only are the types of services and support provided important, but the way you treat people matters⁴. The Board found that the way people were treated by services was profoundly important, and that services should be delivered in a respectful, strengths-based manner that reflects the dignity and integrity of the individual. Further, services should support the important positive relationships formed between professional staff and clients. These principles have relevance for all aspects of service delivery, but particularly for highly disadvantaged groups such as newly arrived migrants and refugees.

The Portfolio Department of Human Services (DHS) includes the Child Support Agency, CRS Australia and Human Services Portfolio agencies – Centrelink, Medicare Australia and Australian Hearing –and is responsible for delivering social and health-related services to all Australians, including those from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. DHS is providing a separate submission to this inquiry, detailing multicultural service delivery in its agencies.

⁴ Australian Social Inclusion Board (2010) *Breaking Cycles of Disadvantage*.